

## Azerbaijan and Türkiye's Tourism Ties: The Role of Zangezur Corridor\*

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### Abstract

This paper evaluates the impacts of the Zangezur Corridor between Azerbaijan and Turkey on regional tourism. The Zangezur Corridor is a connecting road linking the Nakhchivan region of Azerbaijan to Turkey and has significant potential for regional tourism. Opening the corridor could increase the attractiveness of tourism in the region by facilitating tourists' access to a wider range of destinations. In addition, the development of energy transportation and border infrastructure can contribute to the construction of a suitable infrastructure for the tourism sector. However, the region's historical history of geopolitical tensions raises security concerns. The safety of tourists and the maintenance of political stability are of paramount importance. In this study, a literature review was conducted, and studies conducted in the existing field were utilized and analysis of secondary data sources was used as a method. This paper highlights the potential of tourism as a catalyst for regional cooperation and development and provides a basis for future work. Factors such as security, infrastructure development, and promotion need to be taken into account for a more effective use of the corridor for tourism.

**Keywords:** Zangezur Corridor, Tourism, Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Nakhchivan

**JEL Kodu/Code:** L83.

### Azerbaycan ve Türkiye'nin Turizm Bağları: Zengezur Koridoru'nun Rolü

#### Özet

Bu çalışma, Azerbaycan ve Türkiye arasında kurulan Zengezur Koridoru'nun bölge turizmi üzerindeki etkilerini değerlendirmektedir. Zengezur Koridoru, Azerbaycan'ın Nahçıvan bölgesini Türkiye'ye bağlayan bir bağlantı yolu olup, bölge turizmi için önemli bir potansiyel taşımaktadır. Koridorun açılması, turistlerin daha geniş bir yelpazedeki yerlere erişimini kolaylaştırarak bölge turizminin çekiciliğini artırabilir. Ayrıca, enerji taşımacılığı ve sınır altyapısının geliştirilmesi turizm sektörü için uygun bir altyapının inşasına katkı sağlayabilir. Ancak, bölgede tarihsel olarak jeopolitik gerilimlerin yoğunlukla yaşanması güvenlik endişelerini gündeme getirmektedir. Turistlerin güvenliği ve siyasi istikrarın korunması büyük önem taşımaktadır. Bu çalışmada literatür taraması yapılarak mevcut alanda yapılmış çalışmalardan faydalanılmıştır ve ikincil veri kaynaklarının analizi yöntem olarak kullanılmıştır. Çalışma, turizmin bölgesel iş birliği ve kalkınma için bir katalizör olma potansiyelini vurgulamakta ve gelecekteki çalışmalar için bir temel oluşturmaktadır. Koridorun turizm açısından daha etkili bir şekilde kullanılabilmesi için güvenlik, altyapı gelişimi ve tanıtım gibi faktörlerin dikkate alınması gerekmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Zengezur Koridoru, Turizm, Türkiye, Azerbaycan, Nahçıvan

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Tourism offers a range of benefits for local communities, such as economic growth, cultural exchange, social progress and environmental sustainability, while also serving as a mechanism to strengthen ties between two culturally shared nations. Accordingly, tourism development in neighboring countries can trigger various economic, social-cultural and environmental impacts on the tourism destination (Rivera et al., 2016). Cooperation between countries bordering each other encourages tourism movements. Visits to a neighboring country for various purposes (e.g. health, shopping, various activities) contribute to the rapprochement of local communities (Sergeyeva et al., 2022). The relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan, which are already very close historically and culturally, can be strengthened by intensifying mutual tourism activities. This study focuses on the implications of the opening of the Zengezur Corridor on regional tourism, with a particular focus on the close geographical location and historical ties between Azerbaijan and Turkey.

It is emphasized that tourism has the potential to facilitate social development in local communities. In this way, tourism offers opportunities to increase social cohesion, promote intercultural discussion, and facilitate the exchange of ideas and values. Tourism also provides an opportunity for local communities to showcase their hospitality, which can foster a sense of pride and identity. In addition, the tourism sector has the potential to create pathways for community engagement, enabling local people to actively participate in the tourism business and reap the development benefits (Garakhanova, 2023). Tourism, which also contributes to the preservation and revitalization of cultural heritage, can help preserve intangible cultural assets for future generations. In particular, the opening of the Zangezur Corridor between Azerbaijan and Turkey could be an important step for the positive development of tourism mobility between these two countries. This corridor would connect Azerbaijan's Nakhchivan region to Turkey, facilitating access to tourist destinations in the region. At the same time, pipelines for energy transportation, as well as the development of border infrastructure, could provide a suitable infrastructure for tourism. This reflects the potential for cooperation between Azerbaijan and Turkey to promote economic and cultural progress in the wider region.

This study will assess the possible impacts of the Zengezur Corridor on tourism in the region and discuss the opportunities that this corridor offers to the region in terms of tourism. However, it is important to note that factors such as security, infrastructure development and promotion need to be taken into account. This study highlights the potential of tourism as a catalyst for regional cooperation and development and provides a basis for examining the growth of the tourism sector between Azerbaijan and Turkey.

## **2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1. Being A Neighboring Country for Tourism Industry**

The status of being a neighboring country is of great importance for tourism efforts. The potential for neighboring countries to engage in cooperative efforts and cross-border tourism cooperation offers an avenue for mutual benefit and socio-economic development (Park et al., 2022). According to Wani et al. (2023), cooperation between neighboring countries in the tourism sector has the potential to promote cross-border linkages, facilitate peace-building efforts and stimulate economic growth. Accordingly, it is of great importance in the marketing of regional tourism destinations as it provides benefits such as efficient use and optimization of resources in the region (Naipaul et al., 2009).

One of the main benefits of being a neighboring country is the possibility of spillover effects in the tourism sector. According to research by Park et al. (2022), there is evidence that international tourists tend to spread their travel experiences to neighboring countries, leading to a phenomenon often referred to as "spillover". This spillover effect is associated with increased levels of tourism activity and successive economic advantages for the countries involved. The spillover effect phenomenon occurs when visitors engage in cross-border travel, visiting a specific country and then expanding their itinerary to include neighboring countries. This practice has positive consequences for the whole region and provides various benefits. A study by Mordecki et al. (2019) found that tourism demand in Mexico and Uruguay is influenced by an important border country. This underlines the importance of neighboring countries in attracting tourists and enhancing tourism efforts.

Building cooperative efforts among neighboring countries in the tourism sector has the potential to make a significant contribution to poverty reduction. The importance of tourism as a key element in the economic development strategies of developing countries is recognized (Kaya et al., 2022). As highlighted by Kim et al. (2016), tourism has the ability to reduce poverty rates, especially in the least developed countries. According to Croes (2014), cooperation between neighboring countries has the potential to create tourism initiatives that not only support the local population but also help reduce poverty. Vanegas et al. (2015) examined the impact of tourism and agriculture on poverty reduction in Costa Rica and Nicaragua and found that tourism exhibited a statistically significant higher poverty reduction rate than agriculture in both countries. Moreover, the proximity of a country can increase the competitiveness of the tourism industry. According to Batala et al. (2017) and Costea et al. (2017), the overall attractiveness and competitiveness of a region can be enhanced through cooperation in various areas, including tourism marketing, cultural exchange and infrastructure development. For example, Smith (2015) emphasizes that there is effective cooperation among the Baltic States in the field of tourism promotion. This collaborative effort has been crucial in overcoming the challenge of the absence of a distinct image and has enabled these states to establish a prominent presence in the tourism industry. Moreover, the presence of a strong transportation infrastructure, including both air and land transportation, plays a crucial role in shaping the competitiveness of a particular location (Costea et al., 2017).

In the field of cross-border tourism, neighboring countries also contribute to mitigating hazards and challenges. The tourism industry has experienced a significant impact globally as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, neighboring regions of neighboring countries have been shown to exhibit a faster recovery in tourist flows compared to interactions with geographically distant states (Ivanov et al., 2021). This underlines the resilience and potential advantages of collaborative efforts in cross-border tourism under difficult circumstances.

## **2.2. The Importance of Cultural and National Ties between Countries in Terms of Tourism**

The importance of tourism activities for two nations with common national and cultural ties is multifaceted and encompasses various dimensions such as economic progress, cultural exchange, social progress and ecological sustainability (Akyol, 2020). Tourism has the potential to act as a catalyst in the process of improving relations between nations, as well as promoting mutual understanding and cooperation (Weiermair, 2000; Bilgin, 2023).

From a cultural perspective, tourism serves as a platform that facilitates the exchange of traditions, customs and cultural practices between two nations. According to Zhang et al. (2020), this opportunity encourages the development of cultural appreciation and understanding by enabling individuals to interact with the host country's distinctive cultural heritage, artistic expressions and

traditional practices. According to Underberg-Goode (2014), cultural exchange has the potential to contribute to the preservation and advancement of cultural heritage. The process of cultural exchange also facilitates the revitalization of traditional crafts and arts. In addition, the presence of tourism can act as a catalyst for the creation and promotion of cultural tourism offers and activities that highlight the shared cultural history of both countries, thus strengthening their cultural links (Wang, 2016).

Tourism has the potential to facilitate social development in local communities in both countries. According to Wani et al. (2023), using this approach has the potential to facilitate social cohesion, promote intercultural discussion, and facilitate the exchange of ideas and values. According to Trivellas et al. (2016), local communities can use encounters with tourists as a means to showcase their way of life, traditions and hospitality. Thus, they can develop a sense of pride and identity. According to Woyo and Slabbert (2019), the tourism industry has the potential to create pathways for community engagement and participation, enabling local people to actively participate in the tourism business and reap the development benefits. In addition, tourism has the potential to contribute to the preservation and revitalization of intangible cultural assets, including practices such as traditional music, dance and storytelling, which have significant value for national and cultural identity (Nurjaya, 2022).

In sum, tourism activities serve as an important mechanism for strengthening ties between two nations that share national and cultural ties. The aforementioned factors such as economic growth, cultural exchange, social progress and environmental sustainability are all influenced by this phenomenon. Through the promotion of cooperation and the adoption of sustainable practices, both countries have the potential to optimize the benefits derived from tourism, while at the same time preserving their national and cultural heritage for the benefit of future generations.

### **2.3. The Importance of Easy and Fast Physical Transportation for Tourism**

The importance of transportation in the context of tourism is extremely important as it increases the ease of reaching a particular place and allows tourists to move more comfortably once they get there (Albalate & Fageda, 2016). The choice of tourism destinations is influenced by several factors, such as spatial dependence and the proximity of neighboring cities. In addition to these criteria, other important considerations include distance, population density, income levels, accessibility and the presence of attractions (Marrocu & Paci, 2013). There are differences in overall mobility routines between regular life and vacation scenarios, with physical activity tending to be stronger and more frequent during vacations (Schlemmer et al., 2019). The concept of universal design prioritizes the creation of appropriate conditions that meet the needs of all users, covering both physical access and information accessibility (Senkiv & Tserklevych, 2021). The choice of a preferred tourism destination is significantly influenced by mobility and accessibility criteria (Martinčević et al., 2022).

Transportation plays a crucial role in facilitating connectivity between tourism destinations, as well as enabling tourists to increase their mobility and travel between their points of origin and their desired destinations (Darmawan & Chen, 2020). Transportation plays a crucial role in increasing tourism attractiveness, facilitating accessibility and mobility, and providing transportation services in a given destination (Zheng et al., 2016). Decisions on destination and mode of transportation are closely linked, as various criteria such as travel time, distance, online presence and walkability play a role in determining the choices made by visitors (Juschten & Hössinger, 2020). As highlighted by Chen et al. (2021), establishing transport connectivity is an important prerequisite for the progress and growth of the tourism sector. According to Zhao et al. (2021), improving transportation

infrastructure plays an important role in increasing the comfort, safety and overall satisfaction of tourists during their travels. In this context, the active use of the Zengezur corridor could positively improve tourism flows between Turkey and Azerbaijan.

The impact of reduced travel time on tourism demand in the area of tourist travel is a multifaceted phenomenon that encompasses various conceptual perspectives, as supported by the references provided (Mckercher, 1998; Hergesell & Dickinger, 2013; Atar, 2020). The following discourse provides a broad review of the outcomes linked to time savings in the tourism sector. The increased convenience and accessibility of tourist attractions can be attributed to a reduction in travel time and hence an increase in their attractiveness (Sit, 2016; Koo et al., 2017). As a result of the reduced effort and time required to travel, individuals are increasingly inclined to engage in the exploration of various destinations (Aydin et al., 2015; Zang et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2021). The optimization of travelers' trips is achieved by minimizing transit time. This function enables tourists to optimize their limited travel time by effectively exploring multiple destinations within a compressed schedule. The need for tourism is greatly influenced by the concept of time efficiency, as it allows tourists to see a wider range of areas within a limited time, increasing the overall value and appeal of their trip (Gozgor & Demir, 2018). Tourists may experience reduced levels of fatigue, encompassing both physical and mental dimensions, as a result of their increased capacity to take additional time to engage in tourism activities and immerse themselves in local culture.

Increased flexibility is a notable advantage resulting from reduced transportation time, as it allows individuals to have more control over the timing of their trip. Individuals have the capacity to make spontaneous travel decisions and participate in the exploration of various destinations within a limited time window. Onafowora & Owoye (2012) argue that the inclusion of flexible travel alternatives has the capacity to attract a wider range of tourists who might otherwise be deterred from the idea of a longer and laborious journey. In other words, increased accessibility can lead to a significant increase in overall tourism demand.

Reductions in travel times result in economic advantages beyond convenience for individuals traveling. Rather, these gains have a positive impact on both the tourism industry and local economies. Attracting more tourists to a destination leads to an increase in visitor spending, facilitating the creation of employment opportunities and revenue generation for local businesses. Mazzola et al. (2022) argue that the region has the potential to experience a significant and advantageous ripple effect due to economic growth associated with an increase in tourism demand.

#### **2.4. Importance of Zengezur Corridor in Terms of Tourism Potential**

The opening of the Zangezur Corridor linking Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan has the potential to improve connectivity between Azerbaijan and Turkey. This development has the power to have a significant impact on the growth of tourism and other sectors in the region.

The opening of the Zangezur Corridor has resulted in the creation of a border between Azerbaijan and Turkey that serves as a buffer zone (Mustafayev & Sadigova, 2022). This development could have significant implications for the mobility of individuals and the transportation of goods between the two countries, as well as a potential impact on the dynamics of tourism and trade activities. The expected impact of the establishment of a corridor connecting Nakhchivan to the western regions of Azerbaijan and then to Turkey is expected to have a significant impact on the economy and tourism of the region. According to Hasanli et al. (2021), the establishment of this newly built corridor has the potential to create significant prospects for the advancement of tourism in the region. The improved connectivity between Turkey and Azerbaijan has the potential to drive an increase in tourism and cross-border mobility.

Azerbaijan's strategic location at the crossroads of major trade routes and its role in facilitating energy transportation through pipelines such as the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) and the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) have been highlighted (Das, 2022). The presence of such infrastructure not only affects energy trade, but also has the capacity to have an impact on the tourism sector, as well-developed transport networks can increase the accessibility of travel.

According to the study conducted by Mikail et al. (2019), by examining the economic, political and social ties that exist between Azerbaijan and Turkey, and as a result of these relations, it is seen to have significant impacts on the progress of various sectors such as tourism. The existence of political stability and economic cooperation can promote a favorable climate for tourism development. While the main emphasis is on energy, such cooperation has the potential to promote broader economic progress and thus facilitate the expansion of the tourism sector.

In the study conducted by Imrani et al. (2022), the authors discuss the emergence of cave tourism as a potential alternative tourism aspect in Azerbaijan. This implies the potential for diversification in the tourism business as it can accommodate a diverse group of tourists inclined towards cave exploration and adventure tourism. This potential is further enhanced when coupled with the developing tourism flows through the Zengezur corridor. In a study by Erdem & Yel (2023), an efficiency ranking for the tourism industry was published and Turkey and Azerbaijan were identified as the leading countries in this sector. This ranking underlines that the tourism industry will expand in both countries going forward.

Turkey aims to become a leading global player in medical tourism (Pirzada, 2022). This goal has the potential to create economic prospects both within and beyond the medical sector by attracting tourists in search of healthcare services while also exploring the country. The ease of transportation and time savings provided by this corridor between Turkey and Azerbaijan may be more important for this type of tourism.

The creation of an economic corridor is widely seen as a catalyst for regional cooperation and all-round development, including the expansion of the tourism industry (Luvsandavaajav, 2022). This suggests that improving connectivity and infrastructure can create a favorable environment for tourism development by facilitating investment, employment opportunities and transportation. In other words, the operationalization of the Zangezur Corridor and related developments have the capacity to impact tourism between Azerbaijan and Turkey through greater connectivity, expanded economic prospects, and strengthened regional cooperation. The expansion of the tourism industry in the region can be facilitated by the successful and sustainable management of these elements.

Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan offer a wide range of tourism opportunities, from historical sites and cultural encounters to exploring natural landscapes (Ihar, 2020). The establishment of the corridor will provide tourists with access to a wider range of destinations, thus increasing the attractiveness of the region for travelers seeking different experiences. Cross-border tourism can be facilitated through the creation of an effectively managed corridor, thus supporting efforts to encourage tourists to explore both Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan during a single trip. This phenomenon has the potential to create economic advantages for both regions.

Increased tourism has the potential to create economic advantages for the regions adjacent to the corridor. The tourism phenomenon has the potential to facilitate the exchange of cultural values and promote mutual understanding between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. The increasing influx of tourists to the region offers potential avenues for cultural exchange programs and initiatives aimed at promoting peace and cooperation between different ethnic and cultural communities. The establishment of the corridor has the potential to stimulate infrastructure

development to facilitate tourism, including the improvement of transport networks, border infrastructure and the provision of tourism-related services. This is important because of its potential to enhance the overall travel experience. Establishing this corridor in a region that has historically experienced violence and ongoing geopolitical tensions can pose challenges related to security, political stability and the possibility of conflict. Addressing these concerns is crucial to guarantee the safety of travelers and maintain the long-term viability of tourism efforts.

### **3. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study explores the potential impacts of the Zangezur Corridor on the tourism industry between Azerbaijan and Turkey. It discusses the opportunities that this corridor can bring to tourism in the region and the advantages that this development can provide in terms of tourism.

The opening of the Zangezur Corridor could be a way to strengthen tourism ties between these two countries. Connecting Azerbaijan's Nakhchivan region to Turkey, this corridor could offer tourists a wider range of destinations. At the same time, pipelines for energy transportation and the development of border infrastructure could help create an infrastructure suitable for the growth of the tourism industry. However, alongside these potential benefits, there are also some challenges. The region is historically known as a region of conflict and geopolitical tensions, so security concerns play an important role. The safety of tourists and the maintenance of political stability are critical to the successful utilization of this corridor.

In conclusion, the Zangezur Corridor has great potential for the growth of the tourism industry between Azerbaijan and Turkey. This study emphasizes that tourism can be a catalyst for regional cooperation and development. However, in order to fully capitalize on these opportunities, factors such as security, infrastructure development and promotion need to be considered. Future studies should examine in more detail how this corridor can be utilized more efficiently in terms of tourism.

In this context, the following suggestions can be made:

- The importance of security and stability is underscored by the region's historical past of conflict and geopolitical tensions that have led to security concerns. It is therefore imperative to prioritize the adoption of security measures and the maintenance of political stability to facilitate the growth and advancement of the tourism industry in the region. It is imperative that governments and international organizations in the region engage in joint efforts aimed at ensuring the safety of tourists and promoting stability in the region.
- Infrastructure Development: In order to optimize the use of the Zangezur Corridor for tourism purposes, it is imperative to undertake infrastructure development initiatives. This includes improving transportation infrastructure such as highways and airports, developing accommodation facilities and tourist attractions. Implementation of infrastructure modernization initiatives will facilitate improved travel experiences for tourists and hence increase the overall attractiveness of the region.
- The region needs a competent promotion and marketing plan to properly capitalize on its tourism potential. Promotion of the region's touristic appeal and cultural richness should be extended to both national and international platforms. Tourist-oriented businesses in the region have the potential to cooperate and engage in joint efforts to promote and develop cooperation in the tourism industry.
- The establishment of tourism training programs for residents is vital to support the expansion of the tourism industry in the region. This has the potential to provide additional

employment opportunities and improve the ability to effectively meet the needs of the tourism industry.

- Cultural Exchange and Cooperation: Within the region there are diverse communities with different cultural backgrounds. Tourism has the potential to facilitate understanding of these differences and therefore facilitate mutual cultural interaction. Cultural interaction programs and events have the potential to foster mutual understanding between different communities.
- Diversification of tourism in the region is important to cater to a wide range of tourist demographics. This could include examining various aspects such as cultural tourism, nature tourism, adventure tourism and health tourism. This has the potential to enhance the sustainability of the tourism industry.
- Achieving the best outcomes for tourism in the region requires regional cooperation and diplomacy with other bordering countries, particularly Azerbaijan and Turkey. Tourism development in the region can be achieved by promoting cross-border cooperation and facilitating constructive negotiations.
- Environmental sensitivity and sustainability should be prioritized in the management of tourism in the region. Protection of natural beauties and natural resources is of great importance. Therefore, realization of sustainable tourism practices is a mandatory measure.
- Research and Monitoring: Regular research is needed to assess the touristic impacts of the Zengezur Corridor and monitor its success. Thus, future policy decisions can be formulated and implemented by utilizing this data.

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