

**Culture &
Creativity**

EU-Eastern Partnership Programme



CREATIVE TOWNS AND REGIONS INITIATIVE: REPORT FOR MTSKHETA-MTIANETI

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1. INTRODUCTION

The European Union-Eastern Partnership Culture and Creativity Programme launched the Creative Towns and Regions Initiative in 2016 to highlight the importance of culture and creativity in small and medium sized towns and regions. The Initiative introduces a practical approach for towns and regions in the Eastern Partnership countries to use the local cultural and creative potential for social and economic development.

The aim of the initiative is to raise awareness of all key stakeholders of the potential of cultural and creative sectors, to collect data on local cultural and creative resources and to propose concrete action plans for developing the potential of cultural and creative industries, including development of local cultural landscape, establishing clusters with local businesses, increasing the quality of services of tourism sector and building stronger networks with similar towns and regions in other countries.

As a result of the initiative, the Programme published a document “Making the Most of Cultural and Creative Resources: Planning and Strategy Building Handbook for Creative Towns and Regions”, which is available for free download and could provide practical tools and recommendations for towns and regions to develop their local resources.

2. OVERVIEW OF MTSKHETA-MTIANETI

Mtskheta-Mtianeti region is located in the north-east of Georgia, the town of Mtskheta serving as a regional capital. The region has an area of 6,786 km² and a population of 94,370. The western part is occupied by Russian Federation and there are around 10,900 IDPs in the region, most of them displaced after Russia-Georgia war in 2008. The region consists of five municipalities: Akhlagori, Dusheti, Kazbegi, Mtskheta and Tianeti, with 480 villages, 8 settlements and 2 towns.

Mtskheta-Mtianeti has considerable potential for tourism development. All five municipalities are distinguished by their rich historical past, monuments, habits and traditions. Close proximity to Tbilisi is an important factor for the development of tourism.

Mtskheta-Mtianeti is one of the oldest historical regions of Georgia with remarkable sights and very rich cultural heritage. Mtskheta was founded in the 5th century BC. As one of the oldest settlements in South Caucasus, it was the capital of an early Georgian Kingdom of Iberia from the 3rd century BC to the 5th century AD. It was an epicenter of early Christian era, and the location where Christianity was proclaimed as a state religion in 337.

The Christian monuments of Mtskheta are included in the List of UNESCO World Heritage, as the finest examples of medieval religious architecture in the Caucasus. There are 47 monuments in the national heritage list. The region is special by its surprisingly confluent landscape of mountains and cultural monuments. The most significant sites are: Mtskheta and Dusheti historical towns with their vernacular architectural style, Svetitskhoveli cathedral, Jvari temple, Shiomghvime monastery, archaeological sites of

Bagineti-Armazi and Samtavro-Dzalisi; Bochormi church, Ananuri fortress, Gergeti Trinity church, historic cultural heritage sights of Shatili and Mutso villages, Sno fortress, etc. Mtskheta, and specifically the Svetitskhoveli Church, is a holy site for the entire Christian world due to the shroud of Christ being buried here. The region has also a range of intangible heritage assets, including local craftsmanship and folklore poetry, exclusive wine production technology and traditional cuisine.

Currently, there are 7 cultural centers in the region, mostly for youth and children. The main activities of those centers are traditional arts, academic singing and dance, theatre for children, visual arts and poetry. Despite the lack of financial resources, they try to maintain the local cultural traditions by providing dance and singing classes and handcrafting with traditional methodology. 37 song and dance companies, mostly folk ensembles, function in the region. There are 5 music schools, classes include music instruments, choir, music literature. 9 museums of the region are rich with exceptional archaeological exhibits of different historical periods, from the Bronze to late Middle Ages, the earliest of which are the agricultural tools of ancient farmers dated back to 4th millennium BC; there are 35 public libraries and 26 traditional festivals and events.

Agriculture occupies a significant place in the local economy. Geographic landscapes of the municipalities determine development of agriculture in various directions thus enabling the region to sell the considerable share of food products in the home markets of the country. This sector offers the best employment opportunities and supports improvement of social conditions of the region's population. Wine growing is mainly developed in Mukhrani valley. The wine grown here is distinguished by its exquisite gustatory qualities and wine producers are well-known. Production of bio-wine is established here (village Chardakhi) and is much in demand abroad, therefore the total volume of produced wine is exported. The ecological environment, plenitude and diversity of Alpine and forest plants determine special and exquisite gustatory qualities of honey produced in the region.

86 public and 2 private (Mtskheta, Stepantsminda) schools of the region are attended by 11,525 pupils. Repair-rehabilitation activities have been carried out in almost all public schools in the region, two new schools have been built in Mtskheta. The majority of schools are equipped with computers and connected to the Internet. Tsinamdzghvrishvili Community College is a vocational educational institution, which offers general education programs, mainly in the field of agriculture. The curriculum modules cover both secondary education, as well as vocational education. There are no public or private higher education establishments in the region.

3. CREATIVE TOWNS AND REGIONS INITIATIVE IN MTSKHETA-MTIANETI

The key driver behind participation in the Creative Towns and Regions Initiative of Mtskheta-Mtianeti Administration is an intention to increase attractiveness of the region through unlocking creative potential of the local community. The main outcomes are:

Create a clear vision for the development of the region's territory, cultural heritage landscapes and traditions through the strategic and creative approaches used in EU countries with similar wealth and resources;

Increase attractiveness of the region for visitors and investors through strengthening local cultural and creative resources;

Activate traditional heritage resources using more contemporary methods, for instance by generating opportunities for creative tourism development.

3.1. Project Schedule

January 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14 towns and regions from Georgia participated in the contest
February 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mtskheta-Mtianeti together with 5 more towns and regions from EaP countries have been selected as a result of call
March 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk research of the existing strategies, documents and online resources
April 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presenting the project goals to the participants and partners; • Setting up a regional working group (17 members) • Workshop to assess the strengths and weaknesses of Dusheti municipality's cultural and creative sectors • Establishment of social network on Facebook
May 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connecting five winning cities and regions with each other (Chisinau, Moldova); • Workshop to assess the strengths and weaknesses of Mtskheta and Tianeti municipalities' cultural and creative sectors • Open discussion with cultural and creative sectors' representatives from Tbilisi about the opportunities that exist in the Mtskheta-Mtianeti region
June 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field missions to assess and map the distinctive cultural and tourism infrastructure, interviews with local stakeholders • Evaluation and further development of local initiatives (10 projects were discussed)
July 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysing collected data and preparing recommendations for development
November 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation of the final report to the stakeholders in Mtskheta-Mtianeti

Project Core Team

- > **Lia Ghilardi** (UK), Senior Expert for Creative Towns and Regions Initiative.
- > **Zviad Mchedlishvili** (Georgia), Local Expert
- > **Ragnar Siil** (Estonia), Key Expert of EU-EaP Culture and Creativity Programme
- > **Giorgi Razmadze** (Georgia), Country Coordinator for EU-EaP Culture and Creativity Programme in Georgia, British Council.
- > **Shalva Givishvili** (Georgia), Project Coordinator in Mtskheta-Mtianeti Region.

Participants of the Research (total over 70 people):

- > **The Regional Administration of Mtskheta-Mtianeti** (Governor, representatives of Administration).
- > **Municipality of Dusheti** (Chairman, Deputies, Representatives of Education, Culture and Sports Division).
- > **Municipality of Mtskheta** (Representatives of Education, Culture and Sports Division).
- > **Municipality of Tianeti** (Representatives of Education, Culture and Sports Division).
- > **Municipality of Akhagori** (Representatives of Education, Culture and Sports Division).
- > **The representatives of cultural and creative institutions** of the region (cultural centres, museums, libraries, ensembles and schools).
- > **The representatives of creative sub-sectors** of the region (performing arts, literature, visual art, film, etc.).
- > **Non-governmental organizations** of the region.
- > **The representatives of tourism sector** of the region.

3.3. Mapping of Cultural Resources

3.3.1. Diversity of cultural institutions

- a) **Cultural Centers** - the region has 7 cultural centers, the two of them located in Mtskheta and Dusheti are newly renovated. These centers have the capacity to significantly raise creative potential in the region.
- b) **Museums** - 9 museums house and present exhibits from the past thus preserving the rich history of the region, which would otherwise be lost.
- c) **Libraries** - there are 35 public libraries in the region; the public spaces that can be used as venues for communication of local society.
- d) **Dusheti Public Theatre** - theatre performance tradition in Dusheti goes back to 1880.
- e) **Music Schools of the Region** - music education greatly enhances potential of the

region for the development of music festivals and performances.

- f) **Folk Song and Dance Ensembles** - folk music comprises the traditional musical styles of the region.

Challenges:

- > *Absence of coordinated culture policy in the region is a primary challenge for all cultural organizations. The limited funding can only support the salaries, while financial resources are unavailable for joint cultural activities at the regional level. Accordingly, there is no motivation for organizations to develop new activities and collaborate with various organizations.*
- > *Lack of strategic planning in cultural organizations leads to low quality production. Employees are most productive when they understand the bigger picture behind what they are doing.*
- > *The majority of museum buildings require renovation, the communication with potential audience and tourism industry representatives is poor.*
- > *Data collection and results' monitoring practices are absent in cultural organization.*
- > *There is low awareness of a potential and the benefits of creative economy development in the region.*
- > *The narrow definition of culture, inherited from the Soviet past, excludes any economic potential of culture, accordingly issues as culture and employment, culture and social cohesion, culture and creative economy are absent from regional development agenda.*
- > *Creative professionals lack the strategic management, communication and marketing skills.*
- > *There is no public or private institute of higher education in the region, as well as lifelong learning opportunities.*

Opportunities:

- > *In the process of research, a working group was established with representatives from the entire region. Its members gained the knowledge and skills, and experienced benefits of team working. This group could be initial instrument to start the process of strategic planning for development of culture and creative industries in the region. The process itself will result in involvement of more stakeholders from the region and give them more ownership over the final results. Gained knowledge and skills could later be used for developing organizations' strategic plans.*
- > *Attracting necessary investments to the museums will enable them to increase service quality and offer new models of museum management (like living history museum), and attract greater numbers of tourists.*
- > *The Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia plans to open additional 3 colleges in the region similar to Tsinamdzghvrishvili Community College of Mtskheta-Mtianeti. It is essential to start the dialogue with the Ministry regarding adding study courses (strategic management, communication and marketing) in these colleges necessary for the sector development in the region.*
- > *The Ministry of Culture and Monuments Protection with support of the*

European Union-Eastern Partnership Culture and Creativity Programme conducted a research using UNESCO indicators for cultural development that allow assessing the culture's share in the country's economy. The region is given a unique opportunity to use UNESCO methodology. This data is crucial for convincing policy-makers through identified evidence and arguments about existing opportunities of the sector;

- > The region lacks public spaces for people of all ages to gather and discuss important issues of regional development. The existing 35 libraries, the majority of which requires upgrading of operational methodology, could provide public services to the local communities and host various cultural activities. These spaces can be used for educational purposes (workshops, discussions etc.), cultural events (exhibitions, meetings with writers and poetry readings).

3.3.2. Rich cultural heritage and opportunities of cultural tourism industry

- Cultural heritage - cultural heritage is definitely a cornerstone of Mtskheta-Mtianeti touristic opportunities and attracts thousands of local and foreign visitors each year.*
- Cultural and creative tourism - Mtskheta-Mtianeti region has a considerable untapped tourism development potential.*
- Intangible heritage assets - traditional craftsmanship, folk music and poetry, ancient history and arts, unique wine-making technology and exceptional recipes of local cuisine.*

Challenges:

- > The regional cultural heritage monuments, including internationally significant sights require infrastructural development. Some heritage buildings require conservation and restoration; essential visitor facilities (i.e. toilets, information centers, guided tours etc).
- > It is essential that tourism remains a top priority for the region, but despite a big number of the tourists (mainly related with cultural heritage tours), the region's economic benefits are very low. All these tours are organized from Tbilisi, the tourists visit the cultural monuments free of charge and then return to Tbilisi. There are no cultural entertainment services or high-quality souvenir products, despite the fact that the demand for creative products is apparent. This is a main gap that should be closed, this is where culture and creative sectors have a great opportunity to contribute.
- > The low interest to the local product is determined by the range of low-quality creative products. It is important for tourists to be provided with high quality and authentic products and services including not only the cultural heritage landmarks, but also a variety of high quality offerings that have the appropriate value.
- > Inadequate respond to existing market opportunities (lack of hotels, quality restaurants and cafes)
- > Weak internal public transport links in the region causes lack of

communication among municipalities.

- > *Lack of data on visitor numbers, interests and desired activities makes it impossible to improve services.*
- > *The establishment of PPPs is still problematic due to absence of an adequate legal framework, essential to the development of creative industries. There are no state programmes in support of authentic traditions and craftsmen. Craftsmen are switching to mass production, due to competition based only on price; there is a need to develop innovation of product and process in order to create special product for contemporary and more demanding consumers.*

Opportunities:

- > *Despite the proximity to Tbilisi international airport, the region serves as a one-day trip destination for the visitors. Presence of sufficient services would encourage the visitors to stay longer in the region.*
- > *Development of high-quality visitor facilities around the cultural heritage sights will offer opportunities for tourists to purchase local crafts and artworks, enjoy folk music and poetry, taste traditional dishes and region's wine.*
- > *Digitization of monuments of cultural heritage can transform cultural resources into an important part of digital economy. Online accessibility to digital materials of cultural heritage can integrate creativity in tourism industry. Moreover, it can revitalize cultural heritage and return an original outlook to it, promote region, and contribute to better quality of life.*
- > *The region suffers from unemployment and poverty, while hospitality and creative sectors require additional services.*
- > *Development of the concept of a living museum is essential. It is a type of museum, which recreates specific history period and offers the visitors to experience traveling into realities of life of that time.*
- > *Providing unused spaces for cultural and creative initiatives should be taken into consideration. There are many abandoned buildings in the region that could be used for a wide variety of creative purposes like: crafts market, exhibition venues, educational spaces, etc*

3.3.3. Beauty of Nature, traditions and local people

- a) **Natural conditions** - the region astonishes visitors with its natural beauty, snowy mountains of the Greater Caucasian Range (3500 m and 5000 m) beautiful valleys and lakes, alpine fields and meadows.
- b) **Traditional festivals and events** - there are many festivals and events in the region that could be developed as one of the main instruments for visitor attraction.
- c) **Clean air and low pollution** - Administration of Mtskheta-Mtianeti strives to develop green economy and harmonious correlation of ecological, economic and social interests.
- d) **Friendly people and a great culture of hospitality** - hospitality is an ancient tradition of local population.

Challenges:

- > *Decentralized policy, oriented towards municipalities, rather than entire region.*
- > *Festivals, events are lacking professional management, skills such as communication and leadership. The shortage of skilled professionals in the region makes it difficult to develop successful events.*
- > *Lack of supportive services and alternative funding sources for CCl.*
- > *The creative professionals in the region lack specialized information centre able to advice on opportunities and supportive information about potential partners and funding opportunities.*
- > *Commercial cultural sector and cultural non-governmental organizations - both require strengthening.*

Opportunities:

- > *Balancing environmental protection and harmonious exploitation of natural resources will directly contribute to economic development, employment and increase of fiscal revenues of the region.*
- > *Meetings with representatives of cultural and creative sub-sectors of Tbilisi showed that local partners from the regions are in high demand in the capital and creative organizations from Tbilisi are interested in opportunities to work in the regions.*
- > *The ancient history of the region is filled with significant events; development of theatrical performances based on the historical facts can be a great anchor for visitors' attraction.*
- > *LEPL "Creative Georgia" was founded by the government in the beginning of 2017, with the mission to support creative initiatives in the entire country. Therefore, region's working group could establish active partnership with Creative Georgia.*
- > *There is a great potential in the region for the development of heritage, cultural, religious and other thematic routes for various target audiences.*
- > *Georgia's membership in the International Cultural Route Program of the Council of Europe allows the region to initiate new cultural routes or join existing ones.*

4. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEVELOPING CULTURAL AND CREATIVE POTENTIAL IN MTSKHETA-MTIANETI

4.1 Vision 2025

Mtskheta-Mtianeti is the region full of opportunities and creativity, where visitors can discover the ancient history of the people of Georgia and its outstanding examples of

cultural heritage, experience local arts and folklore, creative spaces and outdoor adventure activities, finest wines and exquisite local cuisine.

Potential indicators: the number of visitors, the number of jobs in creative sector and hospitality industries, the volume of revenues (tax income) to the local budget, the number of cross-sectoral initiatives, the number of references according to Google Analytics, TripAdvisor data.

4.2. Development priorities

Strengthen interrelation among key stakeholders in order to unite all promising ideas into one strategic development plan for the region.

4.2.1. Formation of Creative Mtskheta-Mtianeti Commission.

Through the research we found many interesting initiatives. Each municipality has its own vision of development. We discussed 10 promising projects with local groups, implementation of which will undoubtedly lead to beneficial changes for the region. There are strong business companies in the region like Rooms Hotel Kazbegi, Château Mukhrani and Mukhrani Foundation, and all of them have their development priority areas. If all these initiatives are united under common plan with one entity coordinating their implementation the realization of the abovementioned goals will be more realistic.

To ensure effective implementation of any plan, strategic management is required. There is no particular agency working on creative industries development in the region. Mtskheta-Mtianeti Regional Development Agency was actively involved in the mapping process and rather than to establish a new entity, the most efficient approach would be to form the Commission on the basis of existing agency. The role of the Commission would include setting the strategic direction, coordinating activities, ensuring adequate funding of proposed initiatives and ensuring achievement of goals. The members of the Commission could be: representatives of all 5 municipalities; cultural and creative sub-sectors; hospitality industries and institutions responsible for cultural heritage.

In order to take the central government's plans into consideration and obtain the necessary support from them, it is crucial to invite the representatives of the ministries of Culture and Monument Protection, Economy and Sustainable Development, Education and Science, Regional Development and Infrastructure, as well as Tourism Department. To start the process of strategic planning for entire region, it is essential for the Commission to have a political support from the Governor of Mtskheta-Mtianeti region as a Chairman of the Commission.

4.2.2 Set up a Working Group to launch the process of elaborating a strategic plan for the development of cultural and creative industries in the Mtskheta-Mtianeti region

Through the mapping process the working group was formed from the representatives of entire region; these are activists that gained the knowledge and skills, and experienced benefits of team working. This group could be initial instrument to start the process of strategic planning for development culture and creative industries in the region, under the guidance of above mentioned

commission. The process itself encourages involvement of stakeholders in the wider range of processes and gives them ownership of the final result. Tasks for working group could include: managing entire process under the guidance of the Commission; setting methodological guidelines for the process; identifying short-term and long-term goals; drafting document; discussing draft with the different sub-sectors and with the general public; collect and unite all promising ideas from the stockholders into a general plan.

Recommendations:

Create Mtskheta-Mtianeti regional brand (made in Mtskheta-Mtianeti). Creating a regional brand for the creative product promotes the region's popularization, stimulates product quality control, raises the self-consciousness and ambition of the region's population.

Develop tools for promotion of culture and creative industry services and products. A common online platform for products and services of culture and creative sectors can be focused both on local and international consumers. This platform can be used to attract funds for new projects through crowdfunding and for customer survey campaigns.

Establish a multi-day festival based on traditions in the region. For example, the theatrical traditions of Dusheti start from 1880. There are many interesting cases or historical facts that represent sufficient basis for the establishment of Dusheti Theater Festival.

Provide professionals in cultural and creative sectors with continuous training programs. Various subjects, such as art, strategic management, communication and marketing can be taught at community colleges that will be established in the region in the nearest future. It is important to lift age restrictions on these courses.

Create an online platform for digitized cultural heritage. Online access to digital material of cultural heritage monuments could increase interest in the region as an independent destination for a multi-day tour. This platform should be the starting point for acquainting with the region, perfectly illustrating rich cultural heritage and a wide variety of visitor services.

Promote access to public spaces for creative projects. Based on the detailed analysis of the proposals made by initiative group, the terms, conditions and possible co-financing for the use of public space should be determined. This will be a good basis for the development of public-private partnerships in the region and for creating new, attractive spaces for visitors.

Establish a regional fund for the promotion of creative initiatives and encourage international cooperation. Raising of small amounts of funds for co-financing the best projects is essential. Participation of the representatives of culture and creative industries in the international consortium requires local co-financing, that often

becomes an insurmountable obstacle for small operators. The funds can be raised from tourism tax in the region. Consequently, the existence of supporting mechanisms of local funding is essential for attracting funds from international donors and international partnerships.

Organize theatrical performances based on historical facts and develop the concept of Living History Museum. *The ancient history of the region is rich with important events theatrical performance of which ensures the flow of visitors to the region. The Museum of Living History is a simulation of a specific historical period that offers visitors the opportunity to travel and enjoy the epoch.*

Strengthen cooperation between the Eastern Partnership countries. *It is necessary to continue and strengthen the sharing of information, knowledge, policy development and public awareness methods on the development of culture and creative industries in Eastern Partnership countries.*

4.3. Action Plan for 2017-2018

4.3.1. Formation of a Creative Mtskheta-Mtianeti Commission (on the basis of Mtskheta-Mtianeti Regional Development Agency). The Administration of Mtskheta-Mtianeti will establish a Commission. The Commission will be the coordinating body on the development of Strategic Plan on behalf of the Administration of Mtskheta-Mtianeti Region.

4.3.2. Set up a Working Group to start the process of strategic planning for development of cultural and creative industries in the Mtskheta-Mtianeti region. The Commission will announce an open call for expression of interest to participate in the strategic planning for development culture and creative industries in Mtskheta-Mtianeti. The Working Group should be selected by the Commission.

4.3.3. Organizing sub-sectorial seminars. Conducting a one-day seminar in each sub-sector with the participation of the regional and local authorities, public institutions and non-governmental sector. Workshop topics will be as follows:

- > Identification of the main problems based on the analysis of the challenges on the path to possible implementation of existing initiatives in the region;
- > Determining key solutions to the existing problems.

4.3.4. The Working Group together with other stakeholders researches the information on possible solutions to identified key problems considering international practices. The Working Group members and the invited experts will analyze international statistics and problem overcoming methodology with regard to existing local

challenges. Questionnaires can be used to collect expert opinions from wide range of specialists from different sectors.

4.3.5. The Working Group compiles the first draft of the strategy document. Based on the results of the seminars, obtained materials and international experience, the Working Group will draft the first version of the document.

4.3.6. Consultations within the Mtskheta-Mtianeti Commission, with other government agencies and private stakeholders. The Mtskheta-Mtianeti Commission will work through the first draft and set priorities. The Commission organizes consultations with different government agencies and private companies represented in the region.

4.3.7. Public consultation around the draft document. The draft will be published; all the stakeholders participating in the process will be offered to provide feedback; In addition to targeted feedback, the draft will be published on the webpage of the Administration of Mtskheta-Mtianeti and will be open for public comments. If necessary, thematic roundtables could be organized.

4.3.8 Coordination / cooperation with the Ministry of Culture. Integration of Mtskheta-Tianeti Culture and Creative Resource Development Action Plan into the Action Plan of Cultural Strategy 2025.

NOTE

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