

Attracting tourism. Exchange of experience between Poznań and Kutaisi



**The state of tourism development in Kutaisi
and its surrounding areas.
Study tour report and proposed actions**

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www.kutaisi.poznan.travel

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1. The purpose and characteristics of the study trip to Kutaisi

The study trip to Kutaisi was carried out under the project "Attracting tourism. Exchange of experience between Poznan and Kutaisi", implemented with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland (the "Polish Aid" programme).

The research area was the city of Kutaisi and its surroundings (Imereti region). The objectives of the study trip were as follows:

- assessment of the development of tourism in and around Kutaisi,
- simulation of a tourist stay with particular emphasis on expectations and needs of tourists from Central and Western Europe,
- identification of entities, institutions, projects and people involved in the development of the tourism sector in Kutaisi,
- selection of participants of the workshop held in Poznan, whose aim is to lay the foundations for the establishment of the destination management organisation (DMO) for the city of Kutaisi, inspired by local tourism organisations well-known in Polish legislation,
- gathering information and materials that allow to customise the program of the workshop to meet the needs of the tourism industry of Kutaisi and better development of action plans, whose organisational and financial range makes their implementation possible.

The study trip took place between 6 and 13 April 2014. The following persons took part:

- Anna Aleksandrak (Poznań City Hall) – project manager,
- Wojciech Mania, Ph.D. (Poznań Tourism Organisation) - expert (cultural landscape, natural and cultural heritage, tourist information system, PR, IT tools)
- Jakub Pindych (Poznań Tourism Organization) - expert (hotel market, gastronomy, business tourism, meetings market, PR).

Poznań Tourism Organisation was founded in 2003 and is now the main performer of tasks related to tourism in the area of the Poznań agglomeration.

2. Characteristics of the city of Kutaisi

2.1. Physical and geographical overview

Kutaisi is located in eastern Georgia, in the province of Imereti by the river Rioni. The city is located at altitudes from 125 to 30 m above sea level. From the north, the city is surrounded by Egrisi and Rachis mountain ranges, from the east by the Imereti plateau, from the south by the Lesser Caucasus, and from the west by Kolkhida Lowland (Fig. 1).

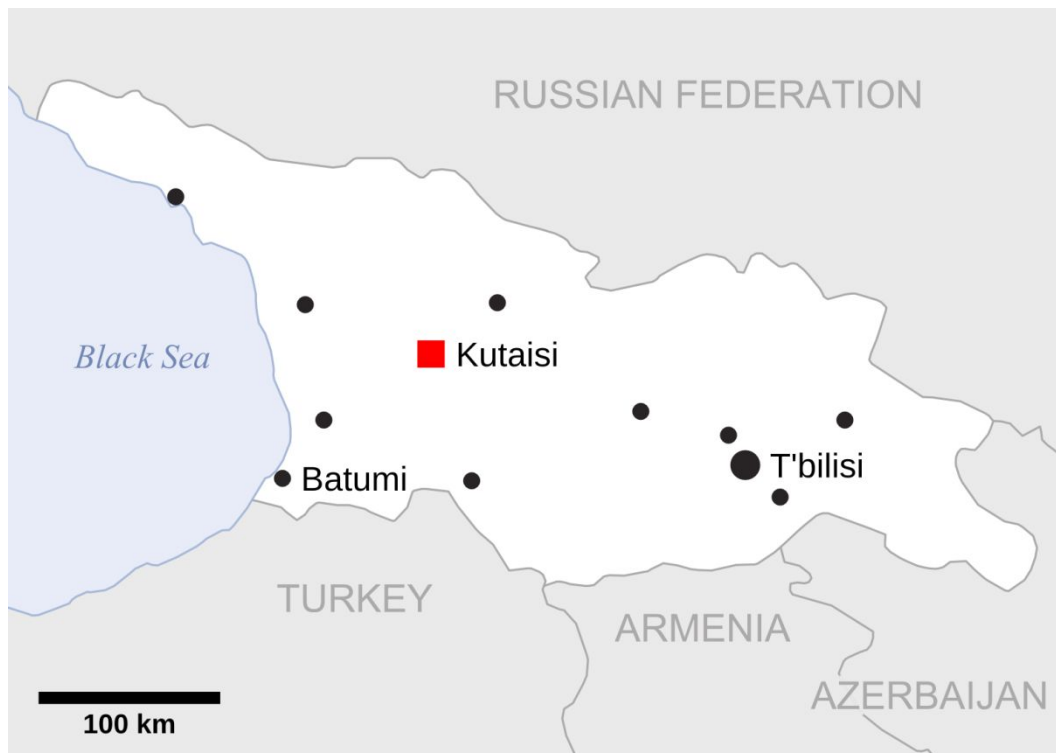


Fig. 1. Kutaisi's geographical localisation against the political map of Georgia
(based on OCHA, Wikimedia Commons).

Kutaisi is located in the humid subtropical climate zone. The average annual temperature is 14.5 °C, with the warmest month being July (23.6 °C) and the coldest January (5.2 °C). The average temperature is higher by about 4-5 °C compared to the remainder of Imereti.

Average rainfall is just over 1500 mm. In winter, heavy snowfall with rain or snow, but the snow cover usually does not persist for more than a week. The mountainous surroundings make strong winds common (kutaisi.gov.ge).

Land cover of the immediate surrounding areas of Kutaisi is dominated by fields, vineyards, orchards and meadows, which together with settlements and villages form a distinctive agricultural landscape of the region of Imereti. From the north, the town is surrounded by vast deciduous forests growing on the mountain slopes.

Such a diversity of landscape strongly favours the development of tourism, allowing to build an extensive offer, including active, cultural, recreation and tourism as well as agritourism. The factor limiting the potential of the surrounding areas of Kutaisi is widespread littering, visible especially on roadsides and trails. It needs to be noted that the trails located within the visited protected areas (especially Sataplia Nature Reserve) were very well-kept.

2.2. Demography and socio-economic situation

Kutaisi's population is 197 thousand people (Fig. 2), and its area is approximately 80 km². It is the second largest city in Georgia (after Tbilisi). The dominant religion is the Orthodox faith.

Kutaisi is also an important industrial centre, although it should be noted that the economic situation is unstable. This is a result of the 1990s which were turbulent for the country and started with the separation from the Soviet Union. This period symbolically ends the so-called "Rose Revolution", which resulted in the resignation of president Eduard Shevardnadze. He was succeeded by a pro-western politician, Mikheil Saakashvili. During his term of office one of the most important events of the Caucasus in the past 10 years took place. It was a military conflict with South Ossetia ("the five-day war") in August 2008, which also involved Abkhazian and Russian forces. Although the military actions lasted a short time, the Russian forces or forces associated with Russia managed to get close to Tbilisi.

These events had a negative impact on the political and socio-economic situation of the whole country, including Kutaisi. The Kopitnari airport was bombed by the Russian air force twice.

The stimulus for the development of the city in recent years was to be moving the Parliament from Tbilisi in 2012. The decision remains controversial to this day, and especially after the change of president (after the elections in 2013 it is the Giorgi

Margvelashvili) there are more and more frequent voices that the seat of the legislature needs to return to Tbilisi.

An important event was also the commissioning of the new international Kopitari airport (David the Builder Kutaisi International Airport).

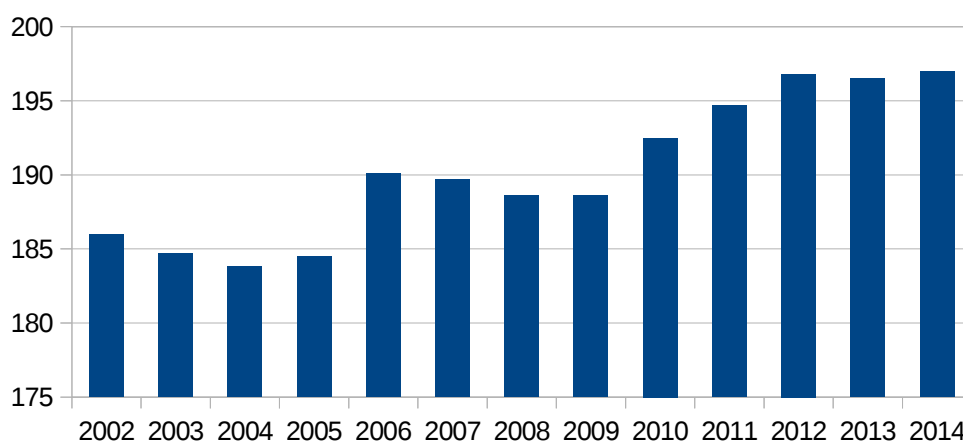


Fig. 2. Changes of population in Kutaisi in 2002-2014 (source: Geostat.ge, 2014)

Moreover, sectors of the economy that play an important role in Kutaisi are trade, agriculture, food, chemical and woodworking industries, light and heavy industry (e.g. production of agricultural machines and machine parts - remnants of the former KAZ automobile factories). Since 2009 a special economic zone has also been in operation.

The capital of Imereti is also academic centre of national importance, and therefore has the potential to educate well-trained personnel, also for the needs of the tourism sector.

An important, but neglected due to the unstable political situation described above, economic sector is tourism. Kutaisi and its surroundings (including the town of Tskaltubo) had a reputation of great health resorts, primarily related to balneotherapy and "speleotherapy". At its peak, the Tskaltubo resorts were visited by approximately 125 thousand visitors a year. Today, that number has dropped to barely a few thousand, and some health and holiday resorts have been transformed into refugee camps during the first war with Abkhazia (1992-1993).

In recent years, extensive renovations and revitalization works have been

undertaken, including resorts themselves as well as municipal infrastructure. Their goal is to restore the attractiveness of the health resorts and attract tourists.

Revitalisation, or rather renovation works were also undertaken in the downtown area of Kutaisi. The aesthetics and quality of urban infrastructure (including historic bridges) was increased and buildings were restored, including many historic buildings, however, numerous vacant buildings are visible in the landscape of the city.

Conclusion: Due to the positive image of Georgia as a hospitable country and to new investments such as an airport, Kutaisi has a chance for the development of tourism. It is important, however, to define realistic goals and provide real support from the local government. It does not have to be financial in every case. It is also important to provide venues (e.g. for meetings, for tourist information centres), as well as create a legal framework for cooperation and implementation of tasks.

3. Analysis of Kutaisi's attractiveness for tourists

3.1. Accessibility

a. by airplane

From the point of view of the development of tourism functions, the central localisation of Kutaisi relative to the geography of Georgia is an advantage. The stimulus for development, which also draws the attention of the city authorities to the possibility of tourism development, was the opening in 2012 of the international airport (David the Builder Kutaisi International Airport) at a distance of 14 km from the city centre. It is the third largest airport in Georgia (after Tbilisi and Batumi).

Its flight network comprises flights to Istanbul (Atlasjet), Minsk (Belavia), Moscow (Georgian Airways) and Baghdad (Iraqi Airways). However, the major airlines, especially from the point of view of tourism, are Wizz Air, which support connections with Kiev, Vilnius, Budapest as well as Katowice and Warsaw. A flight from Warsaw takes a little over three hours.

The rapid increase in the number of passengers associated with providing flights operated by Wizz Air (from around 12 thousand in 2012 to nearly 188 thousand in 2013) is a stimulus for the development of tourism in the city itself and in the region. Note,

however, that Kutaisi struggles with an image of a city that is unattractive to tourists. The airport is therefore regarded as a hub or a transfer point for other parts of the country, particularly Tbilisi and Batumi¹. Buses and marshrutkas (minibuses) to these cities depart directly from the airport. Tourists often do not even have a reason to get to the city itself.

Despite this, the airport has a huge potential for tourism development, particularly city-break tourism. The threat is the possibility of liquidation of cheap flights from Poland and Hungary. Therefore, comprehensive measures towards the development of tourism in Kutaisi must be taken. They must be implemented by the tourism industry in collaboration and with the support of local authorities.

b. by train

Despite the fact that Georgia does not have a particularly well-developed railway network, Kutaisi has a direct connection to Tbilisi. Travel takes about 6 hours. There are also connections to other cities, especially to Batumi, although the station at which the train from Kutaisi arrives is in the suburbs.

c. by bus and car

Kutaisi is situated along one of the main roads in Georgia: route E60 from Tbilisi, which is located about 230 km to the east. One can travel to and from the major cities (Tbilisi, Batumi, Poti and Borjomi) by bus or marshrutka. Travel to Tbilisi takes about 4-5 hours and costs about 10 GEL (about 19 PLN).

One bus line operates in the Kutaisi itself. In addition, one can use taxis. It should be noted that the size of the city favours exploring it on foot, while visiting places like Gelati Monastery, Motsameta Reserve or access from the airport require the use of marshrutkas, which is the main form of suburban transportation in Kutaisi and the surrounding area. The problem from the point of view of tourism development is the lack of a clear timetable and clear permanent price list, which is expected especially by tourists from Western Europe. Renting a car is also possible, although there are opinions that the prices of these services are higher than in Tbilisi.

1 The reason for that are lower airport fees in Kutaisi, however, the possibility of this situation being changed must be taken into account in planning tourism development.

Finally, car traffic is worth mentioning, which compared to Poland or other countries of Central and Western Europe may seem chaotic, even dangerous. Honking is a norm here. There is basically no bicycle traffic on roads. In addition, apart from major intersections, there are no street lights and clearly marked pedestrian crossings in the city. To navigate safely as a pedestrian, it is best to accept the principle that cars always have the right of way.

Conclusion: because of its central localisation, Kutaisi is easily accessible. In contrast, the challenge is to change the image of the city as uninteresting to tourists and attract visitors to stay. The problem can also be the organisation of public transport in the city, thereby limiting access to tourist attractions located near the city.

3.2. Potential and natural advantages of Kutaisi and its surroundings

This section presents the most important tourist attractions of the city of Kutaisi and its suburban area (up to about 20 km from the city centre). The list was selected on the basis of indications of tourist information desk employees and tourism industry entities' employees operating in the city. Among the sites and monuments were also ones that are farther away from the city, however, strongly associated with it and with the region.

Geographical location of Kutaisi is favourable for tourism. Its assets include climate, proximity to the mountains and the surrounding rural areas. This makes it possible to develop various forms of tourism, from cultural tourism in the city, through culinary tourism (including oenological), agritourism, to the variety of outdoor activities: hiking, trekking, rafting, Nordic walking (Fig. 3).

In addition, spas (the abovementioned city of Tskaltubo) and natural values, including protected areas, including the Sataplia Nature Reserve, are worth mentioning. The latter offer not only well prepared hiking trails in varied mountain landscape, but also the unique Prometheus Cave (discovered in 1984) and fossils, documenting the presence of dinosaurs in this area. The high quality associated with infrastructure around these attractions (exhibition pavilions, trails, viewing terraces etc.) is noteworthy.

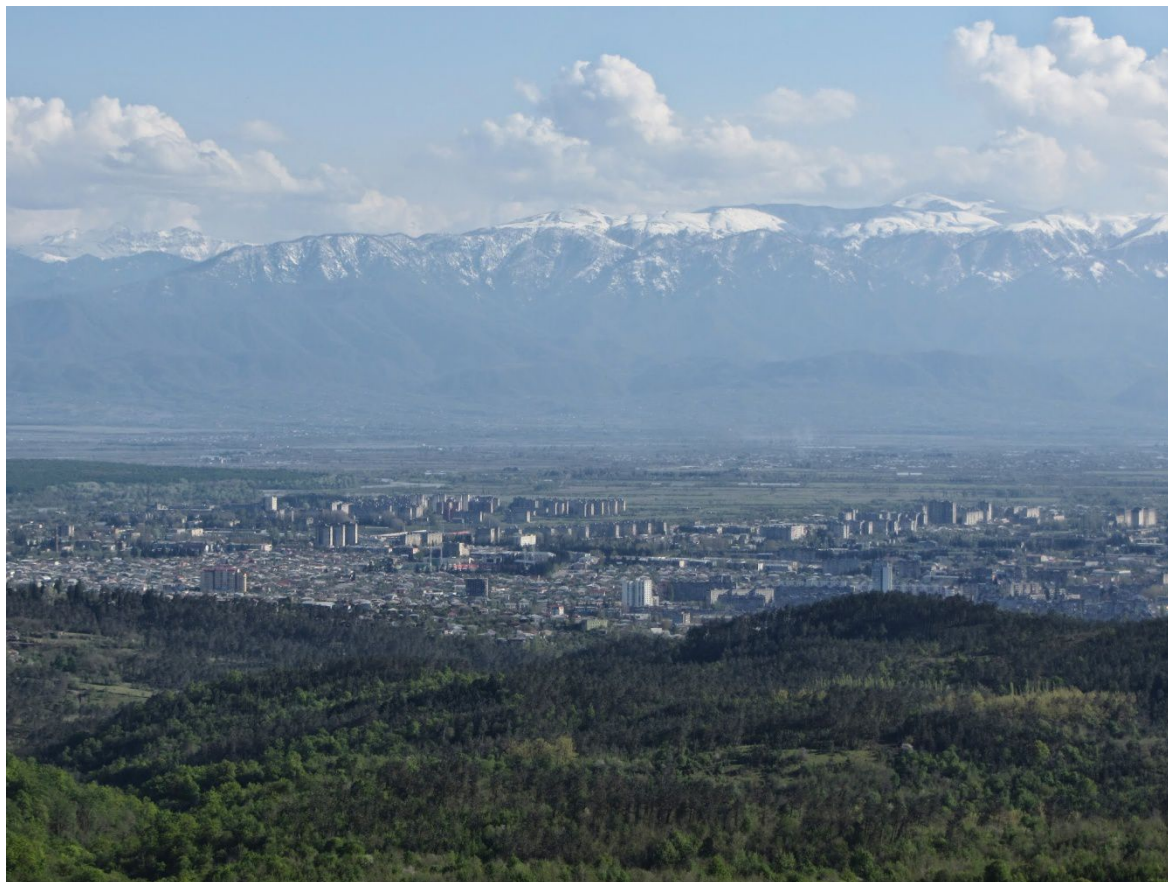


Fig. 3. The view on Kutaisi from the viewing terrace in the Sataplia Nature Reserve. The localisation of the city is favourable for various forms of tourism: from cultural tourism, through culinary tourism to trekking.

The area of the Sataplia Nature Reserve was taken under protection back in the 1920s. Thanks to such a long period of protection, there are basically no significant conflicts with the economic activities. As regards threats, natural ones are predominant (e.g. fungal tree diseases). However, an anthropogenic threat was identified in the case of Prometheus Cave. Increased tourist traffic leads to changes in the cave microclimate².

There are also vineyards in the area, although according to information obtained from the tourist information staff, they are not yet fully developed tourism product and focus on selling wines. On the other hand, visiting wineries as well as acquiring knowledge about the winemaking process is gaining ground among tourists. Georgia is strongly associated with the culture of wine and table (festivities). Thus, oenological themes are an important potential also in tourism.

2 Oral information obtained by interviewing a reserve employee.

The local tourism industry has high hopes for agritourism. Extensive agriculture, traditional methods of cultivation and breeding or still alive regional cuisine are popular themes, expected by contemporary tourists. However, their full development requires the development of infrastructure. The desire to "return to nature" is declared by many tourists, but it should be borne in mind that this is a term representing an idea. In reality, however, comforts are commonly expected, such as a bathroom with a constant unlimited access to hot water, and increasingly often even the Internet.

Only providing those conditions enables the creation of offers and their promotion on a large scale. This does not mean that it is not currently possible to develop agritourism in Imereti. However, one must reckon with the fact that it can remain a niche variety of tourism, attracting connoisseurs seeking genuine authenticity. Thus, it will not generate revenue at the level expected from decision-makers.

Conclusion: Kutaisi's surroundings abound with numerous natural attractions or falling into the ecotourism trend. A very good state of preparedness for tourism in protected areas is noteworthy, although the lack of information on the means of transport to specific locations, in particular public transport, may be an obstacle. Traditional agriculture, which could form the basis for the development of agritourism is also perceived as a potential. Works should aim towards creating tourist offers and packages.

3.3. Cultural heritage

Tangible and intangible cultural heritage is undoubtedly one of the greatest tourism assets of Georgia. Location between Europe and Asia³, rich history, with the background of a spectacular landscape of the Caucasus are favourable for building a touristic narrative on the basis of which offers and packages may be created.

It should be noted, however, that although Kutaisi is the second largest city of Georgia, it is not perceived as an attractive tourist destination. This opinion was established relatively recently, i.e. during the past 20 years. Previously, during the Soviet period, Kutaisi and its surroundings were a popular spa destination.

3 In Poland, Georgia is usually perceived to be located in Asia. English sources mention rather the borderland of Europe and Asia.

However, due to its central location, the new airport offering flights also by low-cost airlines (Wizz Air), and the rich values described below, Kutaisi has the potential to become "the gateway to Georgia".

Its ancient history is an asset in this regard. The first mention of the city dates back even to the sixth century BC. Kutaisi also has ties to Greek mythology, which is a heritage which constitutes one of the sources of European identity and Western culture. According to a myth, it is (called Ai) Jason and the Argonauts went to Kutaisi in search of the Golden Fleece. This is often mentioned in guide books, but unfortunately it is not followed with the possibility to visit related places, attractions or at least buy souvenirs.

Nonetheless, Kutaisi is one of the oldest cities in the world, which could be an interesting distinguishing feature for tourism purposes. A fountain (designed by David Gogichaishvili) which relates to this ancient history was unveiled in 2011 in the main square of the city. It consists of thirty animal figures, which are reproductions of archaeological finds from the area of Kolkhida Lowland dating back to the Bronze Age (about 3400 years BC).

The finest period in the history of the city and the country was between the 11th and 12th century. It was a period of famous rulers: David IV the Builder and Queen Tamara I the Great. Both these characters are related to Kutaisi and still present in the historical narrative and collective memory of its inhabitants. Soon after, the country fell due to the Mongol invasion.

The modern period is a time of religious and cultural isolation. Georgia remained a Christian country, subjected to pressure and entangled in conflicts with its Muslim neighbours. This is another important aspect of the formation of the Georgian identity. In the eighteenth century, Kutaisi briefly came under Turkish and then Russian rule. After the outbreak of the October Revolution, the ephemeral Democratic Republic of Georgia was formed, which in 1921 was conquered by the Bolsheviks, and soon became part of the Soviet Union.

Urban design and architecture of modern-time Kutaisi is mainly the legacy of the nineteenth and twentieth century, and therefore significant Russian and Soviet influence can be found. In the town centre, there are tenement houses older than one hundred years, as well as classicist public institutions buildings.

Among frequently visited places are also the renovated "old town" with its picturesque bridges over the river Rioni and a Jewish district with a Great Synagogue from the nineteenth century. Another tourist attraction can be the ultra-modern Parliament building commissioned in 2012 and designed by a Spanish studio called CMS Ingenieros (architects: Mamoru Kawaguchi, Kenichi Kawaguchi).

A period that still arouses strong emotions in Georgia, which also left its mark on the Kutaisi landscape and surrounding area, is the Stalinism period (1929-1953). An example of socialist architecture of this period is the building of the Lado Meskhishvili State Drama Theatre, and above all, spa complexes in the nearby Tskaltubo. They were visited personally by the dictator.

Many buildings are preserved in their original state (from the 1940s and 1950s), although there are examples of more frequent renovations, erasing the original architectural form. Despite the controversy and ambiguous attitude of Georgians towards Joseph Stalin, the remains of that period, including the characteristic "exotic" architecture from the point of view of Western tourists can be a tourist attraction, even more than the spa offer. However, its possible use in building a tourist narrative requires consideration of the historical context.

However, the most important monuments of Kutaisi refer to the golden age of Georgia, i.e. the period between the 11th and 12th century. As many as two objects are on the UNESCO World Heritage List, which is a distinguishing feature noticed not only by individual tourists, but mainly by tour operators who willingly choose destinations rich in monuments of the highest class. In Kutaisi, these are

- Bagrati Cathedral (properly the Cathedral of the Dormition) in Kutaisi from the eleventh century (Fig. 4). Beautifully situated on a hill (about 2 km from the city centre) is a representative example of medieval religious architecture in the region. In the last decade of the seventeenth century, it was blown up by the Turks. Archaeological and conservation works lasted from 1952 to 2012. In 1994 the building was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In 2001, the cathedral was returned to the Georgian Orthodox Church, and it was renovated in the period of 2008-2012. Unfortunately, the works did not comply with the rigors of conservation of UNESCO, and now this unique monument is threatened with

delisting. Nevertheless, it remains a major tourist attraction of the city due to its historical and aesthetic values as well as accessibility (in terms of transport as well as access to the same object and availability of descriptions).



Fig. 4. Bagrati Cathedral – symbol of Kutaisi and one of the most important tourist attraction of the city.

- Gelati Monastery from the twelfth century, directly related to the figure of David IV the Builder, who was its founder, and who was buried here. The exquisitely preserved church features numerous frescoes. During its heyday it was not only the centre of the spiritual, but also intellectual Georgia, bringing together scientists, philosophers and theologians of the Gelati Academy (the building has been reconstructed).

The Monastery was listed a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1994 along with the Bagrati Cathedral. It is situated on a hill about 8 km northeast of the centre of Kutaisi. It is accessed by marshrutka or on foot. Lack of on-site information boards.

Moreover, in the vicinity of Kutaisi there is one more historic monastery promoted as a tourist attraction – the Motsameta (Martyrs) Monastery. The complex, located on a cliff, was enlarged in the eleventh century, though probably dates back to the seventh/eighth century. Its advantage is its location on the cliff, near a bend of the river. It is accessible on foot or by marshrutka.

In the city itself, there is an attractive and well-maintained park with a cable car. The tour desk often directs tourists also to more distant attractions of the region of Imereti, including the Katskhi rock pillar, on the top of which there is an unavailable church and hermitage.

There are also several museums in Kutaisi. During the study tour it was possible to visit the State Museum of History and Ethnography. It presents a collection of archaeological and ethnographic exhibits related to the region. Unfortunately there are no descriptions of the exhibits in foreign languages, which is a drawback.

The Military Museum was closed for unknown reasons, while the Sports Museum was closed due to renovation works. In addition, there is the Zakaria Paliashvili Museum (composer), and the David Kakabadze Fine Art Gallery.

The cultural offer of the city comprises mainly two largest theatres - the already mentioned Lado Meskhishvili State Drama Theatre and the Opera. The former features, among others, performances of folk groups. Although traditions of cinematography (the oldest cinema of Georgia "Radium") are strongly emphasised in the touristic narrative of the city, there is currently no active cinema in Kutaisi.

In the case of museums and cultural institutions, the biggest problem from the tourist point of view is access to information about the availability of these facilities. Museums do not have websites. Therefore the only source is the tourist information, although due to the lack of a cooperation platform for the local tourism industry, its employees did not have information on the causes of closure of the Military Museum.

Kutaisoba, a city festival celebrated annually on 2 May is also worth mentioning. An important part is a presentation of traditional costumes dances and songs. Then the children sell bouquets of chamomile (money collected this way is given to the poor).

The above offer of places does not exhaust the list of tourist destinations, however, it contains objects that can be used in the first place to promote tourism in the city on the

international markets (Fig. 5).

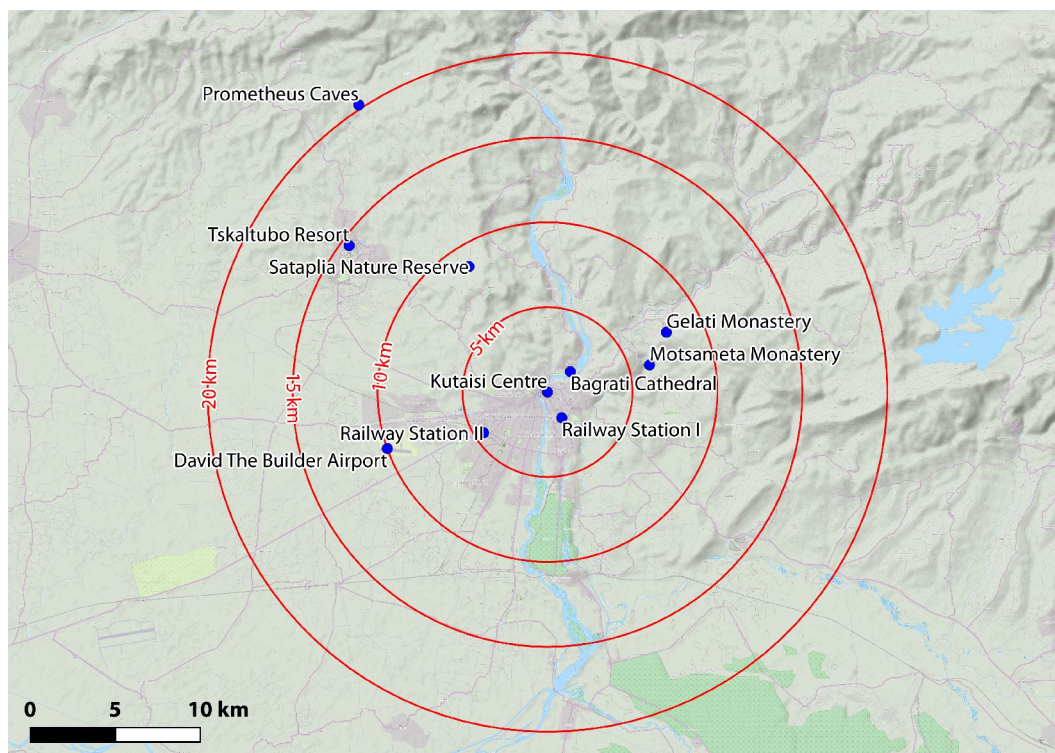


Fig. 5. Kutaisi – localisation of the most important tourist attractions of the city and its surrounding area.

Proximity of the most important attractions favours city break tourism development.

(background map: © OpenStreetMap Contributors 2014).

Conclusion: It is important to define realistic objectives for the development of tourism, adequate to the possibilities arising from the tourist infrastructure, especially accommodation facilities. Kutaisi has all the characteristics to make it a city of good for development of city break tourism, which means a short (2-3 day) stay, usually a weekend, combining elements of cultural and culinary tourism, often combined with recreation. The realisation of this goal requires fine-tuning of elements of the offer for tourists, primarily related to access to information and availability of attractions.

3.4. Culinary heritage and tradition

Culinary heritage is worth devoting a separate section as it represents one of the strongest touristic potentials of Kutaisi. This is for at least several reasons. Firstly, a gastronomic offer is a necessary link in the chain of distribution of tourist services.

Simply put, every tourist, regardless of the destination, must eat somewhere. Usually, tourists look for local products and dishes. Thus, food, from a physiological need becomes a tourist attraction itself.

Although culinary tourism in its pure form, that is when the regional cuisine is the main, if not the sole, purpose of the journey, concerns at most a few percent of the tourists, as much as 10-15% expect that good quality, authentic regional cuisine will be part of the offer (Žuromskaite 2009). A Polish study conducted for Subcarpathia led to more surprising results. The first place on the list of the most attractive forms of recreation associated with the culture of the region, before exploring the sights and learning about local history, was trying local dishes - up to 85% of responses (Apetyt na Region 2013).

The development of culinary tourism is also grounded in local data. According to a report by the Georgian National Tourism Administration of 2012, income from gastronomy amounted to 503 million GEL and were in second place for the income earned by the accommodation facilities.

The cuisine of the Imereti region has all the characteristics that predispose it to become an important distinctive feature of the tourist offer of Kutaisi. Apart from the undeniable taste values, its advantages are:

- the use of local products, often from small local farms (relating to the idea of slow food),
- known and safe products are used, therefore tourists do not have reservations when trying local specialties,
- recipes are simple but diverse, which makes the meals attractive.

The most famous dishes are khachapuri (in many varieties), khinkali (dumplings), kharcho (soup), lavash (bread) and churchele (nuts in concentrated grape juice). Of course, these are just a few examples. An important complement of any meal is wine⁴. Chacha is also a popular beverage. Commonly produced using home recipes from grape marc, is often compared to the Italian grappa.

Lemonades in many flavours their main manufacturer is Natakhtari) and mineral waters are also popular, with Borjomi also available in Poland.

4 Obviously, beer is also known and commonly drunk – especially in regions with tougher highland climate unfavourable for growing grapes.

While speaking of Georgia, it is impossible not to mention the tradition of feasting (*supra*) and toasts (the tamada figure). These are the essential elements of the heritage and identity of the Georgians. Their use in tourism should be exercised in a way that does not lesser their role in the local culture.

The culinary offer of Kutaisi is created by several dozen of different types of venues (restaurants, bars, bistros, etc.)⁵. During the study tour we managed to visit only a few of them. The most interesting were: Palaty (bar and restaurant), Foe-Foe (tea room and bar), Mirzaani (network restaurant) and El Depo (khinkali restaurant). The first two lso have a permanent cultural offer, which consists of a variety of concerts and meetings. Prices in restaurants are slightly lower compared to those in Poland, and therefore affordable for tourists (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6. Georgian cuisine with chachapuri at the front, thanks to its diversity, naturalness and taste is one of the largest tourist attractions of Kutaisi (photograph Anna Aleksandrak).

5 The database of the Tourist Information Point in Kutaisi features exactly 52 gastronomic facilities, however due to the dynamics of the market, this figure should be treated as approximate.

Language is less and less of a barrier. Larger venues usually have menus in English (with names of dishes, but without their description), and often some of the staff speak English. It is still possible and often more effective to communicate in Russian.

However, a significant disadvantage, especially for many tourists from Western Europe, may be the fact that smoking is allowed in restaurants and bars. Sometimes the clarity of receipts and bills may also be a problem due to visitor's lack of knowledge of the Georgian language and alphabet.

More and more often local markets and bazaars are places popular with tourists. There are such places in Kutaisi, and they can be promoted as tourist attractions, offering not only products, but also the opportunity to learn about local customs and culture.

Still vineyards in and around the city have unused potential. Georgia brings very strong associations with the culture of wine, and more and more vineyards open themselves to tourists. However, there still are no offers beyond the opportunity to purchase wine on-site. Such offers could include vineyard tours, oenological workshops and courses as well as workshops on the local traditions, and finally tasting.

Conclusion: Local dishes and culinary traditions are becoming increasingly important in tourism. Imereti cuisine has a number of assets, encouraging the development of culinary tourism: from products and dishes themselves, through tradition, to the already existing venues and prices affordable for tourists. This is a segment of Kutaisi tourism which already has mature offers that may be enriched with additional elements (visiting vineyards, culinary workshops, etc.).

3.5. Accommodation facilities

Accommodation facilities diverse in terms of location, standards and prices are an important link in the chain of tourist services. In Kutaisi it comprises 60 facilities belonging to one of four categories. In total, they offer 1,274 places (beds) in 627 rooms⁶. In terms of numbers, guest houses and rooms are predominant, representing half of the accommodation facilities in the city (Fig. 7). On the other hand, hotels and hostels have the largest number of places (around 60%). The number of beds offered in individual facilities

6 Data gathered by the Tourist Information Centre in Kutaisi.

ranges from 2 to 150. The price per night per person ranges from 15 GEL (approx. 26 PLN) to 130 GEL (approx. 230 PLN).

One may notice the fact that a number of facilities similar to the given above number (77 with the closest surrounding area of the city) can be found at Booking.com. On the other hand, as many as three quarters of the facilities do not have their own websites, and half of them do not have an easily reachable contact e-mail⁷.

Drawbacks of the accommodation facilities base are the lack of a uniform categorisation system (to a certain extent its function is beginning to be performed by recommendations, ratings and reviews at sites such as Booking.com and TripAdvisor) and the resulting uneven standard of facilities and services. In addition, only five hotels have a number of places in excess of 50, enabling them to provide accommodation for a typical coach trip.

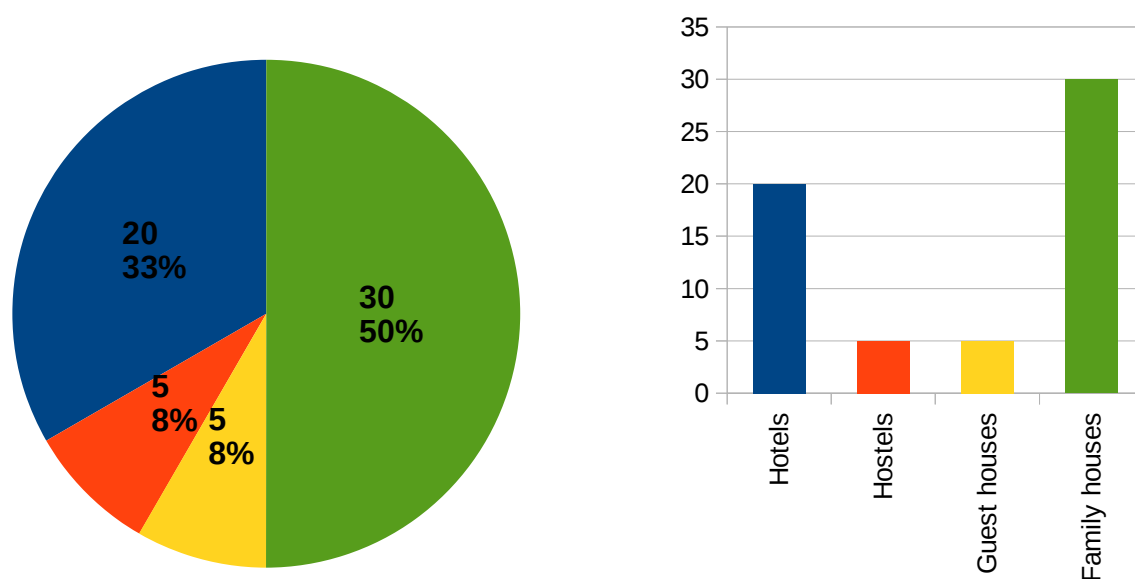


Fig. 7. Accommodation facilities base in Kutaisi (based on data from the Tourist Information Centre in Kutaisi).

⁷ Based on data from the Tourist Information Centre in Kutaisi.

Conclusion: In terms of numbers of beds, the accommodation facilities base is adequate to the current needs of individual tourism development in Kutaisi. Although there may be reservations as to the quality of service (of course with regard to the declared standard). Unfortunately, due to the above-mentioned limitations, the development of organized tourism and business tourism is possible in a very limited way.

4. Tourist information system

The task of the tourist information system is to collect and provide tourists with up-to-date data on attractions, their accessibility, offers, basic information and tips regarding the city and the region. It should be noted that the scope of queries to employees of tourist information centres goes far beyond this definition.

The success of the operation of the tourist information system depends on access to up-to-date data, and therefore, on cooperation with the tourist industry (museums, attractions, hotels, restaurants, etc.). In Georgia, tourist information centres are created in cooperation with the Georgian National Tourism Administration, operating on the central level. Facility maintenance costs are shared between the aforementioned institution and the local government.

The next section characterises the main components of the tourist information system in Kutaisi.

4.1. Tourist information centres

Having offices in key locations, tourist information centres, where visitors and tourists can find answers to their questions, receive publications or offers of spending time in the city or the region, are important elements of the tourist information system. Although more and more of their functions are taken over by websites, they remain an important distribution site for reliable information about offers and attractions. Although there is a noticeable trend towards introducing an increasing number of solutions that allow access to information through various devices (e.g. computer workstations, tablets, multimedia tables), contact with qualified staff is still valued by tourists.

There are two tourist information centres in Kutaisi run by the town council (the town hall), in cooperation with the Georgian National Tourism Administration. One of

them is located at the airport. Although it is not the main tourist information centre in the city, it remains for many tourists the place of "first contact" with Kutaisi. Here, practical information on bus routes, but also on the city itself, is sought most often.

The tourist information centre in Kutaisi is the most important part of the system. There is no need to increase the number of tourist information centres, but it is important to provide a convenient location, availability, and above all, supply the necessary information. After the study visit, an afterthought comes to mind that despite high merit and language competence of the staff, the postulate of availability is not satisfied. The following are the reasons for and consequences of the current situation.



Fig. 8. The current tourist information centre in the town hall. A small piece of paper with the "tourist information" sign visible to the left of the door is the only guiding sign.

In 2011, a well marked and conveniently located modern tourist information pavilion was commissioned, located in the square on the Rustaveli street. Unfortunately, due to construction errors it could not be used, and the tourist information centre was moved to the city hall building. At this stage, a number of omissions were committed (perhaps resulting from the previously outlined division of competences in the field of tourism management at the local level between two entities). These include above all the actual abandonment of the tourist information centre building without eliminating the signs leading to it. In short, tourists are still guided and get to the inactive centre, finding no clear information where the functioning tourist information centre is located.

The rooms intended for the tourist information centre, even though they are located near the entrance, are not sufficiently marked - a small piece of paper that tells that there is a tourist information centre inside hangs on the door (Fig. 8). Outside, there are no elements (arrows, swing signs) indicating the location of the centre.

Although the current location of the main tourist information centre is treated as temporary, at least appropriate labelling should be ensured.

4.2. The City Information System

The City Information System (CIS) is a set of visually uniform and clear elements with information about the city. The most common of these are plates with street names and addresses, signposts, information panels and boards with city maps. Messages should be provided in the local language and one foreign language (usually English is suggested).

The information system in Kutaisi is not sufficiently developed. Most of the elements are located only in the strict downtown. Unfortunately, in the current form, the signposts available in the city addressed mainly to tourists, in fact, misinform, as they direct tourists to the inactive tourist information centre.

In this situation the functions of official tourist information points are taken over by private enterprises such as InfoKutaisi. This indicates a possible direction of the development of tourism, based on the activity of the local tourism industry, but the success of such activities depends on the cooperation and support from the local government, as well as the Georgian National Tourism Administration.

4.3. Publications and guidebooks

Another element of the tourist information system of the city are publications, brochures and guidebooks available at the tourist information centres. In terms of quantity and diversity, the tourist information centre in Kutaisi is well equipped. What is lacking is synthetic publications focusing on the city itself and its vicinity⁸. Most of the materials concerned the region of Imereti. The reason may again be the fact that the publisher is the Georgian National Tourism Administration, therefore, an institution operating on a national level.

In subsequent editions of the publication prepared locally, more attention should be devoted to practical information. Descriptions of attractions should be supplemented with opening hours, ticket prices and information on transport to them. Frequently sought information is also that concerning wireless internet access and organisation of public transport. It is important to supplemented address data with all the possibilities forms of contact (website, e-mail, telephone, Facebook account, etc.). It should take into account the fact that due to the high cost of roaming in Georgia, many tourists may prefer contact by e-mail from places offering free internet access.

Materials in the tourist information centre are free. They should therefore be prepared with consideration to the following criteria:

- comprehensiveness of information: basic publications (leaflets) should provide both short descriptions of the attractions (e.g. as a list of 10 most important ones), as well as practical information and city map,
- simplicity: publications should be developed in the form of a folded sheet; thicker paper should be avoided and the form of booklets with sewn or glued covers – in order to reduce the production costs, but also to facilitate their storage and transport (e.g. to foreign trade fairs)
- availability in several languages: the selection of languages and number of copies of each version can be estimated based on the available data on the number of tourists (cf. Section 5); in the case of Kutaisi the suggested languages are: Georgian, English, Polish, Ukrainian and Russian.

8 The situation has improved with the publication of a new leaflet prepared within a project run by the ICAD Foundation: "Development of the tourism potential in the region of Imereti. Support of the regional labor market", also with the support of "Polish Aid".

4.4. Websites and social media

The Internet constantly gaining importance as a source of tourist information. In addition to websites the so-called blogosphere and social media have developed, whose distinguishing feature is that their content is created by many users, and each message can be commented on and rated.

Moreover, a number of tourist websites emerged, mostly booking sites (e.g. Booking.com, HRS), but also ones combining the mentioned functions with recommendations of places and attractions (TripAdvisor).

The widespread of mobile devices, especially smartphones and tablets, impacted the structure of websites.

Despite this diversity, the official Web site of the city or the region is constantly a sought after source of information. It should contain current information, and apart from descriptions of tourist attractions, it should provide practical tips. Contents should be available in several languages (cf. Section 4.2).

The following observations will be focused on observations from the point of view of a person who does not speak Georgian, and therefore looking for sources in a foreign language (mainly English). The described ones do not exhaust the list of websites containing information about Kutaisi. They are official websites or those which are easy to find while searching for tourist information about the city:

- The official website of the city contains a section on tourism (www.kutaisi.gov.ge/eng/kutaisi-tourism). Unfortunately, the information it contains are often incomplete or descriptions in English are missing. Furthermore, the inclusion of tourist content in the structure of the main city page makes it difficult to navigate and find relevant information.
- **www.sustourism.net** is a result of an international project entitled "An integrated approach for the sustainability of the tourism production" (cf. Section 6). It is highly positioned, hence its presence on this list. It contains basic information in Italian and English, and refers for details to above refers to the official website of the city.
- The official tourist website in Georgia, **www.georgia.travel**, offers only basic information about Kutaisi and - in a separate section – contact data for the tourist

information centre

- In terms of content, available only in English and Russian, **www.travelkutaisi.ge**, stands out. It contains both the descriptions of attractions and ideas for trips, as well as tourist offer (tourist packages) and practical information. There is also a simple mobile application. Although the site requires a few additions and corrections, this is an example of a well-thought through page created by the tourism industry.

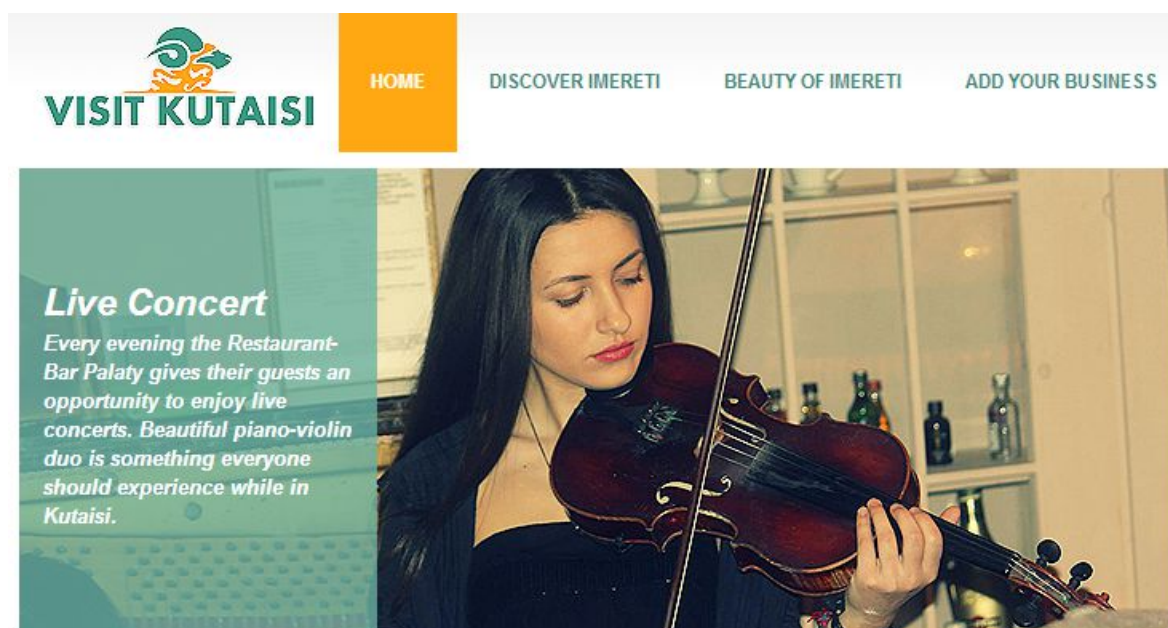


Fig. 9. New website VisitKutaisi.com has the potential to become the official tourist website of the city and the region.

- The most recent initiative is **www.visitkutaisi.com** (Fig. 9). This is a result of the "Development of the tourism potential in the region of Imereti. Support of the regional labour market" project implemented with the support of the "Polish Aid". It is available in Polish and English, and it covers the whole region. It contains descriptions of tourist attractions, the characteristics of the regional cuisine, offers leisure time activities and provides directions. Currently there is no practical information, even on the availability of attractions (opening hours, ticket prices etc.). The website should also be supplemented with a Georgian version. On the other hand, integration with a dedicated Facebook profile and the ability to

download a leaflet with comprehensive information and map of the city is an advantage. The website was created in cooperation with the local tourism industry.

In addition to the above-described websites, Kutaisi is present in tourist services. One of the most important is the TripAdvisor. 60 accommodation facilities, 11 catering venues and, unfortunately, only four attractions can be found there. Tourist information centre staff should prepare, in collaboration with the tourism industry, content which may be published on the site.

Conclusion: The Tourist Information System in Kutaisi contains all elements, but each of them requires actions to improve its functioning. The most pressing issue seems to be the issue of labelling and operation of the tourist information centre. Also noticeable is the lack of a single official tourist website, through which the city and the region could be promoted. www.visitkutaisi.com has a chance to become such a medium, but the success of this project depends on the cooperation of the local government with the tourist industry. The former should create an organisational framework and a promotion mechanism, and the industry should create tourism products that can be offered and promoted through the website or social media.

5. The number of visitors and tourists

During the study visit, quantitative data were collected from several sources: the airport (David the Builder Kutaisi International Airport), the tourist information centre in the city, Bagrati Cathedral, the Satplia Nature Reserve and Prometheus Cave. It should be clarified that the data refer to Kutaisi visitors. We can refer to tourists (as defined by the World Tourism Organization) only if a person coming to a given site stays overnight. Meanwhile, none of the sources include such a distinction.

5.1. Number of passengers handled by the airport

David the Builder Kutaisi International Airport is the third largest airport in Georgia. In 2013, it handled approx. 188 thousand passengers (Tbilisi approx. 1,436 thousand, Batumi approx. 209 thousand; source Georgian Civic Aviation Agency). In

2011, the facility underwent thorough renovation. The stimuli for the development of the airport was launching flights to and from Budapest, Kiev, Katowice and Warsaw, operated by low-cost airline Wizz Air (Fig. 10)

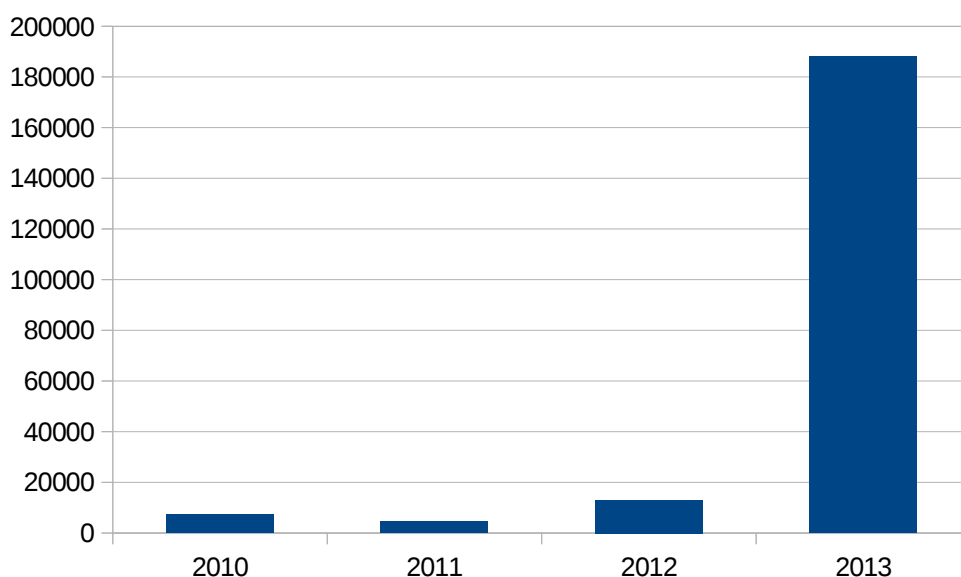


Fig. 10. The number of passengers handled by the Kutaisi airport (source: Georgian Civic Aviation Agency).

It must be borne in mind, however, as has already mentioned in Section 3.1, that for the majority of passengers, the airport in Kutaisi is merely a transfer point to other cities and regions of Georgia or the place of departure from the country by low-cost airlines. Therefore, the number of passengers indicates the potential of people using the airport. The use of this potential is possible thanks to the favourable location of the airport - along the main route, about 14 km from the city centre (cf. Fig. 5).

5.2. One-day visitors and tourists using the tourist information centre

The problems faced by the tourist information centre in Kutaisi are described in Section 4. They are certainly reflected in the relatively small number of visitors and tourists using the tourist information. However, an upward trend may be noticed compared to 2012 and 2013 (Fig. 11). It is probably an influence of the launch of new,

cheap flights.

Based on the gathered data it is possible to identify the peak of the tourist season, which is the summer months (June and July). Also October is popular⁹.

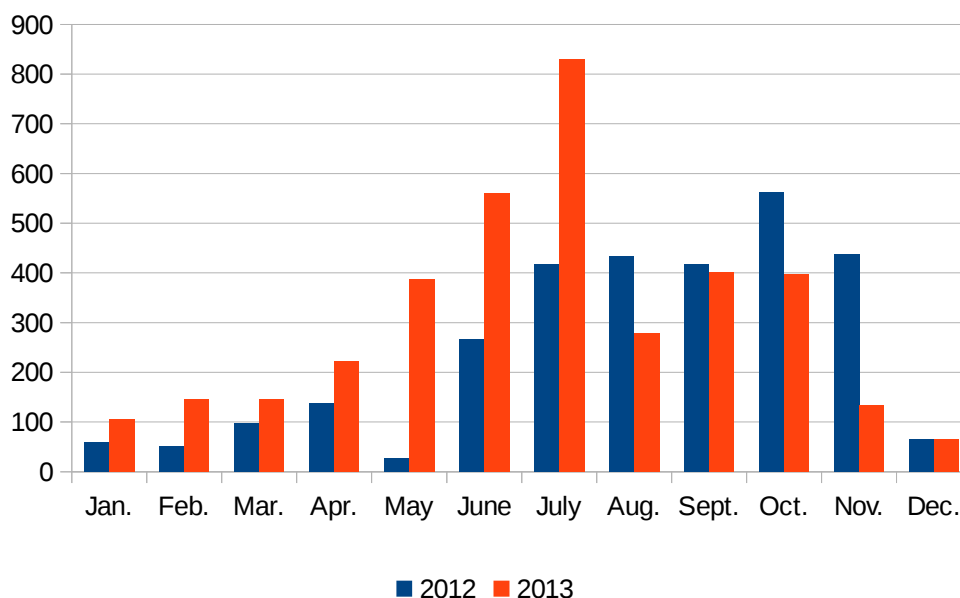


Fig. 11. Comparison of the number of tourists reaching the tourist information centre in Kutaisi in 2012 and 2013 (source: data from the tourist information centre in Kutaisi).

On the other hand, information on the nationality structure of visitors received from the staff at the tourist information centre proved to be surprising. According to their observations, Georgians use the services of the centre to a very small extent. In fact, so much so, that they were not included in the statistics. Among those reaching the centre the largest group in 2013 were Poles, followed by Ukrainians, Germans, Israeli and the Czechs (Fig. 12a). A large number of tourists from the first two countries can probably be associated with the launch of Wizz Air flights.

5.3. Visitors of the Bagrati Cathedral

The Bagrati Cathedral is one of the places for which detailed statistics are kept. It is also one of the major tourist attractions (cf. Section 3.3). In 2013, it was visited by nearly

⁹ This is probably related to the vintage period during this month.

121 thousand people, of which just over 15 thousand were foreign visitors (about 12%). The top five among the groups of foreign tourists is as follows: Ukraine (3120), Israel (2803), Poland (1914), Russia (1233) and Japan (1135) (Fig. 12b). The peak of the season is very clear and fell on the period from May to mid-July, when the cathedral was visited by 55% of all tourists.

These data suggest a large number of organised groups (as compared to individual tourists who use tourist information), probably to a great extent of a touring character. Therefore, tour operators should be contacted in order to extend the stay in Kutaisi. This requires cooperation of the tourism industry with local authorities and the development of attractive offers and services.

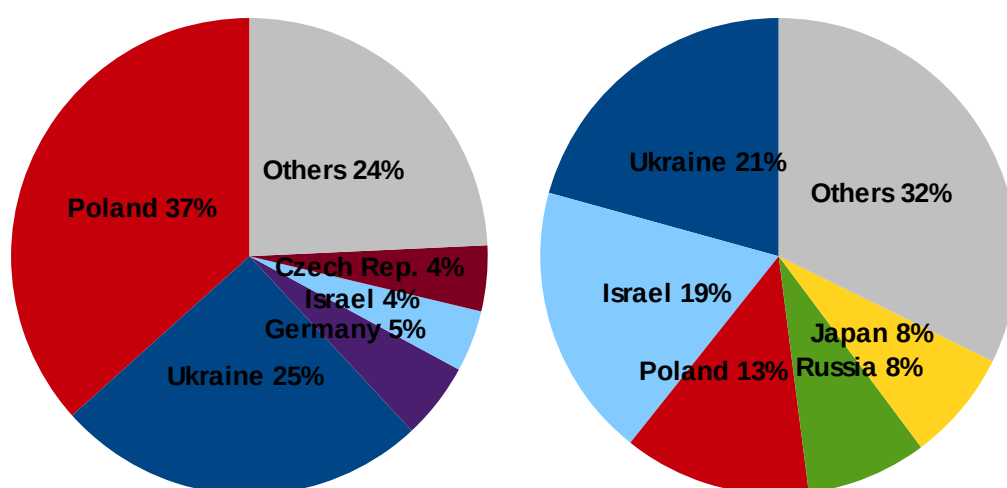


Fig. 12. The structure of foreign tourists in Kutaisi in 2012: a (left). reaching the tourist information centre, b (right). visiting the Bagrati Cathedral (data: data from the tourist information centre in Kutaisi).

5.4. Tourism in Prometheus Cave and the Sataplia Nature Reserve

Data gathered by the staff of the reserve clearly indicate that Sataplia, and especially Prometheus Cave is one of the biggest attractions of Kutaisi. The latter is visited by approximately 100 thousand people a year, and the reserve with fossilised dinosaur footprints is reached by 75 thousand people a year, and up to 4 thousand per day. Among

the foreign tourists the most prominent groups are Israeli, Poles, Ukrainians and Russians¹⁰.

Conclusion: Although data on the number of people visiting Kutaisi are scattered and incomplete (there is no information on the time and reasons for the visit), it can be concluded that the city's attractions and the surrounding area are visited by over 100 thousand people per year. They are usually one-day visitors, probably from the offer of organised tours of Georgia. It is a potential, as they can be kept for at least for one day thanks to promotional activities and the development of infrastructure.

6. The state of the development of tourism in Kutaisi

One of the goals of the project is to establish cooperation between the local government and the tourism industry, which should result in the creation of the tourist destinations management organization (DMO - Destination Management Organisation), operating like the Poznań Local Tourist Organization.

Participation of representatives of both these segments is necessary for modern tourism management. This is particularly important in cities like Kutaisi (but also Poznań), which are not tourist leaders in their respective countries. Only joint efforts can bring significant results in the form of an increase in recognition of the city, and above all, an increase in the number of tourists and resulting income.

Support and arguments for this type of approach may also be found in the existing tourism development strategy prepared by local experts:

In order to create program a working group should be established, which will determine the key indicators of tourism development, general policy and expenditures for the development of this policy.¹¹

Approval of this concept is also expressed by authors of a paper resulting from one of the international programmes (cf. Section 6.3):

Very important the City Hall has to create a networking able to diffuse the reputation and tourist offers of the city.¹²

10 Data obtained from the reserve staff.

11 Tcharkhalasvili K., Gulua G., 2010: For strategy of tourism development in Kutaisi. Kutaisi.

12 Tourism development strategy and action plan for Kutaisi City, Georgia, 2010, Sustour, Kutaisi.

6.1. Public administration entities responsible for tourism

The structures of the city hall include a unit responsible for tourism, which is subordinated to the Department of Economy. Its manager is Konstantine Tcharkhalashvili. Its main tasks include:

- operating the tourist information centre, in organisational and financial cooperation with the Georgian Tourist Organization (Georgian National Tourism Administration) - cf. Section 4,
- preparing tourist publications and website contents,
- collecting and interpreting data on tourism (e.g. database of attractions, accommodation and catering facilities, as well as statistics regarding users of the tourist information centre),
- promotion (participation in tourism fairs),
- preparing tourism development plans and strategies.

6.2. Tourism industry and partners

As mentioned above, the development of tourism is not possible without the cooperation of the local government administration with the tourism industry. These are both public institutions and companies. During the study trip it was possible to make contact with a number of entities that are or should become partners in tourism management. Often the quality of tourist offer, attractiveness of the region, and finally, the availability of qualified personnel depends on their activities.

The first group consists of institutions and associations running educational and research operations:

- Akaki Tsereteli State University is a university founded in 1930. Its offer is indirectly related to tourism: management, administration, journalism, as well as history, archaeology, geography and environmental protection.
- Kutaisi University is a private university with nearly 20 years of history. It offers majors such as tourism (BA), administration and economics.
- The Imereti Scientists' Union "Spectri" is a non-governmental organisation whose objectives are focused on activities related to education, environmental protection, healthcare and entrepreneurship.

- Non-governmental organization "Tourism and Reality", supporting activities related to the development of tourism in the entire region of Imereti.

Another category are the most active entities of the tourism industry, which due to the range of undertaken activities and initiatives and their experience can become leaders in the development of tourism. Their voice is also an important source of information on the needs of the industry, the existing offer and tourists coming to the city. This allows more effective planning of promotional activities, coordinated and conducted by the local government and the tourist information centre. This list is in no way exhaustive. It merely provides examples of organisations and companies representing the most important branches of tourism which were able to identify and make contact with during the study trip:

- cultural institutions and institutions managing the attractions: Sataplia Nature Reserve, Prometheus Cave, the Museum of History and Ethnography, War Museum, Museum of Sports, David Kakabadze Fine Art Gallery, Lado Meskhishvili State Drama Theatre, Opera, and the Georgian Orthodox Church exercising custody of the religious monuments (Bagrati Cathedral, Gelati Monastery and Motsameta Monastery)
- organisers and tour operators, including: Wonderland, Best Travel, Kolkha Tour, Galant Travel, Georgian Earth Travel,
- accommodation facilities, including: Bagrati 1003, Old Town, Rcheuli-Palace, Imperial, Kutaisi by Kote Hostel,
- restaurants and catering-related facilities, for example: Palaty, Mirzaani, El Depo,
- David the Builder Kutaisi International Airport.

Also projects being a result of collaboration of the industry are noteworthy, for example InfoKutaisi.com website or Agro Tourist Association "Korena".

The last important partner that can support the development of tourism are the local media. By providing information on events and activities they build awareness of the attractiveness of the city and region, both in the local community, as

well as among potential tourists.

6.3. External support

The city of Kutaisi and institutions very actively operating there participate in international experience sharing and support projects and programmes. In the past few years, a number of projects relating to tourism were implemented:

- “SusTour – An integrated approach for the sustainability of the tourism production” (2007-2010): Georgian-Italian program funded by the European Union under CIUDAD (Cooperation in Urban Development and Dialogue). Among the visible effects the following should be mentioned: "Tourism development strategy and action plan for Kutaisi City, Georgia", a brochure about the city issued in English and Russian, and the www.sustourism.net project website.
- “WeNeT: E-Learning Network for further Education and Training in the Field of Tourism (Belarus, Georgia and Ukraine)” (2010-2013): educational programme, implemented by the Kutaisi University.
- An international (Georgia, Moldova, Armenia, Romania) educational project for waste management, including promotion of selective waste collection (2013). It was implemented by the Imereti Scientists' Union "Spectri", and one of the objectives was to improve the aesthetics of the environment through limiting the littering of streets, road sides and other areas.
- "The development of the tourism potential in the region of Imereti. Support for the regional labour market" (2014): a Georgian-Polish program implemented by the ICAD Foundation - International Support Centre, with financial support from "Polish Aid" (MFA). Its effects include dozens of trained tourist guides, the creation of a comprehensive tourist leaflets and launching the VisitKutaisi.com tourism portal
- "Attracting tourism. Exchange of experience between Poznań and Kutaisi (2014): another cooperation programme implemented by the partner cities of Poznań and Kutaisi with financial support from the MFA ("Polish Aid"). This paper is a part of that programme.

6.4. Analysis of the tourism potential of Kutaisi (SWOT)

Reading papers on tourism in Kutaisi¹³, conducted conversations and observations made during the study tour enabled the identification of problems and barriers to the development of tourism. Among them we should mention the lack of sufficient financial organisational and political support on the part of the decision makers. Also noticeable is the lack of communication and cooperation with the tourist industry. This results, inter alia, in the lack of offers and packages that could be a real object of promotion (e.g. during fairs).

During the stay in Kutaisi also limitations of access to tourist information and some sites and attractions were encountered (e.g. the War Museum and the Museum of Sports). In some cases, the lack of fixed price lists for certain services (e.g. transport) may be poorly received by tourists (especially from Western Europe).

Also lacks in the development of city infrastructure (e.g. the quality of roads, lack of a city information system) and tourist infrastructure (e.g. lack of hotels of a given standard and capacity) may be noticed.

These criticisms do not belittle the tourism potential of Kutaisi. They are rather a challenge, and because of many analogies with Poznań, justify the implementation of the project whose part is this paper.

The characteristics of the development of tourism in Kutaisi and its surrounding areas are compiled in the SWOT matrix below (Table 1).

Conclusion: Numerous entities are involved in tourism in Kutaisi, from the City Hall, the Tourist Information Centre, to many representatives of the tourism industry. However, one may notice a large number of institutions that do or may provide support. These are universities, but also non-governmental organizations. Many of them have considerable experience in obtaining external funds. It is therefore important to seek cooperation and integration of activities in the field of tourism.

13 Tcharkhalasvili K., Gulua G., *op. cit.*

Table 1. SWOT analysis of the state of tourism development in Kutaisi, based on the results of a study visit.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – favourable geographical location („the "gate to Georgia"), – modern airport – diversity of places and attractions: from cultural tourism, through culinary tourism, to recreation and active leisure activities, – the city itself and the proximity of the most important attractions, – distinctive features: two UNESCO World Heritage monuments, – qualified personnel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – lack of a formalised platform for cooperation between the local government and the local industry (DMO), – dependence of many actions on the central level, – insufficient financial and organisational support from the city hall, – lack of infrastructure for the development of business, organised and family tourism
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – flights operated by low-cost airline WizzAir, – a positive image of the country (hospitality, beautiful landscape, rich history), – international cooperation and numerous support programmes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the risk of liquidation of moving the cheap flights to another airport, – unfair practices of some service providers (e.g. inflated prices for marshrutkas), – limited possibilities of strategic planning due to the unstable political situation

7. Proposed actions in the field of tourism

The proposed actions (or action plans) were chosen to correspond to the needs of tourism development indicated in strategic documents, identified during the study visit and described in this document. Importantly, they were chosen so that they can be initiated or implemented only by those responsible for tourism at the local level, i.e. the Department of

Tourism of the Town Hall and the tourism industry. Their cooperation is necessary for the following purposes and for the development of tourism in Kutaisi.

Also the principle that actions must be feasible to implement in a relatively short period of time (maximum of several weeks to 1-2 years) and that their effects must be measurable or easily noticeable was adopted. They also cannot require large amounts of money or external support.

7.1. Organising the city and tourist information system

Description:	Due to the necessity to close the new tourist information centre (cf. Section 4.1), the issue of signs giving directions to the still non-functional pavilion remained unresolved. If for financial or organisational reasons it is not possible to repair or liquidate the defective building, then actions should be taken to organise the system of city information.
Actions:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Liquidation or change of the location and content of elements of the city information system (arrows, signs) that direct tourists to the inactive tourist information centre (Fig. 13) - in the event of liquidation of the elements, it is important to preserve posts, plates and boards for future use.2. Covering the tourist information symbols on the unused pavilions and placing clear information about the location of the current tourist information centre on them - it is important to use durable and aesthetic solutions.3. A clear indication of the current tourist information centre through banners, posters, swing signs - it is important to use durable and aesthetic solutions.



Fig. 13. Although the new tourist information centre visible in the photograph is closed for technical reasons, tourists still come there.

	4. Introducing clear information on the current location of the tourist information centre to Internet sources and publications.
Coordinating entity:	Department of Tourism of the Town Hall / tourist information centre
Partners:	Kutaisi Town Hall
Implementation time:	Up to 3 months
Source of financing:	Kutaisi Town Hall
Expenditures (1-3):	1

7.2. Initiating cooperation between the administration and the tourism industry

Description:	<p>Tourism development requires cooperation of the local government (public sector) with the tourism industry. The former usually coordinates the activities, is responsible for promotion, especially external. However, for these measures to be effective a tourist product in the strict sense, created by the industry is needed.</p> <p>Exchange of information between all entities that are involved in tourism is necessary to assess the current state of development and strategic planning and define realistic goals for tourism development in Kutaisi (Fig. 14).</p> <p>In addition, the destination management organization (DMO), creation of which should be a result of cooperation, is stronger and more reliable, competent and equal partner in discussions with the City Hall, the Georgian Tourism Organization or tour operators.</p>
Actions:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Initiating possibly most systematic (suggested interval of month or quarter) meetings with representatives of the local government, employees, tourist information centre staff and travel industry representatives. 2. Identification of barriers to the development of tourism and ways to deal with them on the city scale, as well as defining realistic goals. 3. Construction of packages and offers, and joint development of a promotional strategy. 4. Organisation of a joint venture (event, festival, concert) having a promotional potential for the city and showing its values to residents and tourists.



Fig. 14. Identification of tasks of the public sector and the tourism industry (based on the tourism development strategy for Kutaisi Tcharkhalasvili K., Gulua G., *op. cit*) and their relationship.

	5. Determination of the possibility of formalising cooperation in the form of an association or organisation, focused on the activity typical of a DMO.
	6. Cooperation with other partners (external and internal), with a view to sale offers, increase competences etc. (cf. Section 6)
Coordinating entity:	Department of Tourism of the Town Hal, tourist information centre ¹⁴
Partners:	Kutaisi Town Hal, the tourism industry, Kopinari Airport, the Georgian Orthodox Church (religious monuments)
Implementation time:	Permanent task
Source of financing:	Kutaisi Town Hal, the tourism industry
Expenditures (1-3):	1

14 Its role is particularly important. The tourist information centre has the potential to become not only a place for providing service to tourists, but also a place of exchange of information with the tourist industry as well as a distribution (perhaps even selling) point for services, tour packages, gadgets, tickets, etc. It can also become an initiator (which does not mean the performer at the same time) of many activities.

7.3. Organising the existing and taking up new activities on the Internet

Description:	<p>The Internet is no longer just a place to look for inspiration for a vacation, but also a source of specific information and a platform for concluding transaction (purchase of airline tickets, hotel booking, etc.).</p> <p>Kutaisi lacks an official website dedicated to tourism, which would be available in Georgian and foreign languages (mainly English, Polish, Ukrainian and Russian). The opportunity is to implement the VisitKutaisi.com service (cf. Section 4.4), but its success depends on the will and support of the city authorities and the tourism industry. It is also important to define the responsible entity. Also activity in the social media is gaining importance (e.g. Facebook, TripAdvisor, Instagram, Twitter).</p>
Actions:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Determination of competences in the field of editing and hosting the city's tourist website. 2. Development of the tourist website content (also possible to use in other publications), taking into account the distinguishing features of the city (a list of the top 10 attractions), practical information (availability of attractions, tickets, transport). 3. Correction of content for search engine optimisation (SEO). 4. Analysis of statistics. 5. Establishing cooperation with the editors of the Georgia.travel website and establishing rules for cooperation in the scope of provision of information related to Kutaisi. 6. Establishing contacts with state-owned company United Airports of Georgia to determine the principles of

	cooperation and determine the possibility of establishing a separate official site of the Kutaisi Airport.
	7. Encouraging the tourism industry to expand the list of attractions in tourist services (e.g. TripAdvisor) and activity in social media.
Coordinating entity:	Department of Tourism of the Town Hall/ tourist information centre, the tourism industry
Partners:	Kutaisi Town Hall, the tourism industry, Kopinari Airport
Implementation time:	Permanent task
Source of financing:	Kutaisi Town Hall, the tourism industry
Expenditures (1-3):	1

7.4. Developing a promotional programme for Kutaisi

Description:	The purpose of tourism promotion is to strengthen the image of the city. However, its importance for the sale of tourist offer should not be neglect. The former objective may be successfully implemented by the Department of Tourism of the City Hall. On the other hand, the actual development of tourism cannot exist without the other element, whose creator is the tourism industry. This is another argument for cooperation of both "worlds". One of its objectives is to create a promotional program (based on existing strategies), taking into account sales, and therefore targeted not only at (potential) individual tourists, but also at tour operators.
Actions:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Audit of promotional activities carried out so far, including participation in trade fairs. 2. Identification of distinctive features of the city important for tourism. 3. Review of the existing offers and packages created by the tourism industry. 4. Starting new forms of promotion in cooperation with the

	tourism industry, e.g. organisation of study tours, press trips).
	5. Media monitoring.
Coordinating entity:	Department of Tourism of the Town Hall/ tourist information centre, the tourism industry
Partners:	Kutaisi Town Hall, the tourism industry
Implementation time:	Up to 2 years
Source of financing:	Kutaisi Town Hall, the tourism industry
Expenditures (1-3):	2

7.5. Increasing the qualifications of tourism industry employees

Description:	The following are proposed training topics that can increase the qualification of professionals working in tourism development in Kutaisi ¹⁵ . The training programs can be implemented in collaboration with local partners, as well as in the framework of international cooperation projects.
Actions:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Access to Open Source data and IT tools in tourism. 2. Optimisation of websites for the purposes of search engines. 3. Promotion in social media. 4. Field training on tourist offer of the city for „first contact” personnel (e.g. hotel reception desk staff). 5. Creating business plans for tourism. 6. Language courses. 7. Aesthetics and environmental protection.
Coordinating entity:	Department of Tourism of the Town Hall/ tourist information centre
Partners:	Kutaisi Town Hall, the tourism industry, local universities, associations, NGOs, external partners\

¹⁵ First trainings regarding some of the mentioned topics were carried out during the workshop in Poznań on 18.05-1.06.2014.

Implementation time:	Permanent task
Source of financing:	Kutaisi Town Hall, the tourism industry
Expenditures (1-3):	1

8. Conclusions

The tourist potential of Kutaisi, starting from its localisation, through the availability of transport, to the variety of attractions. makes it possible in the long term for the city to become "a gateway to Georgia". However, the greatest value of the city are its people: highly trained specialists in the field of tourism, working in the city hall and the tourist information centre as well as determined and experienced representatives of the tourism industry. The development of tourism in Kutaisi depends on them.

Actions proposed in section seven do not exhaust the needs of the tourism sector in Kutaisi, but they allow achieving visible results in a short time without incurring large costs. Nevertheless, the issues that require more funds and cooperation with other entities, also at the central level are worth noting. The above proposed actions are based on observations made during the study tour. They are also perceived by people involved in tourism and its development in Kutaisi. The need for the development of urban infrastructure and restoration of degraded urban areas is worth mentioning. One noticed flaw is even the lack of public toilets¹⁶.

The most urgent problem is the issue of organising the tourist information system. Modern, conveniently located and comfortable pavilions deteriorate and require repairs. Their repair or other development of the attractive area should be considered before it becomes degraded. Regardless of the fate of this facility, it is important to provide employees of the tourist information centre with adequate supply of modern materials for information and promotion. To fulfil its role, they must include elements such as city map, most important attractions and practical information (opening hours of attractions, ticket prices and advice). Thus designed leaflet or brochure will help to neutralise the negative impact of deficiencies in other areas (e.g. infrastructure), solutions to which are beyond the current financial capacity of the city.

¹⁶ Tcharkhalasvili K., Gulua G., *op. cit.*

Also the city information system requires expansion. The city lacks arrows and signs with descriptions of monuments (in several languages), boards with maps and other elements that make a city tourist friendly.

Museums and cultural institutions in Kutaisi, which constitute an essential part of the tourist offer, struggle with lack of funds, in term conservation and educational activities, and actions related to the modernisation of methods of displaying their exhibits.

There is also no system of categorisation of accommodation facilities, which is an impulse for the development of organised and business tourism (conferences and meetings). The data in this study indicate that Kutaisi is visited annually by nearly 150 thousand people. Therefore the challenge is to keep them in the city. This can be achieved by the preparing offers, establishing contact with tour operators as well as infrastructure development. The fulfilment of these needs becomes more realistic in the case of the public sector actively collaborating with the local tourist industry towards a common goal.

The above issues are not intended to criticise the state of tourism development in Kutaisi. They are, however, challenges for the city, but also indicate potential areas for collaboration for future cooperation projects of partner cities of Kutaisi and Poznań. It should be emphasised that their result should be improving the quality of urban space, which first of all serves and is shaped by the people of Kutaisi. Tourists, although expected, are consumers of the qualities and attractions of the city in the second place.