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Development directions of tourism in the liberated territories of Azerbaijan

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Abstract. The development directions of tourism in the liberated territories of Azerbaijan are considered in the article. Tourism development problems are analyzed for this purpose. The tourism opportunities of the liberated territories are evaluated. Tourism opportunities of Shusha and Kalbajar districts were investigated and the importance of creating tourism infrastructure was substantiated. It was noted that the transport infrastructure formed in the region will stimulate the development of tourism. The multiplicative effect of tourism development in postconflict areas is considered. Recommendations were made and proposals were prepared to accelerate the development of tourism in the liberated territories in the near future.

Keywords: *Azerbaijan, tourism, Karabakh, East Zangezur, liberated territories, tourism development, Shusha.*

After the Great Karabakh Victory in 2020, the processes of restoration and revival of the liberated territories of Azerbaijan are accelerating [1]. The prospects for the development of a number of activity areas in these processes are remarkable, and one of such areas is the tourism sector, which has a high potential in the region. It is known that in order to develop tourism, first of all, the infrastructure opportunities in these areas, the geographical position of the territory, the climate and the favorable conditions for tourism should be considered and evaluated as the main conditions.

It should be noted that the process of researching and evaluating tourism development opportunities in the already liberated territories has gone into a deep phase. In these areas there are more resources for the development of travel

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and health tourism. The presence of charming nature corners, ancient monuments and historical sites allows the formation of interesting tourist routes. Unfortunately, for almost 30 years, most public buildings, tourist complexes and sanatoriums were razed, since the territories of East Zangazur and Karabakh were occupied by the enemy. Therefore, in modern times, there has been a need to start all work from start, including the creation of tourist facilities [2].

Looking at the tourism potential of the region, we see that there is a high potential for the development of health tourism in Shusha, Kalbajar, Lachin, Khojavend, Zangilan, Gubadli areas. Since these areas have a mountainous relief, the organization of entertainment tourism in them is quite realistic [3]. At the expense of efficient use of the mentioned resources in the liberated territories, there are opportunities to create modern technology-based tourist complexes and infrastructure. Therefore, it is important to systematically study the tourism potential in the Karabakh and East Zangazur economic regions and assess the investment attractiveness of this area [4]. At the same time, there remains a need for productive use of the opportunities of the tourism-recreation zone, which has such powerful resources as Karabakh, and stimulating the invitation of potential investors to these areas [5].

We can already note that the creation of modern tourist complexes has begun in the region. Even during the Soviet Union, sanatoriums of Union importance operated in Shusha and Istisu settlement of Kalbajar. Tens of thousands of people from 15 Union republics of the former USSR came to these sanatoriums to rest and to treat themselves. Taking into account these factors and the existing potential, the groundbreaking ceremony of the sanatorium "Istisu" was already held in Kalbajar on June 2022, 26 with the participation of the President of the country [6]. The new Treatment Complex "Istisu" will be located on an area of 34 hectares and an infrastructure will be formed to accommodate 300 people. In our opinion, the imminent commissioning of the "Istisu" complex would play an important role not only in the socio-economic development of Kalbajar, but also in the development of the region as a whole. Thus, the processes of rapid development of transport infrastructure, the formation of various segments of the tourism industry and the development of the service sector in the area will accelerate at a significant level. At the same time, after the

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commissioning of Lachin International Airport, there will be favorable transport opportunities for future tourists both in Shusha and Kalbajar. At the same time, modern transport projects are being implemented in these areas, convenient highways, tunnels and bridges are being built.

The development of such a promising sector of the economy as tourism in Azerbaijan is of strategic importance, thereby expanding the structure of the national economy [7]. On the other hand, in the period of global economic transformations and in the conditions of postpandemic challenges, the possibilities of improving the health of the population increase due to the development of tourism [8].

If we add to this the intensive processes of restoration and reconstruction of the cities of Shusha and Lachin, a fundamental basis for the development of tourism in the region will be created. It is no coincidence that Shusha is called the Pearl of the Caucasus, and it is in Shusha that various types of tourism can be developed. The presence of ancient architecturally valuable buildings and monuments, the presence heritage house museums of prominent artists and thinkers of Azerbaijan, Jidir duzu, Isa spring, Topkhana forest and the potential for extreme mountain tourism can also be noted.

Along with these, it is possible to implement effective projects related to the tourism potential of the Karabakh Economic Region [9]. In the beginning we mentioned certain ideas about the tourism opportunities of the city of Shusha, but we believe that there are more perspectives. For example, the Azykh Cave, which is one of the first and ancient settlements of people and now is located in the territory of Khojavand region, can be restored on the basis of modern technologies to form the potential of attracting tourists from different countries of the world. The restoration of the Azykh Cave and the creation of a tourist infrastructure here can also increase the possibilities of domestic tourism. Thus, the territory of Khojavand region consists of beautiful natural corners, pure water springs and forest massifs with strong flora [10]. "Sarsang" and "Sugovushan" reservoirs can be noted as other areas with high tourism potential. International rowing competitions are already taking place in Sugovushan, and therefore the creation of modern hotel-tourist complexes and the development of sports tourism in this area promise quite high prospects. It is possible to create an infrastructure for holding training and gathering

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events of rowing teams, as well as local and international tournaments of various formats. And these can create an atmosphere of attractiveness for more tourists to come to Sugovushan. There are opportunities to organize tourist zones and complexes around the "Sarsang " reservoir [11].

At the same time, it is appropriate to create tourist clusters to develop tourism in the liberated territories. Clusters can create additional opportunities for the development of the tourism business [12]. At the same time, the clustering of the tourism industry will create conditions for attracting more investments in this area [13]. In our opinion, clusters can have a greater effect in the development of such multifunctional sectors of the economy as tourism in our country in modern times [14].

We would like to pay attention to one more issue. It is known that the development of tourism requires the presence of a powerful transport infrastructure. From this point of view, Fuzuli International Airport, which is the air gate of Karabakh, is one of the major factors contributing to the development of tourism in Karabakh [15]. We believe that it is precisely through the effective use of the potential of this modern airport that it is possible to carry out affordable air routes – charter flights in order to stimulate the arrival of tourists from different countries of the world to Karabakh. At the same time, according to the First State Program on the Great Return, the return of the former IDPs to Sugovushan settlement and Fuzuli city has already begun. It is planned that by the end of 2026, 22 thousand people will be transferred to Fizuli. The center of the city is already being formed, residential complexes and social infrastructure facilities are being commissioned. On October 2023, 16, with the participation of the head of country, the groundbreaking ceremony of the II and III residential complexes, a kindergarten for 240 children, a sports complex, the villages of Gochahmadli and Juvarli was held in Fizuli.

We believe that the intensification of settlement in Karabakh will create a multiplicative effect, and soon the opportunities for the development of a number of priority sectors of the economy will increase. In particular, it will be possible to develop the tourism sector in most areas of Karabakh [16]. The Eastern Zangazur economic region is also of exceptional importance in terms of the development of the tourism sector. Thus, there are enough sights, ancient monuments, rare forest massifs, a large number of medium and

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small rivers, springs, and picturesque places in the economic region. In particular, there is a high potential for the creation of tourist zones in the territories of Kalbajar and Lachin regions. The commissioning of the International Airport in Zangilan has significantly increased the transport and logistics potential of the region, and this factor allows the region to become more attractive for tourists. On the other hand, after the completion of the construction of the International Airport in Lachin, a favorable transport infrastructure will be formed for tourists to come to the tourist complexes that will be created on the territory of Lachin and Kalbajar regions, which have high tourism potential. In addition, there will be new opportunities for the development of tourism in terms of the construction of modern highways, as well as the opening of the Zangazur Global Transport Corridor in the near future.

Thus, it is possible to predict the intensification of the processes of strengthening the tourism potential in the liberated territories, and a group of factors are noteworthy in this regard:

- First of all, there is a need for a fundamental analysis and assessment of tourism potential in the liberated territories;
- Conducting targeted grant projects and interviews to create modern tourism zones in the Karabakh and East Zangazur economic regions can be effective;
- There is a need for measures to attract world-famous tourism companies and investors in the liberated territories;
- To accelerate the development of tourism in the region, it is important to develop public-private cooperation;
- Taking into account strategic targets in the liberated territories, it is proposed to develop and implement an appropriate state program on the effective and productive use of the region's tourism potential, etc.

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