

Mid-Term Strategic Plan for Dedoplistskaro Tourism Development Association

September 2020 - September 2023

Contents

INTRODUCTION	3
Analysis of the Existing Situation	4
Dedoplistskaro Tourism Development Association	5
Assessment of tourism products, services, facilities, visitor satisfaction based on available information	7
Roles and responsibilities of stakeholders for investment in tourism products and services	10
Tourism development strategies in the region and synergies	10
Markets and target groups.....	11
The SWOT analysis of the sector of rural tourism of Dedoplistskaro municipality and Dedoplistskaro Tourism Development Association	14
Recommendations on needed infrastructure and tourism products for investment	17
Conclusion	21
List of Annexes.....	21

INTRODUCTION

The Mid-Term Strategic Plan (strategy) for the Dedoplistskaro Tourism Development Association (DTDA) for the period of September 2020 - September 2023 is compiled by members of the Estonian Rural Tourism Organization (ERTO) during May-August 2020 by the support Heks-Eper Georgia in the frame of the Project “PROCEED” (ENPARD II), with a partnership of Dedoplistskaro Local Action Group (LAG). The DTDA is a young umbrella organization for tourism development on a local level and ERTO has a 20-year experience of building up, developing and running such an organization in Estonia. The idea of cooperation came up in 2019 and was strengthened by the visit of Raili Mengel, the Director of ERTO, to the Dedoplistskaro area in February 2020.

The strategy was compiled in the complicated situation of COVID-19 pandemics, there was no possibility to travel to the destination to meet the stakeholders or have site visits. Therefore, the compilers of this mid-term strategy are grateful for the help and cooperation of Project “PROCEED” representatives to get the relevant information. The strategy is compiled, based on numerous strategic documents, available in English, 26 interviews with tourism stakeholders and members of the local community, and consultations with the project staff and the DTDA members.

The compilers of the strategy for DTDA, Raili Mengel and Marika Kose, have used the best practices of Estonian rural tourism development, their 20 years experience in developing rural tourism in Estonia on local, regional and national level to make the document as usable and relevant as possible for DTDA.

Relying on the UNWTO reports, National Tourism Development Strategy, recently elaborated ecotourism developed strategy under the TJS project for Vashlovani PAs and other relevant strategies, and to our findings, we believe, that in “after COVID-19 World”, the small scale rural and nature tourism will be even more popular among domestic and international visitors. Even more, the goal of the Georgian tourism strategy 2015-2025 is rather no to increase arrivals but prolong the stay and increase the profitability of tourism, by creating quality products and services, opportunities to spend. Relying on the prognosis of UNWTO experts, international travel will be problematic in several forthcoming years. Therefore, we believe that in the years 2020-2023 the domestic travel in Georgia will increase and the Dedoplistskaro region will find its good place in Georgians hearts and travel preferences.

Raili Mengel and Marika Kose

Analysis of the Existing Situation

Tourism in 2020

This strategy document is written during the times of COVID-19 pandemics, which makes all earlier tourism trends and prognosis most irrelevant. The following prognosis refers to UNWTO publication¹ in following trends and prognosis for forthcoming years (which is also the time span for this DTDA strategy document). While tourism has been in growth in 2018 and 2019 in the whole world, including Southern Mediterranean Europe, International tourist arrivals (overnight visitors) saw a decrease of 56% in the first five months of 2020 over the same period of last year, according to data reported so far by destinations worldwide. International arrivals declined 98% in the month of May, reflecting travel restrictions in nearly all destinations worldwide, amid measures to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions on international travel, domestic travel and traveling to adjacent countries are resuming faster. The European Travel Commission (ETC)² also prognoses, that domestic and short-haul travel will be the first source of recovery for European tourism. Experts also foresee changes in consumer behavior. In addition to trips closer to home or adjacent countries, there will be also bookings closer to the departure dates of the trip or preference to travel by car rather than public transport (bus, train, aircraft). In Europe, there is some prognosis for resilience – the likelihood of a stable and quick recovery – of travel demand.

As the situation is changing all the time, there is no good opportunity to make a longer prognosis of tourism trends. By the prognosis of UNWTO, ETC the recovery of international travel will start only after the efficient vaccine for COVID-19 will become publicly available for all continents and countries, to enable the recovery of short-haul and long-haul flights. However, the avian sector has great difficulties and to re-establish the flights in the amounts of a pre-COVID situation will take at least 3 years.

Despite many international and domestic barriers, the tourism sector continued to grow in Georgia until the beginning of 2020. Until 2020, an increase in international arrivals has caused the growth of the number of employees in the tourism sector and income growth from tourism was expected. Georgia's tourism strategy, prepared in 2015 for up to 2025, declares as one of the main aims to get more economic benefits from tourism, not aiming for the increase of visitors but enabling more products and services and spending opportunities, also prolonging the visits. This is in line with the Dedoplistskaro municipality specification as a fragile nature tourism destination with great tourism potential. The main countries of incoming visitors are Azerbaijan, Russia, Armenia, and Turkey, which are all neighboring countries and more than 5.500.000 visitors originate from these countries. The most important European Union countries are Germany and

¹ UNWTO World Tourism Barometer (English version) ; Print ISSN: 1728-9246; Volume 18, Issue 4, July 2020; <https://www.e-unwto.org/toc/wtobarometereng/18/4>

² European Travel Commission; EUROPEAN TOURISM: TRENDS & PROSPECTS, Quarterly report (Q2/2020), ISSN No: 2034-9297; issued JUL 2020, <https://etc-corporate.org/reports/european-tourism-2020-trends-prospects-q2-2020/>

Poland, contributing to Georgian tourism, with an increase of visitors number by 38,1% and 32,0 % accordingly³

Comparing the tendencies of International arrivals to Georgia and Vashlovani PAs there are significant differences. Among visiting foreign citizens slight resemblance are in Russian and Italian travelers, also German and Polish travelers, which are 11th and 12th in-country rating in 2017)⁴.

Analyzing the collected data about visitor numbers and origins in 2017-2019 in Georgia and in Dedoplistskaro nature reserves, where there is collected statistics, it can be said, that in light of the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic the considerable market share has been cut off from Georgia and Dedoplistskaro for 2020 and if the prognosis is relevant, for next few (2-3) years. Comparing the visitor numbers of Vashlovani NP and Chachuna managed reserves to other similar destinations in Georgia, the visitor numbers are very low. The numbers of domestic visits are relatively small. The opportunity during the COVID-19 pandemic situation is to increase domestic tourism and encourage visits from neighboring countries if COVID-19 restrictions and situations allow. The situation is favorable to improve infrastructure, develop human resources, increase the number and quality of products and services while DTDA has a key role in leading and promoting these processes.

Dedoplistskaro Tourism Development Association

With the foundation (in May 2019) of the Dedoplistskaro Tourism Development Association (DTDA), the members of DTDA have shown the will to belong to an umbrella organization that unites rural tourism stakeholders. Membership in DTDA (profiles, activities, age) is diverse and it makes strong bases for networking. Several members are included and marketed in national networks (wine, ecotourism).

During its short time of existence, members and the leaders of the DTDA have done many practical and necessary activities for rural tourism stakeholders. In the short time the webpage has been created, many training sessions have been organized. There has been consultancy for members (product development, marketing materials, training, service design). This is a good sign that members have the willingness to learn and curiosity to develop their businesses. Active organization and participation in different further training (example: service quality and design, customer journey, safety, pricing, marketing, guiding, languages, etc.) will bring competence for stakeholders and will guarantee a better understanding of quality in tourism products and services (see ANNEX 3 and 4 for suggestions).

However, the survey and interviews showed that there is an urgent need to make the DTDA a more efficient, better functioning NGO. For strengthening the relations between DTDA members it would be necessary to organize regular study trips and visits or meetings in their community. During study trips, members can learn about each other's products and services and get a broader view of their municipality and how visitors will see and feel about it. These kinds of visits will be good also in cross-marketing. Organizing all

³ <https://gnta.ge/statistics/>

⁴ <http://apa.gov.ge/en/statistika>

suggested activities needs the dedicated and professional leadership and functioning structure of the organisation (See ANNEX 3 and chart below) and is a full-time job. It could be financed in combination with membership fees, municipality, and donor support.

The interest to have a mid-term strategy for the DTDA is a sign of determination to develop tourism in Dedoplistskaro municipality in a sustainable and organised way. To get a wider platform and recognition, getting new members to the DTDA from all sectors should be a strategic goal. Strong, active and visible members and organisation as a whole will create and strengthen the positive attitude towards tourism, get a wider basis for organization and build trust among stakeholders and partners.

At the moment DTDA is neither a strong partner nor a well-functioning tourism leading unit. However, the strong and wide-based DTDA would be a good partner for national and international tour operators, visit Kakheti, Georgia National Tourism Administration (GNTA) and all other tourism-related institutions. Participation in Georgian tourism-related umbrella organizations networks should be also one main goal for the DTDA. Networking and lobbying for tourism in all sectors and on the local, regional and national level, PPP partnership is the basis of all future development activities and this needs that DTDA will act as DMO and has joint marketing strategy for different markets. DTDA could cooperate with local schools to popularize tourism and guiding as career models. Generally, DTDA could become a community leader NGO in the Dedoplistskaro municipality. Only in this way the local community could be encouraged to participate in tourism-related activities and entrepreneurship and be a part of highly evaluated local hospitality.

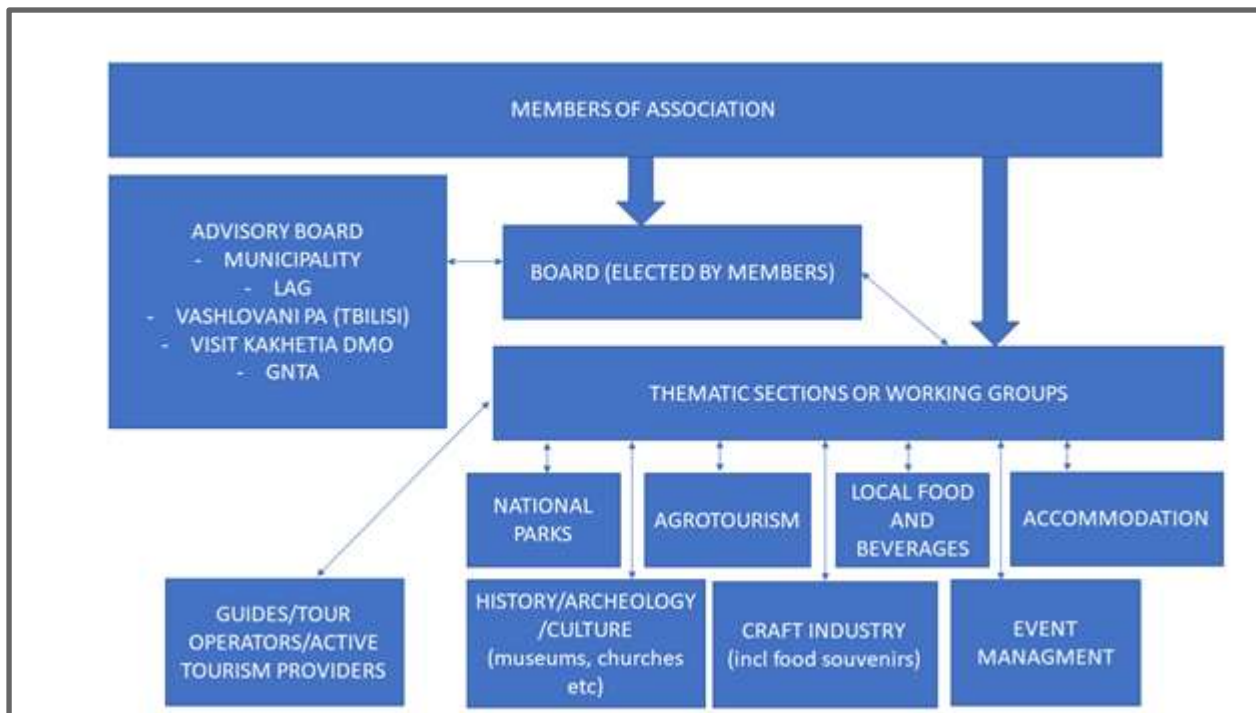
Dedoplistskaro municipality has planned tourism development in its strategy as a separate and therefore outstanding economic branch. In all well-functioning rural destinations, there is a strong umbrella organization (DMO). In some regions it is a specific tourism association, in many developing European destinations (like Estonia) the LEADER LAGs have taken the role in rural areas. Therefore, Dedoplistskaro DTDA as an umbrella organization is vital for initiating, coordinating and facilitating tourism stakeholders and activities. There is no other kind of institution or organization that could carry this role on a local level as resulted from interviews and consultations from stakeholders. At the moment DTDA is unattractive to potential partners (because of passiveness, lack of cooperation skills, and not acting like a reliable umbrella organization).

The general NGO culture is low in Dedoplistskaro, members do not understand the role and working principles of the umbrella organization and bottom-up approach. The members of the DTDA are passive about the activities of the association and all hopes are on the leader. Insufficient communication and cooperation inside DTDA is the problem. Different stakeholders mentioned the decrease of enthusiasm of the people in the rural tourism sector. DTDA leaders should motivate stakeholders to be patient with the development of rural tourism products and services, give inspiration, and explain the longevity of such a strategic and long-term approach. DTDA should have a strategy on how to support, encourage, and consult members and stakeholders to have a strong and motivated network.

Having DTDA as a DMO in this region is even more important for the fact that the area is large, sparsely populated and activities and enterprises are scattered. While it would be good to practice community-based

tourism and slow tourism tactics and related new products and services, it needs even more cooperation and facilitating. The demands and expectations of potential partners (tour operators) could also be too high and difficult to meet or understand, DTDA could be the contact between service providers and resellers.

At the moment the internal structure of the organization and distribution of tasks is not efficient and not based on a bottom-up or participatory approach. The suggested structure of DTDA is more participatory.



Assessment of tourism products, services, facilities, visitor satisfaction based on available information

The geographic location of Dedoplistskaro is providing unique nature and beautiful landscapes. At the same time, the municipality is only 2 hours drive from Tbilisi and 30 km from Signagi, which are the most important sources of visitors for the region. It is important to guarantee smooth transportation from these places and information about the Dedoplistskaro municipality as a destination in several languages. The potential of river Alazani is unused as the transport corridor and as a tourist attraction. Being a remote region of Georgia, a “dead end” because of the closed border with Azerbaijan, there is very poor mobile connection and mobile operators don't see enough market for their service. This undermines tourism but with the increase of tourism, the operators should be negotiated to consider improving the connection. The lobbying should be done both by DTDA and Dedoplistskaro municipality. Also, the internet quality in the municipality needs improvement. The businesses and public sector should provide free internet for foreign and domestic visitors or if with a password, it should be easily accessible to visitors.

In Dedoplistskaro municipality the accommodation and transportation services are available as well as few food and beverage services. The majority of enterprises do not have the practice of receiving tourists. Especially in rural areas - people have very poor ideas about how they can contribute or take part in tourism businesses. Locals associate tourism and tourists with Vashlovani Protected Areas. Therefore product development in the directions of business management, product diversification, and market orientation is needed in the area. The tourism income analysis demonstrates that there is a growing demand for overnight stays in the Vashlovani PAs, particularly camping areas, tourist shelters, and hotels but tourists increasingly request higher levels of services, especially when additional marketing will appear. It is obvious that there are limits of establishing accommodation in Vashlovani PAs, which suggests that there is a need for such services in close vicinity or nearby the protected areas. A suggestion can also be that the Vashlovani PAs will rent the accommodations out to entrepreneurs, who could operate the existing facilities in a better way. Visitors also expect communicative and educated guides, friendly hosts, comfortable environment where they feel included in the local commune. Today the best-met expectation is the friendliness of people, the rest needs serious planning and development. The most frequently named hindering factors of tourism development in Dedoplistskaro municipality are in line with all strategic documents in the region and can be addressed followingly:

It is impossible to receive large groups by accommodation facilities, they are too small and do not meet the needs and expectations of such groups. The problem could be solved by establishing smaller accommodations in close range, but this needs to be facilitated. There is no understanding of standards for accommodations. The existing accommodations operate based on personal experience and ideas and recommendations of friends and colleagues. Today there are no existing B&B in the region and missing low-cost hostel-type overnight facilities. There are 2 hotels (and 2 under construction), 3 guesthouses, 2 shelters, and 1 cottage but that is not meeting the need for accommodation. The local population should be informed about the demand for such accommodation types and the possibilities of starting a B&B. There is also a low number of food providers (restaurant, cafe, catering, etc.) - there are at the moment only 6 restaurants and 2 halls. Specific local food restaurants are missing. When visitor numbers increase, there will be an increasing need for more catering places or outdoor picnic or catering services. DTDA could encourage and train community members to become entrepreneurs.

Low-quality transportation equipment – due to the condition of roads the local transportation by entrepreneurs are used to take people to Vashlovani PAs and other remote areas from Dedoplistskaro. These vehicles are old, without an air conditioner, there are too few of them. When a destination wants to have more visitors, the means of local transport need improvement. There is a Taxi service in Signagi, which is a busy destination and taxi drivers take visitors to Vashlovani PAs from Signagi. In Dedoplistskaro there is no public taxi service available for tourists (and locals). The community or entrepreneurs could establish such an opportunity, either a business or an application-based service by order.

The overall problem is an unqualified staff and lack of skills, principles of service unknown – the service providers have no specific preparation for customer service or service principles. The DTDA has organized

some seminars, but lack of skills and knowledge is wider and the systematic and planned training activities are needed. The DTDA could be the facilitator of this process with the educational center “Spectri” which is located in Dedoplistskaro. The knowledge of foreign languages is a bottleneck. 5 guides in the Dedoplistskaro region can speak foreign languages, also the drivers and rangers do not speak foreign languages. If the Dedoplistskaro municipality has a strategic goal to be a local destination, this would not be a problem, but when foreign visitors are expected, foreign languages are needed to offer local products and services.

There are several public services that tourists are using as well as locals. The safety and first aid are on a good level by estimation of local respondents and it is not indicated as a problem in any strategic document. However, other public services are mentioned in all interviews and strategic documents and need urgent attention. The road networks exist but their condition is easily negotiable only for 4-wheel driving cars. All other means of transport needs to be careful and therefore is slow. It is not attractive to tour operators to take buses to such roads, also FIT tourists wouldn't like to break their vehicles or get lost in areas with poor mobile connection and unsigned. There are several areas in Dedoplistskaro municipality without permanent water supply and in many regions, there is not enough water for locals. If developing tourism and marketing for more visitors, this must be kept in mind. The water problem is linked to the issue of public toilets and sanitary problems. This is especially problematic with larger groups, traveling by buses, and needing regular stops for toilet and hygiene. In larger bus groups this issue must be solved in an organized way, even for a small payment. The municipality needs a good contemporary geological assessment of groundwater supplies and together with developing water resources, wastewater management should be addressed. Another public service is waste management. It is organized by the local municipality but the population needs education about solid waste disposal and rising environmental awareness. This could not be only a task of environmental organizations and protected areas, this needs general attention and change of behavior. Tourism creates a lot of waste and if there are no specific picnic places (with toilets, garbage bins regularly emptied, etc) tourists will stop anywhere and it is very difficult to manage. Building a network of organised parking places with suggested infrastructure would help to direct and coordinate the movement of visitors, to deliver information about the municipality, promote products and services.

The Dedoplistskaro municipality is not an active player in the Georgian and Kakhetian tourism landscape. There is no municipality tourism portal, no maps, tourism guide, brochure or other means of joint marketing. The marketing for the region is only via Protected areas management authorities and based on Vashlovani PAs and Chachuna MR. The absence of a tourism information center is compensated by the visitor center of the Vashlovani Protected Areas, which is struggling with visitor loads in high season and needs either more staff or in cooperation with the local municipality and DTDA to establish a joint TIC. DTDA could help to collect information and coordinate joint marketing but needs support from the municipality, donor organizations, and good planning with Vashlovani PAs administration.

Dedoplistskaro municipality is an agricultural region of Georgia. At the same time, agricultural units are not prepared to receive visitors and do not see tourism as part of their activities. However, agritourism is a growing trend and will be after COVID-19 pandemics, therefore creating visiting, communicating, tasting,

buying and learning opportunities in agricultural enterprises would add value to Dedoplistskaro municipality as a destination. While developing agritourism, the priority issues are food safety, health and hygiene issues as well as proper facilities and communication skills of the farmers.

Roles and responsibilities of stakeholders for investment in tourism products and services

To solve existing problems, mentioned in the previous chapter, close cooperation between the public and private sectors is needed. In this case, the first step is to create the Dedoplistskaro municipality's tourism development strategy and the process of elaboration must involve all stakeholders, including national and local government, the local population, tourist service providers, local action group (LAG), protected areas, the National Tourism administration, donor organizations, non-governmental sector. The investments are listed in part 2 of the document. The planned strategy should be cross-complaint with all other strategies, have the “ownership” by all sectors and stakeholders, and be realistic.

Tourism development strategies in the region and synergies

There are several thorough, consistent, and high-quality tourism development documents, regarding the territory of Dedoplistskaro municipality. In the document of “Kakheti Regional Development Strategy 2014-2021” the tourism development strategy of Dedoplistskaro municipality has a small part.

In the strategy, it is mentioned that the development of adventure and agritourism is very important. The main goals for tourism development are creating new destinations, including adventure, eco and agritourism; developing infrastructure, including water, waste management and road construction and improving qualifications, including business starting and management. All these strategic goals for Kakheti are most relevant to the Dedoplistskaro region. The idea of establishing professional travel associations in the region to lobby the industry interests, establish business contacts, improve services, raising funds, and ensure greater involvement of people engaged in the industry is also very relevant in the context of DTDA. The Dedoplistskaro municipality, Kakhetian tourism stakeholders and DTDA should see the big picture and need for good cooperation in building up the local tourism industry.

“The Local Development Strategy of Dedoplistskaro municipality”⁵ has two specific objectives regarding entrepreneurship. Fostering the development of innovative and diversified businesses and Sustainable development of Tourism. Modernization of the infrastructure and services in tourism is also a strategic goal, aiming to support the creation and development of traditional and innovative tourism businesses considering youngsters (women). Measures, dedicated to innovative developments for social and other support actions foresee the projects dealing with innovative approaches and addressing innovatively and sustainably this domain: building/extending/modernizing/endowing of hosting infrastructure, tourism

⁵ <http://enpard.ge/en/strategy-documents-2/>

programs, setup of tours (routes) for tourism attractions; building/setting up of feeding facilities (traditional cuisine restaurants, fast-foods with natural ingredients, sandwich-making stores, etc.), setup of information centers, etc.

The second objective, transforming the area into a place of social and cultural welfare is addressing strengthening the effective public-private-civil society cooperation. The strategy sees that the development of public – civil society cooperation for social infrastructure and other actions is needed and DTDA is exactly the needed tool to strengthen this kind of cooperation. This is in line with the “2019 Eco-Tourism Development Strategy Vashlovani Pas”, where the development of a volunteer program is foreseen to assist the administration of Vashlovani Protected Areas in generating ideas, conducting specific activities, and saving financial resources. E.g. Volunteers can assist in setting up touristic routes and adjusting infrastructure, it is also possible to offer them organizing events for large companies aimed at increasing their social responsibility, etc. These volunteers could also be members of DTDA. The document also indicates the need for training guides and educating rangers.

All strategies outline the need for specific infrastructure, activating the business sector by starting new businesses and services, investing in human resources i.e. training staff and creating professional umbrella organisations and activating PPP.

Markets and target groups

Tourism contributed 71% to Georgian service exports in 2019. Expenditures of foreign visitors have a significant impact on the Balance of Payment of the country. The foreigners form only 1/3 of the visitors of Dedoplistskaro municipality and due to the COVID-19 situation, their increase would be unlikely during forthcoming years. The visitor numbers are small, estimated as 13 000-15 000 annual guests, without significant or systematic marketing on national and/or international level. The respondents of the interviews outlined the unawareness of the Georgian population about the Dedoplistskaro region for different reasons (see ANNEX 2), one of which is the absence of specific marketing. However this could be turned into a remarkable and unique advantage for the region, as Dedoplistskaro and DTDA members could discuss and create the image, what they would like for the municipality, develop unique USP(s) and marketing messages and also select audiences and target markets as they like. As a small destination with very poor infrastructure, all respondents had the opinion that if there will be no improvement in infrastructure (roads, hygiene, signage, accommodation and catering) the municipality could receive a maximum double as many visitors as today. Therefore there is no need for marketing activities (which are very expensive) for “everybody”, but select the target groups and do targeted marketing for them.

Suggested target groups to Dedoplistskaro municipality regarding its location, cultural, natural and human resources

Tourist group	Existing situation	Future
Nature tourists. Specialists. Hardcore. Groups and FITs. Mainly foreigners. Wish contacts with local guides and researchers.	Visiting PAs for science and research, specific species and habitats, expeditions. Educated and agreeable with all conditions. “Pioneers”, able and willing to pay for good service. GER, NL, PL, UKR, EST, etc. NB! Nature tourists need no supervision, they are responsible for garbage, no vandalism, obeying conservation rules.	The most desirable target group. Better accommodation, services are needed. If better infrastructure and marketing, more visitors will come. All European countries and Russian-speaking countries. Specific bird-watching tours - great potential to GER and GB markets. 4 seasons, no seasonality for the target group, as birds gather in wintering areas.
Nature tourists. Generalists. Organized, groups, buses. Self-guided self-driving or by taxis from Signagi etc.	Daily visitors, small guided groups on horseback and bicycles, hiking groups (1-2..3-6 days). Georgians, Europeans, and Russian speaking countries. Staying in bungalows or tenting. All age groups.	Main desired target group to increase. Daily visitors are expected to stay 1-2 nights in the destination (if accommodation improves and increases). They use side-attractions and expect catering. If more marketing, there will be more FITs. But tourism people would like to have more groups and organized visits in PA-s. A great need for specific and quality accommodations, comfort, catering. Signs, mobile connections, maps are needed. All European countries and Russian-speaking countries. All age groups. Need guides.
Culture tourists.	Mainly organized groups. Domestic and foreigners. From Tbilisi and Signagi (less). Mainly day tours. There are also FIT-s with rental cars or Georgians driving their own cars. Visiting churches, Monastery, Pirosmeni museum and Khornabuji, etc. Also, some archeological monuments.	Respondents did not indicate any specific ideas on how to increase the tourist group but the group was mentioned and wanted. Respondents suggested more activities in museums (workshops, events, rejuvenation of Friendship museum). Restoration of archaeological sites. Parking places and signs. If more marketing is planned, more FIT tourists will appear and there will be a need for accommodation.
Food and wine tourists.	Few developing wine cellars, some farms, known in Georgian /Kakhetian level. Some ideas for	Respondents see great potential in attracting visitors to come and buy and enjoy local food. However, no good ideas so far, how to organize it on a large scale. Need for local food restaurants,



	future product development and service design.	cafes, shops, farms with degustations. Hygiene issues are crucial for this target group. Water, toilets, facilities.
Event tourism	Eliaoba- brings all relatives and Diaspora home on 2 nd August. 26 th May- Georgian Day or Independence Day. Wine and Bread and folklore. In the Pirosmani museum some events take place.	Respondents agree that there is a need for new events. Sometimes not big resources are needed but initiative and a group of people to organize. An event like in Tbilisi- Food & Beverages related event 3 days should be in Dedoplistskaro. The new proposal-Gastronomy competition, wine competition, Art festival (painting fest, or Pirosmani (art) festival.
Agritourism	Not happening today in Dedoplistskaro. Unused resource. Some people have good ideas and visions. There are needs and potential for domestic and foreign markets.	The region is famous for different farms and crops, breeds, and products, it would be a good selling argument. Many people addressed that this should be developed. Farmsteads, staying, practicing, participating. Suitable for seniors or families with kids. Many old breeds and ancient sorts are growing and can be introduced in farms and products. Hands-on tourism, participatory tourism. Horseback riding.
Photo tourists	There are guided photo tours in Vashlovani PA-s. No specific hides.	Photo tourism and photo hides is a rapidly growing and very popular tourism branch in nature destinations. If there are proper guides and places in the municipality where hides can be built, this could be an exclusive opportunity.
School groups	Not very many visit the area, but there are some.	There are several objects in Dedoplistskaro municipality which are in school textbooks. Khornabuji, Vashlovani NP and archeological sites and Pirosmani. DT could be promoted as a unique destination for school excursions with cooking classes, adventures or agriculture.
Students	The cooperation between agricultural universities and other Georgian Universities does exist but is weak. The student groups from other countries to PA-s exist but are rare.	The destination could promote itself as a destination for researchers' and student research, summer courses, practical works, etc. research-based local products (food, crafts, etc) can be a good project.

Seniors	Unused target group and has potential. So far they are interested in culture.	The good target group for agritourism. Bad roads-do not want to drive- very tiring. If there were more comfort and services, they would be a great target group.
Seminar tourists	The destination is not yet ready, facilities are under development.	Great potential, if hotels, restaurants and facilities catch up. A unique destination for agricultural, conservational and rural development events, training and seminars. Local products and tours are expected by seminar tourists. They often return with families and friends.
Study tours, FAM tours	Some via LAG and tour operators.	Great potential, same as seminar tourists. A good marketing tool.
Military tourism	Some people coming to see “old “places	Potential for people, who have served in the Soviet army.

The SWOT analysis of the sector of rural tourism of Dedoplistskaro municipality and Dedoplistskaro Tourism Development Association

THE STRENGTHS	THE WEAKNESSES
THE SECTOR OF RURAL TOURISM	
Rich cultural heritage - traditional wool and carpet crafts, local food, churches, historical monuments, archeology, Pirosmani birthplace.	Dedoplistskaro is not recognized as a travel destination in Georgia and the world.
Unique natural environment (landscapes, rivers and valleys, gorges, deserts, semi-deserts, savanna landscape, Chachuna and Vashlovani PA-s, specific rear birds, mammals and reptiles, plants, invertebrate species for specific tours) for development of the products of nature tourism.	Poor tourism infrastructure (roads, parking, public toilets, signage, information boards, public picnic areas).
The best knowledge and competence about Ecotourism in Georgia (people from Vashlovani NP, Vashlovani Friend Association, WWF Georgia, etc.)	Poor infrastructure (interruption in electricity and water supplies, wastewater management, waste management, mobile connection, remote area).
Visitor friendly community.	Very remote region.
Very safe destination (very low crime, by statistics)	The concentration of tourists in Vashlovani PA-s
Rich wild flora with existing traditional knowledge for use in healing and food craft can be turned into souvenirs and products.	No standards for rural tourism services and lack of tourism-related skills and knowledge.

On the homepage of the association, there is a user friendly database of the entrepreneurs of rural tourism	Low-quality and insufficient equipment (vehicles, accommodation, catering etc.)
Ancient varieties of pears, pomegranates and wines for specific souvenirs and other kinds of products	Lack of local souvenirs and craft products for tourists
Tush herders and sheep wintering areas	Cultural heritage is not properly presented (no info, no interpretation, in ruins, etc.)
Agricultural production region (wine, vegetables, cereals, sunflower, dairy, meat, honey) gives great potential for agritourism	Not enough local guides, especially local nature and multilingual guides
Attempt to get international recognition by creating biosphere reserve under UNDP	No specific tourism-related events in Dedoplistskaro areas.
Four seasons are all suitable for tourism (no classical "seasonality"), but rough winters and hot summers may be problematic.	Very low PPP cooperation and almost no community-based activities
The local community has experience and tradition to organize and host large local events like Eliaoba and Independence Day on the 26 th of May	Dependence on very specific and fragile Nature reserves (with limited carrying capacity) as the main attraction.
Vashlovani PA-s is the main recognized travel destination in the Dedoplistskaro region	
THE STRENGTHS DTDA	THE WEAKNESSES DTDA
The will of local tourism stakeholders to have an association and to belong to an association like DTDA is	Low NGO culture in Dedoplistskaro, members do not understand the role and working principles of the umbrella organization and bottom-up approach
During a very short time, the webpage has created	The members of the DTDA are passive about the activities of the association. Insufficient communication and cooperation inside DTDA.
The members of the DTDA have a willingness to develop tourism and have a strategy for it. (the will for developing the sector and themselves).	No strategic plan and goals
Very diverse membership in DTDA (profiles, activities, age) which makes strong bases	No idea of members' expectations and interest in the organization
Consultancy for members (product development, marketing materials, training, service design)	The members are not aware of the other members' activities and services, they have not visited each other
The members have the willingness to learn and curiosity to develop their businesses	The members have not visited the sights and natural monuments of the Dedoplistskaro region and are not familiar with the local tourism potential

Several members are included and marketed in national networks (wine, ecotourism).	The members have very little experience as customers in rural tourism and therefore a weak understanding of tourists' needs.
	The DTDA leaders have short-term skills in tourism and insufficient skills in managing the NGO
THE OPPORTUNITIES	THE THREATS
THE SECTOR OF RURAL TOURISM IN DEOPLISTSKARO	
Changes in the lifestyle, expectations, and needs of the visitors, which brings along the emergence and development of new tourism trends, incl. the increase of demand for experience related products	The decline of the tourism sector during the time of economic crisis over a longer period due to COVID-19. Some of the enterprises may terminate their activity due to a lack of visitors
The increase in popularity of short trips among the residents of Tbilisi (and whole Georgia) who are the main target markets of rural tourism	The more versatile tourism products and a more efficient marketing activity of the competing regions in the market (both domestic and foreign markets)
Improvement of the cooperation of the entire tourism sector of Georgia (rural tourism, towns, GNTA, regional tourism organizations, etc.)	Insufficient cooperation between the various tourism related Parties
Increase of the awareness of the Georgian and foreign visitors about the Dedoplistskaro municipality	The decline of security in the region
Development of cooperation with the other sectors of rural economy (artisans, transport, trade, villages, agriculture, etc.).	A decrease in the enthusiasm of the people in the sector of rural Tourism and entering rural tourism
More efficient use of different national and international funding opportunities for infrastructure in the region	Decline and ageing of the population (workforce) in the region
Rural tourism creates new jobs and businesses, attracts young people back to the Dedoplistskaro municipality	The tourism business is using the critical resources (water, electricity, mobile connection, rescue unit) and while tourist numbers increase, there may be opposition to tourism
THE OPPORTUNITIES DTDA	THE THREATS DTDA
Strengthening the relations between DTDA members (community-building activities, study visits to members and other regions, etc.)	The internal structure of the organization and distribution of tasks is not efficient

Getting new members to the DTDA from all sectors to create and strengthen the positive attitude towards tourism, get a wider basis for organization and build trust among stakeholders and partners	DTDA is unattractive to potential partners (because of passiveness, lack of cooperation skills, and not acting like a reliable umbrella organization)
Active organization and participation in different trainings for DTDA members (service quality and design, customer journey, safety, pricing, marketing, guiding, languages, etc.)	Decrease of enthusiasm of the people in the rural tourism sector
Strong and wide-based DTDA is a good partner for national and international tour operators, Georgia National Tourism Administration (GNTA) and all other tourism-related institutions	The demands and expectations of potential partners (tour operators) are too high and difficult to meet
Participation in Georgian tourism-related umbrella organizations	
Networking and lobbying for tourism in all sectors and governance levels (local, regional and national level), PPP partnership	
DTDA is acting like DMO and has a joint marketing strategy for different markets	
DTDA has a good functioning leading unit and a good system of subordination	
Cooperation with local schools to popularize tourism and guiding as career models	

Recommendations on needed infrastructure and tourism products for investment

A list of investments for priority tourism infrastructures and products is based on the results of the interviews, the SWOT analysis, strategic documents and other sources of information available. To develop the region and solve existing problems, close cooperation between the public and private sector is needed, facilitated and led by DTDA.

The main task of DTDA, its members and Dedoplistskaro municipality is to motivate the stakeholders in the private sector to be actively developing their products and services, involve the local community to be part of this process as well as negotiate the public sector and governmental institutions to direct investments to Dedoplistskaro municipality.

Recommendations for private sector activities, investments and private sector operated products

- To develop a strong umbrella organization DTDA with a strategic plan, as the basis of attractive and well-developed destination is networking and well-informed local people;
- To create more hands-on (to arrange art courses for hobby artists, workshops: bread making, winemaking, kneading of grapes with feet, working with wool and weaving traditional carpets, etc) services in the region;
- To develop pop-up catering or set up the pop-up cafés in the Dedoplistskaro municipality (people can order flavors of Dedoplistskaro, made from local products by a local chef(s));
- To develop the offer of pre-ordered “picnic baskets” /outdoor catering, using local food;
- To create a network (Culinary Route) for food and beverages and create gastronomic tours;
- Increase awareness of tourism potential of the municipality: branding, participation in national and international exhibitions as DTDA members and GNTA partners;
- Create local souvenirs based on local materials, traditions, and labor (low-cost, low weight, suitable for flights); Different trainings need to be conducted on such issues as the shape of souvenirs, functionality, arranging the workshops, pricing, and the basics of hospitality;
- Raising the quality of products and services by trainings, study tours and visits to other regions, competitions and exhibitions;
- Investing in equipment for seminar service (lighting, portable tables, chairs, data projector, screen, flipchart, marker pens, etc);
- Investing in equipment (tents, tables, chairs, dishes, etc) for pop-up catering in the Dedoplistskaro municipality;
- Investing in equipment for picnic baskets /outdoor catering (tools and knowledge);
- Investing in bicycle renting services;
- Organizing training for existing and new guides (general guiding competences and extra training for local nature guides (bird watching);
- Creating common values: Adopting accommodation standards or criteria for evaluating accommodations and their quality;
- Investing in B&B and low-cost hostel-type overnight facilities;
- Investing in agritourism service and facilities (hygiene, safety, infrastructure, space for tasting products, etc);
- Purchasing of equipment according to accommodation standards or criteria for evaluating accommodations;
- Creating common values: common rules or standards for food-related activities (catering, workshops, degustations);
- Purchasing of equipment according to common rules or standards for food-related activities. Specific equipment need will come out of these standards;
- Developing culinary route (food and beverages) in the Dedoplistskaro municipality and joining with European culinary heritage network www.culinary-heritage.com;
- Creating different tourism routes in Dedoplistskaro municipality (example bicycle routes);

- To purchase binoculars or spotting scope in Khornabuji for enjoying the landscape. (permanent, working with coins) and creating and information about panorama/views;
- Investing in new vehicles improving the local transport for an increasing number of visitors;
- Investing in taxi call service;
- Signagi is not a problem for the Dedoplistskaro area, but a great opportunity. To offer added value for Signagi visitors, the Dedoplistskaro area could cooperate with the message: Before going to Signagi, get blessed for long-lasting friendship in Dedoplistskaro!

Public investments by other institutions:

- Development of Dedoplistskaro municipality Tourism Strategy;
- In cooperation with governmental institutions to start displaying the historical/archaeological monuments;
- Activation of cultural tourism (e.g: Pirosmeni Museum brand) by National Museum;
- Creation of tourism portal of the municipality;
- Providing information for tourists in public places in Georgian, English and Russian languages;
- Creating public toilets and access to drinking water near the attractions and in public space, regarding the needs of bus tourists (bigger groups) and single tourists and the local population, meeting the regulations of COVID-19 prevention;
- Renovating the main roads to the attractions and villages;
- Erecting road signs along the roads directing to attractions, enterprises, and public services;
- The signs and info boards in Vashlovani NP need renovation, coordinates for safety;
- Investing in good quality Internet-connection in the area;
- Regular cleanup events or actions;
- Colors in Dedoplistskaro! (A campaign of cleaning/painting the houses. A competition of “Beautiful Home” in cooperation with paint companies);
- Renovating or establishing new public parking places together with renovating the roads;
- Public resting places (picnic places, parking, etc. Complex solutions like in Eagles Gorge) in locations like Khornabuji and Elia Monastery or other attractions;
- Organizing the solid waste management in a way which is more visible, comfortable, and understandable for visitors and the local community;
- Re-organizing the Dedoplistskaro town market, creating the order and system installs;
- Refresh the looks of the marketplace. Organize the cleaning routine and hygiene for sellers and customers;
- Building the “WELCOME to Friendship Forever Region” gates or entrance on the border of Dedoplistskaro municipality. Complex solution with parking, resting, toilets;
- The maps of Dedoplistskaro region in the public / visited places (sights, attractions, museums, shops, petrol stations, tourism enterprises, etc.);

- In Eagle's Gorge should be an info board about the region and specific information about birds.
- Renovating the road to Khornabuji. Road signs;
- The info boards Pearl of Dedoplistskaro to attractions: Elia's Monastery, Eagle's Gorge, Pirosmani Museum, etc;
- Creation of tourism promotional materials of the municipality;
- Increase awareness of tourism potential of the municipality: Dedoplistskaro municipality is supporting the branding, participation in international exhibitions in cooperation with DTDA and GNTA (see ANNEX 4).

From training thematics the most important topics are:

- Guesthouses training in hospitality basics;
- Guides training
- Training in Tourism Marketing issues (ANNEX 4).

Diversification of tourist offers is important for tourism development in Dedoplistskaro municipality. It should be noted that the municipality tourism industry should satisfy the requirements of tourists from "developed countries". Their requirements include access to a hospitable village population, a clean environment, healthy food, natural wine, participation in local holidays, and local traditions. Listed products should be provided to tourists considering basic standards of hospitality, such as the best sanitary conditions at the accommodation facilities and catering facilities, high standards of food and wine, etc. This can be evaluated by using visitor questionnaires (ANNEX 1).

Dedoplistskaro municipality has impressive natural resources, rich history, interesting traditions, and hospitality culture, but the local population needs to improve basic infrastructure and acquire the knowledge needed for the tourism industry.

The hindering factors of tourism development, first of all, should be improved: to multiply overnight facilities and other tourism-related infrastructures in the region, restaurants, cafes, picnic sites, tourist trails, tourist attractions. Family hotels and agro-tourism farms can be easily developed, and their improvement expenses are relatively less, whether the overall municipal infrastructure will be developed or not. Also, there are many critical issues in the municipality, which will hinder the development of the tourism industry if they are not solved promptly and properly. The DTDA has a critical role in reminding and addressing the issues to relevant organisations and mobilising members to PPP.

Conclusion

During the short time of existence, DTDA has managed to make a good start as DMO. Even without a strategic plan the right steps for developing the region have been taken during the first year of existence, such as meetings, trainings and mentoring of entrepreneurs. DTDA has many members, who are professionals in their field and could be the flagship cases for the others in Dedoplistskaro municipality. There are also cooperation partners among tour operators, craft people. There is a basic tourism competence among members and if there will be cooperation and networking between members, DTDA and Dedoplistskaro municipality will be soon strong and well known among Georgians and foreign visitors. The umbrella organization is strongly needed by the interviewed stakeholders but as well as foreseen in local and regional strategies. Dedoplistskaro municipality and Vashlovani PAs have also a need for a social partner for tourism development.

There are several bottlenecks for tourism and its development in Dedoplistskaro municipality, regarding infrastructure, visibility and accessibility of attractions, missing services and products. It is not enough to have single strong enterprises, attractions and businesses. Their voice would not get far when lobbying for infrastructure and resources are not enough to do marketing. Only jointly, as an association, the entrepreneurs could make themselves visible, heard and influential, become reliable, trustworthy and competent DMO, partner, adviser and community leading organization.

List of Annexes

1. ANNEX 1. Dedoplistskaro municipality visitor survey - Questionnaire.
2. ANNEX 2. Dedoplistskaro interviews. The interim report from overall questions.
3. ANNEX 3. Recommendations for strategy and the plan of activity of DTDA.
4. ANNEX 4. DTDA and Dedoplistskaro Municipality Marketing Strategy.