ADAPTING GLOBAL STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM TO THE POST-CONFLICT KARABAKH REGION IN AZERBAIJAN

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ABSTRACT. *Nowadays, tourism is one of the main fields of the world economy and plays a vital role, even the gross domestic product (GDP) of some countries almost entirely relies on tourism. Tourism also can be beneficial for the development in the post-conflict regions. With the rich resources of the region, many modern tourism methods can be applied to the Karabakh region with examples shown from other post-conflict areas. Moreover, with the ongoing initiatives by the Azerbaijani government and the potential implementation of additional tourism strategies, the Karabakh region has the potential to become one of the main tourist destinations in the Caucasus, and even in the Middle East. This paper analyses how different fields of tourism can be applied in the post-conflict Karabakh region in Azerbaijan for development and recovery of the region by comparing case studies from other post-conflict areas and analyzing data.*
Key Words: *Karabakh, sustainable tourism, post-conflict recovery, tourism strategies, regional development*

Introduction.

The tourism industry is one of the main parts of the global economy and it is a very important component for the socio-economic growth of countries. The interest in this field increases day by day. This sector plays a significant role for prosperity of regional economy, employment of people and improvement of social welfare, especially for attracting new technologies and investments. The GDP amount of measurable direct tourism products and services in 2023 was $3.3 trillion, which is 3% of global GDP (World Bank, 2024).

The growing interest in tourism has been reflected in several key areas of study and development, in this regard, the most studied aspects have been the role of tourism demand, the nature of tourism resources, the role of tourism in promoting socio-cultural progress, the measurement of tourism sustainability and forms of sustainable development. A sustainable tourism industry requires constant development for economic development, society and sustainable use of resources. However, demands of people and markets always change, so we shouldn't extend only one single industry in some regions. We should understand that tourism is a collection of services offered to tourists or investors. Tourism comprises many different services on transportation, accommodation, meals, excursions, and other services depending on the purpose of the trip. There always can be different wishes and desires of tourists and we always need to be ready for it. Studies

show that the nature, useful resources, material and cultural heritage of the people and archaeological monuments are key determinants that distinguish a region from others and contribute to its uniqueness, and effective use of those sources can provide long-term economic benefits for region and country.

For many of the "fragile" and post-conflict regions, tourism is one of the main components for those countries' integration into the global economy. It is generally agreed that the role of tourism in socio-economic development of less developed and post-conflict regions can be so substantial. Tourism is increasingly recognized as a valuable tool for economic diversification and revitalization, post-conflict stabilization, socio-economic recovery, and fostering multilateral integration and peace by several organizations such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the UN Development Program (UNDP) and the European Union (EU), as well as national ministries, regional bodies and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

All these factors make us understand the importance and contributions of tourism industry to global economy and make the development of tourism in the post-conflict Karabakh region very convenient both from a scientific and practical perspective, and tourism can serve as a key driver for the development and post-conflict recovery of the region. The natural wealth of the area, the rich flora and fauna cover, the presence of healing mineral springs and ancient caves, and in general the rich natural and cultural heritage samples make Karabakh region extremely favorable for all types of tourism activities like rural tourism, archaeological tourism and ecotourism. The region offers untapped economic potential with its tourism opportunities for ensuring the employment and social welfare of the people living in these regions and for sustainable settlement.

Many studies have focused on the role of tourism in the world economy and how it can be beneficial, but we thought that there is a lack of information about post-conflict recovery using tourism, especially in the Karabakh region, as it is a new post-conflict region.

Therefore, this paper seeks to answer the following questions:

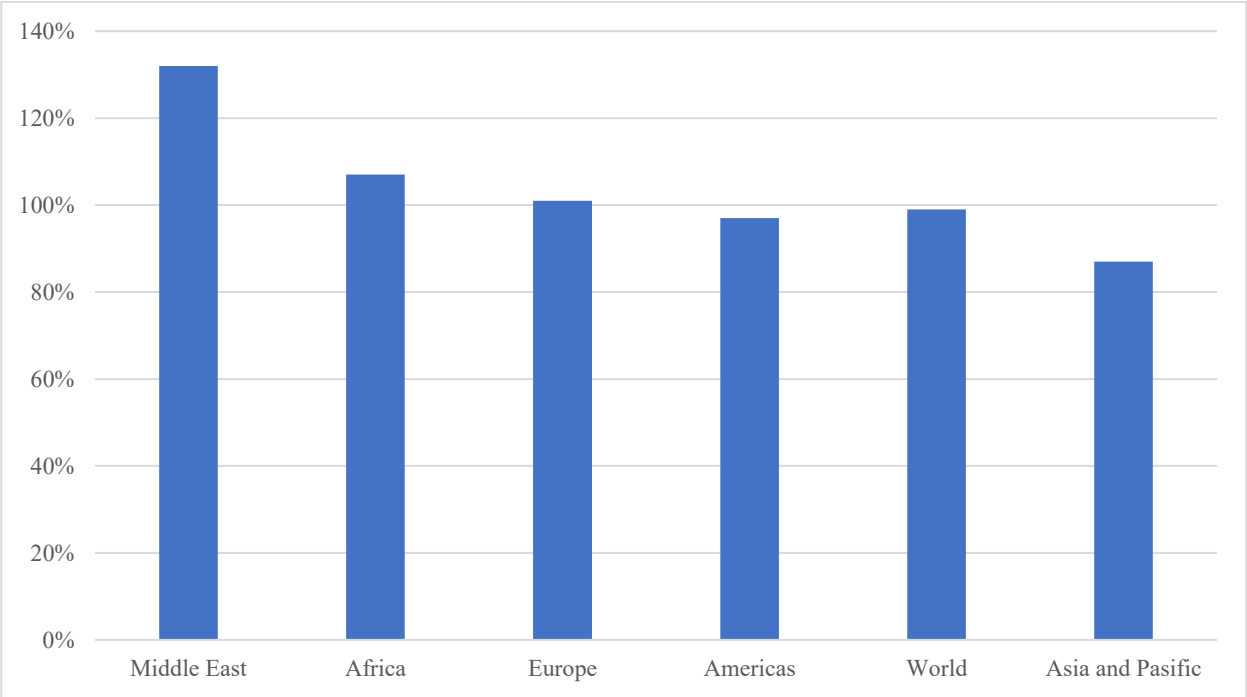
1. Which fields of tourism can be improved in the Karabakh region?
2. How can tourism help to the development and recovery of the post-conflict Karabakh region and create a sustainable environment?

Role of tourism in the global economy and post-conflict recovery.

The tourism sector is considered as one of the main sectors of the global economy. It plays a very important role in the growth of GDP in developing countries. It fosters job creation in underdeveloped regions, drives technological and innovative integration into local economies, and enhances broader societal welfare. When entrepreneurs start new businesses in tourism field to earn an extra income, in parallel, they create new job opportunities and fields of activities populations residing in rural or peripheral regions, away from major urban centers. Basically, extending tourism in various areas leads to the development of those regions. To explain and clarify it more widely, let's look at some examples. The total amount of money spent in the tourism industry of the United States in 2022 was around 1.2 trillion dollars, and in that year the tourism industry provided employment to 8 million people in United States (U.S. Travel Association, 2023). We can clearly see the importance of tourism in the most developed countries of the world, and we can observe it in the economies of many developed and developing countries. Of course, the COVID-19 pandemic caused turmoil in tourism, tourism incomes decreased instantly, but if we look at numbers after

pandemic, we can clearly see that share of the tourism sector in world economy increases day by day again. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2019, tourism contributed 3% to the global economy. Despite a significant decline during the pandemic, the sector has gradually recovered, returning to its pre-pandemic level of 3% by 2023 (World Bank, 2024). In 2024, participants of international tourism were 1.4 billion people, that is 99% of the pre-COVID (2019) level and 11% more than 2023 **(Figure 1)** (UNWTO, 2025).

Figure 1: Recovery of international tourist arrivals by region in 2024, based on percentage of 2019 levels



Source: UNWTO (2025).

Tourism can be considered as "social healing" for post-conflict regions in many cases. Specifically, government officials and politicians saw tourism as a way to create peace, socio-economic growth, reconciliation and justice in conflict regions. With the help of developing infrastructure and transportation improvements, new tourism initiatives can lead to a post-conflict recovery. We can use some Balkan countries as examples: Focusing on process of ''reconstruction, diversification and re-imaging'' had so many benefits for renovating the tourism infrastructure and on product innovation and upgrading in Slovenia, Croatia and Montenegro. Croatia chose to restore tourism sector with a state-driven policy of economic recovery, as a result, it is aimed to attract foreign investments and foreign currency. Of course, one of the main tasks for post-conflict regions is reassuring tourists that a destination is safe for traveling. We can give signing of the *General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (also known as the *Dayton Agreement* of 1995) as an example for restoring tourists' confidence for region.

Applying post-conflict tourism strategies in Karabakh.

The Karabakh region holds substantial potential to use tourism as a tool for post-conflict recovery, economic revitalization, and the reintegration of local communities. One of the most instructive case studies for Karabakh's post-conflict recovery is Rwanda's transformation from a genocide-affected state into a sustainable tourism destination. Angela Varhela's 2013 thesis, "Sustainable Tourism Development in Post-War Rwanda", offers strategies that align closely with Karabakh's current needs.

Rwanda faced some post-Conflict Challenges like infrastructure, services and ecosystem damage. They initially struggled with destroyed infrastructure, a lack of tourism professionals, and investor hesitancy. Karabakh faces similar challenges today. Moreover, the nearly 30-year occupation severely disrupted Karabakh's natural ecosystem—forests were degraded, water sources were misused or contaminated, and wildlife habitats were neglected or destroyed. In Parallel with this, Rwanda also saw extensive environmental damage during its conflict, including deforestation and loss of biodiversity. Its recovery emphasized environmental protection as a foundation for sustainable tourism.

Some recommendations for Karabakh are:

1. Prioritizing ecological restoration alongside infrastructure development
2. Rehabilitant forests, reintroduce native species, and clean water systems, design tourism zones with environmental assessments and long-term sustainability goals
3. Training local communities in eco-tourism and conservation practices to ensure inclusive development.

Some of the main factors after war are rebuilding image and securing global and securing global recognition. Rebranding is very important to achieve those goals. Just as Rwanda successfully rebranded itself as safe and eco-conscious, Karabakh must now rebuild its image as a peaceful, stable, and attractive destination. Raising international awareness and increasing Western investment are key to this transformation.

To support rebranding in the Karabakh region, some things can be applied in the region, such as:

1. Launching a media strategy focused on Karabakh's unique natural beauty, cultural heritage, and peaceful revival
2. Engaging in tourism diplomacy at global forums to promote partnerships and recognition
3. Encouraging investment from top Western countries in eco-lodges, cultural preservation, and green technology.

Leveraging social media and influencers as tools to promote sustainable image also can be very beneficial. Rwanda's tourism benefited from storytelling that highlighted resilience and nature. Karabakh can attract international interest by inviting social media influencers and travel vloggers to authentically document the region.

Steps can be taken in social media are:

1. Offering support and incentives to influencers to create nature-focused, culturally rich content about Karabakh
2. Establishing a "Visit Karabakh" digital campaign to highlight rebuilt villages, scenic routes, and conservation projects
3. Collaborating with reputable media outlets and travel platforms to include Karabakh in regional tourist itineraries are some of the

The Karabakh region has unique natural resources, using these resources while supporting local communities can be very beneficial for the development of tourism in the area. In Rwanda, initiatives like the Congo–Nile Trail provided eco-friendly experiences that supported local communities. Karabakh's mountainous terrain, forests, and heritage sites offer similar potential.

It is recommended that:

1. Develop hiking trails, eco-parks, and cultural heritage tours that engage residents as guides, hosts, and artisans.
2. Promote agro-tourism and rural homestays to revive village economies.
3. Ensure all tourism development aligns with sustainability standards to protect Karabakh's fragile post-conflict ecosystem.

Karabakh now stands at a critical turning point. Sustainable tourism can be a powerful driver for economic revitalization, environmental recovery, and international recognition. By adapting Rwanda's successful strategies and addressing the ecological damage caused by decades of occupation, Azerbaijan can transform Karabakh into a model of post-conflict sustainability and global engagement.

Tourism potential of the Karabakh region.

The Republic of Azerbaijan has adopted a deliberate and comprehensive policy framework aimed at promoting the growth of the tourism industry. To reach this goal, several programs and acts, new improvements are being implemented by the government. The "Strategic Road Map for the Development of the Specialized Tourism Industry in the Republic of Azerbaijan" adopted by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on 06.12.2016 has led to long term improvement of tourism sector in the whole country.

In 2020 and 2023, Azerbaijan won 2 battles in Karabakh region and freed all the Karabakh region from occupation, and it led to a new era for the development of tourism in Karabakh region. Given the economic potential of the Karabakh region, the efficient utilization of its tourism potential has become a pressing priority to support social integration, improve employment rates, and promote the well-being of its inhabitants. Considering all these factors, tourism sector is being one of the main socio-economic development ways of Karabakh region, but what tourism opportunities does Karabakh region have exactly?

Archaeological tourism.

Archaeological tourism represents one of the most impactful and widely practiced forms of the cultural tourism for the post-conflict regions. It serves to represent and preserve ancient, historical, and religious heritage, including its cultural monuments of the region in purpose of increasing interest in the region and offering new services. Archaeological tourism also shows the importance of protecting and promoting the cultural heritage. It makes people see all the cultural heritage and pay for it. So, archaeological tourism is both economically beneficial and a way to protect and promote all the historic monuments and cultural heritage.

If we look at Karabakh region, the archaeological wealth and historical depth of the region make it highly conducive to becoming a prominent destination for archaeological tourism. It is enough to mention that the ancient Azikh cave, one of the pearls of history, the archaeological monuments located in Tugh village of Khojavend and other areas, in general, the rich cultural heritage and architecture of Karabakh allow the creation of cultural tourism destinations here.

Historical monuments and ancient cultural heritage sites located in Shusha, Kalbajar, Lachin and other areas create conditions for the development of cultural tourism here.

Rural Tourism.

The natural riches like geographical advantages, rich nature, natural landscape diversity, the presence of abundant rivers, healing mineral springs, as well as rich cultural heritage and national culinary samples of Karabakh, nearly all types of tourism activities make the region perfectly available for rural tourism. The rich culture, culinary and craft traditions of people living before the occupation, including carpet weaving, national clothing items, jewelry, making various souvenirs and other experiences makes available for the people to engage in business for tourism, and it leads to flow of tourists to the region. The program called "The Great Return project" that is started and planned to be completed in next years makes available the return of the people who were far away from their homelands for decades, and for the most of them, engaging in their traditional activities for tourism can be a great way to create a business, because the natural potential, charming nature, sweet rivers, natural healing springs and recreation areas, as well as the historical and cultural heritage of the Karabakh region makes it comfortable for the improvement of the rural tourism industry. However, it should be noted that although services are provided for tourists, the services are not at the high levels. Educating local communities on the principles and management of agrotourism, upgrading current facilities, increasing the availability of rural tourism services, and elevating service standards are essential measures that can drive economic growth in remote areas. Moreover, a new state program that aims strategic development between the years of 2022 and 2026 also requires settling "Tourist villages" in the remote areas with the high tourism potential, and the development of this field is being supported through coordinated efforts by the relevant governmental bodies, it means rural tourism will develop rapidly in Azerbaijan, as well as in Karabakh region.

Ecotourism.

Ecotourism is a highly promising field with significant development potential in the Karabakh region. Ecotourism concept firstly used by a Mexican scientist named Hector Ceballos-Lascuria in 1983, is considered as enjoying nature and knowing its value. Since the 1990s, this field has started to develop rapidly in the tourism sector. This field helps to protect the natural environment, and decreases effects that against it, also it is beneficial for the improving the social well-being of the communities using natural resources. By supporting biodiversity preservation, ecotourism also fosters sustainable development and livelihood opportunities within local communities. Despite the serious effect of the COVID-19 pandemic in the tourism sector, and in connection with this, effect on the ecotourism field, this field developed rapidly again after pandemic. 152.5 billion dollars in 2021 and 185.4 billion dollars in 2022, which means an annual increase of 17.5 percent in comparison. In this regard, the growth rate of ecotourism in the international tourism market is predicted to be 14.5 percent for 2022-2027 (IMARC Group, 2023).

Karabakh region is convenient for the development of ecotourism. The colorful landscape cover, the richness of fauna and flora create favorable conditions for the development of ecotourism in these areas. The forest cover covering 22-25 percent of the region makes Khojavand, Khojaly, Shusha, Kalbajar and other areas highly favorable for ecotourism development. For example, the red oak trees present in Hacısamlı forests in Lachin region, hazel forests are widespread in the

valleys of Zulfugarlı, Agdaban and Tutgun rivers in Kalbajar, as well as eastern oak, linden and cypress trees, and the rich Topkhana forest located in Shusha opens wide prospects for ecotourism, also the rich forest cover of Araz, Georgian oak and beech trees, arid forest landscape in Gubadli district are considered unique natural resources of this place. After the liberation of the territories from occupation, the expansion of the Beshitchay reserve, as well as the process of reproduction of rare oriental sycamores and oak trees in Zangilan, further increases the ecotourism potential of the region. In addition, there are about 20 large and small caves in Karabakh and Eastern Zangezur, which are mainly located in Shusha, Khojavand and Kalbajar and Lachin regions. As an example of these caves, we can show Azykh, Taglar, Dashaltı, Zar, Bashlibel, Sadınlar, Baygara, Hochaz, Garanlik and others, which allow the development of cave tourism in the region.

During the occupation years of Karabakh, the rich ecological environment of the region was severely damaged, mineral resources were occupied, water of rivers was polluted, approximately 60,000 hectares of forest were destroyed by deliberate burning. This ecological terror act caused really serious damage to the region, natural vegetation and ground were burnt completely, some animal and plant species which rapidly decreasing in number and had extinction risk were destroyed, so the ecosystem of the region was spoiled. All this ecological terror act started before the occupation, in 1988, an aluminum company called “Kanaker” cut trees in Topkhana forest without permission, and this terror act even continued during Second Karabakh war, until the Karabakh region freed from occupation, and after the Second Karabakh war, extensive recovery efforts are currently underway. This recovery actions are not only will help to ecology of the region, it also will be beneficial for the development of the ecotourism field in the area, also it shows that the government also wants to improve tourism in Karabakh region and make the region one of the main tourist attractions in the Caucasus.

Green energy potential in Karabakh.

While developing tourism in regions, applying “Green Energy” policies is necessary.

A dual-edged role of airports in Karabakh’s tourism development must be examined. While the establishment of three new airports—Fuzuli, Zangilan, and Lachin—in the Karabakh region greatly enhances accessibility and signals progress, their environmental impact cannot be overlooked. These airports, though strategically important for logistics and connectivity, contribute significantly to CO_2 emissions, which may contradict the principles of eco-tourism and discourage environmentally conscious travelers.

To reconcile accessibility with sustainability, it is crucial to invest in alternative, low-carbon transport methods such as electric shuttle buses, rail connections, and cycling infrastructure within and around tourist sites, promote green certifications for transport and tourism services that align with international sustainability standards. integrate carbon offset programs linked to airport operations and encourage visitors to participate voluntarily in funding reforestation or local conservation efforts.

By diversifying and greening transportation options, Karabakh can attract a broader spectrum of tourists, especially those who value climate-conscious travel—and strengthen its image as a forward-thinking, sustainable destination.

According to Soyalp (2024), from nearly 1,000 prospective eco-tourists, found that information about carbon emissions and travel distance significantly reduced interest in environmentally friendly trips—even for short travel windows

Main finding: Tourists with environmental concern were less likely to choose long-distance or high-emission air travel, and carbon emissions influenced their travel decisions, especially among eco-tourists.

According to Xiong et al. (2023), it was examined that 4,938 Chinese cities from 1999–2017. It concluded that opening a new airport increased city-level CO_2 emissions by approximately 4.3%, compared to cities without airport expansion.

After the end of the second Karabagh war, Azerbaijan declared its intention to transform liberated territories of Karabakh and Eastern Zangezur into a "Green Energy Zone". This is both environmentally and economically vital and a politically symbolic strategic vision. Spacious nature isn't influenced by industrial pollution for decades and rich in natural resources, the region provides a unique opportunity to create a sustainable energy model from the ground up.

According to research, the region is especially suitable for renewable energy deployment due to its topographical and climate conditions. The abundance of solar radiation, untouched wind corridors and significant hydro and geothermal potential make Karabakh ideal for solar farms, small hydropower plants and even geothermal-based energy.

As stated by preliminary assessments, the region holds over 4500MW of solar energy potential and up to 550 MW of wind energy capacity, particularly in mountainous areas such as Kalbajar and Lachin where wind speeds an average of 7-8 m/s annually. In addition to this, Karabakh accounts for approximately 25% of Azerbaijan's local water resources, offering substantial opportunities for hydropower generation along rivers like Khakari, Tartar, and Bazarchay. Solar power zones in regions such as Gubadli, Zangilan, and Fuzuli have also been identified as favorable for photovoltaic growth. Furthermore, hot water projects are being improved soon: 3000 m^3/day in Kalbajar and 400 m^3/day in Shusa. (AREA, 2022)

In short, we can easily say that the Karabakh region has potential to become one of the main tourist attractions in Caucasia, and even in Middle East with the factors such as rich biodiversity, numerous historical monuments, and diverse landscapes. However, while improving tourism, "Green Energy" policies must be applied, and we see that Azerbaijani government also make some ongoing changes for this.

Dark tourism in the context of Sustainable Tourism: Potential for applying in Post-conflict Karabakh

Within the broader paradigm of sustainable tourism, which emphasizes enduring economic sustainability, cultural respect, environmental stewardship, and social development, dark tourism emerges as a distinctive yet comparatively underexamined niche with significant potential for contributing to post-conflict reconstruction.

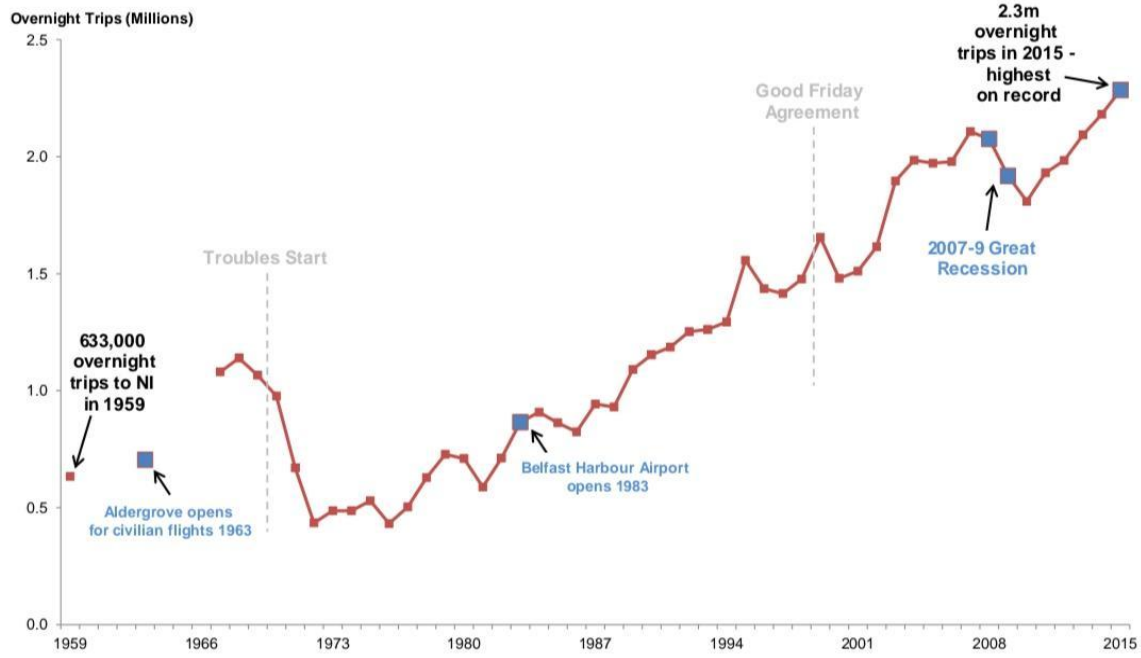
Also known as thana tourism, dark tourism involves travel to locations intrinsically associated with death, conflict, trauma, and suffering. Such locations commonly include battlefields, genocide memorials, decommissioned prisons, natural disaster sites, and regions impacted by armed conflict.

In parallel, Seaton (1996) introduced the term thana tourism—derived from the Greek Thanatos, meaning "death"—to emphasize the psychological and emotional affective motives behind tourists' engagement with sites of mortality and trauma. Collectively, these scholarly contributions have shaped dark tourism as a complex and evolving relationship with memory, morality, pedagogy, and commercialization in contemporary travel.

Northern Ireland provides a distinctive case study in the domain of dark tourism, primarily focusing on sites related to historical conflict and socio-political significance. The period referred to as "The Troubles" (1969–1998) saw sectarian violence that profoundly disrupted the region's tourism sector and its social fabric. During this time, substantial loss of life occurred, and the enduring repercussions of conflict continue to influence society. Tourist arrivals decreased sharply due to safety concerns and military presence, rendering principal urban centers such as Belfast and Derry/Londonderry comparatively inaccessible to visitors. Following peace agreements in the 1990s and notably the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, the tourism sector gradually recovered, developing heritage tourism including visits to murals, peace walls, and museums dedicated to narrating the conflict's complex history.

This trajectory of recovery is visibly reflected in the evolution of overnight tourist visits to Northern Ireland from 1959 to 2015. During the peak of the Troubles in the 1970s, the number of visitors dropped below 0.5 million, due to heightened violence and widespread security concerns. Following the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, a steady increase in visitors' numbers was observed. Overnight visits had more than doubled, reaching 2.3 million in 2015, the highest on record. This upward trend illustrates the positive impact of political stability, improved accessibility, and strategic heritage tourism development on the region's post-conflict recovery and international image (**Figure 2**) (NISRA, 2015).

Figure 2: Annual external overnight trips to Northern Ireland, 1959-2015



Source: NISRA (2015).

Northern Ireland's experience highlights how heritage tourism can support post-conflict recovery and reconciliation, offering useful insights for other regions, including Azerbaijan.

In the Azerbaijan context- particularly within the Karabakh region- the legacy of prolonged armed conflict has left a landscape shaped by both visible destruction and collective remembrance. Integrating dark tourism practices in this, active community involvement, and the preservation of cultural heritage—presents a meaningful strategy for diversifying the country's tourism offerings and advancing the sustainable recovery of war-affected areas. This approach not only enhances public understanding and commemorative engagement but also supports the constructive incorporation of shared trauma into evolving narratives of national identity and reconciliation.

The Karabakh region, emerging from decades of armed conflict and occupation, offers numerous sites where tangible cultural heritage intersects with collective trauma, rendering them particularly within the framework of ethically constructed dark tourism. Prominent examples include the vandalized yet culturally iconic House of Khurshidbanu Natavan, the desecrated Aghdam Mosque—frequently referred to as the "ghost mosque" due to its spectral presence amid ruins—the plundered collections of Shusha museums, and the war-scarred estate of Panahali Khan in Aghdam. These sites collectively embody both the cultural patrimony of the region and the destructive legacy of warfare.

One of the most evocative and emotionally charged examples is the former Shusha prison, where a mass grave contains the remains of 17 Azerbaijani civilians and prisoners of war- subjected to severe torture and execution- was uncovered following the restoration of Azerbaijani control. Although the prison's exterior structure remains largely intact, its interior's dilapidated condition powerfully conveys the memory of suffering and atrocity.

For some tourists, conflict regions can be seen as ''a new post-conflict symbolic landscape", those areas will remain painful memories for many communities. In such cases, involving diverse groups in identifying and interpreting dissonant or contested heritage plays a crucial role in the transitional justice process. This factor must be used correctly, because failure to reach such accommodation can create new divisions, and it can lead tourism to be catalyst for further intercommunity rivalry and animosity stemming from old wounds instead of becoming a vehicle to reconciliation. The careful preservation and ethically sensitive presentation of these sites not only create meaningful avenues for education and commemoration but also play a vital role in advancing inclusive heritage tourism. In doing so, they serve as essential elements in the wider post-conflict recovery process—enabling the recognition of collective trauma, enhancing historical consciousness, and supporting the construction of a contemplative and unifying national narrative.

Rebranding Karabakh through post-conflict tourism.

After violent conflicts, regions often struggle with the dual challenge of healing collective trauma and rebuilding shattered economies. Tourism, especially in post-conflict zones, can play a pivotal role in both. Drawing from global experiences, the concept of Phoenix tourism refers to a distinct stage in the process of tourism revival in post-conflict societies, where tourism is not only as a tool for economic recovery, but also as a medium for emotional healing, reconciliation, and social transformation. Just like the mythical phoenix that rises from its ashes, Phoenix tourism symbolizes the rebirth of a war-torn region through carefully managed and community-centered tourism development. By embracing the Phoenix tourism model, Karabakh can position itself as a post-conflict destination of learning, renewal, and sustainable peace, providing both domestic and

international tourists with a profoundly significant and transformative experience. Through this lens, tourism becomes not just a commercial endeavor, but a process of collective healing that helps restore both the land and the lives it holds. The scars of war—depopulated settlements, destroyed heritage sites, and degraded landscapes—should not be disregarded or removed, instead, they ought to be integrated into the region's tourism narrative. This approach allows Karabakh to present a story of resilience and revival, shifting its image from a war zone to a region of peacebuilding and ecological restoration.

Sri Lanka exemplifies phoenix tourism, where the tourism sector rebounded following extended periods of conflict and crisis. After the conclusion of the 30-year civil war between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in 2009, international tourist arrivals increased significantly, signaling the successful recovery of the tourism industry. This recovery was bolstered by the government's post-crisis initiatives, including the 2011 Tourism Development Strategy, enchantments in infrastructure, simplified procedures for investments and licensing, as well as high-profile international promotional events like Visit Sri Lanka Year and the Cricket World Cup. These efforts closely align with the phoenix tourism model, characterized by planned restoration and strategic rebranding after destruction. Despite economic growth, several challenges emerged. Research has pointed to concerns about the uneven distribution of tourism benefits, lack of transparency, and limited protection of human rights. Furthermore, sectors such as agriculture and fishing faced challenges as tourism gained priority.

Therefore, the Sri Lankan case highlights that phoenix tourism must transcend beyond economic revival. Long-term sustainability depends on fair governance, ethical policy-making, and social responsibility. Without these components, recovery efforts risk reinforcing pre-existing disparities rather than alleviating them.

While Sri Lanka illustrates the swift restoration of tourism infrastructure in the aftermath of conflict, in the case of Azerbaijan— especially in the Karabakh region—is presently concentrating on comprehensive, long-term planning aimed at establishing integrated tourism routes that combine ecological, historical, and cultural components.

Following the liberation of the Karabakh region, the creation of multi-functional tourism routes has emerged as a central element of post-conflict tourism planning. These routes aim to merge ecotourism, cultural and historical heritage, and outdoor recreation, positioning them as key instruments for fostering both domestic and international tourism growth.

Numerous ecotourism-focused routes have been envisioned across the liberated territories, each offering a distinct blend of heritage sites, natural monuments, and opportunities for nature-based and adventure tourism. The Ahmedbeyli–Fuzuli–Hadrut–Tugh–Azykh route, for instance, presents more than 20 culturally significant landmarks, along with scenic areas ideal for hiking and speleotourism. Likewise, the Ahmedbeyli–Dashaltı–Shusha route provides access to Shusha's rich architectural richness and allows for activities such as paragliding and cultural sightseeing.

In the northern territories, the Goygol–Toghana–Kalbajar–Zulfugarli –Istisu corridor illustrates eco-health tourism potential, thanks to its combination of natural monuments, mineral-rich hot springs, and locally produced goods like honey and river fish. Adventure ecotourism activities like rafting, photo safaris, and mountaineering are also supported in this area.

Moreover, the Guzanli–Aghdam–Garvand–Shahbulag–Khachin Reservoir route showcases Aghdam's cultural and natural assets, featuring archaeological ruins, panoramic viewpoints, and

religious architecture. With increasing accessibility via the Baku-Aghdam bus corridor, this route holds promise for near-term tourism destinations.

Overall, these proposed routes represent a thoughtful and integrated vision for sustainable tourism development in post-conflict Karabakh, integrating diverse tourism forms—ecotourism, cultural heritage, adventure tourism—into a comprehensive framework that contributes to both regional recovery and diversification of Azerbaijan's broader tourism portfolio.

Conclusion.

This paper analyzes how tourism can be used as a tool for post-conflict recovery in Karabakh region in Azerbaijan, with comparing from other post-conflict regions and analyzing data and can be beneficial for government offices and investors. The importance of tourism sector in development and global economy is undeniable, and day by day, the role of tourism sector in global economy increases. Despite the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourism, this sector recovered rapidly, and it has almost reached levels before the pandemic. Tourism also can be very beneficial for post-conflict recovery, we can see it with provided examples from countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina, Rwanda, Sri Lanka etc. Rich resources and potential of the Karabakh region make it available to improve in tourism fields like ecotourism, rural tourism, archaeological tourism etc. With the help of tourism, Karabakh can recover and develop after war. The Azerbaijani government has already initiated numerous development and reconstruction efforts in the region. One of the main tourism fields that can be developed in post-conflict Karabakh is dark tourism. It is basically a tourism type that shows tourists the damage of war and occupation in the region, and effective use of it can be very beneficial. "Green energy" policies also play a significant role in development of tourism, because sometimes tourists prefer transportation methods with less carbon emission. All these factors show us tourism can become a very useful method for post-conflict recovery of Karabakh, also the region can become one of the main tourist attractions in Caucasus, and even in Middle East.

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