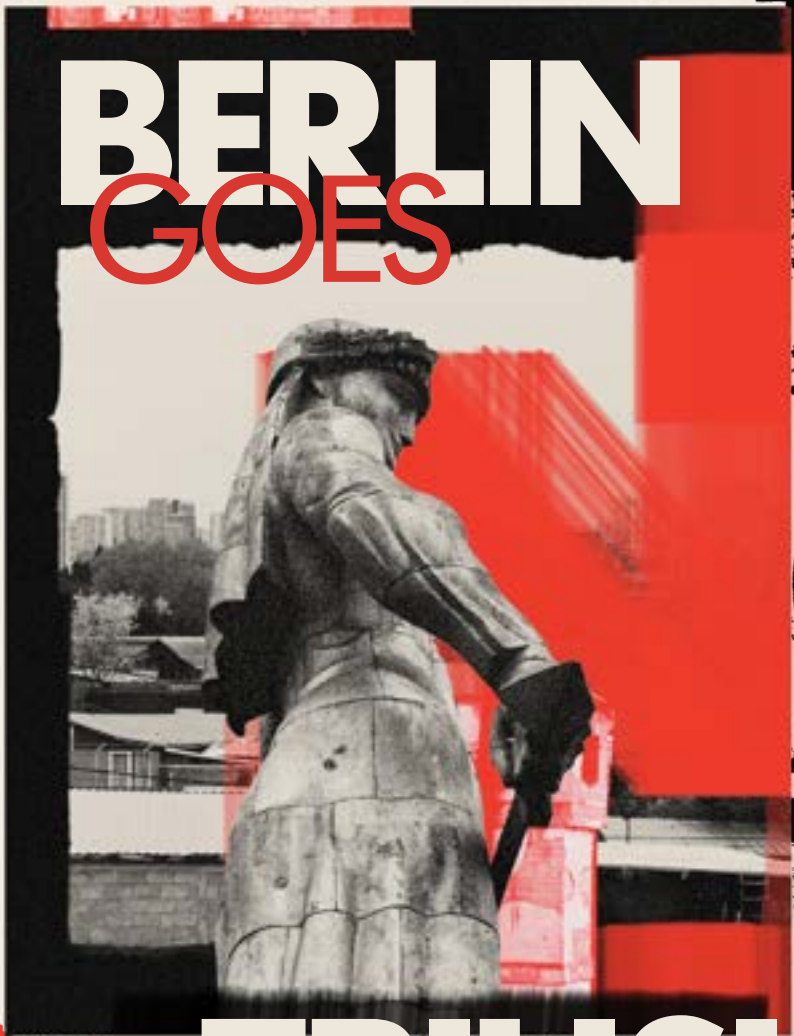


**CLUBCOMMISSION**

# **BERLIN** **GOES**



# **TBILISI**

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Exploring Resilience and Resistance:  
Insights from Tbilisi's Club Culture

# NIKA KHOTCHOLAVA - LEFTBANK



**Nowadays, as the Georgian underground club scene garners global recognition, questions inevitably arise about how such a vital, energetically charged culture could emerge from a country with such a traumatic recent history, weighed down by systemic neglect. The answer, in its most distilled form, sounds like this: under conditions of oppression, counterculture becomes the only viable route.**

Even though traces of the art of joy practically bleed from the buildings of old Tbilisi's urban cityscape, "going out" has never been merely a pursuit of pleasure or an escape from reality—neither for the post-independence generation nor those who lived under Soviet occupation. Instead, it has always functioned as a vital act of resistance: **When Georgian dissidents trading forbidden music copied onto X-ray film, while risking their freedom; when they formed unique bands amidst a brutal, Western-style civil war; and even when the lights finally came on—quite literally—the local underground stubbornly continued its evolution.**

This untamable energy never simply vanishes; it merely transforms. In Tbilisi, nightclubs emerged precisely when armed gangs controlled the streets—initially elite and dangerous before gradually becoming safer and more mainstream over the past 15 years.

For the youth, clubs have become the only trustworthy institutions, standing at the vanguard of protest movements in a reality dominated by economic hardship, injustice, violent dispersals, and draconian policies. When crises emerge (as they frequently do), these spaces are the first to raise their voices. Consequently, the pressure against them intensifies. In such moments, international support becomes vital. Fortunately, numerous examples of international solidarity exist. Most recently, this occurred when nearly bankrupted Tbilisi clubs, during a general strike, received tangible support from countless foreign clubs, agencies, labels, and other entities. Berlin's support proves especially vital, forging a relationship built on shared underground resistance against oppressive realities.

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**The Berlin club scene has always served as an example for Georgian club stewards, demonstrating how to create safe spaces for everyone, especially vulnerable groups**

The historical knowledge and cultural experience contributed by queer people during the formative stages of club culture gradually fades. Despite its myriad problems, Berlin represents an example of creating such experiences. This is why continuous communication, collaboration, and sharing of experiences between these two cities is crucial—experiences that differ yet remain intimately connected.

# THE ANTI-LGBTQI+ LAW & ITS EFFECTS

Explanation, interviews with activists, list of resources, thoughts on resilience & safer spaces.

**WITH** Ann Marjanidze (Ana) and Hitori Ni  
Authors: Katharin Ahrend & Thale Reitz - Clubcommission



During a World Café session held in Tbilisi, experts Ann Marjanidze (Ana) and Hitori Ni shared and produced valuable knowledge on the implications of the new anti-LGBTQI+ law in Georgia. **The conversation explored social, legal, and cultural consequences of the legislation.**

## Omar Gogichaishvili aka Hitori Ni

is a self-taught photographer from Tbilisi. In his work, he documents Georgia's youth, subculture, club culture and nightlife - with a special focus on those people who stand for a freer, progressive Georgia. His photographic narratives revolve around friendships, intimacy, rebellion and the young voices that do not conform to stereotypical traditional values and norms.

## 3AM a.k.a Ana Marjanidze

is a DJ based in Tbilisi. Inspired by various Georgian and foreign artists, she tries to remain genuine and create a special connection with the audience, sharing deep emotions through sonic journeys. Ana is also a feminist who thrives to ensure equal representation of female artists on the electronic music scene, being co-founder of FLINTA\* party series held at Bassiani. In addition to her artistic practice, she works as a lawyer and advises in the fields of human rights and anti-discrimination, among others. In her work, she combines political activism, queer visibility and community building in nightlife.

## INTRO INTO TOPIC

In September 2024, the Georgian government passed the so-called 'Law on the Protection of Family Values and Minors'. Behind this title lies anti-queer legislation that represents far-reaching cuts to the rights and visibility of LGBTQI+ people.

The law not only threatens club culture as a protective and free space for queer communities, but also aims to systematically displace them. This session discussed how the law affects the lives of queer people in Georgia, what forms of resistance exist and what role international solidarity can play.



# MAIN DISCUSSION

## The law as a means of intimidation and social control

Although the law has not yet been actively used against individuals, its ambiguity and the threat of punishment make it effective. It creates self-censorship, fear and a climate of hostility.

Queer people experience increased social pressure and psychological stress. The danger lies not only in concrete threats of punishment, but also in the silent legitimisation of hatred and violence.

# CONTENTS AND PROHIBITIONS OF THE LAW

The law contains a comprehensive ban on queer realities in public spaces.

## IT PROHIBITS:

Same-sex marriage

Adoption for non-heterosexual persons

Gender affirming health care

Public discussions about gender or queerness in the media, education and literature

The display of queer symbols such as rainbow flags

Freedom of assembly for LGBTQI+ groups

Queerness is equated with criminality, incest and paedophilia and symbolically erased

# IMPACT ON THE LIVES OF QUEER PEOPLE

**A trans woman was murdered** shortly after the law came into force. Young trans people are leaving the country to Berlin or Belgium. The already precarious situation for queer people has worsened massively: fewer job opportunities, increased police violence, psychological stress, profound fear.

**It is a matter of survival.**

## RESISTANCE AND QUEER COUNTER-SPACES

Despite the repression, queer clubs and underground events continue to exist in Tbilisi. These spaces are not only places of joy, but of resistance. Celebrating queer is political. In the midst of fear, these places offer protection, visibility and community.

**Nevertheless, organising  
such events is becoming  
increasingly risky.**





# QUEER HISTORY IN GEORGIA AND ITS ERASURE

Queerness is not an import. There is a long, marginalised, history of queer life in Georgia. This is now being actively erased. Even cultural artefacts such as icons of bearded angels, which allow for queer interpretations, are under threat. The law attempts to stigmatise queerness as 'Western' and to play off national identity against it.

# INTERNATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY, SOLIDARITY AND SUPPORT

## WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Internationally, support has been limited. Tools and strategies that may work in Western contexts, like those from Germany, often fall flat in Georgia's reality. There is a growing recognition that no one will fight for your freedom on your behalf. Change must come from within, and outside help must avoid falling into "white savior" narratives.

**What is needed is real support:** platforms for Georgian artists abroad, access to healthcare - including hormone treatments and mental health services -, visibility of stories from Georgia, raising awareness and being equipped with knowledge.

Locally, creating and maintaining safer spaces is vital. Joy itself becomes an act of resistance—through queer events, parties, and art. Spreading awareness about the law and its effects empowers people to organize and support one another. Visibility, even in limited forms, challenges the imposed silence.

**Silence, after all, is what this law feeds on.** To stay vocal, visible, and connected is to resist. Hiding may offer temporary safety, but it cedes ground to fear. The fight continues—not just for the queer community in Georgia, but for a broader mindset of dignity, diversity, and freedom.

## CONCLUSION / MAIN TAKE-AWAY

The law is a means of systematic marginalisation and intimidation, to an extent that is similar to laws only seen in Russia. The legal framework doesn't operate through open prosecution (yet), but rather through fear and moral panic.

Club culture remains an essential space for resistance and community. International support must be orientated towards local realities and give space to queer voices - both without falling into "white savior" narratives.

# CLUBS IN UNUSUAL SPACES

**Profiles of venues, challenges, and visuals  
of unexpected club locations.**

At this World Café table, the discussion brought together **Tamar Axander** (owner of the techno club Khidi, Tbilisi), **Natalia Nebieridze** (architect, Tbilisi), and **Jakob Turtur** (Jonny Knüppel, Berlin / Clubcommission Berlin). Joined by international participants, the group explored the potentials and limitations of club culture in non-traditional and often repurposed spaces.

## INTRODUCTION

From bridge foundations and industrial ruins to vacant office buildings – clubs are often born in places not originally designed for nightlife. But what makes these spaces so special? What challenges arise when working with them? And how do the conditions in Tbilisi and Berlin differ?

This session explored legal frameworks, ownership models, city planning issues and the socio-political dynamics that shape the sustainability of cultural spaces. It also highlighted a shared urgency: the need for long-term security and recognition of club culture as a valuable urban force.

Author: Moses Mawila - Clubcommission



# MAIN DISCUSSION

## Contrasting Permitting Realities

In Tbilisi, no official permit is required to open a club – which offers flexibility but also leaves operators exposed. Permits are still needed for ventilation systems and parking, but approvals often depend on the mood or interpretation of individual city clerks. In Berlin, the situation is the opposite: operators face strict requirements – including incorporation, building permits, fire safety, structural approval, and sound predictions. While complex, once granted, these permits can provide long-term operational security.

## Zones That Exclude Culture

In Berlin, clubs are not allowed in industrial zones – despite these areas often containing ideal, underused buildings. The land is legally protected for traditional industry, and rezoning can take 10 to 20 years. This leads to paradoxes where clubs can't access spaces that would otherwise fit their needs. In Tbilisi, there is a general lack of designated or protected cultural zones – and real estate speculation often trumps cultural planning.

# OWNERSHIP AS PROTECTION

One of the most important topics was property ownership. Most clubs in Tbilisi are tenants, which makes them vulnerable. Khidi is a rare exception – the club owns its building and was therefore able to survive the pandemic and rent inflation. The same applies to Elektrowerk in Berlin.

Ownership brings stability and autonomy, whereas rental contracts – in both Berlin and Tbilisi – are often short-term and fragile.

# BETWEEN **TEMPORARY USE** **AND LONG-TERM VISION**

Many clubs start out as temporary uses of space. This can be liberating, but also insecure. A core question discussed:

*“Do we want to remain temporary forever – or how do we move toward lasting structures?”*

The group agreed: Without long-term strategies, club culture remains at risk. There’s a need to create pathways from informal or interim use into recognised and protected cultural infrastructure.

# **RISING COSTS &** **LACK OF FUNDING**

**Since the escalation of the war in Ukraine, renovation and construction costs – especially for soundproofing – have soared.** This affects clubs everywhere, but particularly in Tbilisi, where there is no public cultural funding. Most clubs rely solely on ticket income to survive. This creates a constant state of financial pressure and vulnerability.

# **SOLIDARITY OVER** **COMPETITION**

**One positive outcome of the pandemic:** more solidarity within the club scene. In both Berlin and Tbilisi, clubs have started communicating and collaborating more openly. This growing sense of community was highlighted as a crucial resource for resilience in the face of external pressures.





## CONCLUSION

### MAIN TAKE-AWAY

- Unusual spaces offer creative potential – but also structural and political challenges.

Berlin's rigid planning laws block access to available space. Tbilisi offers more freedom but no protection.

Property ownership is a key factor for long-term sustainability.

- Cultural strategies must include tools to transition from temporary to permanent spaces.
- Cross-club collaboration and solidarity are essential for navigating future crises.

**“If Khidi didn’t own its building, we would have had to close during the pandemic.”**

*Tamar Axander*

# TBILISI MORE THAN TECHNO?



MUSIC SCENES BEYOND TECHNO, UPCOMING ARTISTS, LOCAL PERSPECTIVES.

**WITH** Zaza Panchulidze, Ani Kvirkvelia and Lisa Weinhold  
Author: Laura Kamu - Clubcommission



## Zaza Panchulidze aka Zapa

started playing his decks in early 2000 in Germany. In 2008 Zapa had his debut in Georgia and from this time on he's been actively involved in the development and promotion of electronic music. Zapa is one of the co-founders of BUDE club in Kutaisi and still very active in the scene.

## Ani Kvirkvelia

is a multidisciplinary artist and a DJ based in Tbilisi, Georgia. She is a member of Vodkast Records and 11TH community. Her DJ journey began in 2018, and since then, Ani has showcased her talent in numerous renowned venues across Europe, including Bassiani/Horoom, Left Bank, Berghain, Tresor, Zur Klappe and many more.

# INTRODUCTION

As Tbilisi is so known for its clubs and therefore electronic music, we wanted to find out

**how the Georgian electronic music was born and which other influences and genres play a role in the country and its music history.**

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# MATK DISCUSSION

## The start of Georgian Techno:

In the Soviet Union where “new/modern music” was strictly forbidden, Techno didn't have the slightest chance. As a consequence Georgia had a rather late start to electronic music, with the first Trance artist Badju publishing his music in 1995.

2000-2010 was when Techno and electronic music started to finally spread and first parties and raves took place.

It grew extremely quickly and in 2008-14 the first official Techno Clubs like “Cafe Gallery” and “Bassiani” opened their doors to the hungry public. Georgian techno started with a dark sound, and as always music was the perfect mirror to the atmosphere in the country whose society had lived through times of war, corruption and no electricity. Nowadays Georgia, with its short history of electronic music, has a wide range of electronic music styles and DJs and is considered one of the major destinations when looking for a vibrant club scene.

# RAVING IS POLITICAL

It isn't surprising that Georgians took up the trend of Techno music, as some of the well known traditional dances have a similarity to the beats we know from Techno music. Celebration is a big part of Georgian culture, people love to sing and dance and get together. It is on one hand the feeling of union people strive for but it is also a shelter in harsh living conditions in the past and nowadays. Georgians have been oppressed for so many centuries and had to live through so many wars, that club culture becomes an escape from reality and expression of emotions and creativity. Then and now.

Club culture has always been a stronghold for close community experiences. Club nights invite us to come together as one - with friends or strangers.

Despite all challenges clubs remain a haven for everyone who is in need for allegiance, creating own communities and defining them. Techno to them is not only a style of music, it means community, solidarity, creative exchange, it is an attitude and positioning in society. As clubbers have been a crucial and main part of the current protests - **pictures of Gen Z kids raving** on recent demonstrations have made it through world media - they have also put themselves on a political side. The side against the pro Russian regime and therefore an enemy of the governing party.

# OTHER MUSIC TRENDS

**In our discussions the question arose whether combining Georgian traditional music and electronic music is something that Georgians do and like?** There have been parties and DJs like Hamatsuki combining the two styles of music and some artists, with the most popular being Tamada, composing music from the old and new. His music combines chanson type of songs, mostly originating from Tbilisi and electronic beats as musical background. He impersonates the Georgian host, called "Tamada" who makes toasts on the dinner table and always drinks too much, wearing a bathrobe and a bottle of wine during his concerts on stage.

The internet, but especially Youtube and Spotify, Tiktok and Instagram have been a gamechanger in the consumption of electronic music also in the rural areas of Georgia.

Many youngsters from small villages learn to dj and move to bigger cities in order to become famous DJs. This also explains the number of DJ schools, and possibilities for newcomer DJs to perform in the capital.

Other music genres that are big in Tbilisi are Breakbeats, Drum and Bass, Hyper Pop, Postpunk and Hip Hop. There is a big trend of Hip Hop battles in the city. Many people go there to listen, cheer on their favourite artists and especially to let off steam.

Trap music has become an integral part of Tbilisi night culture especially for FLINTAs. The parties at TES club have attracted a strong community combining pole dance with Trap music.

# NO AFTERHOURS

An, at the first glance surprising characteristic of Georgian nightlife, is the lack of after hours. It is mostly due to the heavy drug policies in Georgia, sentencing you with up to 5 years of prison owning drugs, not speaking about selling drugs.

**This is why once having entered a club, people would stay as long as possible in order to consume everything they had on them.**



## CONCLUSION/MAIN TAKE-AWAY

Summing things up, Tbilisi has become a diverse and attractive place for electronic music, but looking into the future, it still paints a dark picture. The current government is trying to shut down all clubs, drivers of clubs and the music scene are leaving the country and its future remains unknown.

The main thing that is left to do now is to support our Georgian friends and colleagues, give them spaces abroad to promote their music and culture and help them spread the word about what is happening in their country.

# OPEN AIRS & FESTIVALS IN GEORGIA

– IS IT A THING?

Event highlights, struggles with  
permissions, festival economy.

# OPEN AIRS

What have been highlights and learnings?

What are they struggling with?

A conversation between:

**eZo Festival (Vakhuna Kavtaradze)**

**4GB Festival (Nika Japaridze)**

**Clubcommission Berlin**

Author: Elena Pitscheider - Clubcommission

# INTRODUCTION

Georgian festivals face unique challenges—political repression, funding shortages, and logistical hurdles—yet they remain vital for cultural expression and activism. This was the central topic of the world cafe station.

While the original thought was to talk also about “What have been highlights and learnings?”, the discussion mostly focused on the core values of the festivals and their communities, the struggles and their survival strategies.

# EXPERTS

The discussion at this station was accompanied by two experts when it comes to festivals in Georgia, Vakhuna Kavtaradze and Nika Japaridze.

The discussion at this station was accompanied by two experts when it comes to festivals in Georgia, **Vakhuna Kavtaradze and Nika Japaridze.**

## Vakhuna

is the co-founder of eZo Festival, a space that has been hand-built and created by the Mzesumzira community and has taken place next to the iconic theme park overseeing Tbilisi, Mtatsminda.

## Nika

is a co-founder of the 4GB Festival, an annual electronic music festival held in Georgia since 2011. It was founded in memory of Gio Bakanidze, a pioneering Georgian DJ, by his friends and fellow artists.

The moderation and documentation was carried out by **Elena Pitscheider and Vy Tran** from Clubcommission.



# MATN DISCUSSION

## COMMUNITY & COLLECTIVE CARE

**Open-air festivals in Georgia are vital and essential - especially in politically challenging times.**

They're not just music events, but spaces where people gather to resist isolation, build alternative communities, and hold onto joy in difficult times. Despite limited resources and increasing political pressure, organizers continue to create spaces where connection, creativity, and care can thrive.

Funding is mostly independent. State support is rare and often comes with strings attached and demands political alignment with the government. Sponsorships and ticket sales are key, but solidarity plays a big role too—artists accepting reduced fees, community-led fundraisers, and donations help keep things going. Volunteers are a crucial part of the process—not just as extra hands, but as part of the wider festival family.

At the heart of these festivals is community. Whether it's eZo, 4GB, or smaller gatherings, the focus lies in bringing people together—not just as attendees, but as co-creators. Festival teams are often structured collectively, with decisions made horizontally and responsibilities shared. These aren't top-down productions—they're built from the ground up, through relationships, trust, and shared purpose.

They help run workshops, care teams, and logistics, forming another layer of connection and shared responsibility.

These festivals hold space for something larger: moments of freedom and expression in a climate that often feels heavy.

**They offer room to breathe, to dance, to dream—and to be together in a way that resists isolation and repression.**



## PRESSURE, REPRESSION & POLITICAL REALITIES

The challenges, though, are real and growing. In addition to the anti-LGBTQ legislation, from June 2025, Georgia will implement stricter drug laws that make no distinction between substances, punishing even minimal possession harshly. These laws are widely seen as a tool for controlling nightlife and silencing cultural spaces that stand for openness, care, and community.

Festivals are often met with suspicion or outright hostility—by local authorities, state institutions, and sometimes nearby residents. Organizers have faced pressure to relocate, last-minute cancellations, and increasing surveillance. Securing festival grounds is a constant battle, with much of the land being either state-controlled or owned by the conservative elite. Temporary land-use agreements are fragile at best, and many organizers find themselves navigating legal grey zones.

In this context, putting on a festival becomes more than cultural work, it becomes resistance. The values at the heart of these gatherings - freedom, solidarity, collectivity - are directly under threat. And in a country as small and politically tense as Georgia, the impact is deeply personal and immediate.

Sadly, approximately two weeks after the world café at Left bank, the city communicated the new land use plan, which also includes a reclassification of eZo festival grounds as a forest zone. As a result, the organizers' lease agreement was not renewed, and permission to host the festival at the site was officially denied.

The eZo team made extensive efforts to preserve the location and ensure the festival's return, going well beyond standard measures in hopes of reversing the decision. Despite these efforts, the festival will not be able to take place at its original venue and will not take place in the same form this year.

# STRATEGIES OF RESISTANCE & SOLIDARITY

**Due to the political situation in the country, and the fact that many of the festival community and visitors are focused on protesting, organizers are increasingly turning toward smaller formats.**

Solidarity extends far beyond Georgia's borders. Georgian artists are touring internationally to raise awareness and support. Clubs and collectives abroad are planning and organizing Soliparties to channel funds and visibility back into the scene. Despite growing challenges, some festivals still work to book international acts—but most now focus on local talent, which brings its own strength and resonance. Georgian artists, stories, and sounds remain at the center.

Even as the legal landscape grows harsher, many organizers remain committed to harm reduction and guest care. In the past, this meant testing stations, awareness teams, and non-policing security. Moving forward, even underrepression, the same ethos endures: safety through solidarity, not control.

Organizing under these conditions demands everything. But it also creates something powerful: lasting bonds, collective memory, and a refusal to back down.

**Georgian festivals are more than events—they are acts of resistance, survival, and HOPE**



## CONCLUSION/MAIN TAKE-AWAY

**THIS WORLD CAFÉ STATION SERVED AS A REFLECTION ON THE CORE VALUES OF FESTIVAL CULTURE — EMPHASIZING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF COMMUNITY AND SHARED SPACES IN RESISTING ISOLATION AND PRESERVING JOY IN CHALLENGING TIMES.**

It reminded us that the party is inherently political, often subject to political repression. Lastly, it reaffirmed that club culture is not only about celebration but also a culture of resistance and solidarity.

As festival and club culture in Georgia faces challenging times, the community calls upon the international scene to raise awareness about the situation and offer support. This can be done by inviting Georgian artists to perform and create spaces for their voices, collaborating with local collectives to host solidarity events, or simply by contributing through donations, such as supporting eZo Festival here: <https://mzesumzira.com/en/donate>.



# SHORT REFLECTIONS ON THE TRIP



# EXPLORING RESILIENCE AND RESISTANCE: INSIGHTS FROM TBILISI'S CLUB CULTURE

The delegation trip to Tbilisi was organized by Berlin's Clubcommission, joined by representatives from the Berlin club scene and financed by the Senate Economic Affairs, Energy and Public Enterprises. It offered a deep and personal look into the clubculture that is not only creatively vibrant but also politically vital. In a country experiencing an acute political crisis, marked by authoritarian shifts, anti-EU sentiment, and repressive laws — especially targeting LGBTQI+ communities — clubs in Tbilisi are emerging as spaces of cultural resistance and solidarity.

The trip offered not only conversations but moments of shared urgency. In exchanges with local pioneers from clubs like Mtkvarze, Leftbank, and Bassiani, it became evident that clubs in Tbilisi are far more than party spaces. They are infrastructures of resistance, mutual care, and cultural resilience.

The question that framed many discussions—how can clubs remain economically and politically resilient in times of crisis?—was answered not in theory but through lived experience: through crowdfunding, self-organization, and the transformation of venues into multifunctional, adaptive cultural shelters. What became clear is that financial survival is deeply tied to a club's social role: the more rooted a venue is in its community, the more adaptable and resilient it can be.

Clubs in Tbilisi are no longer just nightlife venues — they are multifunctional hubs. Many have begun to think beyond the dance floor: they serve as spaces for artistic experimentation, political education, and community support. Networking — both local and international — plays a crucial role in building these resilient structures.

**The Berlin delegation contributed ideas, but also took home inspiration as well as learnings from how deeply interwoven clubs are with the society in Tbilisi.**

Author: Lisa Weinhold

**ONE ESPECIALLY STRIKING ASPECT OF THE TRIP WAS THE STRONG AND EMPOWERING PRESENCE OF FEMALE AND QUEER LEADERSHIP AS WELL AS CULTURE WITHIN THE GEORGIAN CLUB SCENE.**



**FIGURES LIKE TAMAR AXANDAR (KHIDI) AND KETA GABUNIA (MTKVARZE) ARE NOT ONLY SHAPING SOUND AND AESTHETICS, BUT ALSO STEERING ORGANIZATIONAL, CURATORIAL, AND ACTIVIST STRATEGIES.**

The stories they shared highlighted the intersection of diversity, creativity, and resistance.

The World Café sessions underscored the richness and complexity of Georgia's cultural landscape. From the subtle yet chilling effects of anti-LGBTQI+ legislation, to the transformation of unusual spaces into clubs, to the genre diversity beyond techno, and the growing challenges and hopes of open airs and festivals — every discussion opened windows into a cultural field navigating repression with ingenuity.

Walking through Tbilisi — a city layered with brutalist monuments, Soviet-era structures, and bold new architecture — it's impossible not to feel the tension between control and creativity.

Despite the heavy political atmosphere, the **energy in the city's clubs and creative spaces is defiant, caring, and radically alive.** This trip did not just offer insights into how clubs can adapt — it affirmed that clubculture, when rooted in solidarity and resistance, is a powerful force for cultural and political agency.



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