

## THE ROLE OF TOURISM IN SOCIOECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF MOUNTAIN RURAL AREAS OF AZERBAIJAN (ON THE EXAMPLE OF GUBA AND GUSAR DISTRICTS)

Z.T.Imrani, N.R.Jafarova

*Institute of Geography named after acad. H.A.Aliyev of ANAS,  
AZ1148, Baku, Azerbaijan*

zaur\_imrani@mail.ru

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### Abstract

The provision of material and social needs of the population in the mountain rural areas is mainly satisfied at the expense of local natural resources and available opportunities. Use of tourism and recreational resources serve as one of the main sources of employment for mountain regions of developed countries. Because of the structural constraints in production, difficulties in providing employment in the mountainous regions, combined with the unfavorable demographic processes, aggravates the situation. One of the priority directions to eliminate these problems is the creation of tourism facilities using local opportunities: climatic conditions, landscapes, forest resources, mineral and thermal waters of therapeutic value etc. This study was carried out with considering the laws of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the state programs on development, national statistics, fund materials collected in various research institutions, relevant literature, and results of other conducted researches, and through historical and comparative analysis, complex approach, statistical, mathematical and cartographic methods, and GIS technologies.

### Keywords:

Guba

Gusar

natural tourism resources

tourism potential

tourism infrastructure

mountain villages

socioeconomic development

### 1. Introduction.

In modern conditions, it is important to identify the economic development potential of countries and regions, to implement a systematic and coherent set of measures. Thus, there is a need for diversification of the economic structure of the country, which has great natural and human potential, and is related to the formation of complex modern economic sectors and regions. The tourism industry is considered one of the best ways to meet this need. Azerbaijan is one of attractive countries in the world in terms of tourism. Natural wealth, diversity of cultural and historical monuments, ethnic diversity, multiculturalism and other advantages are influential factors in the development of tourism industry. However, tourist destinations and tourist areas are concentrated in Baku, Ganja, Nakhchivan, Naftalan and other regions and large cities. Mountain villages are far behind in this regard.

Geographers have found that 78% of the country is suitable for settlement; while in mountainous areas this figure is 1.5 times lower (52.9%) [1]. The stated situation is reflected both in the range of settlements and the creation of tourism businesses.

As for 2018, tourism industry accounted for 2.2% of GDP in Azerbaijan [3]. This indicator was 1.0% in 2010. The reason for the increase was the announcement of 2011 as the Year of Tourism. The

same year \$ 828 million was invested in the tourism, which resulted in rapid development of this industry. New hotels were built in a short time, and the number of tourists visiting the country increased by 2.5 times.

The development of tourism is not limited to its high-income role. It plays an important role in addressing social problems, reducing and eliminating unemployment, economic and social development of the regions, as well as improving living standards. Tourism, with a large labor force, is not only a powerful tool in preventing migration in the regions, especially in remote mountain villages, but also opens up great opportunities for small and medium-sized businesses [11]. One of the prerequisites for increasing income from tourism services is the attraction of both domestic and foreign investments in this field, because the investment has a positive impact on the development of tourism sector, as well as the livelihoods and economic activities of the local population.

Some part of revenues from the oil sector in Azerbaijan is directed to the non-oil sector. In 2018, investment in the economy of Azerbaijan was US \$ 15.3 billion or 53.8% of all foreign investments. Analysis of the structure of foreign investments shows that in 2018, only 11.7% of total funds were allocated to the non-oil sector, where

tourism is the leading sector [3]. The total investment in tourism in 2018 was \$ 135.1 million. Comparison with 2012 year indicates to a decrease as much as more than 5.5 times. However, the share of value added in tourism within the country's GDP increased by 0.7% to 4.3% [5].

All the above mentioned statistics are of a general nature, and the role of tourism resources in the socio-economic development of mountainous rural areas is underestimated. In order to overcome this problem, new tourist routes have been established in the country and their activities have already begun. These routes are mainly based on tourism facilities of national importance. And there are not local tourist routes that would fully reflect the country's historical, cultural and natural monuments. The creation of such tourist routes can play an important role in the employment of the people living in the regions. In addition to the role of guide, local people can help tourists to meet their daily food needs and stay at night as guests.

## 2. Materials and methods.

Materials used in this research consist of laws of the Republic of Azerbaijan, decrees signed by the President of Azerbaijan, State Programs, publications issued by the State Statistical Committee, fund materials of the Institute of Geography of Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences and other institutions, scientific works, methodical instructions etc.

In the article, historical and comparative analysis, system approach, statistical and mathematical approaches, cartographic (GIS technologies) methods were used.

## 3. Analysis and discussion.

Guba and Gusar administrative districts are located in the northeast of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The territory of Guba administrative district is 2.61 thousand km<sup>2</sup>, and its population is 170.0 thousand people. The area of Gusar is 1.50 thousand km<sup>2</sup>, where the population number is 97.2 thousand people. These two districts together make up 4.7% of the country's territory and 2.7% of the country's population. The population density is 65 people per km<sup>2</sup>. The natural increase is 9.2-9.4 per thousand people, which is higher than the national average [8.9]. In Guba, 24.89% of the population lives in cities, 75.11% in rural areas, while in Gusar they are 21.08% and 78.92% respectively. The distance between the capital Baku and them is 168-180 km [4]. The proximity of these districts to the city of Baku as well as the climatic condition creates great opportunities for the development of tourism industry here. A tourist, first of all, is interested in the

climate of the venue, which influences the organization of leisure time more effectively depending on the type of leisure.

The territories of Guba and Gusar are characterized by the prevalence of moderate warm climate with approximately equal distributed precipitations, and cold climatic conditions of dry winter.

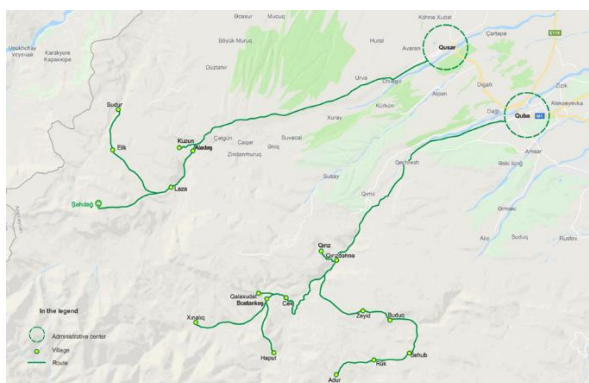
Due to the complex relief structure of the area, the climatic elements vary considerably from north-east to south-west. The average annual temperature here fluctuates between 0-10°C, 2-14°C in January, and between 5-23°C in July.

In the warmer seasons, the absolute maximum air temperature rises to 30-40°, while in the colder months, the absolute minimum air temperature comes down to – 30°C. The average wind speed is 1-2 m/s. Western and eastern winds blow on the territory. The annual number of strong windy days (over 15 m/s.) does not exceed 6 [8]. The climate of the region, in addition to its significant advantages for the tourism industry, can also be associated with some problems. Thus, natural disasters caused by climate change create serious obstacles to the activities of the tourism industry. Floods, landslides, heavy rains and hails in the Guba and Gusar districts are good example.

Climate is one of the important conditions for the development of tourism industry. In this regard, tourists who choose both short-term and long-term rest prefer the days and areas with most suitable weather [10]. Besides the climatic parameters of Guba and Gusar districts, because of their natural richness, they also have ancient settlements, historical and cultural monuments in the area, which makes it ideal for tours. Natural monuments in Guba include Balbulaq, Gizbanovsha, Gachrash, Tangaalti valley, Afurja waterfall, Pirbanovsha waterfall, as well as Salavat, Shahdag, Gizilgaya, Laza waterfall, Suvar waterfall, Shahnabal waterfall in Gusar region. Different ethnic groups live here: representatives of the Shahdag national ethnic group, a unique ethnic group of Khinalig, budugs, jeks, grizs, haputs and other minorities. According to this approach, Khinalig, Budug, Griz, Laza, Sudur, Jek, Haput and other rural areas are suitable for ethnographic, environmental and religious tourism. In the near future, the organization of tourism towards these villages will turn them into important tourism destinations. This, in turn, will play a positive role in the socio-economic development of them.

Khinalig is one of the most ancient villages with over 4000 years old. This village is located 65 km south-west from Guba, 225 km from Baku, and 2300 m above sea level. The village of Khinalig is

surrounded by Tufan Mount from the north, northeast and west, Khinalig Peak (“Gibla” or “Yani Gibla” Mount) in the south and Gudyalchay valley in the south-east. The village has 1972 inhabitants. The ethnic group, which resides here, deserves attention due to speaking in a language that has no analogues in the world. The rarest sight in Khinalig is the structure of houses. The houses here have been built upon the stairs, and the roof of one house plays a role of courtyard for another house, located above it. In addition, a fortress wall and towers have been built in Khinalig against attacks of nomadic tribes. There is a fire-worshippers temple in the tower. The Khinalig people were fire-worshippers in the past, and later were converted to Islam. Khinalig is a place where religious beliefs are high. There are 10 mosques in Khinalig. The oldest mosque is “Juma Masjid” [Friday Mosque]. The Juma Mosque, built in the 12th century, is known as the Abu Muslim Mosque. In the oldest part of the village, a Tower was built in the 7th century in the place of the Zoroastrian fire temple. This temple is visited during Muslim religious holidays only [12].



**Figure 1. Mountain villages of Guba and Gusar districts**

Located 5 to 6 km from the Khinalig village, near the Golden Rock, the area where the natural gas is called the “Ja yuvr jiga” (Fire place) is one of the natural temples of the local population. There is a water sacred hearth called “Girxh Abdal” [40 Abdal], located 2 km from Khinalig village. “Forty Abdal” with several sources of water under the big rock and drops of water from the rock were turned into of water cult sanctuary [13]. Apart from this, the water of spring Alkhas, Pir Jomerd monument, “Jabbar baba”, “Khidir Nabi”, “Gulle” sanctuaries are considered sacred places. There is also a historical and ethnographic museum in Khinalig which is very important as a tourist destination. It is possible to organize ethnographic, religious, cultural and ecotourism tours to Khinalig village.

*The tourist flow to Khinalig village is very high in summer.* The majority of tourists are foreigners.

Tourists from Russia, the UAE, Turkey, the United States of America and China are also among them. In addition to the ancient nature of the territory, the peaks of Bazarduzu, Heydar Aliyev, İlham Aliyev, Chingiz Mustafayev attract tourists as well, often visited by mountaineers.

Budug village is situated 38 km south-west of Guba, on the slope of the Greater Caucasus, on the left bank of Garachay, at an altitude of 1800 m above sea level. The village was founded in times of the Caucasus Albania. The oikonym Budug is given to this village by its neighboring ethnic groups. The people of the village call themselves “budad” [14].

The ethnic composition of the rural population is comprised of “budugs” as Shahdag national ethnic group [2]. By the beginning of the 20th century, the population of the Budug village was as much as 2500-3000 inhabitants, whereas today there are only 280 residents live there. The reason for the decline was due to socioeconomic conditions. At present, vast majority of budug population lives in big cities of Azerbaijan. The main occupation of the rural population is cattle-breeding and agriculture.

The advantages of the Budug village are that it has a long history and is rich in caves. These include clay milk pipes from the ancient village from Gazmalar to Budug, the “Sevens” Tower, in the opposite direction of Garachay River, a “Dakhma” or “Silent Tower” on a large rocky cliff which are examples of the Zoroastrian temple. One of the numerous caves around Budug village is located in the inaccessible cliffs of the Garachay valley, 10 km off the village. In ancient times, people in the cave were hiding their animals from sudden attacks of invaders. Inside the cave there is also a holy place called “Pir banovsha”, Gulkhana carst cave, Gasha cave [hand made], and caves in the mountains Gulkhana and Embere. Here, along with ethnographic and cultural-heritage tourism, it is possible also to develop speleotourism.

Girzdahna has been historically the area of Griz population. This village is located in the south-west of Guba. The Griz people are considered to be as aboriginal people from ancient Albanian tribes. Some historical sources state that the Griz people were Oghuz Turks. There are 45 houses in Girzdahna village. The main occupation of the population is animal breeding. Women weave beautiful carpets and socks, while men sew sheepskin coats [9]. The settlement was formed as a result of the migration of families from Griz village headed by a man named Hajikhan. The village’s former name



was Hajikhan Dahna [2]. The remains of the ancient Griz village are preserved in the wood, at the foot of large cliffs, 6 km from the modern settlement. The village is very small. Residents speak the Azerbaijani language, although they remember their ethnic dialect. In ancient times, the villages of Griz and Grizdahna were associated with the “Call of stones”. These mountains are called “good” and “bad” stones. “Good and “bad” news” messages were sent by campfire.

Old traditions are partially preserved. The technical condition of the road to the village are not satisfactory. At the beginning of the road, the natural statue created by the passage of the river Gudyalchay through the rock reaches [Minaret] 30-35 m in length, 4-5 in width, and 3-4 m in height. It is thought to have originated in the 4th century as a result of tectonic processes and erosion. The Minaret also acts as a natural bridge at a height of 10-15 m. The tourist attractions of the village can be seen as examples of Mastargah waterfall, Giriz waterfall, Gurgur waterfall as well as naturel “Buzhana” glacier in the forest.

Haput is another village in Guba districts. The Haputs of the Shahdag ethnic group say their ancestors came from a city called Hama during the Arab invasion [G. Geybullayev, 1994]. They have

native haput language. There are 90 houses in this village, but only 25 homes are inhabited by families. The population number is about 505. Population was engaged in farming until 1950, and later livestock farms were established and the population began to work in livestock farms until modern times. The population is engaged in cattle breeding using winter and summer conditions, too.

Haput village is surrounded by mountains and approximately at 2000 m above sea level. Opposite the village there is a Tayduz mountain pasture, at the right there is Chiye pasture, and to upper there are Garabulag, Tente, Patan and Gabristanlig pastures. Gurbulag pasture is located in the upper part of the village. To the west of the village of Haput, there is a mountain called “Shikhmammad baba” (grandfather) at an altitude of 3323 m. This mountain is also known as the Gibla Mountain of The Haputs. In addition, the village has a tomb of Babadilim tomb, a sanctuary and an ancient cemetery. Many of the graves are in a dilapidated state due to landslide [16]. Aghchay River, the left arm of Gudyalchay River runs nearby the village. This area having beautiful nature, and is a great place for lovers of eco-tourism.



**The way to Grizdahna village**



**The way to Jek village**



**A place between the two mountains**



**Eol relief form**



**Gusar-Laza new highway**



**Guzun village**



**Laza village**



**Khinalig village**

Jek village is a historic area of one of the Shahdag peoples. This village is located on the side ridge of the Greater Caucasus, 43 km south-west of Guba, 1643 m above sea level, on the coast of Gudyalchay River [6]. The village's population number currently is 328. In 1886, there were 7767 inhabitants here [15]. Livestock, agriculture and weaving have been the main occupation of the villagers who have historically moved. The men were mainly engaged in sheep breeding and women making various articles of wool-carpets, palaz, rugs, socks, shawls.

An ancient settlement and one kurgan [kukash or Jek Kurgan] have been discovered in the Jek village. Archaeologists believe that these finding is dated to the Bronze Age [III –II millennium BC]. There are up to 15 caves in the area where the caves are located, which is also likely to be the site of ancient people [17]. In addition, there are more than 25 pilgrimages in the village, including the “Atashgah” Mosque, which features traces of Fire-worshippers and the Mosque “Abu Muslim” which has more than 1000 years old. It is possible to develop historical, ethnographic and rural tourism here.

Kuzun village is located on the banks of the Gusar River, in the foothills, at an altitude of 1300 m above sea level. The village is home to 847 people. Their main occupations are sheep breeding and farming. The settlement called Aladash is also known as Kuzun village. The sights of the village of Kuzun include Laza fall, rare Pine trees listed in the Red Book, an ancient cemetery, and the places of pilgrimage of Bibiheybat and Seyid Baba, as well as Kuzun village mosque. The library and club of the village were collapsed during the torrential rains in 2016. The Kuzun-Sudur road [15 km] is in poor condition. People moves by foot.

Laza village was built in the northeast of the Greater Caucasus, at the “Shah Pasture” foothills of the Shahdag Mount. There are numerous waterfalls around the village of Laza. These waterfalls make the territory more beautiful. During the winter months, these waterfalls freeze and enable development of winter tourism and extreme sports. This village is home to 160 people. However, only 60 of them live in the village permanently. Their main occupations are poultry, large and small horned livestock. The local population speaks Lezgi language, Azerbaijani and partly Russian. The interesting areas of the village include the Double Waterfall, Burbur waterfall, Suvar waterfall; the Albanian Church, the two-story graves, the ancient fortress and cemetery, and remains of an existing

settlement. It is possible to develop cognitive tourism and ecotourism here.

#### 4. Conclusion.

1. Khinaliq, Budug, Grizdahna, Haput, Jek, Kuzun and Laza mountain villages of the Guba and Gusar districts are considered to be the areas that attract tourists because of their charming nature and ethnic origin. There are great potential for the development of religious, ethnographic, ecological, adventure and extreme tourism. It may also play a significant role in generating employment for local population.

2. The main occupation of the rural population is cattle breeding and part-time farming. With the development of the region, local people will have the opportunity to sell their products at the door. This factor must serve as source of income and therefore contribute to preventing of undesirable migration from mountain villages. As the statistics shows, in recent years, the populations of above villages have declined considerably because of migration to other areas, including the cities of Baku and Sumgait.

3. In order to develop the region, new roads must be built, some areas have to be reconstructed. This concerns works on Guba-Khinalig highway, health, education and cultural-educational facilities have to be upgraded with leading attributes of social infrastructure. Establishment of hostel in the region should begin. The types of tourism should be developed that most tourists are interested in.

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**РОЛЬ ТУРИЗМА В СОЦИАЛЬНО-  
ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКОМ РАЗВИТИИ ГОРНО  
СЕЛЬСКИХ ЗОН АЗЕРБАЙДЖАНА (НА  
ПРИМЕРЕ ГУБИНСКОГО И ГУСАРСКОГО  
АДМИНИСТРАТИВНЫХ РАЙОНОВ)**

**З.Т.Имрани, Н.Р.Джафарова**

**Аннотация.** Обеспечение материальных и социальных потребностей населения в горных сельских районах в основном обеспечивается местными природными ресурсами и возможностями. Основная занятость населения в горных регионах ведущих стран основана на использовании туристических и рекреационных ресурсов. Из-за структурных ограничений производства сложность обеспечения занятости в горных районах в сочетании с активными демографическими процессами усугубляет ситуацию. Одним из приоритетных направлений для устранения этих проблем является создание туристических объектов с использованием местных возможностей: климатических условий, ландшафтов, лесных ресурсов, минеральных и термальных вод с лечебной ценностью и так далее. Материалы данной статьи состоят из законов Азербайджанской Республики, государственных программ, публикаций Государственного комитета по статистике, фондовых

материалов Института географии, научных работ и результатов научно-исследовательских работ. В статье были использованы исторический, сравнительный анализ, системный подход, статистико-математический и картографический (ГИС-технологии) методы.

**Ключевые слова:** Губа, Гусар, природно-туристические ресурсы, туристический потенциал, туристическая инфраструктура, горные села, социально-экономическое развитие

**AZƏRBAYCANIN DAĞ KƏND YAŞAYIŞ  
MƏNTƏQƏLƏRİNİN SOSIAL-IQTISADI  
İNKİŞAFINDA TURİZM EHTİYATLARININ  
ROLU (QUBA VƏ QUSAR İNZİBATI  
RAYONLARI TİMSALINDA)**

**Z.T.İmrani, N.R.Cəfərova**

**Xülasə.** Dağ kəndlərində əhalinin maddi və sosial ehtiyaclarının təmin edilməsi əsasən yerli təbii ehtiyatlar və imkanlar ilə təmin olunur. Aparıcı ölkələrin dağlıq bölgələrində əsas məşğulluq turizm və istirahət mənbələrinin istifadəsinə əsaslanır. İstehsalatdakı məhdudiyətlər səbəbindən, dağlıq bölgələrdə məşğulluğun təmin edilməsi çətin demoqrafik proseslərlə birlikdə vəziyyəti daha da ağırlaşdırır. Bu problemlərin aradan qaldırılmasının prioritet istiqamətlərindən biri yerli imkanlardan: iqlim şəraiti, landşaftlar, meşə ehtiyatları, dərman dəyəri olan mineral və termal sular və s. istifadə etməklə turizm obyektlərinin yaradılmasıdır. Bu məqalədə Azərbaycan Respublikasının qanunlarından, dövlət proqramlarından, Statistika Komitəsi və Coğrafiya İnstitutunun fond materiallarından, elmi işçilər və tədqiqatçıların əldə etdiyi nəticələrindən istifadə edilmişdir. Məqalədə tarixi, müqayisəli təhlil, sisteməlik yanaşma, statistik-riyazi və kartoqrafik (CİS texnologiyaları) metodlardan istifadə edilmişdir.

**Açar sözlər:** Quba, Qusar, təbii və turizm resursları, turizm potensialı, turizm infrastrukturunu, dağ kəndləri, sosial-iqtisadi inkişaf