



Azerbaijani Journal of Economics and Social Studies

Azərbaycanın İqtisadi və Sosial Araşdırmalar Jurnahı

Sayı/Number 3, 2015

www.azjess.com

STATUS-QUO OF EXTREME TOURISM IN THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN

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Summary

Azerbaijan is a nation situated in the Caucasus region on the coast of the Caspian Sea. As an emerging country with rich natural resources, it has seen a dramatic growth thanks to its thriving oil and gas industries. Recently, the Azerbaijani government has made a great deal of efforts in the growth of non-oil industries including tourism. Today Azerbaijan is also known as a tourism destination. Beside other types, we can surely say that extreme tourism is one of them. The infrastructure, potential resources and efficient & effective managing staff let us say this. The current situation of extreme tourism in Azerbaijan is analysed and recommendations for improvements put forward in this article.

Key Words: Extreme tourism, development perspectives, potential resources, tourism awareness, involvement of local population

Azerbaijan is known as an oil producing country in all over the world. The most developed industry in country is oil industry. About more than 60 % of total budget comes from this sector. But it is a fact that oil resources are limited and future of oil industry is low predicted. Therefore as an alternative to oil industry tourism is taken to consideration. The government of Azerbaijan Republic decided to develop tourism business as an important sector of country's economy and regional development.

Tourism is considered as a potential source of revenue after oil industry in Azerbaijan. Having potential and natural resources gives us lots of opportunities to utilize them in an efficient and effective manner. The only thing that we need to do is to create an extreme tourism industry in several regions where it can be developed and involve local population in decision making processes because only grassroots know better the place they have settled down.

Tourism industry in Azerbaijan is one of the rapidly growing sectors of economy. Year by year income from this sector is increasing; especially business tourism has an

enormous role in this development. Business tourism is rather profitable and developed type of tourism in Azerbaijan tourism market. The business tourism mainly centralized in capital-Baku. Parallel to business tourism in capital, developing of different types of tourism in regions was taken to account as well. Azerbaijan has several regions which has great potential to develop tourism industry.

The government of Azerbaijan Republic (AR) arrange incentives for a better condition of regions. Most of tourism types are being developed by investing money and with help of local population. One of the developing types of tourism in Azerbaijan is extreme tourism. Since getting independence, Azerbaijan has put lots of things into development of different types of tourism in this region. Several contracts and projects have been signed off and it is an undeniable fact that there have been huge development in the last decades [7].

Having a look at last years is enough to understand that extreme tourism has become increasingly commercialized which can also be considered as better outdoor recreation. In most places, this is currently treated as a purchasable short-term holiday but year by year it has been proved that extreme tourism is more than that and can give people what they need to relax or enjoy.

Furthermore, there are many people who have no reason to take part or travel to destinations. The majority of people need to be motivated to start travelling who want also to see enhanced level of culture of tourism. Besides, affordable products & prices and differentiated packages need to be set in order to tempt local and international tourists.

Additionally, as it has been mentioned in most part of republic people have no idea that we already got some extreme tourism destinations and organizations which means that individuals need to be explained some things in a detailed form such as value of extreme tourism or there is a need to create an appreciation for tourism through campaigns and volunteering activities. Moreover, educational programmes and tourism awareness should be developed and implemented.

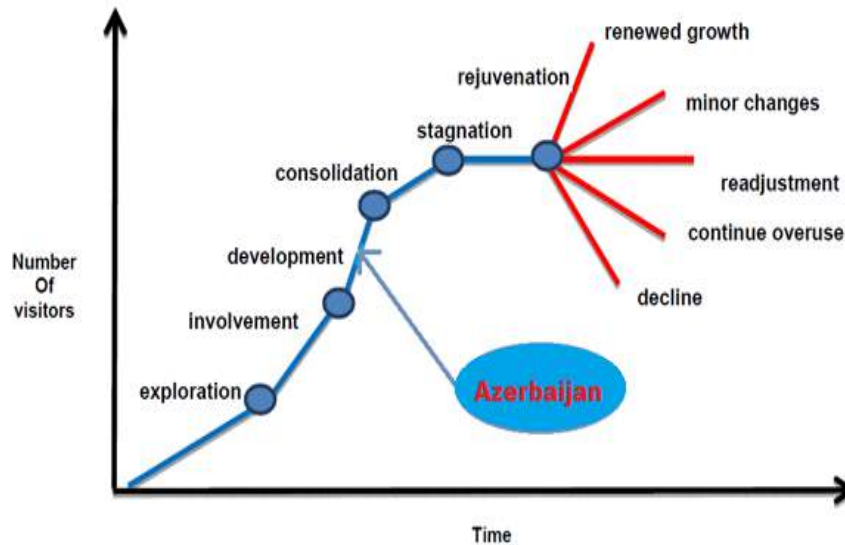
One more thing is related to public and private sector. According to some results of surveys conducted, they should also be encouraged to create a place for extreme tourism and involve people in this.

All these things are good points that have been pointed out but there is a need that we need to take action in order to trigger extreme tourism.

Extreme tourism is mostly defined as a travel to dangerous places and is characterized by a sense of adventure or risk. Besides, extreme tourism is also called “shock tourism” which is directly related to activities that people partake. Furthermore, extreme tourism involves travelling to a destination where people will take part in adventurous and dangerous activities. Extreme tourism is totally different tourism type because there are some characteristics that make it unique. The meaning is that not all people can participate in extreme tourism activities. Extreme tourism demands more physical readiness than other types. Additionally, the degree of engagement and professionalism are other two factors that make extreme tourism a bit inaccessible or unattainable. For example, in adventure tourism or trekking the majority of people could risk to do something, but in extreme tourism people should be checked beforehand. The reason is that during the activities some health problems might occur.

One of the crucial points in extreme tourism is related to “adrenaline rush” caused by an element of risk.

If we analyze the current situation of extreme tourism in Azerbaijan TALC can help us with this. TALC demonstrates the process of changing in destinations as the volume of tourists’ arrivals increases. The TALC suggest that destinations evolve through a number of stages, depicted in the model as a life cycle that starts with the “birth” of tourism in a destination and ends with its decline, leading to “death” or if action is taken to prevent this, the resurrection of tourism, usually in another form” [1] .



Butler`s Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model, 1980 (The position of Azerbaijan in TALC)

So, according to TALC, Azerbaijan is in development stage which means that the government and big companies have noticed the emerging potential of the area as tourist resort and as a result of this, they have started to invest money in this region. Huge investments create hotel complexes and tourists’ arrivals dramatically expands opportunities for local people to get income.

Extreme tourism can be compared to other tourism types. In some cases, it is true that in some activities there is a need of having equipment which might be pretty expensive. Conversely, in most activities, extreme-based activities requires much less investments, whereas, traditional tourism requires significant flow of money to start a business [3]. For instance, there are lots of places in the world that government have put no money in the development process such as “Chernobyl” (Ukraine), Devil`s Pool (Zambia and Zimbabwe) etc[5]. It is an undeniable fact that African countries have already started to maximize profit through using tourism facilities and according to the statistics of “The World Bank” receipts from tourism in 2012 amounted to over US\$36 billion and contributed just over 2.8% to the region`s GDP [8].

The thing is that some developing countries get their real income from this kind of activities. Tourists or guests are directed by a guide or a person who is quiet enough aware of the destination. One of the positive factors here is that local unemployed people can get benefit from this business. Another related point is related to

accommodation issues. In most cases, in mountainous areas people much prefer to stay at the houses of local people which is also considered as an income for local population settled in those areas. In addition, numerous characteristics can be pointed out in order to define extreme tourism as a unique one:

Being a new blossom in the tourism sphere: within the tourism sector, extreme tourism has become an important part of income as it produces more % of a country's GDP and employs globally more people [9].

Physical activity: Interest on extreme tourism related activities attracts more and more people day by day which also increases desire, energy expenditure and as the same time requires more experience and strong body to partake.

Nature-based and outdoor activities: as it is known extreme tourism is mostly based on nature and natural resources. On the one hand, it means that less investment will be put in the business, on the other hand, there might be some consequences related to environment.

Ecofriendly environment and wildlife: While being in the nature, people should be more careful. The reason is that during activities environment can be damaged and the resources, most probably, will be spoilt. Environmentalists was a club founded by John Muir in XX century, or a group of people who have intended to take care of nature and natural resources. Since that century, some projects have been realized in order to enlighten these issues. That's why, people are asked to be more careful while being in the nature and to make it natural resources sustainable [4].

Safety of participants: One of the influential facts is to be safer in extreme tourism. That's why people are more likely to get trained before activities, at least, an explanation regarding following action that with what people might face or what kind of threats might happen. Besides, during tours there are always professional and better trained members besides guests who take care of people throughout the activities.

Healthier lifestyle: Generally, sports related tourism types are better options for people for getting relax and in shape. That's why most people around the world choose extreme tourism. Extreme tourism is also defined as an active form that is more or less related to psychological and physical commitment which means the body can work faster.

Business opportunities for locals: Tourism is a kind of income for people who live far away from the city center and only money flow comes from tourism related activities of tourists in mountainous and remote areas of the country. There are many hidden costs to people that tourism can reveal and make them attainable for locals. Local governors try to maximize profit by using these tools for grassroots and the region itself. By means of tourism, income, employment and general rise of the standard of living can be improved.

Moreover, local populations should be associated with tourism activities and share equitably in the economic, social and cultural benefits they generate, and particularly in the creation of direct and indirect jobs resulting from them [6].

Additionally, as an example, in the northern part of Azerbaijan Republic most people make their money by producing handmade products (handicrafts) such as carpet producing, making some metallic souvenirs or some national and regional sweets. On the other hand, it is a good chance for them for selling products to tourists and guests if

tourists visit to areas and partake in extreme tourism activities. At the same time, it might be considered a good PR tool for creating a strong brand or image of the region.

Existing infrastructure: As it has been mentioned above, extreme tourism, in comparison to other types, requires less money for creating a destination for tourists. More exactly, existing infrastructure allow locals and governors to make money. Mountains, valleys, rivers and the nature itself are possibilities that need just some allocations and organizing to create extreme tourism- related facilities. While talking about existing infrastructure some destinations can be mentioned such as “Shahdag Winter Resort”, “Tufandag” and “Balaken Aviation Centre” etc. These first two are the destinations for improving extreme tourism types such as skiing, snowboarding etc. The last one is a center created for parachuting. This place have been used as an airport since 1983. After this date, exactly, in 1985 there has been founded a Sport Club organizing parachuting activities [10] .

Let`s be frank, having too many natural resources does not mean that goals will be accomplished or people will be attracted in extreme tourism activities. There are also some challenges or exactly problems that need to be got rid of. It is a fact that most people have not had the opportunity to travel to extreme tourism destinations within the country which is actually directly related to people`s salary and time as well. The reason is that most of them in northern and other parts of Azerbaijan are unemployed or have their own businesses. That`s why travelling or participating in tourism activities is in the second or last place. Another reason could be the lack of a culture of travelling which is the results of limited marketing and information provision among local population. Another important element is that extreme tourism activities demand more physical readiness than other types of tourism.

Above all, some more financial issues could be noted. As it is known, this type needs more investment to create an attractive place and also equipment is another issues to deal with which ones are expensive and not easily found. Another educational matter: people emphasize the need for a well-educated and trained tourism manpower to manage all these issues because people want to make sure that their life is protected.

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