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# MYPLACE



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## **MYPLACE (Memory, Youth, Political Legacy And Civic Engagement)**

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### **WP2: Interpreting the past (The construction and transmission of historical memory)**

#### **Deliverable 2.1: Country based reports on historical discourse production as manifested in sites of memory (Georgia)**

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## Introduction

MYPLACE Work Package 2, “Interpreting the past (The construction and transmission of historical memory),” was conducted in Georgia in the town of Telavi, Telavi municipality, the administrative center of the Kakheti region, Eastern Georgia. According to the last Census in 2002, the population of Telavi was 21,800; according to updated information provided by the local municipality, the 2012 population of the town was 19,736 – made up predominantly of ethnic Georgians, with small Kurdish, Armenian, and Russian minorities; Azerbaijanis and Ossets were settled in some of the neighboring villages. A relatively small number of IDPs were settled in Telavi in the early 1990s, after the 1992-1993 war in Abkhazia; of the 453 IDPs living in Telavi in 2012, 214 lived in two ‘collective centers’<sup>1</sup> and 239 – in private accommodation.

Telavi was chosen for MYPLACE fieldwork as one of the contrasting locations in Georgia, known for low level of civic engagement of the local population. Substantially, the IDP experience, as experienced by IDP youth, was the major focus of WP2 fieldwork. Most of the young people we worked with did not remember the 1992-1993 war in Abkhazia; yet, this war has led to crucial changes in the lives of their families, resulting in the loss of their homes back in Abkhazia and their subsequent IDP status lasting for decades, with uncertain prospects in the future. Discussing this experience with teenagers would enable us to see the process of transmission of memory – mostly, within families – regarding important and painful historical events. At the same time, we would be able to discuss and observe the attitudes of young people (both IDP and non-IDP) towards the processes which were happening in Telavi during the

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Collective centers’ is a type of housing (usually, rooms) in former hotels or hostels, sometimes – kindergarten or school buildings, hardly useful as a long-term family accommodation.

fieldwork period – namely, the ‘rehabilitation’ of the historical center of the town, discussed below.

The history of the settlement dates back to the late bronze period: in the 10<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> centuries Telavi was the capital of the Kingdom of Kakheti. A number of ‘sites of memory’ are scattered through the town and its surroundings, dating back to different periods of its history. The most central of these ‘sites of memory’ is the palace of the king Erekle II (1720-1798) and the Telavi Historical Museum, founded in 1927 and located on the premises of this palace. During the last decades, the museum was one of the major touristic attractions in Telavi, attracting approximately 40,000 visitors annually.

During the late Soviet period, a number of large industrial enterprises were working in Telavi, providing employment opportunities for the majority of the population. After 1991, however, all of these industries collapsed, and unemployment skyrocketed, leading to a deterioration of living standards. The first decade of Georgian independence was extremely difficult because of the collapse of the economy and the energy sector. In addition to growing unemployment, the country experienced long-term shortage of electricity, pipeline gas, and, in some regions including Telavi – water supply. As in virtually all post-Soviet countries, neither the government, nor the population had any experience of democratic governance.

A number of new enterprises emerged in Telavi during the 2000s, mostly related to wine production. These, however, were small-size enterprises employing a small number of people, and hence could not have any significant impact on the employment statistics for the population

of the town in general. According to the information provided by the local municipality, only about 150 people were employed in the three wineries working in Telavi in 2012.

In 2012, 35% of the population of Telavi was unemployed, according to the local municipality. Since the early 1990s, labor emigration – internal as well as international – has been one of the popular ‘coping strategies’ of the local population during the economic crisis. In the long run, this has had an effect on the size and demographic profile of the population – the number of people living in Telavi has decreased during the last two decades, with older people more expected to stay, and younger ones – to leave. Kindergartens and schools have become less busy, with significantly fewer pupils, a situation due partially to a lower birthrate, and partially – to out-migration. According to the information provided by the local municipality, 4044 pupils studied in 9 secondary schools in Telavi in 2012; and the average number of pupils per schools was 449.3, At the very end of the 1980s, this number was up to 3 times higher.

Another aspect influencing life in Telavi during the last decades was the collapse of basic energy services – the electricity and gas supplies, as well as the water supply. Everyday life has been very challenging for the local population for at least a decade (in the 1990s). Most local families still use wooden stoves as their main source of heating in the winter. An absolute majority of the population has a limited water supply, so they have to collect water for everyday use. For several years in the 1990s, there was no supply of pipeline gas, and electricity was supplied only occasionally. Gas and electricity supplies were fixed in the 2000s, however, for a segment of the population both are prohibitively expensive.

In 2012, 2960 people were registered in Telavi as extremely poor (below the poverty line, and receiving state social assistance). Most IDPs in the area (especially those living in the ‘collective centers’) are also poor.

Georgia has been trying to cope with an acute IDP problem since the 1990s, when two violent and devastating ethnic conflicts broke out in the autonomous ethnic regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Although *de-jure* both regions are still part of Georgia and are considered to be ‘occupied’, *de-facto* both were lost in the early 1990s, and the 2008 war with Russia made the situation even worse, with Russian military forces taking control of even larger territories in South Ossetia. As a result of each territorial conflict in the country, a new ‘wave’ of IDPs needed to be accommodated and integrated; according to existing estimations, IDPs comprise between 6% and 8% of the population of Georgia.

In April, 2012, 265,109 IDPs were registered in Georgia by the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories (this number takes into account victims of later territorial conflicts as well, so called Phase II and Phase III IDPs), of which 479 were settled in Telavi (Ministry). The absolute majority of Telavi IDPs are ‘first wave’ IDPs from Abkhazia.

By now, approximately half of these IDP families have succeeded in moving out of the collective centers to private accommodation in Telavi or neighboring villages (according to the information we have, very few of them have left Telavi municipality). The remaining half of this IDP population, however, has not been able to move out of the collective centers, and has spent many years living in very difficult conditions: extremely disadvantaged in terms of housing,

employment, and economic prospects, and characterized by a high level of self-identification as IDPs, a group rather different from the rest of the population. Important to note, although most of the young people we were targeting did not remember life in Abkhazia (some have never been there, having being born in Telavi). They still had a very strong self-identification with the IDP group and, often, did not see themselves and their families staying in Telavi forever – rather, returning at some point to Abkhazia, after the resolution of the conflict. This suggests that this group of IDPs is not fully integrated into Telavi society, in spite of the two decades of having lived there.

Although an extremely important event in Georgia's post-Soviet history, the 1992-1993 war in Abkhazia and its social consequences have not yet become an object of any museum exposition in Georgia. As we hypothesize, the fact that there is no museum exhibition commemorating the war in Abkhazia can be explained by the painfulness of this event – this is an example of not only the 'difficult,' but also the traumatic and 'shameful' past the country went through.

In terms of WP2, we were originally planning to collaborate with the Telavi Historical Museum, which was offering a permanent exhibition of medieval armor and coins, household items and clothes, as well as king Erekle's belongings; along with temporary exhibitions organized in the Art Gallery that was also part of the museum complex; we have had information that an exhibition of drawings by IDP children living in Telavi was organized once in the Art Gallery.

However, at the very beginning of our fieldwork the museum was closed for a long period of time (and has not reopened until now), due to the large-scale 'rehabilitation' works underway in

the historical center of Telavi, initiated by the national government. Significantly, even the director of the museum was not informed about these plans in advance. Since it was impossible to think about the fieldwork in the museum, we eventually established collaboration with a local NGO, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA-Telavi). Although technically not a site of memory, YMCA has had impressive experience working with IDP youth living in Telavi and was, in fact, a co-organizer of the exhibition of drawings by IDP children in the Telavi Art Gallery. Of great importance, most of YMCA activities have involved both IDP and non-IDP youth, hence, we could observe the interaction of the two groups of young people.

The experiences of IDPs represent one of the most salient topics in Georgia's post-Soviet history – an unexpected and often tragic reality the country has had to face since the 1990s. Since the topic is, to date, largely understudied by historians and social scientists, all we can rely on to learn more about these experiences are the narratives of the IDPs themselves – narratives that are closely connected with various aspects of post-Soviet transformation.

There is also a second aspect of post-Soviet transformation that we focused on at the later stages of the fieldwork in Telavi. As mentioned, our fieldwork progressed parallel with the historical 'rehabilitation' work being carried out in the town. We introduced this topic (the 'renovation' of historical buildings and streets, changing the look of the town) as a co-focus of the fieldwork, mostly because 'rehabilitation' reflects an attempt to change not only the way the town looks, but also the way in which local history gets interpreted.



## Methodology

WP2 fieldwork was conducted based on the common methodology used by all MYPLACE consortium members. Participant observation in the non-academic partner institution (YMCA-Telavi), expert interviews, focus group discussions with young people, and intergenerational interviews with a young and an old members of the same family were the primary data collection techniques.

Due to the fact that we had to change the partner institution and that the new one was not a museum, participant observation was the most problematic aspect, since not many observable events were happening in the new partner institution, YMCA-Telavi. No problems were encountered, on the other hand, with respect to interviewing (including intergenerational interviews) and focus groups. Following the WP2 leader's advice, guided sightseeing tours were organized for FG respondents before the focus group discussions, during which several historical sites of various historical events were visited by the young people. These were sites commemorating events of different eras, from the very remote to the very recent past. The guide reminded the respondents about the historical events associated with these sites. During the focus group discussions, the moderator reminded the participants about the places they had visited.

Five expert interviews, three focus groups and three intergenerational interviews were conducted:

- three expert interviews with secondary school teachers of history (who had strong reputations as teachers **and** at least 22 years of experience teaching history, and hence,

could provide information about the changing school textbooks throughout the post-Soviet period and the dominant views/interpretations expressed in those textbooks (GEOE1, GEOE2, GEOE3);

- two expert interviews with two historians: one of the respondents used to work as the director of Telavi Historical Museum (GEOE5); another was an independent expert (a historian) based in Telavi (GEOE4);<sup>2</sup>
- three focus group discussions (FG) with young people aged 16-25, living in Telavi (GEOFG1, GEOFG2, GEOFG3). One of the focus groups was composed exclusively of YMCA-Telavi volunteers, who were the most socially active among the FG respondents (GEOFG2); these were relatively older participants (in their 20s), who used to be YMCA-Telavi beneficiaries several years ago (i.e., were attending classes organized by YMCA-Telavi). None of the FG respondents, however, was characterized by very high levels of civic engagement.<sup>3</sup>

We had only one refusal, when one of the experts (the former director of Telavi Historical Museum) refused to be interviewed.

Information about participant observation and general impressions of the interviews are recorded in the fieldnotes; all formal interviews and focus groups have been transcribed. In order to collect as much data as possible, we also asked the volunteers at YMCA-Telavi to write essays on the

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<sup>2</sup> Although there were 5 formal expert interviews, during the fieldwork we talked with more people informed about these issues. Information about such informal interviews/conversations has been recorded in the fieldnotes.

<sup>3</sup> Three intergenerational interviews were also conducted, one in a family of IDPs, two in non-IDP families. The younger respondents were of the target age (16 to 25, two females and one male), the older respondents were a mother, a father, and a grandmother.

topic “Me and My Family”, focusing on the influence of recent history on the life of their family. Ten young people wrote short essays, which are of certain interest to our work.

Closer to the end of the fieldwork period, as a result of the parliamentary elections of October 1, 2012 which were won by the former opposition, the government changed in Georgia. Some of the interviews were conducted after the elections, and we witnessed increased criticism of the Saakashvili government in post-election interviews.

Throughout the fieldwork, we followed all MYPLACE ethical requirements, providing detailed information about the project to the respondents/actors, and preserving their anonymity. We did not encounter any ethical problems during the fieldwork.

### **Theoretical framework**

As demonstrated above, the past 20 years have been tremendously difficult for people living in Georgia. This is especially true for the generation who had to raise their children after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, when the country gained independence, but, at the same time, sank in political and economic crisis. At the beginning of the 1990s, people in Georgia had to deal with the loss of separatist territories, the rise of militarized criminal groups and the outbreak of civic war between the supporters and opponents of the newly elected president. The majority of the population of the country was no longer supplied with electricity and gas; for a certain period, corruption and abuse of power were common issues.

Today's Georgian teenagers remember living in a country where electricity failures and lack of money for basic needs were common everyday issues; their perceptions are as dramatic as the perceptions of adults (especially for IDPs from the separatist region of Abkhazia, which gained 'independence' in 1993). As Mannheim maintains, "the historical events that happen in people's formative years leave a permanent imprint on people's memories" (Mannheim, [1928] 1952, quoted in Scott and Zac, 1993: 316); hence, we would not be surprised to find out that young people better remember and discuss relatively recent historical events. When, in 1985 and 1990, Jacqueline Scott and Lilian Zac did analysis of two studies of the most significant historical events in the USA and in Britain, results showed that more recent events were mentioned mostly by young people, rather than by older respondents. Authors conclude that "recent events in Europe apparently did not have the same impact on older cohorts than it did on younger people, presumably because older people's memories are dominated by the wartime events of their youth" (Scott and Zac, 1993: 323). Scott's and Zac's findings support the idea that people tend to recall the memories from their early youth, and they regard these memories as the most important ones.

Existing literature also suggests that representatives of different age groups attach different meanings to the same historical events (Scott and Zac, 1993). If we asked different age cohorts to give reasons why the 1990s were important years in Georgia, young people, who did not or hardly realized/experienced the difficulties associated with this period of time themselves, would talk about gaining independence, or, generally, talk about the importance of liberty or the country's economic prosperity. While older people would emphasize the tragedy of the civic war

and the lost territories; they would talk about their personal experience, deteriorating living standards, economic crisis, and autobiographic memories.

Elizabeth Jelin and Susana G. Kaufman, who examined collective memory and national identity in the Spanish democracy, have similar understandings of memory. According to them, memories cannot be characterized with homogeneity among the various sectors of society; rather, memory can form different layers even within the same persons (quoted in Aguilar and Humlebaek, 2002: 121-164).

In order to talk about the collective memory of young people in Georgia, we should first examine the term. Maurice Halbwachs used this term to describe socially constructed and shared memory within a certain group of people (quoted in Mah, 2010: 400). Some scholars, however, prefer the term “social memory”. This term implies a more complex and less homogenized relationship between an individual and a group. However, in much of the literature these two concepts are linked to the past, which is separated and disconnected from the present and which should be memorialized (Mah, 2010).

In her theoretical framework, Alice Mah (2010) discusses several concepts of memory. According to her, Nora had argued against the split between ‘true memory’ and historical studies of memory. Furthermore, Samuel had argued for a synthesis between history and memory. Mah claims that her analysis follows Nora and Samuel, since she conceptualizes memory as a dynamic, embodied force and, in particular, the context of industrial ruination as a lived process. She uses a concept of ‘living memory’, which, according to her own words, is

defined as people's memories about a shared (industrial) past. Living memory has different expressions in different generations and classes. This concept implies that local memories exist in the present as dynamic processes and they are not necessarily a part of official or unofficial collective memory. There are parallels with Nora's 'true memory', i.e. the memory which has not yet been absorbed by official history.

Mah's study has shown that although there were generational differences in local memories and perceptions of the past, the relationships were not linear. As the interviews demonstrated, there was not a pattern in which that the oldest generation had the greatest nostalgia for the industrial past and shipbuilding, while the younger generations had expressed the greatest value of detachment. It turned out, rather, that the older generations also appreciated detachment, even if they were related to people who worked on shipbuilding. Other factors, such as socio-economic status, were at least as, if not more significant, as age.

When considering history and memory, the work of Kevin Birth (2006) should also be mentioned. Birth's paper is focused on the problem of structuring of memory through time. The author addresses the question posed by Maurice Halbwachs: "Why does society establish landmarks in time that are placed close together – and usually in a very irregular manner, since for certain periods they are almost entirely lacking – whereas around such salient events sometimes many other equally salient events seem to be gathered, just as street signs and other signposts multiply as a tourist attraction approaches?" (quoted in Birth, 2006: 192). This question addresses the issue that, usually, memories are not distributed equally through a lifetime. They are grouped in clusters and there are significant gaps between these clusters. Such

irregularity may suggest that there are concepts of time other than chronology, which are more crucial for representing the past.

Birth's paper discusses various psychological explanations of the fact that some events are chosen as temporal landmarks, and others are not. Some of these explanations (such as those offered by Barsalou, 1988; Brown and Charter, 2001; Brown et al., 1986; Conway, 1992; Robinson, 1986; all quoted in Birth, 2006) emphasize individual cognitive efficiency; others (Shum, 1998; quoted in Birth, 2006) imply that predictable events are more useful than unpredictable. Birth discusses specific historical events and, based on this discussion, questions the above-mentioned explanations; he argues that "it is the processes of making sense of others' presentations of their memories and of making one's own memories intelligible to others that drive the use of these landmarks" (Birth, 2006: 193). He claims that the use of landmarks is the "socially oriented process of crafting one's identity" (*ibid*). If memory landmarks had only individual cognitive use, there would be no cultural variability; the criteria according to which 'cultural landmarks' are created would be the same across all cultures. However, that is not the case: the study in Trinidad shows that Trinidadians structure their past in accordance to the significant moments of their entire community. The author concludes that memories are structured in two different ways: (1) around historically significant dates, and (2) around culturally recognized life stages and transitions.

Most of the works cited above prove true for the evidence we found during the WP2 fieldwork in Georgia. Historical memories are socially constructed, with the relatively recent ones being the most painful (and, of course, remembered), especially for the young respondents; at the same

time, a critical analysis of the ways the history is presented (either in museums, or the mass media, or elsewhere) is lacking.

### **Historiographical outline**

Political, economic, and cultural aspects of post-Soviet (and, more broadly, post-socialist) transformation were extremely complex, leading to unexpected consequences, and often difficult to explain (Burawoy & Verdery, 1999). We focus on two main historical events of the post-Soviet transition in Georgia that, at first glance, seem to be rather different from each other. However, both are given political importance in the local historical narratives. These two events are the IDP experiences of young people whose families fled Abkhazia during the war of the early 1990s, and the rehabilitation of the historical center of Telavi in 2012. In the reality of Telavi, both these events can be seen as representing different aspects of the same larger process: the transition from the Soviet system to independence.

#### a. “Living memories” of IDP experience

The 1992-1993 war in Abkhazia started and developed during a very difficult period of Georgian history, when the existing (Soviet) institutions and industries were collapsing, and, at that time, were not being replaced. On top of that, the peace and stability of the entire country were also being challenged. Illegal militant groups operating with impunity, due to the weakness of the local police, and the 1991-1993 civil war, concentrated mostly in the capital of the country, Tbilisi, raged between the supporters of then-president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, and the opposition. Extremely important to note, due to overall collapse in many sectors, a large segment of the population was not receiving any reliable information about the current events in the country,



because of the weakness of the media, on the one hand, and a lack of access to the existing media sources due to the mentioned shortage of electricity supply, on the other hand. Hence, many people had to rely on rumor, and ‘second-hand’ information about what was happening; the existing memories about this period are, thus, largely based on subjective perceptions and family stories.

While working in Telavi, we were trying to understand how the IDP youths living here view the history of the country and, specifically, the period of the war in Abkhazia; what are their views about the post-Soviet transformation, and which sources of information do they rely on; with whom and how do they discuss historical events; how do they see history ‘constructed;’ do they differentiate between official and unofficial versions of historical events, especially the ones their families experienced personally? On the other hand, we also wanted to find out how the IDPs and their lives are viewed by their non-IDP peers, how close, or how distant are these two groups from each other?

The very fact of the war in Abkhazia (as well as the parallel war in South Ossetia and the civil war), and the fact that this war was eventually lost, were very painful for the country. The commentators routinely mentioned military assistance that the Abkhazians had received from Russia as the crucial factor that has determined the outcome of the war (Kolbaia et al., 2009), thus stressing the unfairness of the conflict and creating the first wave of anti-Russian feelings in Georgia. In the media, as well as in private discourses, stories of violent incidents taking place during the war in Abkhazia have been told, but no real analysis was made. After the country’s new president, Eduard Shevardnadze, gradually restored peace and stability, the situation in

Georgia started to improve, albeit quite slowly. However, even once when the country's major problems were largely overcome, and internal peace was secured countrywide (by the end of the 1990s), there were very few – if any – attempts to scientifically discuss this event in the recent history, leaving painful emotions aside.

The 1992-1993 war in Abkhazia was also painful because of the large number of IDPs the country had to house and help. Currently, the Georgia's IDPs are concentrated mostly in Tbilisi, Zugdidi and Kutaisi. Although they have been provided with housing in the so called 'collective centers' (e.g., former hotels), their housing conditions have been extremely poor, and any financial support they receive from the state is inadequate. With so many problems to be solved in the country, the IDPs were gradually marginalized (Boell, 2011: 182). Meanwhile, a new generation was raised in these tough conditions – young members of IDP families who are now in their late teens – early 20s.

MYPLACE WP2 focuses on the experiences of so-called Phase I IDPs: those who fled Abkhazia in the early 1990s and were settled in Telavi. Although many Georgian and international NGOs – mostly, humanitarian ones – are working with the IDP community, this aspect of Georgian history is, thus far, understudied and, as mentioned, not yet reflected in any museum exposition/event, or any purely scientific publication. As a result, we did not have many sources to rely on while investigating the situation of the IDPs in Georgia in general and in Telavi in particular.

As mentioned above, the topic of IDPs in Georgia is very sensitive and politically charged. According to the official rhetoric, these people should eventually be given the possibility to return to their homes in Abkhazia, once the conflict is resolved and their security is guaranteed. Nobody, however, can give any realistic estimates of when (and if) this could actually happen (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2012).

The government's (and, in general, politicians') attitude towards the IDP problem in Georgia is two-fold: although politically this problem is given a very high priority, not much is done *de-facto* to improve the conditions of the IDPs, especially – Phase I IDPs. IDPs currently receive monthly monetary assistance of between 22 and 28 GEL (USD 13-17). According to the most optimistic forecasts, this amount may be doubled in the near future, but even so, it would still remain well below the subsistence minimum. In spite of a number of governmental programs, there are not many actual prospects to ensure employment or better housing conditions for the IDPs. There have been cases countrywide in Georgia (including Telavi), in which IDPs were forced by the local government to leave the collective centers where they were originally settled, and to move to reportedly worse accommodation. Allegedly, there were certain financial interests driving the actions of the local government – in fact, the Telavi hotel which IDPs were forced to leave in 2007 was sold to Radisson. Hence, the respondents can see hypocrisy in at least some of the actions and/or words of the government officials. According to the 2010 nationwide survey of IDPs, the number of IDPs reported they did not agree that the Georgian government was taking IDP concerns seriously outnumbered the number of IDPs reported the opposite (Frichova, 2011: 10). According to the same survey, part of Georgia's IDPs reported

being politically marginalized; as the report claims, “The IDPs’ sense of being on the margins of the government’s focus has steadily grown over the past two decades” (*ibid*).

IDPs represents one of the totally new realities of post-Soviet Georgia, unimaginable in the late 1980s, to which the population had to adapt and, to a certain degree, find explanations for, leading eventually to a re-evaluation of its own history. Another aspect of the ‘revision’ of the Soviet past can be observed in the recent process of the ‘rehabilitation’ of the historical center of Telavi.

b. The ‘rehabilitation’ of the historical center of Telavi

No doubt that, during the post-Soviet years, a re-evaluation of the Soviet experience did take place in Georgia; however, this re-evaluation was both selective and superficial. ‘Bolshevist’ Russia has been blamed as the aggressor occupying an independent Georgian Republic in the beginning of 1921, and forcefully establishing the Soviet system and Communist ideology (Lortkipanidze, 2012: 270). At the same time, however, it would be hard to claim that the role of some crucial Bolshevik figures – first of all, the role of Stalin – has been re-evaluated, and the actual meaning of the repressions have been processed and understood (de Waal, 2013). According to a recent poll, ‘respect’ is the dominant feeling experienced by the majority of Georgian respondents when they think about Stalin – mostly because, as the experts hypothesize, there have been no attempts in Georgia to explain in depth what Stalinism actually was, and what it did (*ibid*).

The Museum of Soviet Occupation was established in Tbilisi in 2006, modeled on similar museums in Eastern Europe, with the official goal of re-evaluating the Soviet experience. This museum, however, represents an example of ‘opposite bias’, having the obvious goal of demonstrating only the ‘dark side’ of the Soviet experience. Furthermore, as the forthcoming Carnegie publication claims, the Museum’s exposition is highly elitist, focusing on famous historical actors (e.g. prominent writers), and paying only marginal attention to the millions of ordinary victims of the repressions (de Waal, 2013).

Hence, there is, on the one hand, a clear desire to leave the Soviet past behind, while, on the other hand, there is evidence that this re-evaluation of history is not consistent, and happens in respect only to selective events (Lortkipanidze, 2012; Openspace, 2012). Speaking about significant post-Soviet events, namely, the ethnic conflicts of the early 1990s, we can still see the lack of a consistent approach, something which is evident in the case of IDPs as well. The ‘rehabilitation’ of the historical center of Telavi (and a number of other Georgian settlements) is another example of this.

The Government of Georgia started a large-scale World Bank-funded project aimed at the renovation of the historical center of Telavi in Spring, 2012, soon after the start of our fieldwork. According to the original, official plan, about 70 historical buildings were to be renovated and the project would be finished by Autumn, 2012. This plan proved to be unrealistic, and the renovation is still not finished (January, 2013).

Although events of different scales, it can be claimed that, on the one hand, the war in Abkhazia represents a story of failure in the recent history of Georgia, memories of which are traumatic for the population. The ‘rehabilitation’ of the historical center of Telavi, on the other hand, was meant to be (and was presented in a rather populist way, as) a story of success, if not a downright triumph of the Saakashvili government. Important to note, Telavi was neither the first, nor the only Georgian settlement to undergo such renovation: similar processes took place earlier in Signagi, Tbilisi, Batumi, Kutaisi, Mtskheta, to mention only the most famous and widely discussed settlements (Liberali, 17.03.2010). Important to mention, immediately before and after the change of the government in October, 2012, the majority of the ongoing renovations projects were stopped (Liberali, 18.06.2012; Netgazeti, 04.10.2012).

In reality, the way the ‘rehabilitation’ work was conducted can be characterized by three big problems, that are obvious from the observation of this work, but that have not been discussed publicly (except for episodic reports in the independent and oppositional media, e.g. Netgazeti, 03.07.2012). First, the ‘human factor’ was not given priority, and although the population whose dwellings were to be renovated was provided with temporary accommodation, they were given neither an exact timeline explaining when they would be able to return to their dwellings, nor any guarantee that the renovations would not damage the interior of their dwellings. In fact, to the best of our knowledge, no formal agreements were signed: people simply had to move out from their dwellings for an unspecified period of time, without knowing what the condition of their dwellings would be upon their eventual return. In most cases, the renovation focused only on the building facades, while the rest, including any interior damage which occurred during the renovation process, was not fixed at all. Second, the quality of the works conducted by the

renovators, as well as the building materials used, was not of good quality, and the expectation was that it would not last for a long time. Finally, some historians claim that important historical monuments have been destroyed during the ‘rehabilitation’ (Netgazeti, 03.07.2012). In fact, the original ‘rehabilitation’ plans have been radically limited since the change of the government. Other similar projects in the country were also announced to be failures – most notably, the Bagrati Cathedral in Kutaisi, which UNESCO is considering removing from the list of UNESCO World Heritage sites, since, as a result of recent ‘restoration’ the Cathedral is seen to have lost its cultural and historical value (Liberali, 18.01.2013).

In terms of our fieldwork, we were trying to understand how the reconstruction of the historical center of Telavi was viewed and assessed by the actors, and to what extent did they agree (or disagree) with official interpretations. Eventually, our goal was to try to draw a picture of the ‘human side,’ to tell the ‘human story’ of the rehabilitation of Telavi, and how the youth views this recent process in the history of the town.

## **Findings**

### 2.1. ‘Difficult past’ and the dominant historical narrative

As our data suggest, events of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, associated with the rule of the king Erekle II, to a large extent dominate and represent one of the most salient ‘memory landmarks’ in the local historical narrative in Telavi. Largely, this can be explained by the historical focus of the local museum – although called the Telavi Historical Museum, the museum is located on the premises of the palace of King Erekle II, and a large part of its permanent exposition is devoted to his life and his rule. Therefore, to a large extent, it can be viewed as the ‘King Erekle II Museum’. The

interviewed schoolteachers claim that whenever they organize student visits to the museum, these visits are almost exclusively devoted to the rule of King Erekle II.

Although clearly dominant in the local historical narrative, the historical events associated with King Erekle II, by no means represent a ‘difficult past’ in Georgian history – rather, the rule of Erekle II is generally associated with one of the nation’s most prosperous periods, one which most Georgians are taught to be proud of from their early childhood (See Plate 1).



Plate 1: The cover of recently published children’s book about the king Erekle II.



The following events have been named by the respondents as examples of the ‘difficult past’ in recent Georgian history (the list below is given in chronological order):

- 1937 Stalin repressions;
- War in Abkhazia, civil war and economic hardships in the 1990s;
- 2008 war with Russia;
- ‘Terror’ by the United National Movement in the very recent past (2007 through September, 2012)<sup>4</sup>.

The 2003 “Rose Revolution” gets added to the list of the events mentioned by respondents as an important (although not a painful/difficult) event.

As we see, the events are grouped in small or big ‘clusters’ – consistent with the expectations raised in the theoretical framework (Birth, 2006) – and they certainly demonstrate the respondents’ subjective assessments of these events, representing the ‘internal calendars’ they have with regard to Georgian history.

Since WP2 fieldwork was a qualitative fieldwork, we cannot generalize the findings; neither is it possible to prove any correlations between the opinions expressed by the respondents and the

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<sup>4</sup> The United National Movement (UNM) was the ruling political party in Georgia after the Rose Revolution (in 2004-2012). The party came to the power with democratic rhetoric and, in fact, achieved certain progress in several important areas: decreased level of corruption in everyday life; reformed the police and made its work very efficient; liberalized international trade and attracted investments. However, the UNM rule was becoming less and less democratic, less tolerant towards different points of view; especially so – in the regions of the country, outside the capital, Tbilisi. 2007 anti-government demonstrations in Tbilisi marked the turning point in the UNM rule, when the protesters were violently beaten by the military. There was evidence of fraud during the 2008 elections in Georgia, organized by UNM supporters. Georgian media freedom was in danger. By 2011, the political situation in Georgia was extremely polarized, allegedly – with extremely high numbers of political prisoners. During the months before the 2012 Parliamentary elections, the supporters of the opposition were claiming that the UNM representatives were threatening, blackmailing them, or were trying to influence them in other ways. For the UNM supporters, on the other hand, it was easier to secure jobs, especially – in the public sector. MYPLACE WP3 respondents in Telavi also mentioned such facts. By the end of 2011, part of the population would characterize the UNM rule as ‘terror.’

socio-demographic groups they represent. We do, nevertheless, have detailed information about how the respondents explain their views.

Our findings are clearly in line with the theoretical overview, suggesting that the events (mostly – personal events) of early youth are very important for young people; this often holds true for older respondents as well – as we can see from the list of events above, at least four out of the named five events happened recently, or at least during the respondents' lifetime. Not only verbal, but also behavioral findings prove this: as mentioned, guided tours were organized for IDP respondents before the focus group discussions. 'Sites of memory' of different historical periods were visited during these tours: the older generation of IDP youth (those in their early 20s) reacted most vividly and emotionally, when they visited the premises of their old collective center, the site where they and their families spent their first decade in Telavi.

Important to note, not all respondents were willing to discuss the difficult and, especially, shameful past; one of the experts actually asked our interviewer to switch the recorder off while answering this question (GEOE5). Another expert (GEOE4) refused to answer any political questions, although he was willing to answer any other questions, and we had an informative and interesting interview with him. An adult respondent of one of the intergenerational interviews mentioned she “does not even want to remember” the difficulties associated with the early 1990s. A young FG respondent mentioned: “I think, there have been no such [shameful] periods in the history of Georgia” [GEOFG1]. Finally, a schoolteacher said, whatever she knows from the books covering tragic events in world history (territorial conflict, civil war, IDPs, political terror), it has all happened in Georgia in the last 20 years [GEOE2].

The oldest of the most difficult and/or shameful events of recent Georgian history named by the respondents were repressions which took place during the Stalin era (1937). More broadly, the respondents were also discussing a dual attitude towards the Soviet past, characterized on the one hand, by protesting against terror and totalitarianism and, on the other hand, by certain

‘nostalgic’ sentiments on the part of the population. However, as one of the schoolteacher puts it,

“... when people telling the truth become dangerous, <...> when society becomes a mob, this is shameful.”

[GEOE3]

Many young respondents report that their grandparents remember the Stalin period; they also report mixed feelings about Stalin and mixed assessments of his rule.

The second ‘cluster’ of the events of the difficult past refers to the events that immediately followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. War in Abkhazia, civil war, economic problems, and energy shortages are the main issues in this ‘cluster.’ The IDP experience has been a painful experience, which can also be illustrated by the fact that, according to our interviewer’s report, older respondents of the intergenerational interviews would cry during the interview while remembering the poverty and unbearable years of the early 1990s.

The 2008 war with Russia was mentioned probably most frequently by the young respondents, but the experts also mentioned it:

“We went through many difficulties [in the 1990s and 2000s], and in the end this war completely destroyed us.”

[GEOE1]

“It’s prohibited in my family to discuss this [2008 war], because my Dad finds it very painful.”

[GEOFG1]

As another respondent of the same FG puts it, there are many aspects that make the 2008 war problematic:

“First, <...> the very fact that this war happened was bad. Then, we lost Abkhazia. We [Georgia] have had very bad relations with Russia since 2008, but both my Mom and my Dad have relatives in Russia, we all speak Russian in our family.”

[GEOFG1]

Both before and after the change of the government (in October, 2012) the respondents mentioned the fear they perceived as existing in the society and associated with the rule of the then-ruling political party, the United National Movement (UNM). One expert was particularly concerned about the injustices associated with UNM governance (important to note, this interview was recorded after the October, 2012 elections):

“We’ve been living, surrounded by falsehood for the past 20 years. <...> Do you really believe that the history of Georgia started in 2003<sup>5</sup>?”

[GEOE2]

Interviewed schoolteachers tend to explain society’s problems by the fact that the ‘lessons of history’ have not been learned by society in general – and, in particular, by their pupils. They are

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<sup>5</sup> The respondent means the 2003 Rose Revolution.

skeptical while discussing the population's (or schoolchildren's) interest towards history. According to them, it is particularly difficult to engage young people and cultivate their interest towards history.

“If there was an interest [towards history], [our] country would not make such mistakes. <...> Hence, I would say, the society does not know [its own] history.”

[GEOE2]

“... the [historical] sightseeing tours [organized for schoolchildren] are often seen predominantly as a possibility to have fun, to miss classes, and not as much – to learn something new.”

[GEOE3]

At the same time, although there may have been a selection bias, all representatives of the CRRC team were quite impressed by the interest and knowledge of the young respondents. The respondents themselves also claimed they were interested in history and cared about the past. Interestingly, they did not see any strong relationship between this interest in history and civic engagement:

“One may be very actively involved in social life, but, at the same time, not be interested in history at all.”

[GEOFG1]

The experts, including the schoolteachers, claim that there have been many instances in which the historical events have been ‘falsified’ by the government, i.e., presented in a way that was favorable or desirable for the government. The same, according to the schoolteachers, holds true

when it comes to school textbooks, which always used to be in accordance with the political mainstream.

“We did not really teach the history of Georgia during the Soviet period. <...> What was taught, was very limited. And it was taught very ideologically, history textbooks can do [this], in general, history is very ideological.”

[GEOE2]

“I usually tell teachers of mathematics, how happy you are that 2x2 is always 4! While, in my case, with every new government I had to sing a new song. <...> We are teachers of history, we serve the government.”

[GEOE3]

At the same time, the interviewed schoolteachers provide examples of the falsification of history in the textbooks of the Soviet period. Their assessments of the post-Soviet textbooks are much more positive, they mostly complain about the fact that some of the textbooks are too complicated for children of a certain age, but not about the falsification of historical events.

“It’s much better now, believe me. <...> I could not breathe when I was first holding a textbook discussing 1918, the government of independent Georgia, <...> revolt in 1924.”<sup>6</sup>

[GEOE3]

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<sup>6</sup> In a short period between the collapse of the Russian Empire and the Soviet occupation (i.e., in 1918-1921), independent Democratic Republic of Georgia was established. After Georgia became part of the Soviet Union in 1921, several anti-Soviet revolts took place in Georgia (the most famous one was in 1924), however, none was successful. During the Soviet period, information about these revolts was censored, and was not mentioned in the history textbooks; coverage of these events was restored after Georgia regained independence in 1991.

The respondents, however, often needed additional explanations when the questions about ‘official’ VS ‘unofficial’ interpretations of history were asked. This was the case both with some of the experts and with the general public, especially – the young respondents; clearly, they did not categorize interpretations of history in this way before. During one of the FGs, the following definitions of ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ were provided:

“Official [history] is history that should be known to everyone, and unofficial [history] is history that is closed [in the archives], and very few people know about it.”

[GEOFG3]

All respondents agreed that the current period of Georgian history (the 2000s) was not as difficult as previous ones, although problems still exist.

All these events, mentioned by the respondents as examples of the ‘difficult past’ in recent Georgian history, represent historical ‘landmarks’ (Birth, 2006), used by them to structure their pictures of the past and interpret historical events. Such ‘landmarks’ can, of course, refer to both positive and negative events; if given the choice, the respondents prefer to remember and discuss positive events, and try to forget the negative ones. The negative memories, however, also get transmitted to younger generations, as the memories of IDP experience demonstrate.

Most of these ‘landmarks’ are personal, in the sense that respondents’ personal experience determines whether certain event will be named as such a ‘landmark’ or not. At the same time, the existing museum expositions / sites of memory seem to influence development of historical discourse. In case of Telavi, although the local museum was criticized by the experts for not been

proactive, not having updated expositions, not trying to reflect and present recent historical events, the narratives of the young people suggest, they often fail to imagine another type of a museum. As stated by many respondents, a museum, in their opinion, should do what Telavi Historical Museum was doing for decades before the restoration: present a permanent collection, focused on the events of quite remote past – the events that make the visitors proud of their country.

## 2.2. ‘Difficult past’ and the sites of memory

The young respondents claim, their main sources of historical knowledge are their families and educational institutions. As for museums in general, and the Telavi Historical Museum in particular, all of them visited it, and, as they report, they found it to be ‘OK’ – they cannot imagine a different concept of a museum, with a broader sphere of interest and less limited coverage of historical events.

Although, because of the ‘rehabilitation’ of the museum, we did not manage to conduct fieldwork in the Telavi Historical Museum itself, rather we collected as much information as possible about the Museum.

As the then-director of the Museum claimed during the interview, the Museum sees itself as a cultural, educational and scientific center, mainly focused on school pupils and university students (GEOE5). Before it was closed for reconstruction, the Museum had long-lasting relationships with the Telavi State University Department of History; it also used to have special educational programs for schoolchildren.



This expert also claimed in his interview that the Museum represented the past objectively; in fact, he added that the part of Museum's permanent exposition devoted to the Soviet period has been cancelled because it was not objective (it was pro-Soviet, because it was set during the Soviet era). (GEOE5)

The museum did not offer any exposition (even a temporary one) devoted to more recent events. The failure of the museum to offer a variety of updated expositions has been criticized by all experts, especially – taking into consideration the fact that, as they report, the museum does have some interesting objects and documents in its inventory, dating back to relatively remote periods of history, that are not currently in display. Museum staff shared the same opinion during informal conversations.

At the same time, the respondents also mentioned that Telavi Historical Museum does not have the potential to offer any exhibition devoted to the most recent historical events (i.e., the post-Soviet period), because there is nothing in its inventory that would allow them to put together such an exhibition. All they have refers to the relatively remote past, not the last decades. Thus, not surprisingly, one of the interviewed schoolteachers claimed during the interview that the (historical) museums play almost no role in the everyday lives of young people (GEOE3).

The interviewed schoolteachers do mention that, in general, the museums should be more proactive and 'modern' in their work, namely, offer more exhibitions, and regularly update the old ones. However, the respondents can see a political agenda behind what and when the museums

offer (in general) – for example, the recently established Museum of Soviet Occupation in Tbilisi. This museum is seen as one designed to fulfill the expectations of the Saakashvili government:

“You are completely stressed out when you exit the Museum [of Soviet Occupation], <...> with a feeling that nothing like this should happen again. <...> [But] there are many items that are not in display, they are hidden, not really hidden, but <...> kept in the inventory, because this particular government did not need them, but whenever they’ll need them, they’ll display them. <...> It’s all politics.”

[GEOE2]

Speaking about the Telavi Historical Museum, the respondents found it hard to discuss its political agenda, since very old historical periods were represented in its permanent exposition.

“[The Museum] does not really have any agenda, they keep telling visitors the same text about the life and rule of King Erekle [II].”

[GEOE3]

Most of the respondents voice rather stereotypical opinions about the role of the museums, and the role of history in general, claiming that historical exhibitions should result in the “formation of kids as patriots of their country.” [GEOE2]

When such an attitude is in place, there is no room for the ‘difficult past’ in the museums; the respondent would expect – and welcome – exhibitions featuring old icons, ancient manuscripts, etc., i.e. the items to be proud of.

No museum in Georgia, to the best of our knowledge, offers any solid historical exposition devoted to the difficult years in the 1990s; to the war in Abkhazia; or, specifically, to the IDP experience (there have been, however, a number of temporary photo exhibitions on this topic, organized, mostly, by local and international NGOs). Officially considered as one of the most painful events in the recent history of Georgia, the war in Abkhazia in the early 1990s gets commemorated through street monuments and verbal discourses, but not through serious (i.e., scientific) historical work.

Interestingly, even the IDPs themselves find it hard to imagine how their experience can be made the object of a museum exposition. This is, in our opinion, mostly explained by the fact that both younger and older respondents have been trained to see exclusively remote events as objects of historical interest, more so – as objects of museum exhibitions. The recent past, according to their understanding, does not get covered by museums.

Our interviewer had an interesting and very characteristic dialogue with one of the experts (a schoolteacher) about the possibility of a museum exhibition devoted to the IDP experience. When the expert's opinion was asked about such an exhibition, the respondent was obviously surprised, and answered:

“- About the IDPs? Well, I don't know, would not it be even more painful for them? If one enters and sees, how... Well, I personally cannot look at this, and I cannot force anyone to look at what I cannot look at. <...> I don't know, we should ask the IDPs themselves, whether it's worth for them to remember that pain. <...> But the children of

the IDPs, who are in Tbilisi, or in other parts of Georgia, those who have not experienced this, it would be possible to take them once [to such an exhibition] and show them.”

[GEOE2]

Many Georgian NGOs work currently on issues related to IDPs, but even these NGOs do not necessarily consider the IDP experience to be an object of historical study. Partially, this can be explained by the tough conditions that IDPs have faced and continue to face; hence, humanitarian or any other type of assistance get prioritized.

One of the NGOs working on IDP issues is YMCA-Telavi, which is the only NGO in the Telavi region providing free programs for the IDP youth. YMCA-Telavi has been our partner in implementing WP2 fieldwork in Telavi after the museum was closed for renovation.

The main goal of this organization is to support the social integration of local and IDP teenagers and young people. YMCA-Telavi has operated since 2004, and organizes joint educational and sports programs for young people, as well as sightseeing tours and summer camps. In addition, PC literacy and English language courses are organized regularly, and offered free for IDPs. Although the main beneficiaries of the NGO are between the ages 6–18, some of its projects target their parents as well. The integration of IDP youth in particular seems to be a really problematic issue, since our data (although not representative) suggest that the younger generation of Telavi dwellers has very limited, if any contacts with their IDP peers; and the latter also mention that they have the most contacts with other IDPs, not with the local population.

We learned about the activities of YMCA-Telavi from one IDP respondent, who remembered the positive role this organization played in his life. We were also interested to learn that YMCA beneficiaries once held a temporary exhibition of children's drawings in the local Art Gallery (which was part of the Telavi Historical Museum complex). Otherwise, YMCA-Telavi does not particularly focus on historical discourses. The organization, and the teenagers that YMCA-Telavi works with, were, however, interested in investigating the 'human side' of 'rehabilitation' in Telavi.

It is clear that, eventually, this 'rehabilitation' will significantly change the look of the historical center of the town and although this event gets different interpretations, there is a high probability that the event will be remembered by the local population for quite a long time. Hence, this will become another memorable event in the history of Telavi.

The respondents interviewed after the first phase of the rehabilitation work in Telavi was completed were unanimous in claiming that: (a) the quality of the completed work is not good enough, (b) historical monuments are not preserved well enough, and (c) the entire project has not been coordinated with the local population, and hence does not take into consideration the local demands. As one of the respondents claimed, she tries not to look around while walking in the central (i.e., reconstructed) streets of the town. Even the respondent claiming s/he was happy the process of 'rehabilitation' was happening in Telavi [GEOE3] still mentioned all the concerns mentioned above (quality of the work; preservation of historical monuments; and consideration of the opinions and needs of the local population). In addition, she points out that the work has been proceeding too fast.

“Restoration, renovation are very good, <...> but these decisions were taken by a very small group of people.”

[GEOE3]

Nobody knows when the works will be finalized. It is not known to what extent the historical uniqueness of the town will be preserved and, in particular, what will happen with what used to be the Telavi Historical Museum. Access to museum territory has been closed to all who are not involved in the rehabilitation works, and there is no transparency about the plans. It is known, however, that segments of the buildings that made up part of the museum complex have been demolished. There are rumors that a wine museum will be built there. The respondents hope these works will help attract more tourists, although some (especially the young ones) were skeptical about this, as well as about the fact that the town has lost its charm as a result of reconstruction, and hence it will not be interesting for tourists:

“All that was genuinely old has been removed, and replaced by new [materials] that won’t be able to preserve history.”

“It’s very bad, not only from the technical point of view, but from the historical, cultural points of view as well. <...> In my opinion, [everything that has been renovated] should be destroyed and renovated again, can’t you see everything gets destroyed? <...> People around me think the same way.”

[GEOE2]

No matter what the final outcome of the ‘rehabilitation’ will look like, it is clear that this project will represent an important period in the history of Telavi, and will mark another ‘landmark’ event in its history.

### 2.3. Young people’s experiences of memories about ‘problematic’ periods of national history

Although we cannot generalize the findings of qualitative fieldwork, the results suggest that the hardships of the early 1990s **and** the 2008 war with Russia get mentioned by young respondents most frequently as the most problematic events in the recent history of Georgia. One respondent’s explanation exactly mirror the claim made by Scott and Zac (1993): events from early youth tend to shape the most important memories:

“The earlier wars [in the early 1990s] happened when we were not born yet, while at the time when this one [2008] happened, we were here, following the events. <...> This made this war the most difficult for us, <...> and the most difficult event in the recent history of Georgia.”

[GEOFG1]

The 2008 war was also different in one important respect: while the information young people have about the hardships of the early 1990s is based solely on what they have heard from their elders, they have two sources of information about the 2008 war: TV and the ‘true’ stories of witnesses, and these two sources complement each other (although the respondents tend to trust TV less).

Importantly, these young respondents report that their views about events like the 2008 war, or the situation in Georgia in the early 1990s, are similar to their parents' views about these events, and some even explain this similarity by the fact that the young people mostly get information about these events from their parents.

When discussing the IDP experience in particular, all respondents – both IDPs and non-IDPs – find this problem to be very important. The situation faced by IDPs is characterized as very difficult, and one which remains largely unresolved. Not surprisingly, however, the respondents from IDP families report that the IDP experience gets discussed in their families, while this is not the case with non-IDP families.

A few times the respondents mentioned (independently from each other) an interpretation, according to which the problems that led to the war in Abkhazia started much earlier, during the Stalin period:

“Stalin <...> made the status of this territory controversial.”

[GEOFG3]

All young respondents – both IDPs and non-IDPs – have stories to tell about the IDP experience before, during and after the exile from Abkhazia. Some base their stories on the memories (‘true memories,’ as defined by Mah) of their own families – parents and/or grandparents; others refer to the stories of neighbors, classmates, etc.



Both groups of the respondents, however, claim that they did not expect the ongoing IDP situation to last for such a long time – there was a long-lasting hope that the IDPs would spend a much shorter time away from their homes, and that they would be able to return home relatively soon.

The young respondents mentioned that young people may also be nostalgic, and bring examples of their IDP peers being nostalgic for the places where they were born, but which their families had to leave because of military conflicts. Our data suggest, such nostalgia is more or less characteristic for all IDP respondents; as they claim, their families often think and discuss various scenarios of returning “home”. In fact, this myth of return seems to play a very important role in the self-identification of the members of these families. Even the very young respondents who have spent their entire lives in Telavi are reluctant to consider Telavi as their true ‘home.’

At the same time, most of the young IDP respondents take a certain pride in the very fact that their families actually survived in spite of the extremely difficult times they went through: “we managed to overcome these problems” (GEOFG2).

Both IDP and non-IDP respondents find it difficult to enjoy the new look of Telavi after the ‘rehabilitation.’ They claim that the renovated buildings lack a common style; that some look old, others are very modern, and these two styles do not match well. They also mention that some old buildings were destroyed during the ‘rehabilitation’ work, which, in their opinion, cannot be justified, and new ones were built instead. The young respondent find ‘some’ of the

renovated buildings to be ‘very beautiful’, but overall, they report not to be happy with the new look of the town. They also mention that only the facades of the buildings have been renovated, while the rest remained the same. The young respondents also question the priorities of this process:

“There is a church, Gorijvari, which is in terrible condition, almost destroyed; it cannot be in a worse condition. So, according to me, they had to take care of this church in the first place.”<sup>7</sup>

[GEOFG1]

The discussion of young respondents’ opinions about the ‘rehabilitation’ of the historical center of Telavi is limited in this section, since this topic was introduced at a later stage, after most of the interviews and focus groups with young people had been conducted. However, we plan to focus on this issue during the dissemination event with our non-academic partner to be organized in terms of WP2.

## Conclusions

The recent decades were objectively very difficult for all people living in Georgia, especially – for those who became IDPs because of the ethnic conflicts. While thinking about their past, respondents identified events that were especially problematic for them. There are clear generational differences in the respondents’ perceptions, as suggested by Mah (2010), with events happening in the early youth being prioritized.

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<sup>7</sup> The church is indeed in an extremely poor condition, however, no restoration works have been conducted in this church during the process of ‘rehabilitation.’

There is, however, a mismatch between the events characterized by the respondents as their ‘difficult past’ and the events/periods represented in the ‘sites of memory’, and this is true not only for Telavi, but for the whole country. Official historical narratives tend to focus on positive, not negative events. The IDP experience is completely neglected by these ‘sites of memory.’

The local museum is characterized by inertia and a lack of interest towards recent historical events. This is, however, the very concept of the museum that the respondents are used to. Neither the young respondents, nor, in fact, the expert can actually suggest any different models for the local museum, even when they report not being happy with the existing one.

The ongoing ‘rehabilitation’ will inevitably change the museum, however, it would be impossible to predict how exactly it will be changed. The ‘rehabilitation’ itself is a controversial process to be studied more closely, and we plan to deepen our focus on it during the second phase of the fieldwork, since, as we expect, this process will represent another ‘landmark’ event in the historical discourse of the near future.

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