

Brand Georgia: Examining Its Present State and Potential for Future Development

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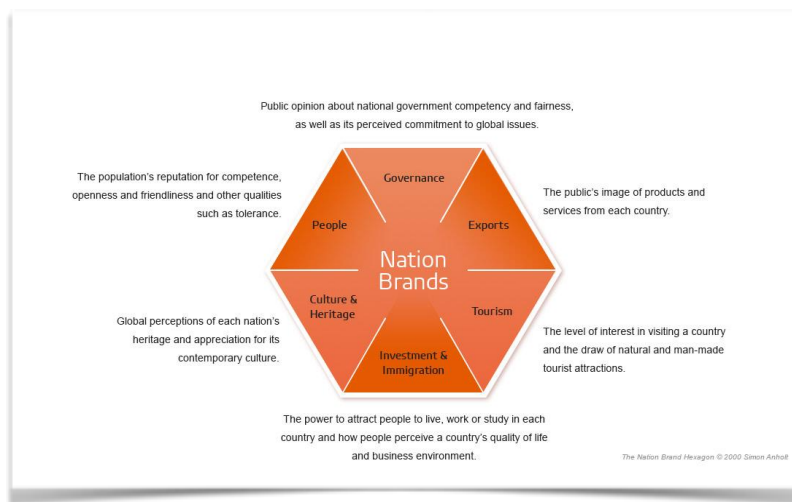
Introduction

Nation branding is a relatively new field of study at the crossroads of a number of different disciplines including marketing, international relations, political sciences, sociology, as well as many others. First introduced by Simon Anholt in 1996, it rests upon the assumption that today's world, in which geopolitical advancements define the strength of a country, is gradually transitioning towards a postmodern society, in which foreign public perceptions, images, and influences, define power dynamics.ⁱ Nation branding, therefore, is one tool that allows states to achieve their aspirations for power, prosperity, and visibility in a neoliberal world order defined by competition and the free market economy.

The field's novelty and multidimensional nature are two of the reasons why no comprehensive theoretical framework or single definition of the term nation branding exists today. Academic research on nation branding has slowly been gaining momentum, however, as of today it practitioners still largely dominate the field. It is therefore important to define the concept of nation branding, as it will be used in this paper. Nation branding, as defined by Ying Fan, "is a process by which a nation's images can be created or altered, monitored, evaluated and proactively managed in order to enhance the country's reputation among a target international audience."ⁱⁱ It is also important to distinguish between the practice of *nation branding* and the *nation's brand*. *Nation branding* describes the process of creating a nation's image while a *nation's brand* is the final product.

Fan defines the latter as "the total sum of all perceptions of a nation in the minds of international stakeholders, which may contain some of the following elements: people, place, culture/language [...] and so on."ⁱⁱⁱ The latter, in turn, must not be confused or used interchangeably with the term *national brand*, which refers to "a brand available nationally as distinct from a regional or test-market brand."^{iv}

Why exactly is it important for a state to allocate resources towards and adopt a comprehensive national branding strategy? As outlined by Aronczyk, national branding, first and foremost, increases the country's soft power by allowing it to generate capital and funds through the stimulation of tourism, exports, and trade; as well as the attraction of foreign direct investments, skilled workers, tourists, and students. Secondly, it helps to convey the image of legitimacy and authority abroad. Finally, it helps the current government increase its popularity at home and allows for the rise of nationalist sentiments and unity among the population.^v Simon Anholt offers a straightforward argument for the importance of nation branding in the world today. He suggested that various "clichés and stereotypes—positive or negative, true or untrue—fundamentally affect our behavior towards other places and their people and products," which in turn influences the ability of a country to attract tourists, investments, and business as well as to push out products, culture, services, ideas, etc.^{vi}



Nation branding gave many former Soviet Republics and satellite states an opportunity to narrow the gap between their external images, affected by their gloomy communist past, and the states present day reality.^{vii} Nation branding become particularly important for countries seeking European Union membership. Countries saw their admission to the Union as contingent upon the positive perception of their country by the citizens of other member states such as France and Germany.^{viii} For instance, Bulgaria's *Nice To Meet You* commercial, which aired on the *Euronews* channel on the occasion of the signing of the 2005 Treaty of Accession, is just a fraction of a more extensive branding campaign initiated by the country's government. The video's clear message of Bulgaria as a friendly, outward-looking nation is an excellent example of a state's attempt to "present [to foreign audiences a] new and more appealing national image in the context of EU enlargement."^{ix}

Figure 1

As with any brand in the 21st century, memorable visuals are essential to promoting a country's interests—for example, an aesthetic logo and a well-made TV commercial shown at a strategically optimal time can help advance a country's interests internationally. Strong national branding, however, is far more than a simple advertising campaign. It is the result of an assiduously implemented and comprehensive cross-sectorial long-term strategy.

The importance of the cross-sectorial presence of a brand is reflected in the nation brand hexagon (*figure 1*)^x developed by Simon Anholt. The hexagon illustrates six dimensions of a brands image that determines its power and quality: governance, people, culture and heritage, investment and immigration, exports, and tourism.^{xi}

The Anholt-GfK Nation Brands Index, developed by Simon Anholt and members of the Gesellschaft für Konsumforschung (GfK) team, is the best existing country branding index. This index is renewed yearly and includes 50 nations selected, as stated by the GfK team, on the basis of "political and economic importance of the nation in global geopolitics and the flow of trade, business, people, and tourism activities."^{xii} Due to these country-selection criteria the index doesn't offer insights about the brands of many smaller states, which may or may not already be using branding as a tool for promoting their countries global interests.

In some cases, a small country's arrival on a "mental political map," one that exists in the minds of the global population, is achieved through a single symbolic action, in contrast to a long term branding strategy. For example the "Slovenian government [donated] financial aid to their Balkan neighbors [...] to prove that Slovenia wasn't part of the Balkans."^{xiii} This helped

foster a positive image of Slovenia in the eyes of the international community. However, publicity is not always positive for a country's image. For example, the 2006 comedy *Borat* caused tremendous negative publicity for the Central Asian country of Kazakhstan. In the movie, Kazakhstan was portrayed as being filled with racist, stupid people. Due to the state's negative depiction throughout the film, Kazakhstan's international image was detrimentally affected. In spite of the fact that the film's popularity arguably helped to boost the country's tourist industry "it was a far-from-ideal way for a country to arrive on the map" and could potentially have had a negative effect on the state's foreign investment influx and immigration numbers.^{xiv} Thus, the Kazakhstan government was forced to pour millions of dollars into rehabilitating its image around the world.

Similarly to Kazakhstan, Georgia entered international consciousness with a single event, the Georgian-Russian War. Prior to 2008, Georgia was relatively unknown internationally. To many foreigners, Georgia evoked images of a vacation paradise, the cradle of great wine, and the birthplace of Joseph Stalin, while many others may never have even heard of the country with a population of less than four million people located in the Caucasus region of Eurasia. Thus, in August of 2008, the world was awakened by the news of the Georgia-Russia military conflict in the breakaway region of South Ossetia and the tiny nation came into the international spotlight. It was, perhaps, particularly disturbing for many American citizens to learn of the conflict as many had been previously unaware that a country shared one of their states names and was the recipient of American aid.

To this day, memory of the conflict is present in the international communities conception of Georgia. In addition, Georgia is still struggling to resist Russia's attempts to project its political influence through means of hybrid warfare as well as negotiate a re-integration deal with the two breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. With all of these issues Georgia has a somewhat negative association in the global consciousness. This is a major issue as Georgia's membership to the EU and NATO constitutes the top priority for the country's foreign and security policy. As previously stated, this negative image of Georgia can be detrimental to their goals as the citizens of the member-states hold influence on the timeline and acceptance of the country into these organizations. Taking into account these facts, the research at hand aims to examine the efforts made by the Georgian government, civil society, and private sector actors to promote Georgia's reputation at home and abroad. Based on the research outcome, the author will develop a set of suggestion on how to strengthen the Georgian brand and utilize the existing assets to undermine the impact of adverse events on state's images as well as improve country's position in the international arena.^{xv} The evaluation and suggestions-developed will be performed in accordance with the criteria developed by the GfK and Simon Anholt and illustrated in the nation-brand hexagon (*figure 1*). The research at hand aims not to compare Georgia to its peer-countries but to introduce the state to the art of nation branding in Georgia and show how preexisting assets can be utilized and built upon to provide the country with a competitive advantage over its peers.

Nation branding as it is today is a field of practitioners. Taking into account that no prior research on Georgian nation branding exists as of today, a wide range of primary sources was utilized in this research including government websites, interviews with public officials and researchers, speeches, statistical data, and publicly available documents. Some secondary sources in English and Russian were used as well.

Strategic Narrative

The staple of any national branding strategy is a strategic narrative that outlines what the country is and is not, the desired vision of its future (the common goal of the population), and how it is going to achieve it.^{xvi}

Georgia's policies, international as well as domestic ones, are aimed at, as Archil Gegebidze put it, "disassociate[ing] itself from Post-Soviet space and escap[ing] from Russia's historic, geographic, and civilizational space."^{xvii} The strategic narrative, therefore, is constructed around the idea of Georgia's return to Europe after the years of forceful separation by sovietization and Stalin's Iron Curtain. Georgia's European narrative emphasizes its Greco-Roman-Christian roots, the country's historic role as a springboard of Christianity towards Europe from the Middle East, as well as its status as a European cradle of winemaking. Most importantly, however, the narrative emphasizes Georgia's special strategic role within the European family. Historically the final stop on the Silk Road before reaching Europe, to this day it remains "anchored in Europe bridge of western lands to other worlds," or, in other words, "a transit country for commerce between the West and the states of Central Asia and the South Caucasus."^{xviii} The narrative is supported by the fact that Georgia indeed is the only country in the Caucasus region that demonstrates a strong allegiance to the West - neighboring Armenia is a part of the CSTO and Azerbaijan's foreign policy is developed with an outlook on Turkey and other Islamic partner-nations.^{xix} Rejoining the Euro-Atlantic family through the means of the EU and NATO memberships is, therefore, presented as one common goal of the Georgian nation. In order to achieve this goal, experts believe that the successful implementation of sectoral reforms and further development in conformity with general EU standards is essential to admittance to these alliances. It is important to note that in any given country its government, which can be altered with a change of leadership and does not necessarily reflect the view of the entire population of the given country, formulates the strategic narrative.

Georgia's strategic narrative, therefore, can be summarized as follows: Georgia is a historically European nation on the way to achieving even greater democratization and rejoining its Euro-Atlantic family. The country can offer not only its rich cultural heritage but also its beautiful and strategically situated geographic location.

Georgian Nation Branding. The Overview.

The results of the author's research indicate that at this point no comprehensive Georgian national branding strategy exists. The existing documents that somewhat resemble a national branding strategy are the *Communication and Information Strategy of the Government of Georgia on Georgia's in the sphere of EU Integration for the period of 2014-2017* and the *Communication Strategy of the Government of Georgia on Georgia's EU and NATO Membership for 2017-2020*. Raising awareness in the EU and the NATO Member States is mentioned in the goals/objectives sections of both documents. The documents also include the description of principle messages (strategic narrative), target audience, communication channels, and coordinating bodies - all the components necessary for the development of a national brand. There

is, however, no mention of a single slogan or image that is used as a reference point for country-promotion.

The 2014-2017 strategy includes an overly excessive description of partners with almost no mention of particular institutions. The 2017-2020 strategy offers some concrete examples but fails to provide a framework, which would allow for careful coordination of all the activities and comprehensiveness and consistency of the outward projected message.

It is worth mentioning, however, that the author was made aware by several representatives of the Georgian National Tourism Administration (GNTA) that the organization is currently (October 2017) developing a brand new re-branding strategy in partnership with the World Bank. The GNTA, however, refused to provide the information upon request and the WB website contains no mention of such project - therefore, the given information cannot be verified, and no predictions can be made on the new strategy's potential for success and how it can change the overall global status of Georgia's brand.^{xx}

Examining Components of the Brand

Tourism

The first part of the GfK NBI Hexagon that will be examined is tourism, the component of a national brand defined as the level of interest in visiting a country and the draw of its natural and man-made tourist attractions. This component is, arguably, by far the strongest aspect of Georgia's brand. In the World Economic Forum's 2017 Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report, Georgia was ranked 70th out of 136 countries and second in its regional category (behind Russia). The index is comprised of fourteen pillars of which Georgia's strongest performance is in the business environment and safety & security categories and weakest in natural resources/cultural resources and business travel.^{xxi} For anyone familiar with Georgian landscapes and rich culture ranking natural resources/cultural resources and business travel as two as country's weak points in the index might come as a surprise. As the analysis below indicates, however, the weakness is a reflection of the tourism industry to capitalize on its existing assets.

The statistical data of the GNTA shows that the number of yearly international arrivals to the country has been growing consistently since 2010. In 2016, 6,360,503 people visited Georgia, twice as many as the country's population, 43% of those arrivals were for 24 hours or more.^{xxii} As of November 2017, the total number of international arrivals to Georgia equaled 5,822,893 compared to 4,887,227 at the same time last year.^{xxiii}

The top five nations nationals that visited Georgia in 2016 were Azerbaijan, Armenia, Turkey, Russia, and Ukraine. As for the EU countries, the two countries with the largest number of nationals visiting Georgia were Poland and Germany (number nine and ten in the overall rankings).^{xxiv} As of September, the top visiting nations in 2017 were Azerbaijan, Armenia, Russia, Turkey, and Iran with the only European nation that made it to top ten being Poland; Germany, nevertheless, came in at eleventh place.^{xxv}

These quite impressive statistics come as a result of the GNTA's consistent effort to promote Georgia's tourist industry on the international market. In fact, according to the agency's website, it recognizes the need for development of "Georgia's brand"- this is the only agency that uses this wording.^{xxvi} The GNTA actively invests in online and TV advertising. In fact, the

agency chose to abandon the more traditional forms of advertising such as outdoor banners completely due to its proven ineffectiveness. The TV advertisements are aimed primarily at the former Soviet states such as Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. The same is true for online advertising, with the exception of Trip Advisor, which viewed internationally.^{xxvii} The social media accounts run by the GNTA (named Georgia travel or Georgia and Travel) on Instagram, Facebook and Pinterest are also quite successful; however, it is likely that they only attract the attention of people who have already been to the country or are doing online research in anticipation of their visit. GNTA also actively uses the services of famous travel bloggers - some come to Georgia on their own and later on their posts are actively promoted online including on the travel.georgia website, others are invited by the GNTA to tour the country and document their experiences. Perhaps, the most famous example of the GNTA-blogger collaboration is Georgia's six millionth tourist campaign - Jesper Black, a video blogger from Denmark, happened to be the country's six millionth visitor and a star of its award-winning "Dinner with Georgia" clip.^{xxviii}

Tourism in Georgia has been on the global media's radar throughout 2017. Vogue magazine listed Georgia as one of the Ten Hottest Travel Destinations of 2017 and also published at least three articles about the country's attractions, amid many other articles promoting its fashion industry. The Lonely Planet, the largest travel guidebook publisher in the world, placed Georgia on the list of top ten countries to visit in 2018. Other media that wrote about tourism in Georgia was National Geographic Travel, BBC, the Atlantic, the Telegraph, and many other regional and international outlets.

The logo currently used by the GNTA is made in the motif of the Georgian flag - a figure that could be described as a red four-leaf flower with a white background. That logo, however, can hardly be allocated to brand Georgia as a whole as it doesn't seem to be used by any other agencies in the country. There is also no single slogan used to promote the country, at the moment various slogans are used such as "Europe started here," "Georgia-for the best moments of your life," and "Georgia is the country of life."

Exports

The export component of the Georgian brand represents the public's image of products and services from the country. As Anholt-GfK Nation Brand Index research team notes: "this dimension of a nation's reputation has staying power, being a reputation asset that takes years to build and that is least prone to whimsical changes based on events."^{xxix} The team also notes that the top ten overall measure leaders are also the top-ranked countries in this particular sub-category, hence "a nation's overall reputation is strongly associated with consumers' feelings about buying its products."^{xxx} The top five nations in this category in the 2017 Nation Brand Index are Japan, the US, Germany, the UK, and France. It is worth mentioning that in the 2017 overall ranking the US has fallen to sixth place compared to its 2016 number one position. Despite issues with good governance, the country has managed to retain its strong position in its exports category.

In 2016 the top five exports in Georgia were copper ore, nuts, ferroalloys, cars, and wine.^{xxxi} Not all of the top exported products are important for the creation of a brand, however. Consumers, for example, are unlikely to care about the origin of ferroalloys used in the process of producing their favorite goods. Products like wine or cars, on the other hand, allow for a

greater sense of emotional attachment. Unlike, for example, Germany, Georgia can't use its car exports for branding purposes because, in fact, Georgia never produced vehicles but was able to successfully capitalize on re-exporting used ones to Central Asia and other countries in the Caucasus. Georgian wine, on the other hand, is an already recognized brand with high potential.

“Georgia-Cradle of Wine” is the slogan used to brand the product. The factual evidence reaffirms the slogan - archeologists have found 8000-year-old pottery fragments on the territory of Georgia, which revealed the earliest evidence of grape-wine making found in the world as of today.^{xxxii} Georgians unlike all other winemaking nations in the world have preserved the winemaking methods developed several centuries ago. Wine lovers worldwide, as well as the UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity list, recognize the traditional Qveri winemaking practice as one of the best in the world. As of today, 18 appellations of wine and 525 grape varieties exist in Georgia.^{xxxiii xxxiv} Georgian winemakers promote their products through participation in various international wine fairs. In addition, the Saperavi World Prize, a Georgian wine contest for foreign winemakers, was established in 2017. Inge Olsson, manager of the contest, explains its significance for the industry and the country in the following way:

The winemakers who produce Saperavi wines in the USA or New Zealand are doing a very good job for Georgia. And Georgia must not only show its appreciation but stimulate a wider use of Saperavi in the world. The words “Saperavi” and “Georgia” must be heard often, to become familiar to international consumers. In result, more people will buy Georgian products. So, Georgian producers will gain direct benefits.^{xxxv}

While in 2016 Georgia did not make it to the list of top fifteen countries that exported the highest dollar value worth of wine, Olsson's statement reaffirms the high potential of the product on the global wine market.^{xxxvi}

Another product that often comes hand in hand with wine is, of course, cheese. Here, the efforts of Georgian producers to promote the product abroad seem to be nearly non-existent, but the potential for the creation of a globally recognized brand is quite high. There are 14 varieties of Georgian cheeses registered by the country's Ministry of Agriculture; however, the actual number is estimated to be anywhere between 80 and 150, which is less than the amount invented by the French but still quite impressive.^{xxxvii}

Georgia, however, has more than just a food and beverages market when it comes to capitalizing on its exports thanks to Demna Gvasalia, the creative director of the luxury fashion house Balenciaga and the head designer of Vetements. His success on the global high fashion market brought the Georgian fashion industry into the spotlight. Vogue, W Magazine and many other fashion magazines and blogs now write about the world of rule breaking, up and coming Georgian designers. Mercedes Benz Fashion Week Tbilisi is one of the most hip global fashion events of the year.^{xxxviii xxxix} Notably, according to the GfK Nation Brand Index, fashion exports

are some of the most memorable ones - global consumers take note of the countries that produce their favorite clothing pieces. As *Cosmopolitan* magazine notes, more and more fashion designers bring politics to the runway after the 2016 American Election; the strengthening relationship between politics and the fashion industry provides the perfect opportunity for the Georgian government to capitalize on it.^{xl}

Investment and Immigration

The investment and immigration component represents a given nation's power to attract people to live, work, or study in the given country; as well as the public's perception of the country's quality of life and business environment.

Georgia's source of pride in the given category is its standing in the World Bank's *Doing Business 2018 Report* where Georgia ranked 9th in the world alongside Norway, the UK and, the US. Georgia has by far the best ranking in its regional category. Moreover, it is the only lower-middle income economy represented in the top 20, and it has "implemented the highest number of business regulation reforms since the launch of *Doing Business* in 2003—a total of 47."^{xli} Its DTF score has improved by 2.12 points compared to 2017 thanks to Governmental reforms in the areas of minority investors' protection (now ranked second in the world in the category), insolvency resolution, and electricity accessibility.^{xlii}

Georgia also leads the Eastern European & Central Asian region being ranked 44th best out of 176 countries in *Transparency International's 2016 Corruption Perceptions Index*. The *Legatum Prosperity Index* places Georgia 66th out of 149 countries in the business-environment sub-index - a more than 36 place-rank increase over the last decade.^{xliii} Among other indicators that make Georgia attractive to investors, according to Georgian National Investment Agency, is the 12.4% unemployment rate with 50% of unemployed being between 20-34 years old, no minimum wage regulations, average monthly salary of 410 USD, no working permit requirements, and one year visa-free stay regime for citizens of 94 countries.^{xliv} Very attractive for investors, some of the indicators such as, for example, is no minimum wage requirements and relatively low monthly salary average, which turn away high-skilled foreign workers.

The Georgian government as a whole and Georgian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Ministry of Economy and Sustainable development in particular actively work towards the improvement of bilateral cooperation with various states as well as attracting new investments to the country. However, no traces of a global outreach campaign conducted in coordination or unilaterally by either of the entities mentioned above were found.

Georgia has a 100% literacy rate. However, this one data point alone is not enough to make the country attractive to foreign students. Georgia participates in a number of international exchange programs including several programs sponsored by the US Department of State - the Fulbright (inbound), FLEX (outbound) and Global UGRAD (outbound); and the EU's Erasmus + program. According to the research recently conducted by the Research Division of the Georgian National Tourism Administration, the percentage of international students at Georgian higher institutions is rather insignificant. The majority of the existing international students come from the developing world to pursue degrees in economics and medical sciences.^{xlv}

Georgia is placed 81st out of 163 countries in the Global Contribution to Science and Technology indicator in the 2016 Good Country Index with two positive indicators being the

number of international students relative to the size of the economy and the number of articles published in international journals.^{xlvi} As of today, no Georgian university is represented in either Shanghai or QS world university rankings, which certainly makes it a far less attractive educational destination for international students.

Other aspects that might be taken into account by the potential expats such as equality in society, environmental record, and security will be examined later on. The examination introduced in this section, however, shows that Georgia's strength lies in its attractiveness for business investors but not those seeking opportunities to receive a high-quality education or improve their overall quality of life.

Culture and Heritage

This component represents the global perception of heritage and appreciation for contemporary culture.

The UNESCO World Heritage Sites List contains three Georgian monuments - Historical Monuments of Mtskheta, Upper Svaneti, Bagrati Cathedral and Gelati Monastery. Also, sixteen properties are placed on a tentative list. Three elements of Georgian culture are registered in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity - Georgian polyphonic singing, the ancient Georgian traditional Qvevri winemaking method, and the living culture of three writing systems of the Georgian alphabet. The country also has four inscriptions in the UNESCO Memory of the World Register, which lists documentary heritage of world significance and particular universal value.^{xlvii xlviii} While a valuable asset, however, mention in the UNESCO lists alone can't strengthen any country's national brand or boost the tourist industry, unless the government is actively engaged in practices of international cultural diplomacy - active promotion of its culture and heritage abroad. Indeed, if we look at the top five nations in this category in the 2016 and 2017 (notably, all countries in the given category retained their positions) Nation Brand Index - France, the US, Italy, Germany, and the UK - all of them have established cultural institutes throughout the world.

While there is no international network of Georgian cultural institutes comparable to, for example, the British Council or Alliance Française, some country-specific initiatives do exist. There is, for example, the British Georgian Society in London, Georgian Institute at Athens - the first Georgian academic and cultural institution abroad, and the Georgian Cultural Institute in Copenhagen. Of particular importance, however, are the continued efforts of Georgian diplomatic missions to promote Georgian arts and culture in their respective states by organizing concerts, art exhibits, and roundtables; participation in expos, fairs and festivals; and many other activities.

The most recent effort to raise global awareness about Georgia's rich cultural heritage is the Become Georgia's Digital Ambassador campaign. Initiated by the University of Business and Technology and the National Museum of Georgia it invites social media users to create and share posts which capture Georgia's rich history and culture using the hashtag #shareGeorgia.^{xlix}¹ The program was launched in May of 2017, and as of November, there are just over 2600 posts on Instagram with the hashtag and with the top one getting slightly more than 400 likes - an unimpressive statistic for this social media platform.

Other efforts to promote the country's culture abroad includes participation in international expos and fairs, with the latest example being the concert at the 2017 Expo in Astana which featured renowned Georgian musical artists.^{li}

Georgia's rich culture and heritage are unique assets, which, if wisely utilized, provide an opportunity to improve an overall image of the country. As indicated in the 2016 Good Country Index, however, Georgia's export of creative goods and services when compared to the size of the economy is lower than the global average. The country's overall ranking in the category of culture contribution is 90 out of 162, which is a small number if one takes into account the country's reach cultural heritage. Georgia's Good Country Index standing is an indicator that so far the attempts to utilize culture and heritage for country branding purposes have perhaps not been comprehensive enough and produced limited results.

People

As mentioned previously, nation branding allows a country to enhance its soft power, which in turn places a considerable emphasis on people to people interactions. It is evident, therefore, that any given population's reputation for openness, friendliness, competence and tolerance influence its soft power capacity and plays a vital role in a successful nation brand. It is, perhaps, the one component of a national brand that is the hardest to manage. We all hold certain stereotypes of other nations and some of them are universal - Germans are the most hardworking nation, while Italians are exceptionally lazy; all French are arrogant, while Americans smile in any given situation, and so on. Ironically, however, while employability was listed among the traits that make a particular nation more attractive, in spite of the existing "lazy Italians" stereotype, Italy gained a higher score than both Germany and the US in the 2016 Nation Brand Index.

In addition to global stereotypes, some rankings reflect a population's tolerance towards ethnic minorities, LGBTQ persons, and immigrants. While global stereotypes of a country can change suddenly as a result of an event of a worldwide significance, it takes generations for a given population's attitude towards specific groups to change. Thus, the introduction of a new governmental policy wouldn't be of much help. Take, for example, the continued fight of African Americans in the US for their rights - institutionally the situation was "fixed" in the 1960s, but in practice, the problem continues to exist.

Georgian culture is famous for its traditions of hospitality, which dates back centuries. Admiration of a person's hospitality can be found in various examples of Georgian folklore, national poetry and even paintings of internationally renowned Georgian artist Niko Pirosmani. A famous Georgian proverb summarizes the notion; it says "every guest is God-sent."^{lii} A definite asset for Georgia's brand, however, gets overshadowed by Georgia's standing in international rankings. In the *2017 Social Progress Index* conducted by the US-based nonprofit Social Progress Imperative, Georgia is ranked 124 out of 128 nations in the Tolerance and Inclusion category, compared to, for example, 85th place of Latvia or 17th of Germany. This scoring is the worst when compared to Georgia's 15 peer countries with a similar GDP per capita. What exactly does this standing mean? Tolerance for immigrants in the country is on the low side with 42.91 with 100 being the most tolerant, which places Georgia 100th in the world. Tolerance for homosexuals is at a low 5.25 (out of 100 for most tolerance) points and 103rd place. The score in the category discrimination and violence against minorities is 8.10 with ten being

the highest (worst) - 99th place in the world. Religious tolerance score is 2/4 and 92nd place in the world. The last indicator in the category is community safety net where Georgia ranks 124/128 with a score of 52.72/100.^{liii} Additionally, in the 2016 Legatum Prosperity Index, conducted by London-based Legatum Institute, Georgia's worst sub-performance, number 139 out of 149 nations, is in social capital sub-index, which measures the strength of personal relationships, social network support, social norms, and civic participation in a given country.^{liv}

Therefore, while Georgian traditions of hospitality undoubtedly make the nation attractive for tourists, the indication of the nation's intolerance towards various minority groups casts a dark shadow over its overall reputation.

Governance

Governance refers to public opinion on national government's competency and fairness and the country's perceived commitment to global issues. This component of a nation's reputation, unlike, for example exports, is most prone to change. While Donald Trump's presidency lead to the global populations' negative perception of the American government, people did not stop eating at McDonald's and drinking Starbucks coffee - indeed, in 2017 the US was ranked number six overall with a number two position in exports and 23 in governance, which is a critically low number for one of the world's leading nations.

The Anholt-GfK survey developers have identified the top five global issues that the respondents (ordinary citizens from various countries) would like to see being addressed and resolved, which, subsequently, would improve a given country's global image. The issues are as follows: violent conflict resolution, protection, and promotion of human rights, ensuring the safety of food and water, environment, and natural resources protection, and decreasing social inequality. According to survey developers, their government clients often use this information "as a foreign policy guidance for understanding global expectations for that country and what role it could play in global affairs and the potential impact that it could have on their national reputation."^{lv}

In the 2017 IEP Global Peace Index Georgia is ranked number 94 out of 163 countries; which is third place (least amount of conflict) in its regional category, Russia & Eurasia, and a two place improvement in comparison to 2016. Georgia's ranking is lower than that of the worst performing EU member state (Greece ranked number 73) but still higher than the worst performing NATO member state (Turkey numbered 146).^{lvi} While the current situation in the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia undoubtedly has an adverse effect on the global perception of the country, it is important to take into account that "ending the occupation of Georgian territories" is listed as the number one priority of the country's National Security Policy. The same policy elaborates on the country's commitment to utilizing exclusively peaceful mechanisms of conflict resolution.^{lvii} Georgia's international partners, in turn, praised such commitment.

Therefore, the Georgian government's commitment to resolving conflict in its territory through peaceful means could be seen as a plausible reputational asset, it is, however, important to note that the international community perceives the countries-champions of governance sub-index such as Canada, Sweden, and Switzerland as trusted mediator-nations. For a small nation like Georgia, becoming a mediator would lead to increased global respect, Georgia even has the opportunity to achieve this role right on the Georgian boarder - the Nagorno-Karabakh

conflict. Another possibility is in increasing the country's troop and police contribution to the UN Peacekeeping mission - currently, the number of personnel provided by Georgia equals to two people compared to neighboring Armenia's 34 or Sweden's 262.

In spite of the fact that the fulfillment of extensive commitments in the spheres of democracy, freedom, and human rights is the requirement of the EU/Georgia Association agreement, Georgia's progress in the area is somewhat stalled. The areas of particular concern, as outlined by the major international watchdogs, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International; include the rights to privacy, abuses committed by law enforcement entities, freedom of the media, and women's and LGBTQ people's rights.^{lviii lix} The existence of such issues was further reinforced in the 2017 UNHCHR Report on cooperation with Georgia.^{lx} The issues are also reflected in the reports made by the representatives of international organizations. One of the most recent examples is the report issued by the UN special rapporteur on violence against women which highlights "widespread violence against women both in private and public spheres, caused by 'entrenched patriarchal attitudes and gender stereotypes,'" as well as a high number of child and forced marriages.^{lxi} According to UNICEF, 14% of women between 20 and 24 years old were forced into marriage before the age of 18 - this is the highest number among its neighboring countries; This grim statistic that puts Georgia in line with states such as Indonesia and the Syrian Arab Republic.^{lxii} All in all, the area of protection and promotion of human rights is mostly a source of negative publicity for the country and an impediment to the creation of a successful national brand.

Georgia is listed among 146 countries that have met the UN Millennium Development Goals target on improved access to water. Statistical data indicates that 100% of the country's population is using an improved source of drinking water which is the general trend among the European nations and higher than, for example, in nearby Russia where the number equals 97%. In contrast, however, is the percentage of the population that has access to sanitation facilities, as of 2015 that number equaled only 86% which is still higher than in neighboring Russia but lower than in the majority of the EU-member state.^{lxiii} The 2016 Europe Foundation report titled *Food Safety Regulation in Georgia: Assessment of Government's Reform Efforts in 2015* talks about the Georgian government's commitment to reform in the sphere of food safety regulation and commitment to bring country's legislation in conformity with the EU standards. However, in 2015, as the report notes, the Georgian government has "failed to fulfill [...] plans for legislative approximation and many issues [were] left without adequate regulation."^{lxiv} As the outlook on the overall statistics shows, Georgian government's achievements in ensuring the safety of food and water are characterized by relatively good standing in the global ratings; however, they are unlikely to appear as particularly memorable and impressive, hence, are not a source of strength for Georgia'.

Protection of the environment and natural resources is an important issue rather than a source of pride for the Georgian government. In the 2016 Yale Environmental Performance Index, Georgia is ranked number 111 out of 180 countries on the list, and it performs worse in comparison to other countries in Eastern European and the Central Asian region.^{lxv} The country has received the lowest score in the issue areas of wastewater treatment and fisheries (assesses the percentage of fish stocks overexploited or collapsed).^{lxvi} The environmental-health damage, if not eased through adaptation of necessary legislation, might be destructive for the country's economic growth and the poor in particular areas.^{lxvii} Taking into account that country's natural

attractions are the main selling point for the tourist industry, which in 2016 amounted to 7.6% in GO of country's economy; the failure to embark on a path of sustainable and environmentally friendly development might be detrimental for the country's future.

The 2017 Oxfam's *The Commitment to Reducing Inequality Index*, which ranks governments in accordance with what they are doing to tackle the gap between rich and poor, placed Georgia 64th out of 152 nations. That is a relatively good result, taking into account that another former Soviet state that is currently trying to embark on a path to EU membership, Ukraine, was ranked number 142.^{lxviii} Most remarkably, however, in the same report, Georgia is ranked among the top five countries most committed to reducing inequality through a progressive structure and incidence of tax alongside Austria, Malta, Belgium, and Australia - a quite impressive result which, nevertheless, did not seem to gain much publicity.^{lxix}

Just as any other nation, Georgia's brand governance component has many strengths and weaknesses. When managing it, therefore, it is important to place an emphasis on already existing positive indicators, as well as on all and any work in progress aimed at resolving political and social issues in Georgia and abroad.

Conclusion and Suggestions for Improvement

Sectoral analysis introduced in this paper shows that at this point, no comprehensive strategy aimed at managing the international Georgia brand exists. The Georgian National Tourism Administration makes the most remarkable efforts in this sphere, but the single-sectors success is not enough of a powerful brand to help Georgia achieve its foreign policy goals, for example, speed up the process of European integration.

The author believes that the following area-specific action-suggestions could help to strengthen Georgia's brand:

- **Georgia's cultural heritage** - rich but underpublicized. Georgia would benefit significantly from establishing a network of cultural institutes abroad or even from implementing a global program aimed at promoting its culture abroad - such programs could be implemented in the framework of Georgian missions abroad.
- **Georgian logo and slogan.** Eye-and-tongue-catching. It requires minimal resources to invent the two. However, there needs to be only one of each, and they need to be used universally by the variety of governmental agencies as well as private sector actors.
- **Promoting international education and exchange.** Internationalization of a county's higher education allows it to increase its soft power capability. When choosing the location for study abroad students often select rich cultural experiences over academic curricula, and Georgia can and should capitalize on this fact. While it might take years to improve the higher education system, rich culture, friendly people, and an exotic language exist here and should be emphasized when promoting Georgia's universities abroad.
- **New global exports.** The research at hand mentions the cheese-producing industry as one that has a potential of becoming a companion of the global Georgian wines brand. That is, however, only one out of many products that could become Georgia's international representative. Churchkhela, enamel jewelry, artworks, wool, and clothes - the opportunities are endless.

- **Georgia as a global peacemaker.** As mentioned earlier in the research, many small nations were able to secure its vital position in the global political arena as a result of taking up the role of the conflict mediator. Georgia, therefore, could benefit from taking up a more active mediating role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, as well as from increasing the amount of personnel it provides for the UN Peacekeeping operations in different parts of the world. The occupied territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia can be seen as an impediment for advertising Georgia as a mediator – that’s why it is essential for the Georgian government to ensure greater international publicity of its efforts for peaceful conflict resolution – to turn ordinary policy implementation into a so-called symbolic action.

- **Embarking on a pathway to sustainable development.** Even simple waste sorting and plastic bag usage reduction initiatives can make the country look better in the eyes of the international community. It might sound ironic but for the most influential EU-member states like Germany - the world’s renewable energy and recycling champion, a country’s commitment to sustainable development might serve as one important point for its acceptance into the EU family.

- **More global outreach.** Georgia’s impressive ranking in the TI’s Corruption Perception and the WB’s Ease of Doing Business indexes, being listed among the top five nations in the world when it comes to their commitment to reducing inequality through progressive structure and incidence of tax - are quite powerful indicators. However, just “being listed as...” doesn’t equate to a more favorable global outlook. The majority of the global population doesn’t track the changes in the global rankings, and therefore, it is in the interest of the Georgian embassies and chambers of commerce abroad to raise awareness about such developments globally - unfortunately, efforts in this area are currently scarce.

This list of suggestion is, of course, not exhaustive. There are many more things that the nation could capitalize upon to see some immediate returns on brand improvement. It is important to remember, however, that the top five nations in the Anholt-GfK 2017 or any-other-given-year index are not countries without problems. Some of them at this time are experiencing profound political and economic crises in their history; they are, however, the countries that learned how to and actively invest in publicizing their strengths and keeping global attention away from their weaknesses. Therefore, to look more attractive for the world, Georgia is not required to wait until, for example, Abkhazia and South Ossetia' reintegration into the country or the change of attitudes by the general population about improvement to LGBTQ community tolerance indicators. Georgia can and has a tremendous potential to look more inviting to an international audience here and now, but it is up to the country’s government whether the this potential will be utilized to its full capacity.

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