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Issues with Applying the Concept of Community-Based Tourism in the Caucasus

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In Armenia and Georgia, tourism has become part of the development strategies that aim to revitalize those mountain areas experiencing a rural exodus and anemic economic structures.

Association agreements

between the European Union (EU) and Georgia (2014) and the EU and Armenia (2018) promote community-based tourism (CBT), emphasizing the importance of facilitating cooperation between stakeholders and inclusion of local communities. This study describes the current application of CBT in Georgia and Armenia to elucidate the understanding and perception of the concept by different stakeholders and to provide recommendations for the development of comprehensive CBT practices in the South Caucasus. We used qualitative methods within our research. Our

overall analysis includes policy documents and semistructured interviews with tourism and rural development authorities, civil society organizations, and entrepreneurs. Our key findings reveal the various factors that influence the sustainable development of CBT projects, especially in mountainous areas. We recommend integrating tourism and community development practices, elaborating specific guidelines for CBT projects, and filling the knowledge gap of community development facilitators regarding tourism practices. We also suggest focusing more on diversifying community-based products to expand cooperation among service providers.

Keywords: community; community development; facilitation; rural tourism in the Caucasus; participation.

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Introduction

The association agreement (AA) between the European Union (EU) and Georgia (AA 2014) and the EU–Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA 2017) promote the “development and promotion of, inter alia, community-based tourism” (AA 2014:116). It emphasizes the engagement of local communities in the process of planning and implementing tourism, including equality in decision-making (Khartishvili et al 2019). However, there is a knowledge gap with respect to what the community-based tourism (CBT) concept means in these countries. Tourism in both countries today differs from the structures common during Soviet times and is going through a transition period because of pressures from international tourists, who demand high-quality competitive tourism experiences, especially in mountainous areas. At the same time, tourism has become an integral part of the strategy documents of different ministries and institutions; however, intersectional cooperation is lacking. Several international initiatives are facilitating this transition and supporting links between local service providers and tourism operators (Bakhtadze-Englaender 2019).

This research aims to explore the current understanding and application of the concept of CBT in Georgia and Armenia to suggest recommendations for the development of comprehensive CBT practices in the South Caucasus. The research focuses primarily on the following questions:

- What is the current understanding of the term CBT by different stakeholders in Georgia and Armenia?
- Which aspects of CBT motivate its integration into development projects?
- What are the key factors and constraints of CBT projects implemented in Armenia and Georgia?

CBT: understanding the concept

A community-based approach to tourism has spread since the 1970s (Reid et al 2004) and has become an integral part of rural and tourism development strategies in the global South (Lane and Kastenholz 2015). Murphy’s (1985) proposal for community-driven tourism planning is more in tune with rural contexts in both developed and developing countries. In this case, “community” refers to a group of people living in a defined space (Murphy 1985, 2013). Suansri (2003) describes CBT as a type of tourism that is “managed and

owned by the community, for the community, with the purpose of enabling visitors to increase their awareness and learn about the community and local ways of life” (Suansri 2003:14). Denman emphasizes the social dimension in CBT by proposing “community-based ecotourism where the local community has substantial control over, and is involved in, its development and management, and a major proportion of the benefits remain within the community” (2001:7).

The fundamental notion of CBT is a core aspect of sustainable development, in which community participation in the implementation and decision-making processes creates conditions for developing learning capacity and empowering the community (Goodwin and Santilli 2009; Mtapuri and Giampiccoli 2013, 2016; Kontogeorgopoulos et al 2014). For many developing countries, their natural and cultural heritage continues to be a source of significant economic benefits, attracting international and domestic visitors (The Mountain Institute 2000). CBT practices and its participatory development approach are a response to top-down planning (Novelli et al 2017), in which the local community—with many residents who are service providers—has little decision-making power in tourism planning and management processes (Blackstock 2005).

Although many literature sources provide similar definitions of CBT, a single common definition seems to be missing (Goodwin and Santilli 2009). At the same time, most literature refers to similar beneficial aspects of CBT: multipurpose use of resources, economic development through tourism revenues, diversification of the economy, establishment of additional enterprises, protection of living culture and nature, improved community livelihood, and empowerment of communities (Boonratana 2010; Dolezal 2011; López-Guzmán et al 2011; Nair and Hamzah 2015). Empowered communities gain knowledge and management skills through participation and ownership (Arnstein 1969) that enable them to manage businesses and control their resources (Leksakundilok 2004).

Because of these beneficial aspects, CBT is being widely promoted by international aid programs in developing countries (Richards and Hall 2003; Idziak et al 2015; Nair and Hamzah 2015; Dangi and Jamal 2016; Kavita and Saarinen 2016). However, there is much to learn from past unsuccessful cases of CBT. Several community development projects failed, even though they were provided with funding, because project managers did not take into account local circumstances and did not pay proper attention to the local aspects of the contextual nature of CBT (Blackstock 2005; Stone and Stone 2011). Practitioners followed programs proposed by Western experts that may be successful in other countries without considering the local context (Goodwin and Santilli 2009; Johnson 2010; Nair and Hamzah 2015; Mtapuri and Giampiccoli 2016). There are also cases in which the central management system in the developing world hampered citizens’ participation in decision-making processes, which is key to successful CBT development (Leksakundilok 2004).

Despite widespread CBT projects in the developing world, the practice has emerged only recently in post-Soviet countries. CBT development requires a better understanding of the local context, an individual approach, and appropriate planning models that are adapted to local perspectives and social structures.

However, to our knowledge, there is no literature addressing the understanding of CBT and its implementation, including its beneficial aspects and constraints, in the Caucasus region.

Research context and methods

This paper focuses on tourism development projects recently initiated by international organizations in the mountainous areas of Georgia and Armenia. Figure 1 shows one of the popular mountain travel destinations of the South Caucasus: Tabatskuri village in Samtskhe-Javakheti region, Georgia.

Initially, we collected and analyzed policy documents and identified several CBT projects through desk research; we gathered further information about additional projects and stakeholders via the snowball method. In total, 15 CBT projects implemented during 2012–2018 in Armenia and Georgia were examined. The findings are summarized here.

We conducted semistructured interviews (face to face and via videoconferencing) with experts and stakeholders in June and September 2018 and in March 2019. In total, 40 interviews (25 in Georgia and 15 in Armenia) were recorded and transcribed with consent of the interviewees. Among the interviewees were experts and researchers (12), representatives of public institutions (4), nongovernment organizations (NGOs; 14), and private businesses (10). We did not interview community members, because the research aimed to identify the perceptions of experts and project managers. We analyzed the data using qualitative content analysis.

Findings

Understanding of CBT by different actors

Respondents use the term CBT in projects in a loose and undefined way. Project managers even noted that the term CBT does not exist in project-related documents and guidelines and that they accepted CBT as a term proposed in the Western world, which had been included in the AAs per the request of the EU (albeit without a definition; AA 2014). A central leading structure of rural, eco-, and/or agritourism in both countries is missing, and the concept of alternative forms of tourism has not yet been discussed and is not reflected in official tourist documents.

The definition of community also differs from one respondent to another. For example, policymakers focus on administrative boundaries of the municipality (self-governing units in the region), whereas representatives of civil society organizations focus on common lives, interests, habits, etc (Parliament of Georgia 2014). Table 1 provides definitions of community, community-based activities, and CBT proposed by various actors. The respondents’ understanding of CBT is often associated with remote mountainous areas. They use CBT interchangeably with rural tourism, in which the main actors are community members. Generally, both Armenian and Georgian interviewees perceive rural tourism as an umbrella term for alternative forms of tourism and activities in rural areas, including remote mountainous areas.

FIGURE 1 Georgia's beautiful mountain scenes offer great potential for community-based tourism: Tabatskuri village in the South Caucasus. (Photo by Lela Khartishvili)



Beneficial aspects of CBT motivating its integration into development projects

We divided favorable aspects perceived by practitioners and experts as motivation to integrate CBT into development programs into four categories: preservation of culture and nature, valorization of traditional products, diversification of rural economy, and community development.

Respondents from environmental agencies develop community-based activities using tourism as praxis dedicated to enhancing residents' awareness of and involvement in natural resource management and protecting ecosystems. Better communication with locals also helps them to promote and preserve both tangible and intangible culture in mountainous areas. Farmers' associations and rural tourism development organizations spoke about the role of CBT in the valorization of traditional products, particularly organic, locally produced products. They noted that the involvement of CBT practices stimulates farmers to restore forgotten traditions, because it increases their awareness of and access to the market. Such practices resulted in the emergence of new tourism activities, such as *marani* (family wine cellar) wine tours in Georgia.

Practitioners and state representatives concerned about rural revitalization and diversification of the local economy recognize the role of CBT practices in terms of creating additional jobs and employment opportunities for locals,

particularly for the youth in mountainous regions. Community development organizations in both countries advocate CBT as a tool for community mobilization and capacity building—a participatory approach in community and sustainable development. In Table 2, we grouped all aspects mentioned by interviewees from selected NGOs that play a leading role and have extensive experience in both community development and rural tourism practices in Armenia and Georgia.

More perceived benefits of CBT are evident in the purpose/activities column in Table 3, which summarizes 15 projects implemented in Georgia and Armenia, between 2015 and 2018, focusing on their objectives, keys to success, and main constraints. Some projects, initiated either by external initiatives or by local strategic players, are still active. The projects, in particular those initiated by external agencies, focus on safeguarding cultural traditions and natural resources, and enhancing economic prosperity, including the development of trails, product or service quality standards, and establishment of associations and local entities. There are cases of local initiatives that focus on concrete activities, such as managing common spaces (recreational and parking places, waste management, water supply, etc), as well as development of common products and facilities.

TABLE 1 Definitions of community, community-based activities, and community-based tourism.

Term	Definition	Respondent/organization
Community	A settlement in a municipality (self-governing unit in the region) with administrative boundaries. A community consists of 2 or more villages with a common representative. A community fund is a part of the municipal budget.	Government of Georgia
	A group of people living in a certain geographical area (without administrative borders) sharing similar socioeconomic conditions and culture, interests, problems, and needs.	A coalition of 11 civil society organizations in Georgia
	A group of people, unions, and alliances. It can be an informal or formal (legal) nonprofit organization with an organizational structure, such as an association or network.	Green Valley, Georgia
	Community means my family and my neighbors, who share challenges, expectations, beliefs, and benefits.	Tkibuli District Development Fund, Georgia
Community based	Community based means the way people make decisions and benefit at a local level; sustainability refers to results; and community-based activity refers to the process.	Development Principles (NGO), Armenia
Community-based tourism	A form of tourism in rural areas in which the main assets are local residents and their offerings based on local resources.	Iliia State University, Georgia
	Tourism in remote areas that is managed by a local entity (eg, travel agency or tourism information center) and benefits both individual businesses and communities. CBT is driven by active community leaders who contribute to the development of CBT with local and context-specific knowledge.	Utsera development project, GIZ Georgia
	An activity of a group of people in certain rural areas that have a common vision and mission and share common benefits and interests to improve livelihoods through tourism activities.	Centre for Strategic Research and Development, Georgia
	Activities of a legal organization (ie, association, network, or alliance with an organizational structure) or a nonformal cooperative-type rural entity that offers competitive agritourism products and supplementary income for rural residents.	Biological Farming Association Elkana, Georgia
	Activity in rural and remote areas that is more than mere cooperation in the production or marketing of the product.	Tatev development projects, Armenia
	Human-oriented tourism in remote areas managed by local residents who provide accommodation services in village houses or small hotels and offer traditional local food, wine, and handicrafts that are of interest to tourists.	Tourism development center in Gumri, Armenia
	An integral part of ecotourism; it focuses on the benefits and partnerships of the local community and ensures the long-term stay of tourists in the villages.	Georgian Ecotourism Association
	Tourism in less urbanized areas of the country in traditional, natural, and cultural landscapes based on local resources, such as traditional agriculture, and on tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Accommodation is provided in small and medium-size farmhouses and other rural (nonagricultural) homestays.	Rural Tourism Network, Georgia

Characteristics, constraints, and key factors of CBT projects perceived by actors

Tourism projects in Georgia and Armenia are implemented primarily by international aid programs. There are few examples of private initiatives—motivated and active locals in villages who joined forces to address common needs and interests. The cases perceived as most successful by the interviewees are characterized by good cooperation between community leaders and national authorities. Examples of such cases are presented in Table 3: the village of Kalavan,

Armenia, where accommodation and catering services and other tourism facilities belong to a group of local residents, and the villages Dartlo and Omalo in Tusheti, Georgia, where the Tushi community participates in natural resource management and village restoration programs and has effective cooperation with regional and national authorities. Successful cooperation is the result of a long process of community mobilization and capacity building; in Tusheti's case, this was facilitated by the local administration of the protected areas of Georgia and various environment agencies.

TABLE 2 Main beneficial aspects of community-based tourism projects, perceived by practitioners and experts.

Purpose(s) of CBT projects	Identified (expected) aspects	EO ^{a)}			FA ^{b)}	RCDO ^{c)}			
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Conservation of nature and culture	Communication with local people	X	X	X					
	Enhancement of awareness of ecological systems	X	X	X					
	Community-based natural resource management (sustainable management of protected areas)	X	X	X					
	Promotion of cultural heritage (protection and restoration of cultural landscapes in mountainous areas)	X	X	X	X				
2. Valorization of traditional or locally produced organic products	Enhancement of awareness of organic products			X	X				X
	Restoration of forgotten traditions as cultural identity and unique sales products in the region			X	X		X		
	Accessibility to international and national markets				X		X		
	Generation of supplementary income through new activities	X	X	X	X		X		X
3. Revival of rural areas	Distinguishing local production by geographical origin				X				
	Identification of unique, high-quality products				X				
	Development of small and medium-size enterprises	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Establishment of service standards (food safety and service quality)			X	X		X		
	Establishment of value chains			X	X	X	X		X
	Increasing tourist spending in the region (new attractions for tourists)						X	X	X
	Revitalization of the local economy and opportunities for rural areas		X		X				X
4. Mobilization and empowerment of communities	Establishment of strong entities or community groups					X		X	X
	Capacity building at the local level	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
	Enhancement of community participation, ownership, and transparency of project implementation		X	X		X		X	X
	Integration of participatory planning approaches in community development practices		X	X		X		X	X
	Enhancement of cooperation and networking		X	X		X		X	X

^{a)} EO, environmental organization: (1) Georgian Ecotourism Association, (2) Association of Friends of Protected Areas of Tusheti, and (3) Green Valley.

^{b)} FA, farmers' association: (4) Biological Farming Association Elkana.

^{c)} RCDO, rural community development organization: (5) Strategic Research and Development Centre of Georgia, (6) Development Principles, (7) Tbilisi District Development Fund, and (8) Repat Armenia Foundation.

Examples in Table 3 show that sharing common business interests, such as the development and organization of a diverse and year-round tourist product, creates solutions to waste management and other issues, motivates local residents to cooperate effectively, and establishes a network of services. Practitioners see collaboration and partnership as important for getting technical support (training and study tours), defending their rights, and learning from one another. Local leaders, as main drivers, play a crucial role in CBT projects. In most cases, they are urban entrepreneurs who have invested in a second home to rent as a guesthouse. Projects driven by women are particularly successful; women tend to have more experience in networking and hospitality.

Table 3 also depicts the perception of respondents on the constraints of CBT project development. They spoke openly

about activities supported by projects mostly contributing to the development of infrastructure, such as accommodation facilities and trail marking, but did not address the social values of CBT, such as local residents' perception or readiness to participate in implementation and management processes. In most cases, local residents find it difficult to collaborate and take ownership of projects. They are not aware of their rights, preventing them from becoming more demanding and involved in decision-making processes. D. Dolidze, the project manager at the Biological Farming Association Elkana (Georgia), noted that despite many efforts spent on project implementation, there was not enough time to deal with fundamental problems, such as a mistrust among the locals, pessimism, and a lack of motivation and capacity. Such problems are not visible and

TABLE 3 Community-based tourism projects implemented between 2012 and 2018 in Armenia and Georgia. (Table continued on next page.)

Village, country	Initiator	Status	Purpose/activities	Key to success, as perceived by project managers and experts	Constraints, as perceived by project managers and experts
1. Tatev, Armenia	External actors	Passive	Development of a travel destination, tourism activities (long-distance cable car), tourism-related businesses, capacity building via training	High touristic demand, motivated people, active women	Top-down approach, lack of awareness of hospitality and business, seasonal cooperation, more competition than cooperation
2. Nor Nork, Armenia	External actors	Passive	Implementation of the Come Home project for emigrants, communication and awareness raising about Armenian culture	Public and private partnership, hospitable community	Top-down approach, short time to mobilize the community, lack of business skills and experience (local residents work voluntarily)
3. Areni, Armenia	External actors	Passive	Organization of an annual wine festival, expansion of local production through markets and events	Motivated community, cooperation between government and wine businesses, well-known wine region in Armenia	Top-down approach, lack of cooperation between community and private businesses, benefits go to wine entrepreneurs, local residents work for them voluntarily, lack of skills in tourism and hospitality
4. Tsaghkunq, Armenia	External actors	Active	Development of a tourism destination via new services and experiences; enhanced rural tourism networking, local capacity building, and links between locals and tourists	High tourism demand, motivated local businesses, support from aid agencies	Dominant investments, top-down approach, lack of a social approach, low awareness of tourism and hospitality, stereotypes of bad collaboration practices
5. Gusanagurk, Armenia	External actors	Passive	Development of community projects (peach garden) and individual homestay businesses; capacity building through training, study trips, and familiarization tours	Active leaders, trust, good communication	Lack of awareness among local residents concerning development of the tourism business
6. Kalavan, Armenia	Local actors	Active	Support for development of local agriculture and supplementary income from tourism and arts and crafts, capacity building through learning, slow development practices	Competitive approach, active leaders, support from government and aid programs	Lack of cooperation skills, pessimism and lack of motivation, seasonal cooperation, lack of collective thinking, a lot depends on leaders who might leave this position
7. Martvili, Georgia	Local actors	Active	Conservation of nature through tourism and visitor management and ecotourism activities, development of common services (boat tours) and new offers and services	High touristic demand, common business interest, good communication support from administration of protected areas	Tourism management; lack of service skills, services, and innovative and diverse products
8. Chakvistavi, Georgia	Local actors	Active	Conservation of nature through participatory management and ecotourism planning and implementation	High touristic demand, good cooperation and common business interest among community members to develop recreational infrastructure (parking, bridge construction, etc)	Seasonal cooperation, lack of public funding, lack of diversification of services, high competition

TABLE 3 Continued. (First part of Table 3 on previous page.)

Village, country	Initiator	Status	Purpose/activities	Key to success, as perceived by project managers and experts	Constraints, as perceived by project managers and experts
9. Omalo and Dartlo, Georgia	External actors	Active	Conservation of nature through tourism management and ecotourism activities, development of tourism facilities, restoration of traditional architecture, development of trails, service standards	Long process of community mobilization; active leaders; support from international donors, local government, and the Protected Landscape administration	Mass tourism, tourism management, lack of service diversification, high seasonality
10. Tvalivi, Georgia	Local actors	Active	Development of common service (rafting services and facilities), site management	High touristic demand, common business interest, active leaders, support from aid programs	Tourism management, technical staff, seasonal activity
11. Juta, Georgia	External actors	Passive	Support for local participation in nature protection via ecotourism activities	Common business interest, sharing common challenges (waste problem), high touristic demand	Lack of accountability and awareness, no monitoring of use of granted project funds
12. Utsera, Georgia	External actors	Passive	Development of service chains, new product (hiking trails), and service standards; preparation of common platform for service providers; training	Active leaders, good communication, local knowledge, active women	Short time for community mobilization, lack of local capacity, seasonal collaboration, lack of motivation, top-down approach, old stereotypes of cooperatives
13. Satsire, Georgia	External actors	Passive	Rural revitalization, income generation through tourism, valorization of local products, development of a product chain, building local capacities via training, study tours	Local knowledge, active women, effective communication	Little time to mobilize the community; lack of common vision, confidence, and motivation; seasonality; top-down approach; low touristic demand
14. Tsagveri, Georgia	External actors	Passive	Forest rehabilitation and preservation, natural resource management, revitalization of the resort through awareness raising, development of small businesses	Experience in tourism, active neorurals, touristic demand, traditional knowledge	Top-down approach; lack of capacity, skills, and cooperation practices; seasonal cooperation
15. Duisi, Georgia	External actors	Active	Community empowerment through participatory planning practices and development of businesses	Active women, well-informed community, support from aid programs	Seasonal cooperation, lack of skills in cooperation

require better understanding of the context and history of the problem, which could be provided only by local actors. A. Ghazanchyan, from Development Principles in Armenia, and N. Vasadze, who is the director of the Centre for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia, spoke about old stereotypes of collective farms (*kolkhoz*) from the time of the Soviet Union, which impeded development processes in the countries of the South Caucasus and still influence them today. They noted that community-based activities require more patience from the project managers' side and slow development of practices with a focus on

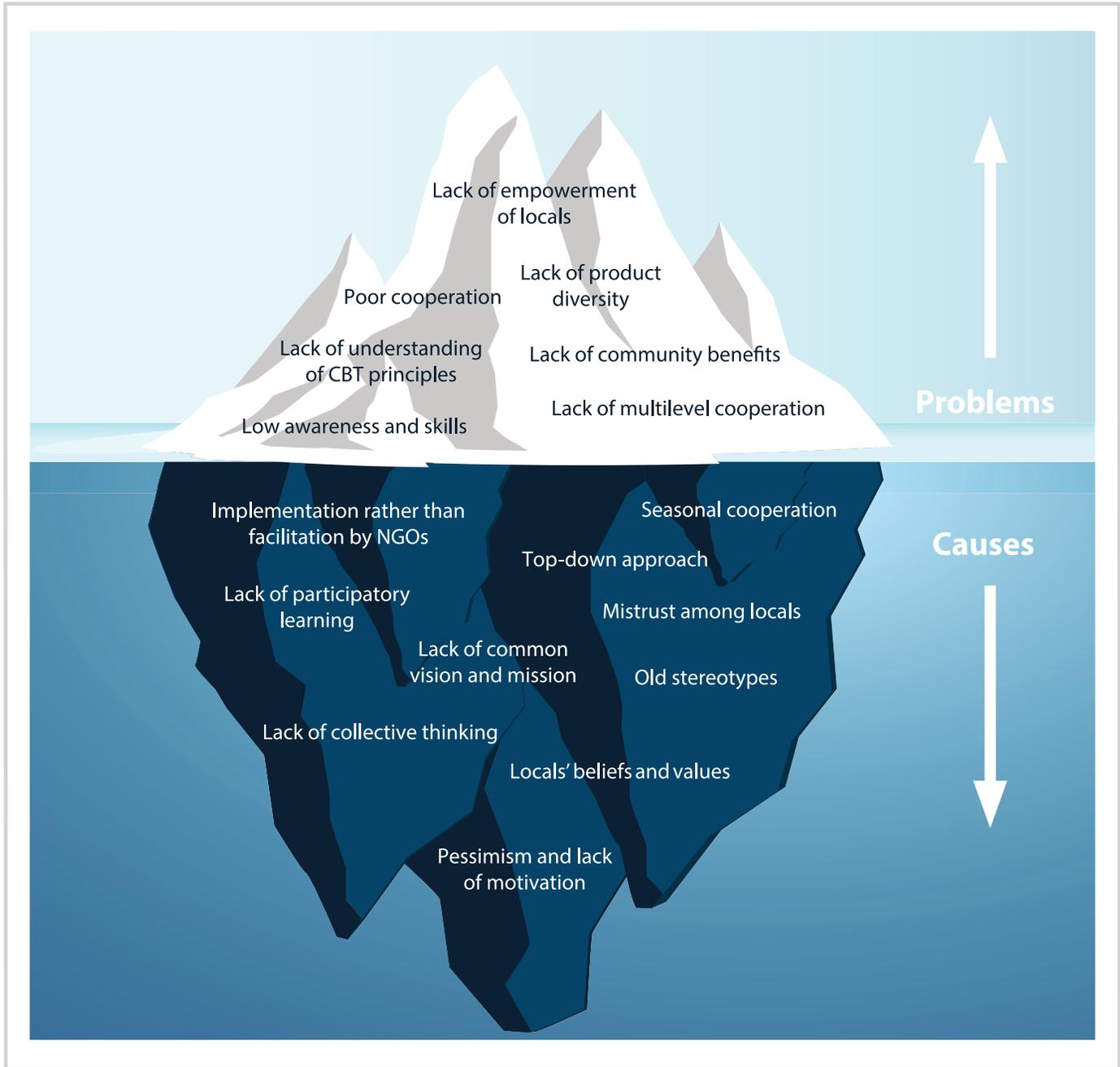
community participation and learning capacity development. Figure 2 visualizes CBT in the form of an iceberg, in which the upper part illustrates the problems and constraints of CBT projects in Armenia and Georgia and the lower part shows hidden elements that cause those problems.

Discussion

The concept of CBT in Armenia and Georgia

CBT is a new concept in the Caucasus, and the respondents appreciate opportunities for professional exchange. They

FIGURE 2 The CBT iceberg: hidden elements that impede the development of comprehensive community-based tourism.



openly discussed issues and problems related to CBT implementation. The respondents' perception and understanding of CBT coincide with internationally accepted characteristics of the term and the fundamental notion of CBT given in the literature. Although there is no single agreed definition (Goodwin and Santilli 2009), the main principles of CBT tend to be consistent, and several practical guidelines are available (Suansri 2003; Giampiccoli and Mtapuri 2012, 2014; Kontogeorgopoulos et al 2014; Dangi and Jamal 2016). Despite the experience of Armenian and Georgian practitioners in community-based approaches and involvement in environmental, cultural, economic, and political activities, the term CBT does not exist in their project documents, and understanding of CBT's guiding principles, such as community-owned businesses,

community-controlled activities, and ownership, are presented in an unclear manner. Because the countries also do not have a clear definition of ecotourism, rural tourism, or agritourism, these types of tourism activities are often grouped together and confused with one another. Although attention has been given to the community approach in all types of alternative tourism development, CBT is still considered a separate form of tourism, rather than a practice that should be embedded in all rural tourism activities.

Identified challenges and constraints

Several practitioners claim that CBT, if planned and organized well, leads to inclusion and empowerment of local

people (Boonratana 2010; Dolezal 2011; López-Guzmán et al 2011). Thus, CBT projects need a clear methodology, but there is a gap in knowledge about such methodology in the Caucasus. Community development and environmental agencies are committed to using participatory learning practices and have elaborated community development working schemes. However, they lack knowledge of tourism, its complex nature, and the specific characteristics of tourism products and services. Blind acceptance of the reference to CBT in the EU AA without a clear understanding of its principles, guidelines, and how they apply in the Caucasus context makes it difficult to implement CBT in practice. Thus, there is a need for better understanding and for specific guidelines for CBT projects in the Caucasus countries. These would help integrate community development workflows with tourism practices.

One of the key constraints to community cooperation in the Caucasus is lack of diversification of tourism activities and high competition. The development of unique year-round activities and partnerships would help to overcome seasonality and miscommunication among locals. Well-organized CBT enables local control and the ability to initiate and manage projects (Leksakundilok 2004).

Today, CBT projects in Armenia and Georgia can benefit from support of external international experts to build capacities on the national and local levels. The empowerment of locals, achievable through active participation and learning capacity development, requires a lot of time for community mobilization, trust building, and planning of long-lasting tourism activities, as was the case in the Tusheti Protected Areas project in Georgia. Social aspects, such as values, opinions, local perception, and behaviors, which are fundamental elements of good cooperation, need better investigation, which could be facilitated by an additional preparatory phase in projects. This will help both practitioners and community members to analyze the context and locals' needs.

Conclusions and recommendations

Our results contribute new findings to understanding of the concept, main aspects, and factors affecting CBT implementation in Armenia and Georgia, which will help practitioners, policymakers, and experts in developing community-driven projects in the South Caucasus. We propose recommendations to fill the knowledge gaps of tourism professionals and community development facilitators in CBT development practices. In particular, we recommend elaborating specific guidelines for implementation of CBT projects, with a focus on diversifying community-based products and community participation, rather than solely developing tourism infrastructure and facilities. Our study opens the opportunity for future research to investigate issues like citizens' inclusion in CBT businesses and management practices in mountainous areas in Armenia and Georgia, and to examine whether CBT practices deliver outcomes that benefit sustainable mountain development.

Based on the results of our research, we propose the following definition of CBT for the South Caucasus:

CBT in the South Caucasus is a community development practice for nonurban and remote mountain villages. It is a joint effort of a group of

people living in a certain geographical area, in which local culture, environment, and hospitality are the main advantages. CBT focuses on the benefits for the local people, capacity building, and empowerment and should constitute a core component of tourism activities in rural mountain regions.

To conclude this study, we suggest the following recommendations for the development of comprehensive CBT practices in the South Caucasus:

- Promotion of CBT as processes generating community development using tourism practices (rather than a separate form of tourism).
- Preparation of guidelines for the development and implementation of CBT projects in Caucasus countries, including a focus on the following:
 - Integration of community development workflows with tourism practices;
 - Stronger integration of participatory learning approaches into tourism development practices;
 - Providing time for community trust building and capacity building of local stakeholders in tourism management.
- Focus on the development of diverse products and business as a major motivation for locals to cooperate and obtain common benefits.

In this paper, we focused on the understanding and implementation of CBT in Armenia and Georgia, primarily addressing CBT in the specific context of the Caucasus mountain region. Our findings are insightful and relevant to other mountain areas, particularly those in other post-Soviet countries. However, we suggest that careful context-specific examination at the local and national levels is necessary to apply our results and recommendations elsewhere.

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