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ECOTOURISM AND MEDICAL TOURISM PERSPECTIVES IN THE EAST ZANGEZUR REGION

Abstract

The abundance of natural resources required for development of tourism sector demonstrates that Azerbaijan's regions have the exact ability to play a crucial role in environmental protection and socio-cultural development, as well as driving economic growth through ecotourism and medical tourism. Recently liberated Karabakh region's distinctive worth is examined primarily in terms of Azerbaijan's ecotourism and medical tourism potential. On the basis of available literature, a research was undertaken on the current situation of ecotourism and medical tourism in the East Zangezur region, the territory's historical significance, and especially its future potential. The medicinal potential of the region, as well as mineral springs, a diverse flora and fauna, and other natural features, are well recognized and should be investigated. The vast potential of the for the development of ecotourism and medical tourism has a significance impact in order to determine both this sector's itself and its' implication on the economy of Azerbaijan.

Key words: *tourism, ecotourism, medical tourism, Azerbaijan.*

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Şərqi Zəngəzur regionunda ekoturizm və tibbi turizmin perspektivləri

Xülasə

Turizm sektorunun inkişafı üçün tələb olunan təbii sərvətlərin bolluğu onu göstərir ki, Azərbaycanın regionları ətraf mühitin mühafizəsi və sosial-mədəni inkişafda həlledici rol oynamaq, o cümlədən ekoturizm və müalicə turizmi vasitəsilə iqtisadi artıma təkan vermək üçün geniş imkanlara malikdir. Bu yaxınlarda işğaldan azad edilmiş Qarabağ bölgəsinin özünəməxsus dəyəri ilk növbədə Azərbaycanın ekoturizm və müalicəvi turizm potensialı baxımından nəzərə çarpmaqdadır. Mövcud ədəbiyyat əsasında Şərqi Zəngəzur regionunda ekoturizm və müalicə turizminin hazırki vəziyyəti, bölgənin tarixi əhəmiyyəti, xüsusən də gələcək potensialı ilə bağlı araşdırma regionun potensialının, o cümlədən mineral bulaqlar, müxtəlif flora və faunas, həmçinin digər təbii xüsusiyyətlərinin önəmini göstərir. Ekoturizmin və müalicəvi turizmin inkişafı üçün böyük potensialın sayəsində həm bu sahənin, həm də Azərbaycan iqtisadiyyatına təsirinin müəyyən edilməsindəki təsirinin əhəmiyyətini göstərir.

Açar sözlər: *turizm, ekoturizm, müalicəvi turizm, Azərbaycan*

Introduction

Medical tourism differs in terms of meaning in the past and present. In the past, only the rich people traveled to developed countries for treatment, today the middle class prefers developing countries for low-cost and high-quality treatment. Although health tourism has been important for centuries, the globalizing world has become synonymous with the development of information technology and mass culture with the slogan "as old as prehistory and as current as tomorrow". In the last century, health tourism has become popular within the competitive conditions in the sector. Countries that want to take place in the international market are also competing to compete. Health tourism has recently become a very important phenomenon due to its economic return. Today, many patients travel for health tourism to find treatment opportunities. Nowadays, people want to have different experiences besides being able to travel comfortably. Reasons such as long waiting times in their own countries, out of coverage of insurance, high prices have pushed people to go to different countries. In the 90s, when ecotourism and medical tourism began to be expressed more frequently, people whose education level increased and who reached a certain level of economic prosperity became more sensitive to the environment and

health. However, the high environmental awareness and protectionist approach to nature significantly increased the demand for ecotourism . Ecotourism, with its approach that protects the environment and supports conservation, is seen as a development strategy used to generate income for the local people. Ecotourism supports economic development by ensuring the sustainable use of protected areas, creating employment for local people, and using the income obtained in the same place (Jalani, 2012:78). Due to the favorable climate and terrain of Karabakh, different types of tourism can be developed, especially ecotourism and medical tourism. The importance of ecotourism and medical tourism in the economy and what needs to be done to develop this sector was revealed. It emerged that the sustainable development of tourism in the region is inextricably linked to its potential, such as climatic conditions, topography, minerals, and the proportion of forest land.

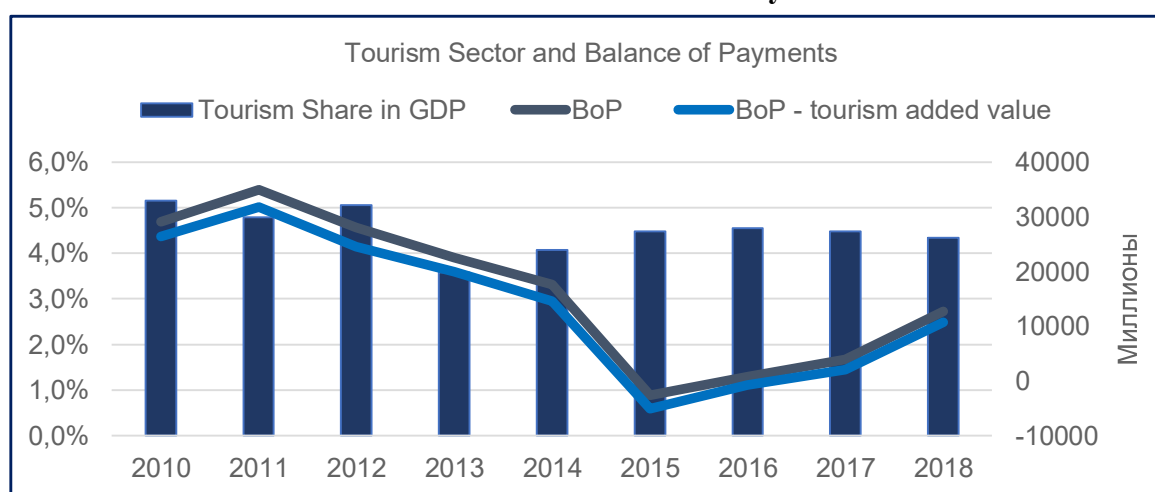
Global tendency and prospects for the development of ecotourism and medical tourism

As globalization continues, some known destinations around the world become popular tourism areas, while others are less known and remain undeveloped (Dologlou and Katsoni, 2016:89). Popular areas are mostly evaluated for mass tourism, unknown or less known places are gaining new value. Popular areas are mostly evaluated for mass tourism, unknown or less known places are gaining new value. There are differences from country to country, social and cultural structure, race and gender about the experiences of tourists or what they want to experience, and this situation may vary over time. In parallel with the economic, political, and technological developments in the world, the preferences of individuals are also changing significantly. These changes are also observed in the tourism sector and the participation of individuals in mass tourism is decreasing compared to the past, and their orientation towards environmentally sensitive tourism activities intertwined with nature is increasing (Cool, 2006:56). In particular, the tendency of third world countries to alternative tourism has started to reduce mass tourism, which has a negative socio-cultural and environmental impact, and has started to be a factor in directing the people of developed countries to alternative tourism activities.

Historical and socio-economic factors affecting the development of ecotourism and medical tourism in the East Zangezur region

When the historical process of tourism activities of Azerbaijan is examined, it is seen that there are many changes. Especially due to the occupation of Karabakh by Armenia and the economic bottlenecks and socio-economic problems experienced in the first years of the country's independence, there were some negative fluctuations in tourism activities and the number of tourists. The state of war in the country has an important role in these negative situations. decision of Heydar Aliyev on August 27, 2002, on the "Development of Tourism in the Republic of Azerbaijan 2002-2005", the state program came into force, the investments in the development of tourism were spent on important places, the improvement of roads and infrastructure, etc. A certain amount of progress has been made in the sector (Musayev, 2017:89).

Tourism Sector and Balance of Payments



Source: compiled by the author based on the data from Azerbaijan Statistical Information Service (https://www.azstat.org/portal/tblInfo/TblInfoList.do;JSESSIONID=BD12FB0F4E5AB13A1DF988BF6BCD66AB#994_024)

As it can be discerned from the chart above, the share of tourism in the total output is modest and ranges from 3% to 5% throughout the histogram.

The chart above illustrates the merits of tourism industry in mitigating the balance of payment deficits and bolstering up the balance of payment surpluses. Two parallel lines represent two variables, namely balance of payment (the upper line) and balance of payment without the gross output of tourism industry.

Certain regions of the Karabakh khanate were covered with dense forests and fertile gardens, and most of them were valuable and rare trees. Poplar, pine, maple, oak, linden, and other species of trees were widespread. Pear, cornel, and crab apple trees were also found in the forests. The population used the forests both for construction and for fuel. (Abdullayev, 2005: 54)

Kalbajar and Lachin regions, in general, are regions with great ecotourism and medical tourism potential in the Karabakh region. The charming nature of the Kalbajar region, which is part of the Kalbajar-Lachin economic region, makes it an ideal place for winter and health tourism, in addition to traditional tourism, and also allows for its development. According to the flora of the region, it is almost dominated by deciduous forests, beech, oak, and hornbeam, and the fauna is dominated by species such as roe deer, mountain goat, brown bear, eagle, squirrel. Before the occupation by the Armenians, there were two huge sanatoriums in the Istisu settlement of Kalbajar. On average, more than 60,000 people were treated and rested each year. Istisu mineral water in Kalbajar was used to treat both external skin and other defects, as well as complications and problems in internal organs. The existing relief here and the construction of wings and similar facilities create conditions for the organization of walks. (Abbasov, 2013:45)

Assessment of the potential development resources of ecotourism and medical tourism of the East Zangezur region

Even people from different parts of the country came here for rest and treatment long before the Soviet Union came to power, and famous all-union health resorts and recreation centers were built thereafter. During the 30 years of occupation, the Armenian invaders methodically destroyed these objects. Restoration, rebuilding and creating new, even better and more modern ones is the paramount task for the regeneration of the rich tourism potential of the liberated territories.

Thermal Tourism is a type of medical tourism in which patients can take advantage of geothermal springs for their health as well as relaxation in attractive locations. The presence of many mineral waters in the region will allow the development of this type of tourism. New hospitals and sanatoriums need to be built for rehabilitation, which will attract not only citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan but also foreign tourists.

The strategic roadmap of tourism industry of Azerbaijan has a deliberate focus on the development of both ecotourism and medical tourism. In the strategic roadmap, it is stated that the Ministry of Culture and Tourism will collaborate with Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources to review the options available for the further development of the ecotourism in Azerbaijan and utilize its full potential. In the strategic roadmap of tourism of Azerbaijan, the advantages of health and eco-tourism, which will help to develop tourism in the region, are explored. With these types of tourism, a large number of tourists can be attracted. Large sanatoriums can be opened where people will rest and be treated. And for nature lovers and those who prefer eco-friendly products, then ecotourism will be ideal. People will be able to rest, but at the same time not to harm the environment. All tourists will find something to their liking.

In 1974, the Bashitchay State Reserve was formed in the Zangilan district. It covered 100 hectares and was primarily responsible for protecting rare plane trees. There are other trees and plants such as the Caucasus Mountain, mountain almond, and long-leaved oak, in addition to plane trees. The reserve also has animals including the wild cat, white hedgehog, henna partridge, and striped kaftar. The natural regeneration and growth of plane trees thrive under these climatic circumstances. Gubadli State Reserve was formed in 1969 in the districts of Lachin and Gubadli. The reserve's goal is to safeguard the wildlife of these places, particularly roe deer, wild boar, pheasant, and other animals and birds, which span 20,000 hectares in the northern part of Gubadli region and the southern portion of Lachin region. (<http://eco.gov.az/index.php?pg=102>)

The airports in Lachin and Zangilan, which are set to be developed in the near future, will be crucial for our country. These airports, according to experts, are built to take advantage of tourism prospects and serve as logistical hubs. Lachin airport, in particular, will be Azerbaijan's tallest airport. The airports in Lachin and Zangilan that will be developed are strategically important. The airport at Lachin, in particular, will be the country's highest. There is a tentative plan to build an airport in Lachin, and the land has been set aside for it. The significance of this location is that this airport will allow air travel not only to Lachin, but also to the Kalbajar region's land. The airport in Zangilan will not only contribute to the growth of tourism, but will also function as a major international logistics hub. The development of the Lachin airport would contribute the Lachin-Kalbajar highway network.

Agriculture, particularly cattle, was the backbone of the region's economy. Even after the occupation, these lands can become one of the region's most important economic growth sectors by establishing sheep, cattle, and beehive farms. At the same time, it is critical to make the most of agriculture's agricultural and crop potential. Because the Parity Index has always been positive for Lachin, it provides a wide foundation for realizing this potential. Lachin, like Kalbajar, contains a diverse range of minerals, including mercury, sawdust, face stone, building stone, clay, sand-gravel, pumice, vermiculite, volcanic ash, agate, and jade, which boosts the region's economic potential, according to the economist. Because both regions are close together, a single development may be used in the post-production processing of resources, increasing profitability of the region. (13)

Conclusion

In the periods when tourism first started to develop, the tourism sector was handled with its economic development and employment-providing benefits. This situation has created negative social, environmental, and cultural effects over time. With the accommodation establishments, infrastructure services and other social facilities built for the visitors, the local people have been displaced and their lifestyles have changed. In addition, with the increase in the number of tourists, natural life was negatively affected and threatened animal life. The sustainability of the tourism sector can only be achieved by preserving and using the historical, natural and cultural values specific to the regional and local areas that are the source of tourism. With the importance of tourism, environmental relations and health awareness of world population, the sustainability discussions brought the concept of ecotourism and medical tourism to the agenda and became popular. Due to the favorable climate and terrain of Karabakh, different types of tourism can be developed, especially ecotourism and medical tourism. The importance of ecotourism and medical tourism in the economy and what needs to be done to develop this sector was revealed. It emerged that the sustainable development of tourism in the region is inextricably linked to its potential, such as climatic conditions, topography, minerals, and the proportion of forest land.

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