

ATTITUDES OF BATUMI POPULATION TO GAMBLING BUSINESS

(Analysis of sociological research)

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Abstract. The relevance of the research topic is mainly due to the fact that gambling has recently taken a very important place in the lives of many of our fellow citizens. The attitude of the population of Batumi towards the gaming industry is mixed. Based on such a situation, the main goal of our empirical sociological research was to make conclusions based on the questions asked in the applicable questionnaire and the answers given by the respondents, the implementation of which would clarify the current situation in this field and to some extent solve the problem of the pressing issue of gambling addiction. Regarding the gaming business, the government's approach to the business is largely distinct, and the opinion of the population towards the gaming business is almost always ignored. In order to find ways out of the failing, we complexly studied and presented various aspects of the attitudes of Batumi residents to gaming as such. In the mentioned sociological research, attention was focused on the following specific issues: Intensity of participation in gambling; Determination of priority types of gambling by the respondents; The main purpose (goals) of participation in gambling; Starting age of participation in gambling business; The first recommender who lead a participant to take part in gambling (his/her social status); The assumption of the interviewees regarding the number of people involved in gambling in Batumi; Frequency of participation in gambling during a week; How much time is devoted hourly to gambling; when participating in gambling, what is the profit and loss balance; Does gambling addiction (ludomania) lead to a change in lifestyle of those involved; Main sources of information for persons involved in gambling; Probable owners of gambling business (foreigners, citizens of Georgia, share owners of the business, etc.); The possibility of presence of an illegal gaming business; Is there noteworthy amount of money influx in Georgia budget from gaming business; What are the prospects for the development of gaming business in Georgia.

Keywords: gaming business, bookmaker (totalizator), gambling, illegal gaming business, advertising.

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Introduction: Gambling has existed since ancient times. In the twentieth century, gambling became one of the main segments of the gaming business. Discussions about its harmfulness have been going on since old times, but one common opinion has not been formed to this day.

Games, whose results depend entirely or partially on chance, are considered gambling. They are carried out through various game equipment or online (remote) mode, and participation in them provides an opportunity for monetary profit. According to the peculiarities of gambling, there are two types of gambling business: standard and electronic. Standard gambling games are games that require a real build to be arranged, and electronic gambling, known as online-space games, is based on the use of Internet platforms.

Gaming business is a specific component of the business sector, because on the one hand it relies on the provision of specific services, – gaming services, – on the other hand, it is not of a uniform type, as it includes different vectors of business activities.

Gaming business (industry) is a capacious term and includes such segments as power industry, casino business, numerical game industry (lottery, bingo, lotto and others), gaming machine industry

(slot machines, recreational vehicles, gaming machines and others). Also, online games, incentive draws, etc.

The gaming business market can be strictly or mildly regulated, competitive or monopolistic (mainly by the state). In addition, gambling qualifies as legal and illegal by law. Legal gambling is a type of games defined by the relevant legal act of the country, which is allowed on the territory of this or that country, and illegal gambling is prohibited in a predetermined manner.

Despite the fact that the field of gambling contains high risks, the dynamics of its growth both in Georgia and in the world is quite high.

The main goal of our research was to identify the views of the people of Batumi regarding the gaming business based on the sociological survey of the respondents. Based on their critical analysis, such recommendations were developed that would regulate problematic issues related to gaming business in a certain way.

One of the main aspects of the relevance of the topic is the fact that such a negative event related to the gaming business as Ludomania (game addiction) has taken hold in our city. Along with economic, this negative event also has psychological characteristics, overcoming which in a certain way is the most important issue for society.

The work is the first study, where issues related to gaming business are discussed based on the scientific analysis of the views of the surveyed population (Batumi residents), which is a step forward in the study of this problem.

Methods: The relevance of the issue in our country is due to the recent sharp increase in the scale of the gaming business. The purpose of the research was to determine, based on the questionnaire sociological survey of Batumi respondents, the attitudes shown by the people of Batumi towards the gaming industry and which, in some cases, do not coincide with the official's point of view on this issue.

Based on the research problems, the target group of our empirical sociological research was selected those citizens of Georgia living within the administrative territory of Batumi who are interested in the mentioned problem to one degree or another. Taking into account the goals of the research, a quantitative research method was developed (this method is a formalized method of sociological research, the use of which is based on statistical regularities and aims to reveal the extent of the spread of this or that social phenomena and the frequency of its detection).

The research was carried out with the questionnaires, using the face-to-face interview method. 200 respondents of both sexes were interviewed.

In addition to the materials of the mentioned empirical sociological survey, other sources were also studied in order to fully present the topic.

Reasoning. Our sociological research is based on a survey of Batumi residents regarding their attitudes toward the rapidly growing gambling industry in the city in recent times, which made it possible to view certain aspects of this industry through the eyes of ordinary citizens (Chkhaidze, 2025).

According to the mentioned sociological research, which is based on the views of the residents of Batumi on gaming business, which has recently become very powerful in the city, made it possible to see certain aspects of this industry through the eyes of an ordinary city dweller.

As for the respondents' answers to the questions asked in the sociological questionnaire, they are of the following nature: to the question – Have you participated in gambling? 34.2% of the respondents gave a positive answer, and 65.2% gave a negative answer. As for the types of gambling, the frequency of participation in gambling is as follows (respondents could circle several answer options, so the sum of the answers exceeds 100%): most respondents go to slot clubs (gaming machines) – 67.4%; play on sports results in totalizators – 59.2%; participate in so called '*gamazva*' (money on hand) – 17.5%. As for other types of gambling (e.g. Online casinos, etc.), the interviewees did not participate in those types of games.

The answers to the question of why people gamble are as follows: 84.3% play for money, 5.7% for entertainment, and 10.0% believe that those involved in gambling are gambling addicts.

When asked how old the respondent started gaming practice, when he first took part in gambling, it was found that their average age is 20.4 years. When asked, when they have participated first in gambling, who was his/her first gambling partner he/she played with together, the answers distributed as follows: 62.7% played for the first time together with a friend; 9.4% with a neighbour, 9.5% with a relative; independently –10.9%; 7.5%– with some other persons.

The respondents believe that about 6.7% of the city's population participates in gambling with certain frequencies (average); to the question – If you participate in gambling, tell us how often? – The answers are as follows: 8.7% play almost every day; 9.2%– 1-2 times a week; 8.5% –3 or more times a week; 54.9% once every two weeks; 18.7% once or less often. To the question – If you participate in gambling, how much time of the day do you spend on it?– It turned out that 15.7% of the player respondents spend an average of less than 1 hour on gambling; 72.5%-1-3 hours; 11.8%-4-5 hours or more. To the question of what is the average profit-loss balance? – Answers are as follows: 84.7% believe that the chance of losing is higher; 12.6% think there is a greater chance of winning; 2.7% –are difficult to answer this question.

The next two questions were about such a painful issue as ludomania (game addiction). Based on the importance of this problem, following the answers of the respondents, we will pay relatively more attention to this issue in the next part of the article. To the question – Does gambling addiction (ludomania) cause these people to change their lifestyle? The answers are as follows – 96.7% confirm such a circumstance; 2.6% do not confirm such a thing; 2.7% find it difficult to answer this question. To the question – Please state your opinion about how important the problem of ludomania is for our city? – The answers are as follows: 15.6% think it is very important; 62.4% think it is more or less important; 12.7% in terms of – insignificant; 9.3% find it difficult to answer this question.

To the question – If you participate in gambling, tell us where you get the information from? The answers are as follows: 82.6% of those involved in gambling have information from Internet search engines; 4.7% by SMS message; – 12.7% from the circle of friends. To the question – Whose property are the gaming business facilities in our city? – The answers are as follows: 9.2% think that gaming business owners are only citizens of Georgia; According to 43.7%, gaming business are mainly in foreigners' hands.

According to 20.6%, the gaming business is jointly owned by Georgian citizens and foreigners, and 26.5% find it difficult to answer this question.

On the question – whether there exists in city of Batumi illegal gambling business? – 5.7% of respondents think it exists; 85.1% think it doesn't exist, and 9.2% find it difficult to answer. To the question – If you participate in gambling, tell us where you get the information from? The answers are as follows: 82.6% of those involved in gambling have information from the Internet search engine; SMS message – 4.7%; – 12.7% from the circle of friends. Gambling advertising is considered by psychologists to be one of the main factors in the formation of gambling behaviour. Therefore, states implement various advertising restrictions measures (e.g. In Georgia, gambling advertising was banned on television and billboards). To the question – Whose property are the gaming business facilities in our city? – The answers are as follows: 9.2% think that gaming business owners are only citizens of Georgia; According to 43.7%, gaming business is mainly in the hands of foreigners; 20.6% of the opinion is jointly owned by gaming businesses, citizens of Georgia and foreigners, and 26.5% find it difficult to answer this question.

On the question of whether there is in Batumi illegal gambling business? 5.7% of – respondents think it exists; 85.1% think it does not exist, and 9.2% find it difficult to answer this question. In the opinion of 25.7% of the respondents, the contribution from the gaming business to the budget of Georgia is very important; 31.7% think that it is quite important; insignificant for 5.7%; 36.9% of respondents do not know anything about this issue. We will touch on this issue again in the article and show that the views of the respondents differ sharply from the real situation.

To the last (open-ended) question of the questionnaire, what perspective do they see in Georgia regarding the gaming business (gambling), the respondents expressed their opinions in text. Below we offer some of them:

"I agree with the government's decision to ban minors from gambling. The main thing here is its strict enforcement; Gambling is a great sin and it should be prohibited by law; it is desirable to ban gambling, thereby avoiding material losses and psychological trauma, both to persons involved in gambling and to their relatives; a believer will not gamble. For others, participation in „light form“ games may be allowed, but placing large bets should be prohibited; Banning gambling will not bring results, because people „prohibited fruits“ more; Gambling business should go away from the city (in a less populated area). It should be subject to very high taxes to limit the scale of the gaming business; There is a need to tighten gaming business regulation laws and establish strict controls on its enforcement, as the managers of these businesses find some ways („black holes“) to circumvent the law; Any advertising of the gaming business should be stopped. On the contrary, regarding tobacco (Smoking kills), there should be advertising of similar content in relation to gambling; such a wide spread of the gaming business is connected with the insatiable desire for rapid enrichment of local elites. These people are behind this business. They not infrequently launder money through casinos; Gambling should be banned altogether, it sacrifices the Georgian nation for death (ludomania, suicide, family destruction, crime, etc.); Online casinos should be banned altogether, and in a real casino, a limit of the low playing amount should be set; It is necessary to instil in children from school that participation in gambling is not a good thing. Games should be allowed only for entertainment purposes, without any financial components; In our country, only foreigners should be allowed to participate in gambling; Banning the gambling business as a whole is unacceptable, because it will go underground; The state should intervene in the gambling business only from a tax point of view; As for ludomania, the state cannot help it, everyone should help themselves; The gambling business should be abolished in all forms, and its facilities should be converted into sports halls; Gambling should be banned immediately First of all, because mostly the poor take part in it, hoping to get some benefit, but in reality they lose their last pennies, which not infrequently becomes the reason for the destruction of their families; The gambling business should not be restricted or banned, but, on the contrary, its scale should be increased, because it contributes to the development of tourism in our country."

Conclusions:

The gaming business is a multi-faceted context and part of a wider public context. Gambling began to be legalized in the twentieth century and transformed into a gambling business. The gaming industry has gone beyond the borders of a particular country and involves both domestic and foreign actors. Based on such a situation, it can be said that gaming business has become one of the most important socio-economic issues of the country.

The rise of gaming business in Georgia began after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The transition to a market economic system gave impetus to the development of the gaming industry. As for Batumi, the field of gambling was quite developed here during the period of independence (1918-1921) and before that (there are archival materials confirming this). Currently, the gaming industry in the city is functioning at a fairly high level.

The people of Batumi have a mixed, sometimes diametrically opposite attitude towards the gaming business – According to some of them, this business should be closed altogether, while according to some, its functioning should be maintained in one way or another. Therefore, the issue of gaming business is one of the key problems not only of a certain group of the population, but also of the entire society.

An important share of the modern gaming business is the gambling market, which is quite difficult to fully regulate. The world gambling industry is considered a high-risk segment for the legalization of illegal income at the modern stage, so in some countries (e.g. North Korea) it is banned altogether.

In order to determine the impact of gaming business on the socio-economic development of the country, it is necessary to identify all the negative and positive factors that accompany the operation of this type of business (the effect caused by the influence of gaming business can be both short-term and long-term).

Among the negative factors, special attention should be paid to the issue of ludomania (game addiction). Ludomania is a Latin word meaning „player person“. Ludomania refers to repetitive, problematic gambling behaviour. A gambling addict finds it difficult to control his gambling behaviour and continues to play despite serious mental problems caused by gambling. Ludomania is recognized by the World Health Organization as an impulse control disorder. Gambling is often associated with various manifestations of health and social problems: depression, suicide, family conflicts, financial problems, career advancement and education delays, criminal behaviour, alcohol, drug use and others. It should be emphasized that the problem of gambling addiction is especially relevant among teenagers, some of them have an insatiable desire to play because they hope to win a lot of money sooner or later. Based on such circumstances, it can be assumed that their main problem is poverty, and therefore the illusion that thanks to the game they will somehow get rid of poverty. A gambler, quite often, changes significantly psychologically and becomes unreliable to those around him. Ludomania has become a heavy burden for a considerable part of the youth. Recently, one of the main causes of suicide among young people in Georgia is ludomania.

The scale of our research and the scarcity of information do not allow us to determine exactly how many game-dependent players are there in Batumi, although we assume that this figure should be quite high (according to unconfirmed data, there are 400,000 Ludo maniacs in Georgia). You can find certain statistical data regarding gambling in the Georgian press, e.g... Journalist B. Danelia wrote in the article published in the newspaper „Republic of Georgia: „thousands of Georgians ‘due to poverty’ cannot stop gambling“(Danelia, 2024). We read, „...15 thousand people are included in a special list, whose game is restricted, although that does not affect the general situation. It turns out that every third citizen of Georgia is registered on various gambling portals, and 1.5 million people are prohibited from playing by law. Also, interesting information is provided to the readers by journalist G. Gigauri in newspaper „Asaval-Dasavalsh“(№51, 2019) in the article „Casino and bookmaker organize our genocide“: „According to the research of the Gambling Research Ludomania Prevention Centre, 48% of teenagers in Georgia are related to gambling! According to the same research, out of 300,000 people evicted from their homes in Georgia, a third of them were left without a ceiling due to ludomania“(Gigauri, 2019, p. 8).

Regarding gaming business, the small contribution that is paid in the budget of Georgia from this field is the subject of criticism. The total turnover of Georgian business in 2024 is up to 230 billion GEL, gaming business 63 billion (by these indicators it is ahead of the banking sector). Despite such a high taxation base, the gaming business tax is only 700 million from the profit in the budget. Amounts in GEL, if gambling brings additional benefits in some countries, for us, the benefit is meagre (Machaidze, 2024, p. 25).

We do not support a total ban on gambling business, but we support policies in this area that will be beneficial to our state and its citizens (this includes the prevention of their lives and social losses). In order to protect the citizens of Georgia from bankruptcy, it is necessary to set a maximum playing limit for gambling kinds, within which the player is limited. E.g. Low-stakes slot machines can be installed with very little gaming sum. With this action, on the one hand, the risk of significant losses will be avoided, and on the other hand, the degree of gambling addiction will be reduced. It is necessary to automatically exclude those persons who systematically lose from the game process and ban the game.

The operation of the gaming business depends on the gaming business policies pursued by this or that state. The latter can be more or less adjustable. A highly regulated gaming business policy implies the imposition of multilateral, rigid restrictions on it by one or another state. A less regulated (liberal) gaming business policy minimally restricts this business. There are the following models of gambling business regulation: a) prohibitions (total prohibition of gambling by law); b) Regulation (regulation with legal levers of gambling).

According to the resolution of the Government of Georgia, the taxation of the gambling sector increased from 10% to 15%, and the withdrawal of money won by citizens was taxed at 5% instead of 2% income tax. The fact that from 2024 the law on the organization of „lotteries, gambling and winning games has been amended, according to which citizens of foreign countries are exempted from 5% income tax on winning gambling games, can be considered positive. The positive social effect of such an action is manifested in the fact that gaming business entities create new jobs. In some countries, gambling business is an important stimulant of the tourism industry. Academician Aleksandre Giochrelidze explains the importance of gaming business for Batumi well in the article „What effect does gaming business have on the country's economy? „ – He says – „After the first casinos appeared in Batumi, this city became a kind of mecca first for Turks, then – for Jews and Arabs. It was thanks to the gaming business that the construction of 4 – and 5-star hotels in Batumi began. Infrastructure was developed, restaurants, clubs, bars, shopping and aesthetic centres and others were opened. The gaming industry ensures the influx of foreign currency and rich tourists to the region, who are interested not only in the gaming process, but also in the purchase of real estate and are active users and investors of shopping centres, catering facilities, resort, medical and other services. The mentioned circumstance creates jobs in the region, allows the local population to develop small and medium-sized businesses. Therefore, there is no doubt that the gaming business plays a positive role in the economic development of the region. In addition, and this is very important, it was the gaming industry that transformed Batumi from a seasonal tourist centre to an unseasonal centre, including providing a full load of hotels throughout the year. Today, thanks to the mentioned circumstances, hotels no longer have to reduce the number of service personnel from autumn to spring, which, of course, affects the income of the population“(Tvalchrelidze, 2024).

In our opinion, it is necessary to restrict access to gambling for a certain part of the citizens of our country, because for many of them it leads to unfortunate consequences (ludomania), and on the other hand, there should not be any kind of prohibitions for foreigners on the availability of any gambling. Such regulation will increase the entry of tourist flows from abroad into our country and the stable functioning of the gaming business.

As we can see, unilaterally evaluating the gaming business is not an easy task, because it has both positive and negative sides. The fact that the majority of our citizens involved in gambling belong to the low-income class can be evaluated negatively. Therefore, due to the loss of the game, not so rarely, there is bankruptcy, ludomania, suicide and other negative facts. Therefore, it is necessary to establish strict regulations on the participation of our compatriots in gambling: a unified base of players should be created, thus creating an opportunity to identify the player based on income. At the same time, it would be good if any family member is allowed to blacklist a closely related player throughout the country; Schools should periodically conduct trainings in terms of anti-gambling advertising, the gambling business should be charged special taxes aimed at the psycho-rehabilitation of gambling addicts, etc.

The issue of those involved in gambling will not be resolved if they are not employed. Until 1992, 46 factories operated in Batumi, where a significant part of the population was employed. Therefore, in our opinion, only the development of the industry can solve the issue of gambling, otherwise this issue will remain a problem for our city.

I would like to draw attention to another pressing issue. Since 2017, the Football Federation of Georgia has signed an agreement with the bookmaker (totalizator) „Crystalbet“, and the name „Crystalbet“ has been given to the National Football League Championship. Thus, Georgia is the only country in the world where the national football championship is called the bookmaker's name – „Crystalbet – National League“. It is necessary for sports managers to remove this shameful stain from Georgian football in time.

In the end, it can be said that despite the fact that a lot has been done by the government in Georgia in terms of regulating the gaming business (banning advertising gambling games on television, placing

banners on the streets, restricting the right to play for 1.5 million people, depriving people under the age of 25 of the right to participate in games, etc.). That is not enough for the effective regulation of the field of industry that has been confirmed by the answers of Batumi respondents participating in the presented empirical sociological study.

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