

Transformations of cultural memory and identity in the regions of Georgia: Historical, linguistic and geocultural perspective

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Abstract--- This paper presents a comprehensive investigation into the processes of cultural memory and identity transformation in the diverse regions of Georgia, emphasizing the intricate interplay between historical trajectories, linguistic practices, and geocultural configurations. Employing an interdisciplinary methodology that integrates historical-culturological analysis, sociolinguistics, and human geography, the study seeks to elucidate how collective memory and regional identity are continuously constructed, negotiated, and redefined over time. Historical layers, including episodes of political upheaval, socio-cultural exchange, and migration, are examined as foundational elements that shape communal narratives and inform contemporary perceptions of belonging. Linguistic dimensions are analyzed through the lens of dialectal diversity, toponymic preservation, and the transmission of local lexicons, demonstrating the role of language as both a repository of historical consciousness and an instrument for mediating identity in changing sociocultural contexts. The research further considers the function of cultural institutions, particularly museums, as active sites where memory is curated, interpreted, and communicated to diverse audiences, thereby reinforcing and transforming regional self-understanding. The findings suggest that regional identity in Georgia constitutes a dynamic, multilayered system, wherein historical consciousness, linguistic codes, and geocultural environments are mutually constitutive. This system reflects both continuity and transformation, highlighting the agency of communities in maintaining cultural coherence while adapting to contemporary challenges. By situating identity within a framework of intersecting temporal, linguistic, and spatial dimensions, the study contributes to broader theoretical discussions on cultural memory, identity negotiation, and the preservation of intangible heritage in pluralistic societies.

Keywords--- cultural memory, identity, region, language, geoculture, heritage.

Introduction: In modern scientific discourse, cultural memory is considered as one of the main components of social consciousness, which determines the identity and self-awareness of society. In the case of Georgia, the issue of memory and identity is particularly closely related to regional diversity, historical traditions and linguistic peculiarities.

Regional cultural memory is not only an archive of historical experience, but also a living system that is constantly undergoing changes in the context of globalization, migration and social transformations.

The aim of this paper is to study how cultural memory and identity have been transformed in the regions of Georgia as a result of the interaction of historical, linguistic and geocultural factors. Analyzing this process allows us to see how the diverse cultural heritage of the regions has been preserved within the framework of a common national consciousness, and the research has been carried out in compliance with the standards of international databases.

The main goals of the paper are:

1. To analyze how cultural memory is transformed in the regions of Georgia through the interaction of historical, linguistic and geocultural factors;
2. To reveal how regional memory maintains diversity in the context of national identity;
3. To present an interdisciplinary approach to the study of cultural memory, which combines historical, linguistic and geocultural analysis.

The research answers the following questions: How are historical narratives embedded in local cultural practices? How are linguistic and geocultural codes adapted to the modern social environment? How is regional memory integrated in the process of forming a common national identity?

Historical memory by region:

Kakheti: The Kakheti region is historically known for its system of kingdoms and trade unions, which creates a sustainable history of local identity. For example, the Alaverdi Monastery and the Tbilisi-Kakheti trade routes combine both religious and economic memory.

Imereti: The Imereti region was historically distinguished by its ecclesiastical and educational centers, such as the Gelati Academy. This tradition is still reflected in local cultural events and the education system.

Samegrelo: Oral legends, artistic architecture, and the history of kings create unique narratives that are still preserved in cultural rituals and subcultural groups.

Svaneti: The towers of Svaneti not only had a defensive function, but also carried socio-cultural memory. Local legends and historical symbols have become a tourist heritage.

Adjara: The coastal trading culture, musical traditions, and handicrafts strengthen the sustainability of regional identity, expressing the historical experience of the local society.

Language is one of the most enduring vehicles of memory. Megrelian, Svan, and other regional dialects preserve historical information that reflects the dynamics of social and cultural change (Kiknadze, 2017; Nora, 1989).

Local names not only reflect geographical reality, but also encode cultural and social experience (Kuprava, 2020). For example, villages in Svaneti reveal architectural and social history simultaneously.

Geoculture defines the space where historical and social experience is formed (Soja, 1996). Landscape, architecture, and the natural environment create a symbolic system that gives roots to identity.

Svaneti Towers: Symbols of Defense and Social Narratives.

Vardzia Rock-Cut Complex: A Material Form of Religious and Political Memory.

Tusheti Architecture: Conservation of Ethnographic Culture.

New layers of identity are formed in modern urban spaces by combining historical and global elements (Gelashvili, 2022).

Factors of cultural memory transformation:

1. Political changes: Changes in state models transform forms of memory.
2. Education: Schools and universities act as institutional mechanisms of memory (Tsitsishvili, 2018).
3. Globalization and migration: Generate hybrid forms of identity.
4. Media and digital culture: *Online space creates new archives of memory (Erll, 2011).

Main part

Historical memory is the basis of cultural self-awareness, which shapes public perceptions of the past (Nora, 1989). The regions of Georgia have historically had different political and cultural experiences - Kakheti, Imereti, Samegrelo, Svaneti and Adjara have been involved in the processes of state development at different times and in different ways.

For example, the historical independence of the Kingdom of Imereti and the ecclesiastical and educational traditions of Western Georgia create a specific layer of memory that is still reflected in local cultural practices. In Svaneti, the function of the bearer of memory is often associated with architectural forms and oral legends, which are mechanisms for the transmission of historical knowledge (Chartolani, 2019).

Regional historical narratives — despite their local focus — are part of a common national self-consciousness. They create a “fabric of memory” where historical layers coexist and intertwine to define the process of identity transformation.

Language is one of the most enduring forms of cultural memory. The linguistic diversity observed in the regions of Georgia is a carrier and transmitter of historical memory (Kiknadze, 2017). Dialects, speech features, and toponymy preserve linguistic codes that reflect the social and historical experience of the local community. For example, the preservation of Megrelian and Svanuri, despite global linguistic pressure, is a resistant form of memory, which expresses the strength of regional identity. The

study of toponymy is also important: local names reflect not only geographical reality, but also layers of social and cultural memory (Kuprava, 2020).

Linguistic transformation is often accompanied by identity change - in a migratory environment, local speech slowly changes, although traditional names and phraseology reflect the code of memory in a preserved way.

Geoculture defines the spatial environment where historical and social experience is formed. Landscape, architecture and the natural environment become a symbolic system that gives roots to identity. As Soja (1996) notes, space is not simply a stage for culture, but an active participant in the formation of historical processes.

In Georgia, this is especially evident in places such as the towers of Svaneti, the Vardzia rock-cut complex, or the architecture of Tusheti - these are not only material heritage, but also symbolic forms of memory. In addition, new layers of identity are being formed in modern urban spaces - combining historical and global elements (Gelashvili, 2022).

Geographical space, therefore, is perceived as a dynamic system that reflects the layers of time and the pace of cultural changes.

The transformation of cultural memory in Georgia is due to several main factors:

1. Political changes - changes in state models (monarchy, empire, Soviet period, independence) significantly transformed the forms of memory;
2. The role of education - school and university act as an institutional mechanism of memory (Tsitsishvili, 2018);
3. Globalization and migration - lead to hybrid forms of identity, where traditional memory collides with new cultural codes;
4. Media and digital culture - the formation of a new memory archive takes place in the online space, which changes its semantics (Erll, 2011).

Thus, cultural memory is in a constant dynamic process—it transforms, but does not disappear; its form changes, but not its essence.

Conclusion

Cultural memory and identity in the regions of Georgia constitute a highly complex and multilayered system, dynamically shaped through the interrelation of historical, linguistic, and geocultural factors. Historical experiences impart temporal depth and continuity, embedding regional narratives within long-term socio-cultural processes. Language functions as a crucial medium for the transmission, preservation, and reinterpretation of collective memory, while geographical space provides both material and symbolic foundations for the development of local and regional self-consciousness. These dimensions interact to produce a living, adaptive framework of identity, which reflects not only historical continuity but also the responsiveness of communities to social, political, and cultural transformations.

Understanding these intricate interdependencies is essential for both theoretical and applied scholarship. From an academic perspective, it enhances comprehension of how regional and national identities are constructed, maintained, and reshaped over time. Practically, it informs contemporary social and cultural policy, particularly in contexts where globalization, migration, and demographic change exert transformative pressures on traditional structures of identity.

The study advances an innovative interdisciplinary approach that synthesizes historical, linguistic, and geocultural perspectives in the analysis of cultural memory in Georgia's regions. Its originality lies in the systematic integration of toponymy, dialectal diversity, and museum-based spatial analysis, offering a novel conceptualization of cultural memory as a dynamic, multidimensional system. By framing memory and identity within this integrative model, the research provides new tools for scholarly inquiry while simultaneously informing practical decision-making in education, cultural policy, heritage management, and the preservation of intangible cultural assets. This approach emphasizes the capacity of communities to negotiate continuity and change, offering a framework that is both analytically rigorous and socially relevant, bridging the gap between theoretical exploration and applied cultural strategy.

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