



Critical Review of Tourism Industry for Sustainable Development of Azerbaijan

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Abstract

In the globalizing world tourism is a lucrative part of the economy. It makes a great contribution to the budget of most countries. The experience of Turkey, Spain and other countries that make revenues from tourism also shows that it is impossible to rapidly develop tourism without state support at the stage. Tourism now has global importance; it regulates social economic relations, creates reciprocal ties between nations, and expands business. Azerbaijan should not lag behind in this development, because the country has all the natural and geographic potential of a tourist destination. Azerbaijan enjoys nine of the world's 11 climate zones, adding to the range of destinations on offer. Laws "On the attraction of foreign investments into the country" and "On the repatriation of funds", the state program for socio-economic development and other important state documents help in the development of tourism. Azerbaijan has great potential for the development of the tourism industry - with such fascinating sights as ancient cities, palaces, fortresses, mausoleums, and mosques. The paper will explain that how different climate zones in Azerbaijan create possible opportunities for developing all types of tourism and how tourism industry can help to increase Azerbaijan economy and its regional development.

Key words: *Tourism industry, historical monuments, foreign investments, socio-economic development, destinations.*

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Introduction

Tourism development is comprehensively related with allurements and competitiveness of tourist destinations in the different parts of the world. Consequently, identification of tourism potentials is in more close relation with the necessity of attaining destination competitiveness on the tourist market.

The aim of this research is to endow results from derived analysis in relation to using the potentials for developing of tourism within the defined regions in the country. Hereby, analysis of present situation in the tourism sector, theoretical background on tourism is the starting point of this research. The indemnity of conducted analysis is to collect information on tourism potentials in local and international based, share Azerbaijan experiences, as well as, to consist of implications for future approaches. In this regard, the major intention is to underline the advantage of various approaches for developing awareness of existing possibilities for developing of tourism in Azerbaijan. Combined findings and research conclusions will serve in defining weaknesses or strengths in the tourism sector in the country, as suggestions starting basis for future activities. (Nestoroska I., 27-29 October, 2011)

The conclusions of captivated research lead to discoveries that demonstrate a strong basis for future development of tourism in Azerbaijan with defined possibilities and potentials for future activities, mostly related with advertising of tourist products within the different regions of the country, esteem of principles for sustainable progress, preservation of natural environment, insistence of defined priorities, policy and activities.

In different literatures, tourism is often depicted as an appropriate tool of socio-economic development of different regions of Azerbaijan. This research conclusion is based both on different theoretical concepts and approaches, as well as, empirical experience. In practice, there is a number of regions in which tourism significantly contributes to the economic prosperity of their inhabitants. (J. Vystoupil, M. Šauer, O. Repík, Number 3, 2017, 113-114). Today developing of tourism in the country is essential to inappropriate balance between current tourist potentials and progressing outcomes. Hereby, an existence of various potentials can give positive effects, whether within the local region or wider. In addition, recently revised different State programs by Azerbaijan government gives recommendations for developing of tourism of the country and offers defining and selecting different strategic clusters as a framework to developing tourism in Azerbaijan: beach tourism, mountain/winter tourism, rural tourism, cultural tourism, medical tourism and nature activities, wine tourism and etc.

The research study of tourist requirements for a destination often initiates an analysis of components of general nature. In this regard, it is important to consist of the resources of the destination. According to this view, the resource-based approach can suggest a suitable theoretical scope for exploration of the subject. The research paper also, explains the major concepts needed to increase a procedure for estimating the competitive potential of a type of tourism in a destination.

Finally, on the basis of above-mentioned issues, the processed factual, statistical and survey via LinkedIn information to focus analyzing of a spatial and functional demarcation of tourism potential in the framework of Azerbaijan model, set the key integrated tourist-recreational regions, and fully usable areas for special functions of tourism in the context of sea, cultural, mountain/winter or rural tourism.

Literature review

Tourism has existed when there is mankind. According to different approaches, during that time, maybe we have called tourism with various words to elucidate such as hunting, invading, discovering, immigrating and etc. As the result of basic view, moving from one place to the other is called as “traveling” and in general that is “tourism”.

“Tourism is consist of as an activity inevitable to the life of nations that`s why its direct impacts on the cultural, social, economic and educational sectors of different national societies as well as, on their international relations” (Technical Manual, 1995).”

In our world the ways and speed to travel is well developing with its modern technology. With this kind of development, the cost or price of traveling is diminishing and ever a lot of people have the financial means to do like it. Today our world is going to be smaller and smaller in sense of moving around. Hereby, all people are continuously and curious would like to discover different places for vacation or business.

Tourism is travel for leisure, recreational or business objectives. So, tourism has become one of the essential players in international represents and commerce at the same time one of the major income resources for different developing countries. This progress goes hand in hand with and developing competition and diversification among various destinations. (Report of United Nations Word Tourism Organization (UNWTO), April 21, 2010).

If we want to look for wider horizon to tourism, on the one hand, tourism is a substantially, spatially differences of socio-economic phenomenon, connected to the attractiveness of local situations. On the other hand, it is a sectional phenomenon which demands a high level of cooperation and coordination of all kind of tourism stakeholders. In general, there are three basic forms of tourism: *outbound tourism*, *inbound tourism* and *domestic tourism*. These forms can be linked in different ways to procreate the additional forms of tourism included as followings: *national tourism*, *internal tourism* and *international tourism*.

Tourism has often been seen as a main element in the developing of different places, which have adopted branding strategies of countries, meant to get a competitive assert and position their identity, in their relations with different potential tourists. As we know, identification of tourism potentials is not an easy theme, whether on regional, local or national level. It requires active participation of stakeholders from all different sectors indirectly or directly confused to and linked with tourism. Consequently, analysis of present situation of tourism sector in this study is focused with aim to have a basis for future research actions. As the author, I input my knowledge and experiences in this field as result of long period of years of this research and collaboration through lecturing, projects, consultancy, and professional development.

Tourism profits distinctly on existing resources and infrastructures, however, it should not put in jeopardy the compatible development of the society. It is consequently the most important to take the supporting capacity of local assets into discretion. Cross sector expertise and local involvement have a central role here. (Lehtimäki M., 2008, 137).

In different view, tourism is not a panacea, but it is long-term hard work for local development in the sector. This research study purposes to help in the planning and also management of sustainable development of tourism by improving the level of understanding

of how various destinations develop and change. As tourism has been increasingly more universal over the last half century, relations towards tourism and its effects have changed.

In a review of these kind of changing attitudes, (Jafari J. 1990, 33-41.) retrospectively aimed four platforms: cautionary, adaptancy, advocacy and knowledge-based.

Tourism potential can be explained according to the Explanatory Dictionary of Tourism (Zelenka and Pásková, 2012: 433) as a general value of all prerequisites of tourism, usually helped on the basis of a scraping scale, lowered by a negative value of negative elements of tourism development, particularly by a contrary state of environmental conflict and segments use of a given area.

Research methodology

The main goal of this study is to analyze and explain the necessary conditions in tourism sector, to explore knowledge and experiences on tourism development and analyze its Azerbaijan model.

Multi-measure decision making tools are broadly accepted to the decision makers and researchers for promoting tourism potential contemplated in literature study. As expected in various researches, rendering of tourism is dependent upon the quality of services furnished as well as the socio-cultural and socio-economic background of the international tourists. There is a broad range for destination selections of the tourists, though the select-value can be increased only by improving the quality of services. Thus, the analysis for evolution of tourism potential is prohibited with proxy data of tourist attractions and existing infrastructure tourist.

Research methods were theoretical analysis of various scientific literature and a survey in the framework of questionnaires were the best instrument of data collection.

It should be noted that although it is relatively easy to acquire quantitative data, ensured local tourism statistics are available, as well as, qualitative information can only be gathered from a field study. Qualitative information can only be acquired through direct or indirect interviewing of tourists, for comparing increasing of number of tourists by year.

The benchmarking approach in this research study allows explaining how to understand tourism potential and comparing tourism possibilities of country by year in the context of Azerbaijan and explaining state programs on tourism as key element for tourism potential. In this research, the study was developed by using observation and survey methods.

Tourism destination branding as key element of tourism potential of country

As we know, place branding reasons to make a city, a region, a country, or a tourism destination stand out in the changing and complex marketplace. In general, place branding has been seen as to be able to extend a place's image and reputation to the inside and outside worlds alike (Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2010, 3).

Places emulate to position themselves in order to involve leisure activities, more exogenous capital, entrepreneurs, new residents, tourists, and skilled workforce and attempt to realize a structural variation in order to be a better place to live, to visit, to play and to work. In this regards, place branding can be a means both for attaining a competitive

advantage in order to improve inward tourism and investment, but also the means for attaining reinforcing local identities, community development and the identification of the citizens with their city, as well as, activating all social forces to escape social unrest and exclusion.

According to Buhalis (2000) (Buhalis, D. (2000), 97-116.), a destination is a geographical unit which is explained by its visitors as a inimitable entity, with a legislative and political framework for tourism marketing, planning and branding attempts. Tourism destinations are immanently complex and a range of economic, social, technological and legal policies impact their attractiveness, appeal, sustainability and competitiveness. To become successfully preferred in the targeted markets, a destination is likely to make use from a positively difference image from its positively positioned, or competitors, in the minds of the potential visitors and consumers.

Destination branding plays a major role in alternation tourism products, integrating communities and stakeholders, evading irritations and answering to issues bearing to places. In this instance, such issues could be those established by the fluctuating process of exploring, or economic crises, confirming, researching and sharing travel experiences (Oliveira & Panyik, 2014).

Moreover, it is significant to discover the right interactions and to realize branding as a all process with strategic thinking and placing the strategic inimitable potential of each territory, in that as intangible and tangible elements, landscape, tourist assets and built cultural heritage at the heart of the process.

Sustainable tourism development via digital technology

Tourism is one of the fastest and largest increasing economic sectors in the world, and has a substantial role to play in rescuing sustainable development in different countries. Beside it, I would like to mention that it must be well managed and designed so that it profits local communities and the cultural and natural environments upon that it depends.

The regions and countries where the economy is conducted by the tourism industry have been increasingly related with the socio-cultural as well as the environmental problems connected with unsustainable tourism. In a conclusion, there is now developing agreement on the need to support sustainable development of tourism to minimize its environmental effect and to maximize socio-economic universal benefits at different tourist destinations.

According to the dimension of the tourism industry, approximately 900 (nine hundred) million arrivals per year around the world and that's why tourism is linked so necessarily to various natural areas, and it is one of the main hazards to natural resources and biodiversity over the world wide. Consequently, it is absolutely irreplaceable to undertake efforts to make tourism more sustainable, regarding different kinds of tourism, at all levels, as well as, for all parts of the tourism business from various international tour operator to small type of pension owners. The challenge of sustainable development on tourism is to make use of tourism's positive affects, channeling and enhancing the benefits into the right prescriptions, and to mitigate or escape the negative effects as far as possible. (Report on Sustainable Tourism Development in UNESCO).

Today, digital technology is playing an improving role in the visitor experience. So, visitors often drive their personal travel and activity what is planning via mobile devices and also

expect internet link at their destination. With developing visitor confidence comes an improve in require for experiences which meet high anxiety. The industry needs managers in the field of tourism who can answer to this substitution and innovate with user-friendly and efficacious digital tools that permit visitors to make the most of their time in and around the world. The ability to allure visitors will depend on managers with in-depth tourism industry knowledge who can respond and anticipate to consumer requirement in this rapidly changing information age. (Tourism Career management, 2015, 29)

Governments have a special role to play in provided coordination and leadership. They are responsible for the providing of much of the resources and infrastructure on which the sector depends and for the important regulatory and promote functions that are more critical for its sustainable development. In this view, tourism needs to have an open position with a minister, within government and a civil service devoted to its development.

State support for increasing of tourism potential in Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan is a country which located at the crossroads between East and West or Europe and Asia with its capital Baku that having ancient rich historical sites and modern infrastructure and with regions embracing fascinating national parks and nature. According to different tourism information, Baku is home to 75 (seventy-five) percent of destinations which is promoted by international tourists.

There are different state programs on tourism such as “State Program on the development of tourism in the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2002-2005 and 2010-2014”,as well as, in 2016, on “Additional measures for the development of tourism in the Republic of Azerbaijan” (Information by link: Tourism in Azerbaijan) which approved by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, established convenient conditions for the developing of tourism, ensure tourism services in line with international standards and principles and increase legislative framework on this field and laid foundation for the country’s integration into global tourism market. It would be noted that, 2011 was announced “The year of Tourism” in Azerbaijan according to the relevant Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan in order to support natural sites, as well as cultural and historical heritage of our country which enjoying rich geographic view while also insuring the appreciable use of tourism resources.

Cultural tourism is the one of main branches of tourism related with cultural heritage of different regions, especially the way of life, art, history, religion, architecture, etc. of the people in those kind of geographical areas. Hereby, this type of tourism potential of the country initiates various arts galleries approachable in Baku, as well as, national music including advanced world jazz music, Mugham, foreign and national dances, rich kitchen with its delicious meals, tolerance to different religious, ethnic and secular groups.

The country is presented with thousands of mineral and hot wells such as Turshsu, Istisu, Galaalti, Badamli, Surakhanyand Shikhiburnuare among popular healing water sources. Beside them, Naphtalan oil is one of the main health resort resources of Azerbaijan as medical tourism destination. As the result of defined actions taken in direction of developing winter and mountainous tourism in the country, mountain descent have been most developed as a major tourism destination. Today, “Tufandag” Winter-Summer Resort and “Shahdag” Tourism Centre have turned into most popular resorts and vocation place of international tourists. The northern and southern regions of country, starting from Absheron peninsula of

Azerbaijan, have a beach tourism potential. In addition, the biggest limitation of the country is meeting now where is the short period of beach tourism season. (Report of OSCE, 2004, 14).

The Azerbaijan's territory consist of different climate type where 9 out of 11 climate types are found in this country that is home to over 4100 plant varieties. Azerbaijan has shooting possibilities, to hunt several forest animals and wild fowls.

According to the relevant Decree of the President Ilham Aliyev to upgrade the procedure of visa issuance (ASAN visa) to the tourists from different countries at the country's international airports is a step focused at further developing of the tourism sector in Azerbaijan. (News in Azernews newspaper, 2 February 2018).

By post 2025, the country purposes to become one of the most promoted total number of 20 touristic locations and improve by maximum the indicators of efficacious use of possible tourism resources.

Survey for review of tourism industry of Azerbaijan during and after COVID 19

For the reason of development of this study, online survey organized among people. 231 people took part in the survey. 183 of them were men and 48 were women.

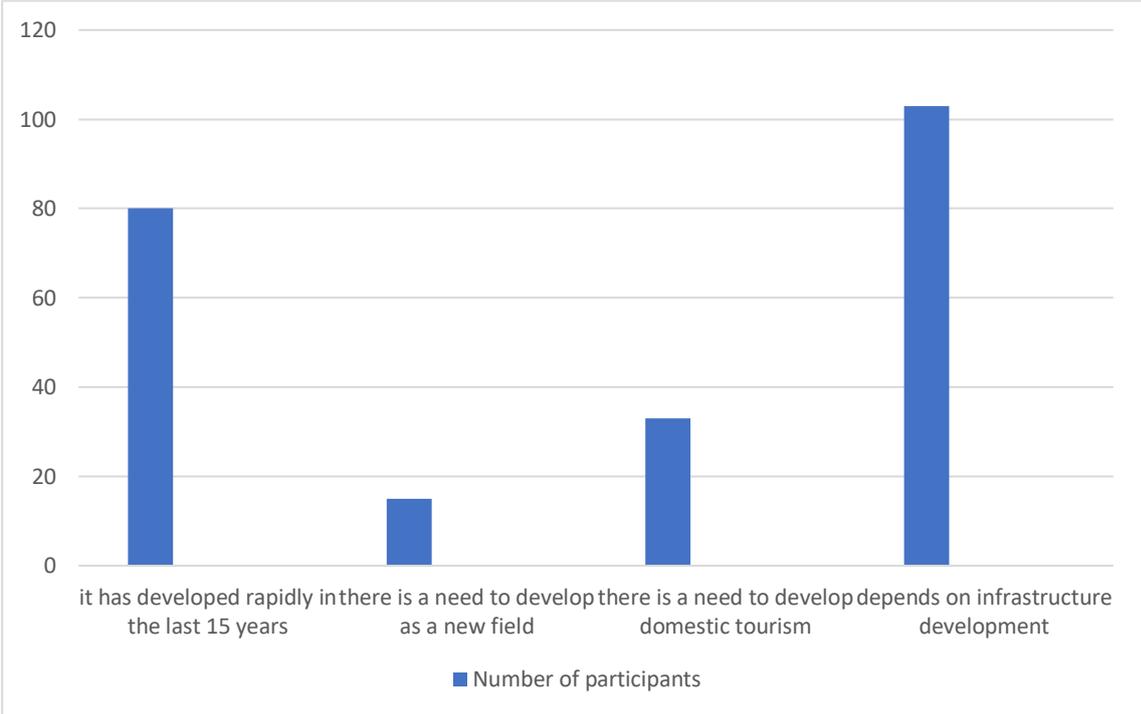


Chart 1. How do you assess the development of tourism in Azerbaijan?

80 of the participants noted that tourism has developed over the past 15 years, and more than 100 noted the serious need for infrastructure development in the field. Thus, tourism is an area that has emerged in Azerbaijan over the past 15 years and is developing day by day.

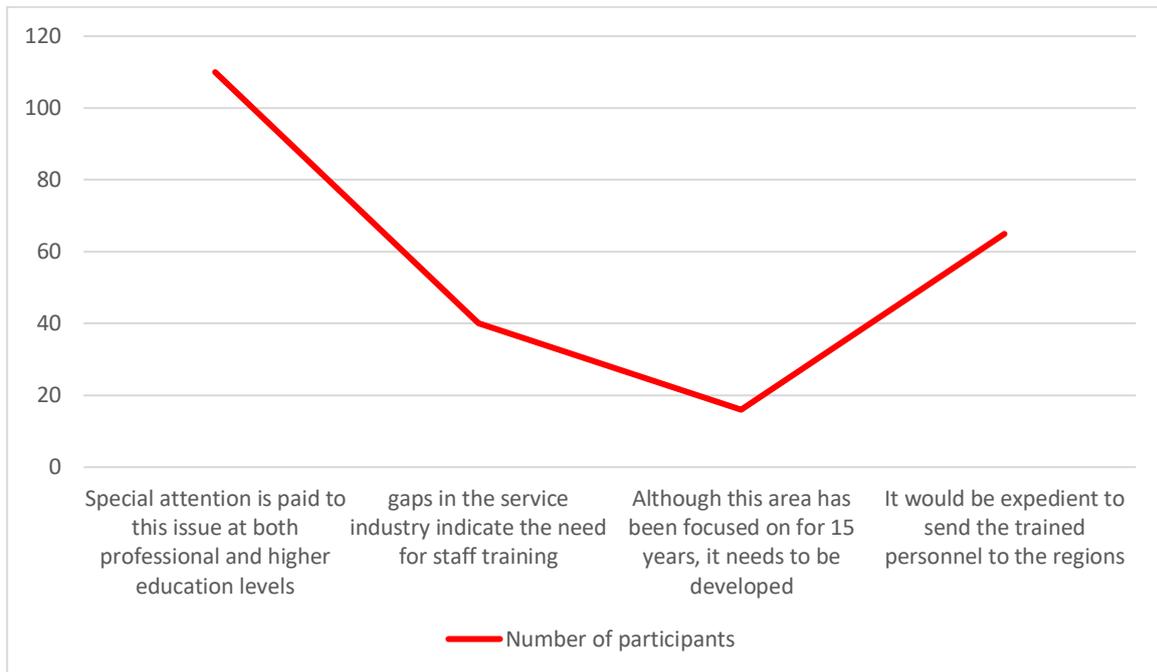


Chart 2.How is the process of staff training in the field of tourism in Azerbaijan?

Respondents were asked about the state of training in the field and 110 people said they would pay special attention to the training of specialists in the field of tourism, 40 people stressed the need for training, and 65 people ideally based on sending specialists to the regions.

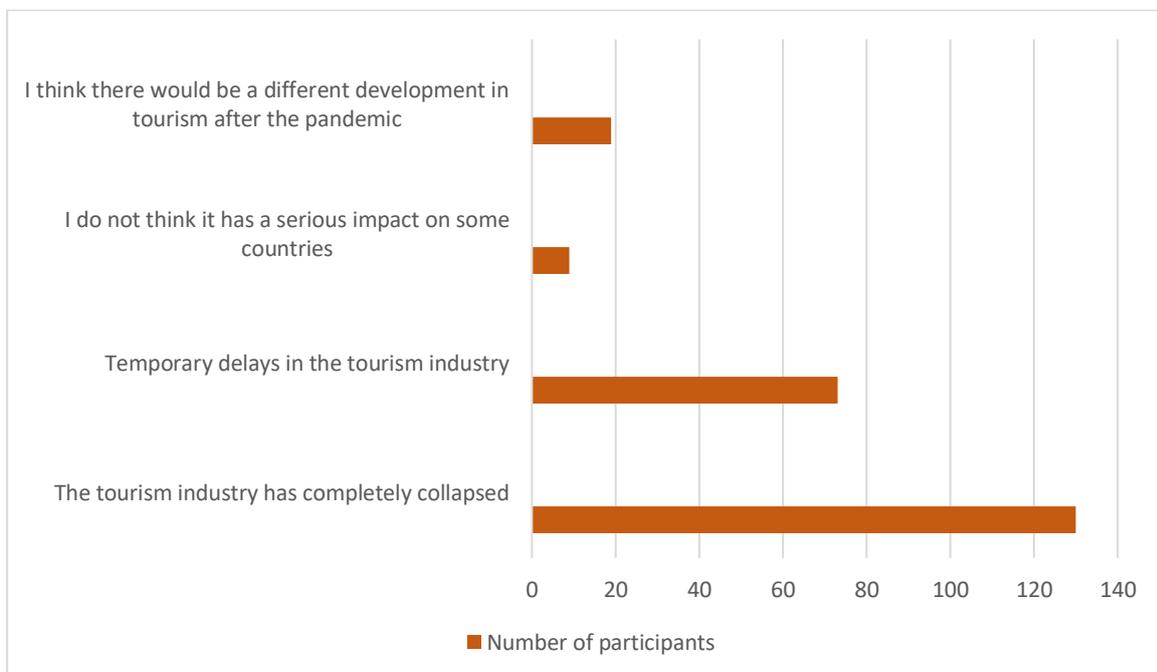


Chart 3.How do you think the Covid 19 pandemic affected tourism?

When respondents were asked how the Covid 19 pandemic affected the development of tourism, a large number of 130 people said that the area was in complete decline. 73 respondents believe that this is a temporary process and will return to the previous pace of development in the post-pandemic period.

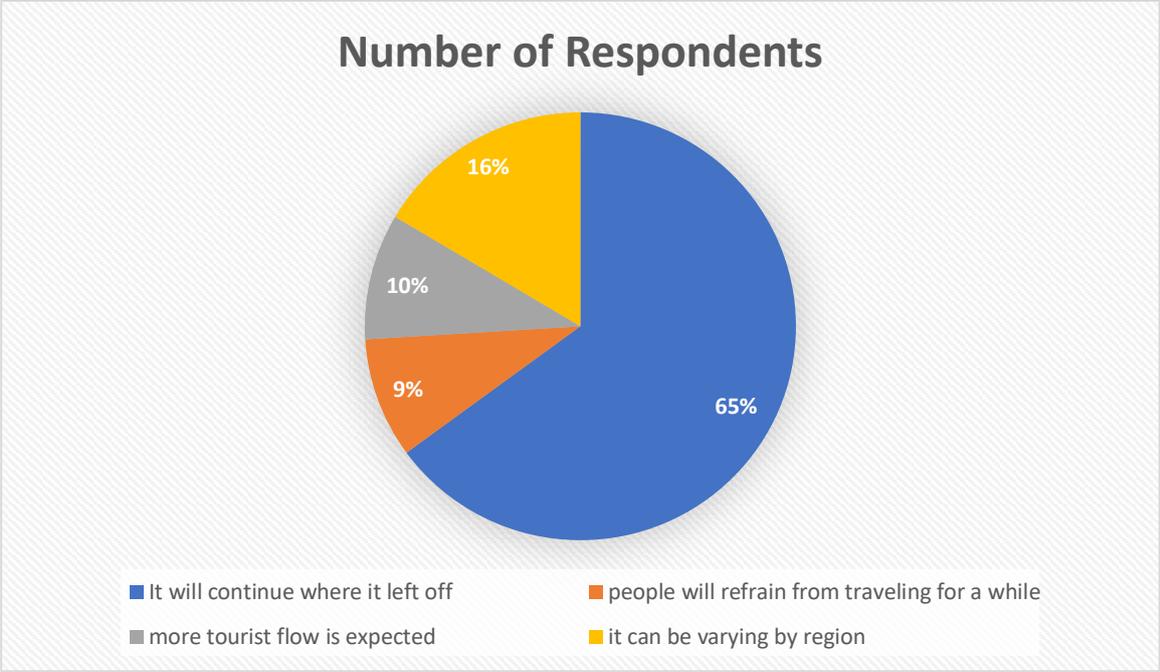


Chart 4.How do you see the development of tourism for post-Covid 19?

In order to analyze the vision of the participants during the survey, they were asked to comment on the development of tourism post-Covid 19. About 150 (65%) participants noted that a period of growth in tourism will begin after pandemic. Total number of 38 (16%) participants think that it may vary depending on the region.

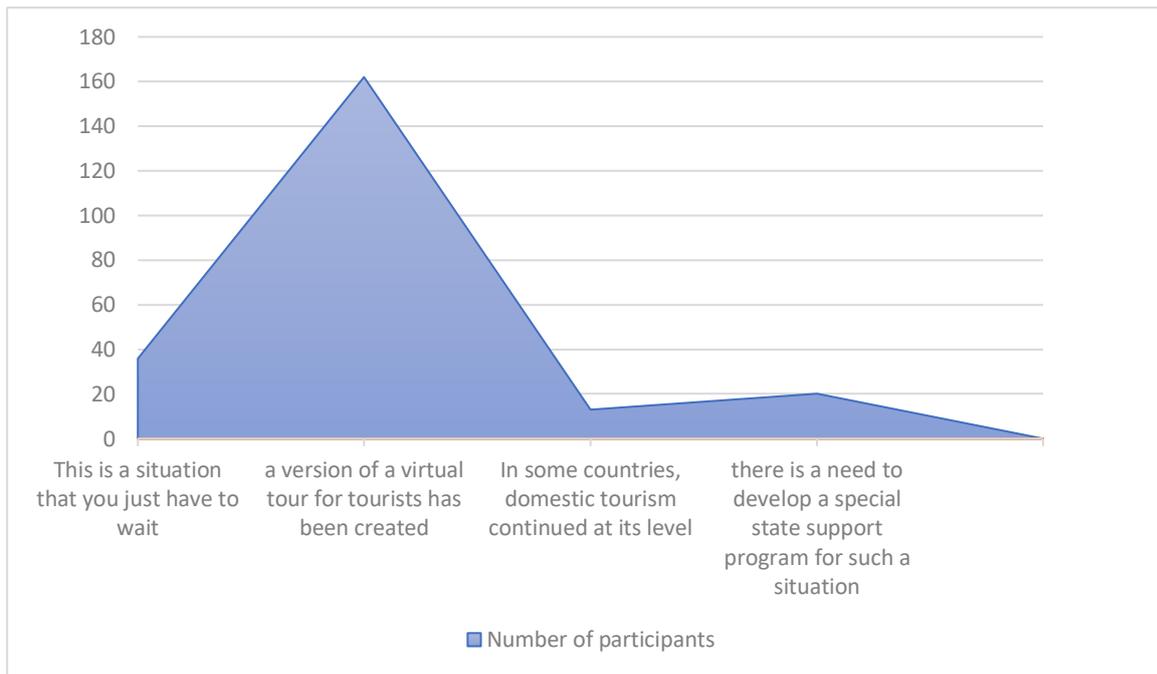


Chart 5.What innovations did the pandemic period bring to the countries in the field of tourism?

Undoubtedly, the pandemic, as in all cases, had a serious impact on all areas of life and made managers think of alternatives. Entrepreneurs in the field of tourism are also looking for different versions to attract tourists. The survey reflected this question and respondents took different approaches. 36 of them said that there is no alternative and just wait for the process to end. 162 people noted that by organizing virtual tours to tourist attractions, it is possible to create attractive opportunities for tourists.

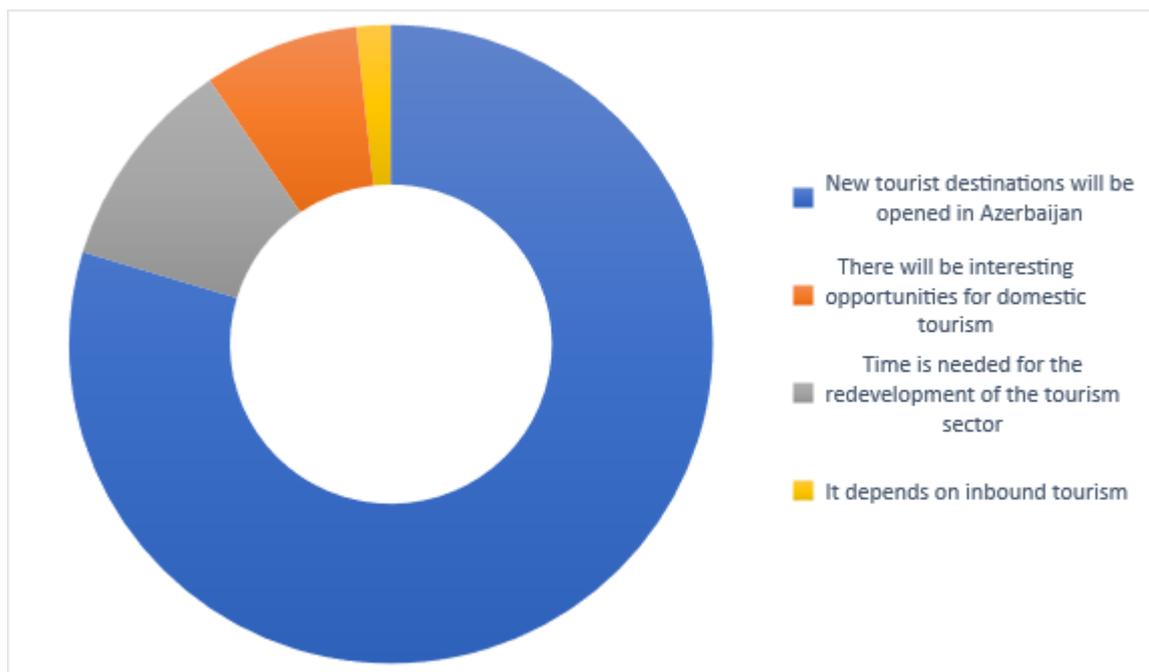


Chart 6. What are your expectations in the field of tourism in Azerbaijan during the post Covid 19 period?

As the study is dedicated to Azerbaijan, participants were asked about the state of tourism in post-Covid 19 Azerbaijan. The liberation of the occupied territories of Azerbaijan in late 2020 and the return of rich natural regions opened a new era in the development of tourism in those areas. Undoubtedly, this is the focus of the respondents. For this reason, 184 respondents expressed confidence that new tourism destinations will be opened in Azerbaijan.

Conclusion

The various developing countries search for possibilities in developing of different sectors. In this regard, very often is tourism sector that is seen as a choice for developing economy of the different countries and their regions. Defining of tourism potentials in Azerbaijan is more closely related to its developed competitive position on tourist market, since it is still not recognizable tourist destination within wider international scopes.

Analyses of these kind of potentials comprised defining of existing strengths for the developing of tourism within the various regions and demonstrate that the basic probabilities for tourism are closely related to the creature of natural attractiveness and values, economic and social development of regions, cultural heritage, transport communications and convenience of different regions of country.

Findings, analyze that, tourism can be comprehend as an internally linked system of individual offer elements that is in mutual relations and preferences of visitors. The result of this study is the spatial and functional organization of tourism that forms the situations that support economic and social developing of the area. The nature of tourism demands a concrete degree of regulation and coordination, and thus, an application of the conceptual approach that can enable a sustainable and reasonable development of tourist destinations in the country. The offered approach to the analyses and assessment of conditions for the developing of tourism in the area is based on this logic. In this regard, the study shows how regional and spatial analysis of tourism can indemnify to the decision - making processes of the various representatives of tourism policy. The key issue is the evaluation of significance of the tourist centers and historical and cultural and natural conditions for the developing of tourism.

In accordance with the objective of the article which is to impartially measure the tourism potential in terms of its offer, the standard for the evaluation of regional, national and local significance in tourism were set. Therefore, a comparative analysis was conducted, which focused on the various tourism centers and areas with respect to their specialization in Azerbaijan. The aim of these analyses was to mention the basic elements of functionally - spatial dispensation of secondary and primary tourism potential of the country.

Content analysis is an empirical technique, that involves the defining and counting of issues and the interpretation of the main content of a text, such as website, a document, report and email message that is supposed to be significant. Content analysis calls for the categorization of the different components or elements which are able to support researchers in explaining current trends (Krippendorff, 2003).

Findings can give answers to the questions related to understanding of tourism within different approaches, recent tourism development in world experiences, present position of Azerbaijan on tourist market and our country vision where do we want to go? Although, rather small country, Azerbaijan has excellent conditions to foster developing of tourism. The existence of potentials in different regions of country should be a basis for tourism, by implementing different state programs and activities related to defining and advertising of certain types of tourism in Azerbaijan.

The survey concludes that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the economies of all countries. There is a serious need for entrepreneurs to create virtual tourism platforms in order not to be ignored by potential tourists. As the tourism sector in Azerbaijan

is newly developed, serious attention should be paid to the training of infrastructure and human resources.

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