

## The Role of Georgia’s Cultural Heritage in the Theoretical Framework of Historical Tourism

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the evolving role of Georgia’s cultural heritage within the framework of history-based tourism by integrating perspectives from historical studies and tourism research. The findings demonstrate that the development of heritage tourism in Georgia varies considerably across regions and is strongly influenced by institutional capacity, locally constructed historical narratives, and the level of community participation. History-oriented tourism functions not only as an economic sector but also as a mechanism of public historical interpretation. By adopting an interdisciplinary approach, the study contributes to contemporary debates on sustainable heritage tourism and offers context-sensitive insights relevant to countries with complex historical backgrounds and developing tourism economies.

Tourism, as one of the most dynamically growing sectors of the global economy, plays a significant role in promoting cultural heritage. Beyond recreation, it serves as an effective means of transmitting cultural values, stimulating interest in regional history, and encouraging the preservation of tangible and intangible heritage. Through festivals, thematic routes, educational programs, and heritage interpretation, tourism acts as a bridge between past and present, facilitating interaction between visitors and local communities.

**Keywords:** Cultural heritage; history-based tourism; Georgia; heritage interpretation; regional tourism development; interdisciplinary research.

In the context of rapid globalization and the intensification of cultural exchanges, the issue of preserving and interpreting cultural heritage has gained increasing academic and practical importance. Tourism has become one of the key mechanisms through which historical knowledge, collective memory, and cultural identity are transmitted to broader audiences. As a result, history-based tourism is no longer viewed solely as an economic activity but as a significant social and cultural phenomenon that shapes public understanding of the past.

For countries with complex historical trajectories and rich cultural legacies, such as Georgia, the relevance of this issue is particularly pronounced. Georgia's cultural heritage reflects multiple historical layers formed at the intersection of different civilizations, religions, and political systems. The growing demand for heritage tourism creates both opportunities for regional development and challenges related to authenticity, sustainability, and responsible interpretation of history.

Despite the increasing role of tourism in heritage preservation, the interaction between historical interpretation and tourism development remains insufficiently studied, especially from an interdisciplinary perspective. This gap highlights the need for research that integrates historical analysis with tourism studies in order to better understand how cultural heritage is transformed into a tourism resource without undermining its scholarly and cultural value. Therefore, the present study is highly relevant, as it addresses contemporary challenges related to heritage management, sustainable tourism development, and the public representation of history.

**Discussion:** In recent decades, cultural heritage has assumed a central position within global tourism systems, particularly in regions where historical depth constitutes a key element of local identity. Tourism motivated by historical interest increasingly relies on the interpretation of heritage sites, cultural practices, and historical narratives—commonly referred to as history-oriented tourism. Within this framework, heritage is understood not merely as a preserved remnant of the past but as a dynamic cultural resource shaped through interpretation, use, and social engagement.

One of the principal mechanisms through which tourism contributes to heritage preservation is its capacity to draw attention to lesser-known or neglected monuments. The expansion of tourism infrastructure has enabled many regions to present their historical legacy to wider audiences. The restoration of ancient churches, medieval fortresses, and ethnographic villages has often been supported by tourism-related investment, encouraging both public authorities and local communities to engage more actively in heritage protection. Additionally, tourism development is frequently accompanied by initiatives aimed at reviving traditional crafts, rituals, and languages, thereby supporting the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. A systematic approach to managing tourist flows, combined with community involvement, forms the foundation for sustainable heritage conservation. [1]

Tourism also holds considerable educational potential. Exposure to diverse cultures, traditions, and historical experiences fosters intercultural understanding and respect for cultural diversity. Guided tours, interactive museums, and educational programs facilitate deeper engagement with historical contexts, transforming abstract historical knowledge into lived experience. Importantly, this educational impact extends to local populations, whose appreciation of their own heritage often grows in response to external interest. Such processes strengthen cultural identity and promote responsible attitudes toward heritage preservation.

Georgia provides a particularly valuable context for examining these dynamics. Situated at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, the country possesses a multilayered cultural landscape shaped by ancient civilizations, medieval architecture, religious traditions, and regionally diverse cultural expressions. Since the early 21st century, rapid tourism growth has intensified the interaction between heritage conservation policies and tourism-oriented economic strategies.

While this development has enhanced regional visibility and economic opportunities, it has also raised questions regarding historical authenticity and sustainable management.

Academic research on heritage tourism in Georgia remains limited and largely fragmented along disciplinary lines. Existing studies tend to focus either on conservation challenges or tourism performance indicators, leaving the interpretive dimension of heritage underexplored. This study addresses this gap by applying an interdisciplinary approach that combines historical analysis with tourism research to examine how cultural heritage is mobilized within history-oriented tourism at the regional level. [7]

The economic dimension of tourism plays a significant role in heritage preservation. Revenues generated from historical sites, museums, cultural events, and souvenir production can be reinvested in conservation and restoration efforts—an especially important factor in contexts of limited public funding. Tourism also stimulates the development of related sectors such as hospitality, transport, trade, and education, thereby increasing the economic interdependence between heritage preservation and regional development. [2]

Regional case studies further illustrate these dynamics. In Upper Svaneti, tourism development is grounded in medieval architecture, defensive towers, and living cultural traditions, although infrastructural limitations constrain growth. Kakheti presents a more integrated model, combining historical monuments with wine culture and religious heritage, supported by stronger governance structures and private investment. Urban heritage tourism in Tbilisi reflects selective historical representation, emphasizing periods aligned with international visitor expectations. These contrasts demonstrate how heritage interpretation and management practices shape tourism outcomes.

The future of heritage preservation through tourism increasingly depends on digital technologies and civic engagement. Virtual museums, 3D modeling, and interactive applications enhance accessibility while reducing physical pressure on heritage sites. At the same time, civic initiatives, volunteer movements, and educational programs have become important drivers of heritage protection. However, risks remain, including over-commercialization, loss of authenticity, and cultural commodification. Addressing these challenges requires clear regulatory frameworks and sustainability-oriented tourism policies. [3–5]

**Conclusion:** This study examined the dynamics of cultural heritage within history-based tourism through an interdisciplinary analysis of regional cases in Georgia. The findings demonstrate that heritage tourism is shaped by historical interpretation, institutional capacity, and social context. The Georgian experience highlights both the developmental potential of heritage tourism and the challenges associated with sustainability and authenticity.

Tourism today extends beyond leisure and economic activity, functioning as a powerful instrument for cultural preservation, regional development, and intercultural dialogue. Sustainable heritage tourism requires coordinated governance, professional expertise, and community involvement. Future research could expand comparative perspectives to other regions of the Caucasus and Eastern Europe, contributing to broader theoretical discussions on heritage tourism and public history.

The scientific significance of this study lies in its interdisciplinary approach, which connects historical research with tourism studies in the analysis of cultural heritage. By examining history-based tourism as a form of public historical interpretation, the research expands existing

theoretical frameworks that traditionally separate heritage conservation from tourism development.

The study contributes to academic discourse by demonstrating how cultural heritage functions simultaneously as a historical source, a symbolic marker of identity, and a tourism resource. Through regional case studies from Georgia, the research highlights the role of institutional capacity, community participation, and narrative construction in shaping tourism outcomes. This approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of heritage tourism beyond purely economic indicators.

From a practical perspective, the findings offer valuable insights for policymakers, heritage managers, and tourism professionals. The research emphasizes the importance of sustainable management strategies that balance economic benefits with cultural preservation and social responsibility. Furthermore, the Georgian case provides a comparative framework that may be applicable to other regions with similar historical complexity, particularly in the Caucasus and Eastern Europe.

Overall, the study enhances the scientific understanding of heritage tourism and underscores the importance of integrating historical authenticity, community engagement, and sustainability into tourism development strategies.

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