

## DEVELOPMENT PROSPECTS OF THE CULTURAL TOURISM SECTOR OF AZERBAIJAN

Gunay F. Musayeva

Baku State University, Baku, Azerbaijan

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### Abstract

The article reflects the development of the cultural tourism sector of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the history of its formation, as well as its development prospects. Since the Republic of Azerbaijan as a whole and in various regions has a very rich cultural heritage and historical traditions, the future development prospects of this type of tourism are also very strong, and this development trend is also clearly reflected in the article. In addition, the importance of historical architectural and cultural monuments existing in our country is also emphasized. The cultural and historical monuments that our regions and developed economic centers also have attract more attention. It is reflected that the relatively older monuments of Azerbaijan are of greater importance.

**Keywords:** tourism sector, culture, cultural tourism, cultural heritage, niche tourism

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\*Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [gunay.musayeva1990@mail.ru](mailto:gunay.musayeva1990@mail.ru) (G. Musaeva)

### Introduction

The concept of “cultural tourism”, which was first theorized as a distinct category of tourism experience in the late 1970s and early 1980s, underwent a significant transformation. In the 1970s, tourism researchers began to advocate the idea that some people travel specifically to understand the culture and cultural heritage of a destination. In the early days, cultural tourism was considered a limited tourism sector that covered a very small number of people and was of interest only to highly educated and intellectual individuals. Today, cultural tourism is considered the most important and broadest tourism product. Depending on the destination and research methodology, 35-80% of tourists traveling in the world today are those who travel primarily for cultural tourism motivation. Cultural tourism, as noted in many documents of international and national organizations by experts and specialists, is a symbol

and indicator of the modern development of tourism. This is related to the complex processes of globalization, which lead to the destruction of the uniqueness and originality of cultures. Cultural tourism serves the idea of preserving the diversity of cultures, revitalizing cultural heritage, bringing citizens to the universal cultural heritage of humanity, explaining cultural traditions, broadcasting and interpreting cultural ideas. If we turn to the definition of cultural tourism presented by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the International Council for the Preservation of Monuments and Objects (ICOMOS), it will become obvious that these international organizations consider cultural tourism itself as "a type of niche tourism, small in terms of market volume, carefully organized, cognitive or educational, often elitist in nature, meeting the sophisticated interests of travelers, dedicated to the presentation and explanation of cultural ideas" [4]. Based on this definition, it is possible to conclude that the very definition of cultural tourism already contains the idea of "niche", heterogeneity, diversification of its multiple manifestations in subspecies, destinations, motivations and profiles of cultural tourists.

Cultural tourists are oriented to the consumption of a tourist product of special quality. They expect, in particular, that the means of accommodation in the destination should create the atmosphere of the place and time and provide the desired cultural experience. Instead of souvenirs ("tourist art") cultural these tourists prefer to buy products of folk crafts and crafts, strive to study the history of their origin and see how they are made by real bearers "living cultures". In general, cultural tourists are tuned in to the authenticity of culture and do not tolerate mediocrity [6]. Modern cultural tourism constantly expands the list of its varieties, among which today distinguish ethnic, ethnographic, historical, archeological, architectural, folklore, hereditary, genealogical, gastronomic, other subtypes of cultural tourism, reflecting separate aspects and layers of cultural traditions of countries and peoples.

In this connection E.V. Moshnyaga notes that "at the beginning of the XXI century, "cultural tourism" became an umbrella term for a wide list of types of tourism similar in nature and character - historical, religious, pilgrimage, ethnic, ethnographic, folklore, anthropological, archeological, event, artistic, museum, architectural, castle, palace, li- theatrical, musical and many others - as a result of the fact that they are all united by the common motivational aspirations of travelers (the search for new cultural experience and intercultural contacts) and common cultural and historical resources" [7]. Special types of tourism are understood as highly specialized types of travel, which are not oriented to the mass markets of demand and do not promote mass destinations, but provide an offer to the micro-segments of the tourist market, which, however, may have a tendency to develop and expand.

Modern cultural tourism has secured the status of socially, ecologically and ethically responsible and sustainable tourism. In other words, cultural tourism can be considered the most important instrument of sustainable development of destinations [5]. The concept of sustainable development was popularized thanks to the publication in 1987. Reported by the World Commission on Environment

and Development "Our general future" [8]. This document gives a conceptual definition of sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Currently, "sustainable development" and "sustainable tourism" are considered in the context of regional development, preservation of ecosystems and cultural communities, and are reflected in state concepts and development strategies, program documents and materials of international organizations [10].

Promoting sustainable tourism, tourist administrations implement three important principles of tourist development: 1) quality (as sustainable tourism provides a quality experience for visitors, improves the quality of life of the host community, protects the quality of the surrounding environment); 2) continuity (since sustainable tourism ensures the continuity of the natural resources on which it is based, and the continuity of the culture of the host society, which provides tourists with the desired cultural experience); 3) balance (as sustainable tourism balances the needs of the tourist industry, defenders of the environment and the local community) [9].

The territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan has rich and diverse cultural resources, which can form the basis for the formation of the concept of the development of niche segments of cultural tourism applicable to the destinations of Azerbaijan [1]. These may also be destinations through which transnational routes will pass, similar to the "Great Silk Road" route [3]. Tourist destinations of modern Azerbaijan are insufficiently well known in the market of international cultural tourism. However, the situation is changing, including because the state is conducting an active tourist policy. Azerbaijan is an active participant in UNWTO international events, it is represented by three associated members - the Azerbaijan Tourist Association, the Azerbaijan Institute of Tourism and the Baku Tourist Information Center. Azerbaijan participated in the development of the concept of the "Great Silk Road", researches are conducted on cultural tourism, the results of which, in particular, were reflected in the materials of the international conference "Taste of the Great Silk Road: Culinary, Culture and Tourism" held by The Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Azerbaijan notes that such types of tourism as cultural, historical, gastronomic are traditionally developed in the republic, while the prospects of international tourism are expanding due to the diversification of the tourist offer on the world market, the integration of regional and international initiatives, such as the "Extended Agreement on Cultural Tourism Routes" with the support of the Council of Europe, the UNWTO project "Great silk road» and others.

A systematic and balanced analysis of natural and cultural resources is necessary for the development of niche segments of cultural tourism in the destinations of Azerbaijan and the development of the concept of the development of niche segments of cultural tourism in the country's destinations, including the study of the availability and condition of the natural and cultural resources of Azerbaijan, the identification of the degree and quality of their use in the development of tours and

programs, the determination of the priority niche segments of cultural tourism in relation to specific destinations of the country, the development of a long-term strategy for the development of cultural tourism destinations Azerbaijan with an accent on certain niche segments.

With an active policy of state support for the development of cultural tourism in the Republic of Azerbaijan, the development of the concept of the development of niche segments of cultural tourism in the destinations of Azerbaijan will contribute to the inventory of the available natural and cultural resources, will serve as a means of wider promotion of cultural destinations [1]. Tourism, will help attract financing necessary for the modernization of tourist infrastructure and marketing promotion, and the very concept will form the basis or expand the state program of diversified development of cultural tourism of the republic. The development of niche segments of the market of cultural tourism in the destinations of Azerbaijan, in our opinion, should serve to solve the tasks of the sustainable development of the republic in accordance with the 12 goals of sustainable tourism defined in the document UNEP ("UN Environmental Program") and UNWTO "On the road to more sustainable tourism" [3]: economic viability, prosperity of destinations, quality of employment, social equality, satisfaction of visitors, local control, welfare of the community, wealth of culture, physical integrity, biological diversity, resource efficiency, environmental cleanliness.

In the Republic of Azerbaijan, one of the most important areas of attention within the framework of the central state policy implemented in recent years to increase the share of the non-oil sector in the country's economy is the systematic and fundamental development of the tourism industry. It is no coincidence that the "Strategic Roadmap for the Development of the Specialized Tourism Industry in the Republic of Azerbaijan", approved by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated December 6, 2016, sets the main goal of "identifying specialized tourism as one of the priority areas in the development strategy of the national economy" and developing this sector in the short term by effectively using the existing tourism potential of Azerbaijan in the future. Based on the document "Azerbaijan 2030: National Priorities for Socio-Economic Development", approved by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated February 2, 2021, the document "Socio-Economic Development Strategy for 2022-2026" was prepared and the tourism sector was identified as one of the 18 main priority areas of the national economy in Azerbaijan.

As a result of the political will and the resulting strategic vision towards the development of the tourism sector, institutional reforms have been carried out, and in order to promote the tourism sector of our country at the international level, especially in target markets using innovative marketing methods, as well as to apply the results of research conducted in this field for the development of domestic tourism, the Azerbaijan Tourism Bureau Public Legal Entity (operating under the State Tourism Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan) was established, and in accordance with the "Order of the

President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Some Measures Related to Improving State Administration in the Field of Culture and Tourism” dated April 20, 2018, the State Tourism Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan was established on the basis of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Within the framework of the process of developing tourism experiences and preparing various tourism products in the Republic of Azerbaijan (nature tourism, health tourism, tourism covering special interest groups), the field of cultural tourism is undoubtedly the most important and most potential direction in the tourism sector. The most important tourism resource used in the preparation of cultural tourism products is the national-cultural heritage of our country. Against the background of increasing fierce competition in the world tourism market, various countries strive to move away from the monotony of cultural tourism products, to differentiate themselves from each other with tourism products that are more diverse in content and less common in terms of tourism experience. Various states are making efforts to make the tourism products offered to visitors more diverse in terms of age categories and interests, and are mobilizing existing cultural heritage resources in this direction. In this sense, the analysis of the potential of national-cultural heritage examples for the tourism industry in Azerbaijan gives grounds for making optimistic forecasts. When looking at the composition and uniqueness of cultural heritage samples, their specific features and elements related to the diversity of cultural self-expression, it seems that Azerbaijan has more diverse, multifaceted cultural tourism resources than other neighboring countries and regions [2]. This point is very important, because the volume of tourists traveling for the purpose of cultural tourism in the tourism market varies between 35-80% across countries.

That is why the preservation, development and state protection of various tangible and intangible heritage samples related to the history and culture of political formations (states and empires) of different historical periods, various religious groups and confessions, peoples who existed in the territory of Azerbaijan in connection with various historical processes, temporarily lived, and were subjected to various migration processes has a positive impact on the development of cultural tourism. The fact that both movable and immovable cultural resources have developed in a historically sustainable manner and have formed various contents and forms proves, first of all, how strong the social and cultural base is for presenting Azerbaijan as a tolerant, multicultural country [1]. Also, Sufi inns, monasteries and tombs of various religious purposes, shrines, shrines, burial places associated with holy figures, the economic and economic sphere of medieval life (for example, caravanserais), places associated with military and urban planning traditions (springs, bridges, castles and buildings), examples of folk religious beliefs, folklore, oral and written folk literature, natural monuments associated with local traditions (centuries-old Khan plane tree and other trees), multicultural festivals (for example,

the Kurmukoba festival) are not only objects of scientific research, but also attract the attention of the tourism industry as cultural tourism resources. It is no coincidence that, for example, the main architectural monuments and intangible heritage examples (folklore, crafts and local lore) of Sheki, Gabala and other North-Western regions, which are developing as a tourist destination, as well as heritage examples belonging to Caucasian Albania (Bideyiz and Zayzid churches, Tepebashi necropolis, etc.), are visited by tourists even if they are not yet fully ready as a tourism product.

Implementing effective cultural management of historical and cultural reserves and other cultural heritage sites, ensuring the efficient use of their tourism resources will be the main directions of cultural tourism development in Azerbaijan in the future. There are successful cultural tourism development models (tourism products and tourism routes) across the country, and the priority goal is to comprehensively involve other cultural heritage examples in this trend [2]. In this sense, in order to achieve the goals and objectives set for the development of cultural tourism in Azerbaijan, a number of economic and theoretical foundations obtained from the experience of successful projects already implemented in Azerbaijan should be understood more deeply.

In order to transform some cultural heritage sites into tourist attractions, study the historical and physical structure of the heritage, and ensure their long-term purposeful use, conservation and tourism concepts, as well as management plans, should be prepared. The conservation plan studies the history and physical structure of the heritage site and monument, and establishes rules and recommendations for its use and protection. At the same time, the purposeful use of the cultural heritage site is justified in this document, and its future use is usually regulated in accordance with this document. Thus, if there is any intervention in the monument or any development projects are planned around the monument, the initial reference document should be the monument's conservation plan. The tourism concept or tourism master plan studies the existing resources of the historical site/monument and the surrounding landscape, conducts a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) of the resources, and makes proposals for their sustainable use [10]. The management plan, in turn, identifies resources for the effective management of the monument, analyzes the SWOT, if gaps in management are identified, predicts work to solve these problems in the action plan and determines appropriate indicators to achieve the goal.

The preparation of these strategic documents requires great effort and in-depth research. It is very important to prepare these documents before implementing major projects aimed at the monument. Only after the preparation of the mentioned documents can the protection of monuments from the negative effects of mass tourism, the integration of cultural heritage into the local economy, the policy of improving the well-being of the local population and other works in this direction be effectively implemented [1]. For example, although examples of Albanian heritage located near or on tourist

destinations, fortresses and fortifications visited by tourists (for example, the Gulustan and Javanshir fortresses), religious sites (for example, the Seven Domes Tombs) are on the main tourism routes, due to the lack of documents and cultural heritage management plans for them, these monuments are not used purposefully.

In general, while restoration and conservation projects of a number of monuments in Azerbaijan are being implemented, unfortunately, their tourism management plans and future business development plans have not been prepared, and as a result, the plans for the future use of the restored monuments remain unknown. For example, although the Chukhur Bathhouse in the city of Guba has been restored and conserved, due to the lack of a conceptual document for its future use, this monument currently remains unused and is not used as a demonstration object on cultural tourism routes.

As a result of certain historical events and processes, the transformation of memorial sites and cultural heritage samples related to the cultural history of other nations into tourism demonstration objects and their promotion can both contribute to the cultural diversity of Azerbaijan and achieve a qualitative and quantitative increase in tourism products through this means. For example, passports of cultural tourism routes such as Polish cultural heritage and Jewish cultural heritage have been prepared in Azerbaijan at the initiative of the Azerbaijan Tourism Bureau. In this regard, the potential of creating a Malakan cultural heritage tourism route and other such routes by studying settlements (Altıgach, Saratovka, etc. villages) and architectural examples related to the Malakan cultural heritage should be considered [2]. Thanks to direct state investment in our country, a number of new cultural tourism destinations, such as the “Basqal” State Historical-Cultural Reserve, have been developed, and new cultural tourism development strategies have been implemented in tourism destinations, such as the “Yanardag” State Historical-Cultural and Nature Reserve. Those studying or specializing in tourism need to study these processes in more depth in the context of the country.

In modern times, the concept of “cultural tourism” is explained as a special tourism concept based on fundamental tourism theories. The UN World Tourism Organization defines the term “cultural tourism” as follows. Cultural tourism is the movement of people from one place to another in order to leave their own area of residence and see the cultural heritage of other cities or countries, to gather new information and experiences and satisfy their cultural needs, as well as to see monuments, art and cultural expressions (ethnographic elements, etc.) in places other than their own [7]. Some experts (Canada Tourism Commission, UNWTO) point out that cultural tourism is a special type of tourism and evaluate it as a tourism activity arising from a tourist’s desire to discover the cultural heritage of a destination. Other experts, who continue this idea, explain cultural tourism not only as a type of activity arising from special interest, but also as a “meaningful experience” that reflects the

cultural heritage elements and unique social nuances of the place visited. Because the “special interest” that brings a tourist to a cultural heritage site is the desire to understand a particular history and culture. Thus, the individual’s ideas about the cultural heritage object should acquire a specific meaning and value. In other words, the desire to see and understand a particular cultural heritage example is one of the main reasons that give rise to cultural tourism, which is accompanied by different attempts to interpret it. Also, the effort to learn more about and understand a cultural content gives rise to cultural tourism.

As can be seen, all definitions emphasize the presence of specific passions and experiential activities in cultural tourism. When we pay attention to various publications of the UN World Tourism Organization, it is clear that cultural tourism refers to activities such as festivals, cultural events, art performances, visits to museums, monuments and religious and sacred sites and other cultural areas. According to experts, cultural tourism is a form of tourism that refers to the cultural heritage resources of a destination and transforms these resources into a product form for consumption (use) by tourists. According to them, the cultural tourism market consists of 5 main segments:

1. Cultural tourism-oriented tourist: Cultural tourism is the most important and main motivation for visiting a destination and the person experiences a deep cultural tourism experience.
2. Cultural tourism excursion: Cultural tourism is the main reason for visiting a destination, but the experience is mostly an activity that remains in the shadows.
3. Serendipity: Serendipity is a situation or event that is learned and discovered by chance. For this type of tourist, cultural tourism is not the main purpose of the visit, but he or she gains or attempts to gain a deep cultural tourism experience during the trip.
4. Simple cultural tourism visitor: Cultural tourism is a weak motivation for the visitor and the tourism experience gained is very limited.
5. Casual cultural tourist: Does not act with a cultural tourism motivation, but participates in various cultural tourism-oriented activities.

According to the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, the following fundamental concepts have been given about the various components of “cultural heritage”:

- a) Monuments: works of architecture, monumental sculpture and painting, elements or structures of an archaeological nature, inscriptions, cave dwellings and groups of elements of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science;
- b) Ensembles: groups of individual or combined buildings whose architecture, unity with the landscape or their relationship with it are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science;

c) Outstanding sites: areas of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, aesthetics, ethnology or anthropology, including remarkable archaeological sites, are understood as works of human hand or the combined work of man and nature.

Intangible cultural heritage refers to the traditions, forms of representation and expression, knowledge and skills, tools, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces that individuals, groups and society itself accept as examples of cultural heritage. According to the current Azerbaijani legislation, intangible cultural heritage includes three main categories:

1. Ethnography or local history (customs and traditions, holidays and ceremonies, historical symbols and secrets);
2. Folklore (performance, music and dance, oral creativity, games and performances);
3. Folk crafts (applied art, traditional decorative art, national visual creativity).

Natural monuments in Azerbaijan can have two levels of importance: republican or regional. Taking into account the opinion of the National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan, natural monuments of republican importance are organized by the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the basis of the presentation of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and natural monuments of regional importance are organized by the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Azerbaijan [1]. Objects and territories belonging to natural monuments are excluded from economic exploitation and any activity that violates the natural state of natural monuments is prohibited there, and their management, use and lease by individuals and legal entities is prohibited. Of course, natural monuments can be used for scientific, cultural and educational purposes.

The Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Azerbaijan registers natural monuments in kind with indicative signs and ensures management of natural monuments, exercises state control over the protection, preservation, restoration and use of these objects. The list of natural monuments is prepared by the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, a passport is prepared for each natural monument included in the list. The passport reflects the significance of the natural monument, its name, location, date of establishment, registration number and date of the state act on the right of the owner, user and lessee of the land in the area where the monument is located, the type of protected object, its characteristics, and notes on changes made to it during the operation process.

#### **Conclusion:**

The dozens of different examples we have seen in this article about the creation of tourism products using cultural heritage resources show that for the tourism industry this resource is an inexhaustible treasure in the field of applying creative and innovative strategies. In this sense, specialists in the field of cultural tourism must definitely cooperate with interest groups operating in the field of cultural

heritage management together, in a manner of mutual understanding and coordination. Because cultural tourism, like other tourism categories, is a profit-oriented activity and is constantly aimed at expanding and meeting the expectations of travelers, while cultural heritage management, without considering travelers as a priority, bases its activities precisely on the protection of cultural resources and values.

Therefore, cultural heritage specialists sometimes put limits on the unlimited development and business-oriented motivations of cultural tourism, promoting the sustainable use of cultural heritage resources: limiting the number of tourists visiting monuments, keeping part of archaeological monuments open for visiting, applying positive discrimination to the sale of traditional handicraft products, etc. Cultural heritage resource and cultural tourism product are separate concepts. When developing cultural heritage elements as a tourism product, its importance is first studied and assessed, all necessary services and infrastructure needs are created for the traveler to see and experience it, and the area is promoted in tourism markets.

In relation to cultural heritage resources, the traveler's actions and experience are kept under control or within certain frameworks (ticket sales, restriction of entry and exit hours, requirement to comply with certain rules of conduct, etc.). While cultural heritage specialists are more concerned with the preservation and efficient management of heritage, and at the same time with a deeper study and understanding of cultural heritage values in a creative direction, specialists in the field of cultural tourism strive to ensure that the traveler has a comfortable tourism experience and consumes the tourism product more comfortably. The content offered by cultural tourism is not equally interesting or understandable to all travelers. The impressions they feel towards that content and the motivations for the tourism experience they want to obtain can never be at the same level.

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