

## The Development of Ecotourism in the World: Azerbaijan Case

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### Abstract

The importance of tourism in the economies of countries is increasing everyday. Every expenditure in tourism sector creates revivment in the economy and affects the economy in different ways. Increase in the development level of tourism in the country is observed with the increase in the share of it in the economy.

Recently there were changes in the tourist taste and consumption because of fast economic and technological developments in the world. Time by time the demands of new type of tourists require silence rest, far from sea, sand and sun, the rest in the leap of true nature, good service in a good room but not exaggerated, at the same time they require silent rest in virgin places where humans' interfere is very limited.

That is why; ecotourism becomes one of the main forms of tourism nowadays. Many countries take advantage of the natural environment and build special infrastructure in order to benefit from ecotourism. Also the countries pay attention to the security issues in order to diminish the damages to the environment. For this purpose Azerbaijan Republic pays attention to the special villages in the pure nature, creates special investment opportunities for the investors in this sector and increases the safety and security issues in those regions. In the past few years Azerbaijan has done several steps in the development of ecotourism with the natural resources. Especially, the ecotourism activities are increasing in the mountainous villages that kept their natural beauty.

In this article, the importance of ecotourism, its effects in the tourism sector, the development perspectives, and its role in the economy have been stated. At the same time, world and Azerbaijan statistical information have been used.

**Keywords:** Tourism, ecotourism, Azerbaijan, taste, tourist.

**JEL code:** L83 - Sports; Gambling; Recreation; Tourism

### Introduction

Last few years increasing environmental issues, global warming, shortage of natural resources, extinction danger of biological varieties, and food security issues made the people take into consideration the environment and nature and live in accordance with them.

It is known that, though the natural environment is the main element of tourism, time by time it has several negative impacts on environment. Tourism which uses all kinds of natural and environmental resources damages cultural and natural resources that bare importance for tourism. Water reserves, flora and fauna are main factors that demonstrate the interdependence of tourism with the environment. In general, the ecological environment named as ecosystem is vital for the development and sustainability of tourism. Taking into consideration this, we may say that the development and future of tourism depends on the well protection and management of environment. Polluted environment will affect human health, wealth, at the same time it will make the regions to differentiate and lead to loss of resource as far as tourism activities (Eynalov, 2011:33).

The natural environment when defined as the tourism product reflects itself on the reduction of negative environmental effects by tourism enterprises, the values that can be gained from environmental protection, and the positive development of tourists' attitudes towards environment. That is why ecotourism plays an important role in tourism sector as it has the sustainability factor.

The ecotourism notion time by time gains the meaning like green tourism, nature tourism, and wild tourism. If used on purpose the ecotourism can be the source of ecosystem and the development of regional population's socio-economic welfare. If we take into consideration the poverty and deprivation of rural population who leave in mountainous regions, then the ecotourism can be the reduction factor of disbalance among social classes.

### 1. The Emergence of Ecotourism Concept

Growing concern for recreation and green tourism the ecotourism becomes the fastest growing element of tourism which has growth rate of 30% annually. According to the International Ecotourism Society's statistics ecotourism

currently comprises about 20% of the world travel market (TIES: Ecotourism Statistical Fact Sheet, 2012).

In regard to this, when the literature is analyzed many definitions of ecotourism can be found. According to Gossling, ecotourism comprises the travels made to the virgin and unpolluted areas (Gossling, 2002:200). Another definition was given by TIES – the International Ecotourism Society as ecotourism is organized in small groups. Accommodation and food services are provided by local small firms (Eynalov, 2011:33).

An ecotourism experience is one in which an individual travels to what he/she considers to

be relatively undisturbed natural area and is more than 40 km from home, the primary intention being to study, admire or appreciate the scenery and wild plants and animals as well as existing cultural manifestations found in the area (Blamey, 1997:110).

Local community, resource management, and tour operators are necessary components of

an ecotourism development model, this perspective is most explicit about the merger between conservation and tourism (Fennel and Eagles, 1990).

But there is not any internationally accepted definition of ecotourism because of variety of understandings and acceptance. Taking into consideration this fact the following points may be included to the definition of ecotourism (Weaver and Lawton 2007: 170):

- attractions should be predominantly nature-based
- visitor interactions with those attractions should be focused on learning or education
- experience and product management should follow principles and practices associated with ecological, socio-cultural and economic sustainability.

World Tourism Organization defines ecotourism as a responsible travel aimed at protection the environment of the local region and increase the local people welfare (WTO, 2010).

Summarizing all the definitions given above we propose the following definition for ecotourism as the travel to less modified natural regions and/or using those resources in the region without any damage with the condition of protection the natural resources and respecting the population's cultural heritage.

## 2.1 Ecotourism Facts

According to TIES – International Ecotourism Society, ecotourism participants require variety of activities, here we may include land and water based activities. The most popular of them are wildlife watching, visiting protected areas, and hiking (TIES, 2012).

The increasing demand to ecotourism led to different surveys in this area. One of them was held by the Canadian government in order to analyze the market demand in 1994 revealed that ecotourists differ from normal tourists in income level, education level, expenditure level, travel experiences and age. According to the research those who join the ecotourism are more educated, they are between 35 – 54 years of age, they spend more, their income is high and they are more frequent travelers (TIES, 2012).

At the same time, ecotourism involves tourists from developed countries (the US, Canada, Germany, the UK, and etc) who visit the places in developing countries (Nepal, Nigeria, Kenya, Costa Rica, and etc). One of the first ecotourism destinations was Kenya. Hence eight of tenth of tourists came to Kenya for ecotourism purpose which generated more than \$ 350 million dollars for the country's economy in 1990.

According to the World Tourism Organization Statistics each year the number of ecotourists in the world is increasing 20%. When comes to the ecotourism demand, the main destinations here are first of all North America, then follow Western Europe, Australia and New Zealand. 10% of revenues from international tourism come from ecotourism in the US. In the Western Europe the ecotourism is accepted as one of the economic categories. For example, each year Finland accepts ten thousands of tourists to watch the wild nature (WTO, 2010).

Based on United Nations press releases the tourist flow to the developing countries increased for the last 20 years because of their rich flora and fauna and varied biodiversity. Those developing countries with stable political environment accept most of their profits from ecotourism. As the example Kenya, Costa Rica and Nepal are in front.

## 2. The Aims of Ecotourism

Ecotourism, in comparison with mass tourism, reduces the number of tourists and spreads the tourism over the year, reduces the pressure over the natural environment, prepares the plans for avoiding the damages, and follows the longterm economic interests. The main aim of ecotourism is to organize travels in small groups to the natural environment and create opportunities for tourists to rest and watch the lives of local people. Thus, thanks to controlled tours in ecotourism the environmental pollution level is diminished at the same time the economic welfare of local people is attained (Arslan, 2003:33).

Together with those aims of ecotourism mention above WTO defines following aims respectively;

- Protection of biodiversity,
- Taking care of the local people's welfare and informing either the tourists and local people on the environmental issues,
- Small scaled firms provide services for small number



of tourists,

- Providing responsible behaviors towards the natural resources by either tourists or the local people,
- Making sure of rare resources consumption limited,
- Taking into consideration the local authorities in tourism management,
- Providing employment opportunities for the local people.

In general, ecotourism activities provide not only benefits for the natural environment but also for the local people. That is why the countries organizing ecotourism first of all educate local people how to treat the ecotourists and how to use rare natural resources. For this purpose the countries provide humid climate for the development of local and regional small scaled tourism firms to operate effectively.

### 3. Ecotourism in Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan is one of those countries that are characterized by biodiversity, rich of natural resources and hospitality by local people. When comes to the natural resources, Azerbaijan possesses nine climatic zones out of eleven in the world which reflects itself in wide range of flora and fauna. According to the information of Azerbaijan Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources more than 4500 plant species are spread all over the country that represent 64% of the known flora of the Caucasus, and 24% of the known flora of the former Soviet Union. Some 240 or 5% of these species are endemic and relict species that are classified under 108 genera and 36 families. Most of the endemic species occur in the Talish natural area. More than 400 plant species in the Azerbaijan Republic require special protection, and 140 rare and endangered species are included to the Red Book of Azerbaijan (Mammadova, 2004:9).

Because of rich of climate zones more than 15.000 fauna species dwell in Azerbaijan. In addition, 30 important forest areas, 2083 trees over 100 years of age, and 73 geological and paleontological objects, were included in the list of Natural Monuments.

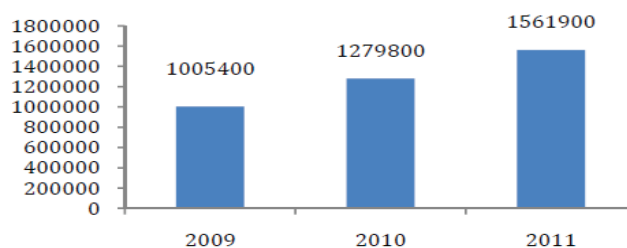
According to State Statistical Committee of Azerbaijan Republic there are 8 natural protected parks and 11 reserves which account for 519.8 thousand ha which ensure the protection of available ecological systems.

Rich nature of Azerbaijan opens wide opportunities for ecotourism. While it is not that popular type of tourism yet, it has enormous potential for development and opens up wide opportunities for investments (Azpromo, Azerbaijan Tourism, 2012).

In graphic 1 it is shown the international tourist arrival trend. We may see that in 2011 Azerbaijan accepted more than 1.5 million international tourists which in turn is

the opportunity for ecotourism.

**Graphic 1. Number of foreign tourists visited Azerbaijan**

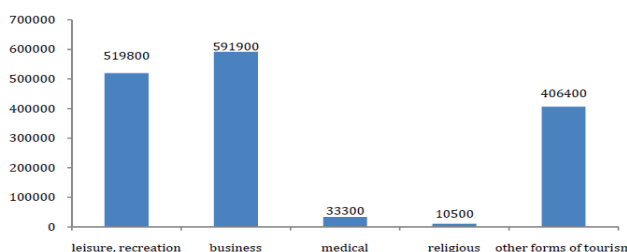


Source: AZPROMO, statistical information, 2012

However when we look at graphic 2 we may see that the role of ecotourism is not visible rather than the other forms of tourism in Azerbaijan.

Though ecotourism has not been developed in Azerbaijan, there is a need for the development of this type of tourism in order to reduce the negative effects of traditional tourism which is developing rapidly in Azerbaijan. For this purpose Azerbaijan Government announced 2011 as the year of tourism and very important projects have been realized either by government or private sector. In response to the activities Azerbaijan Tourism and Cultural Ministry organized ecotourism routes to the natural regions where the ecotourists were introduced the local hospitality, the virgin natural resources and local cuisine.

**Graphic 2. Number of foreign tourists according to travel objectives (2011)**



Source: AZPROMO, statistical information, 2012

### Conclusion

Especially the local people who are going to benefit from ecotourism must understand that only protecting the natural resources they can benefit from it. The local entrepreneurs and local people must be informed about ecotourism, its types and benefits by trainings, courses or briefings. Together with these the ecotours must be developed under the strict control.

In Azerbaijan there are still many virgin and not spoiled areas by humans. Especially the flora and fauna keep its breath taking scenery. And when we add the socio-cultural value to it, we will have the great opportunity for the development of ecotourism. Wildlife watching especially birds watching takes very important role in ecotours. To protect and develop these resources are the main duty of

either the government or the entire population of Azerbaijan.

To sum up, in order to develop the ecotourism and gain more profits the government must provide humid environment for small scaled enterprises in the regions to operate efficiently and effectively. In this sence, the government msut provide financing options for them, prepare professional seminars and trainings in the course of ecotourism, educate the local people, to create the infrastructure relative to ecotourism paying attention to the natural and environmental factors, educate the personnel for ecotourism, pay attention to green color in the tourism advertisements depicting the country's tourism industry.

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