

Ethno-tourism potential of the Shaki-Zagatala economic region: opportunities and challenges

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ABSTRACT

Problem statement. The ethnic tourism potential of the Shaki-Zagatala economic region, which is one of the regions with a rich ethnic composition of Azerbaijan, the usage possibilities of ethno-tourism and the emerging problems were investigated in the research paper. Studying the ethno-tourism opportunities of the region is fairly important in terms of recognition of the area from an ethnic point of view, employment of the local population and protection of ethno-diversity.

Purpose. The primary aim of the research is to study the current state of ethnic tourism in the region, explore the possibilities of using it, and for this, conduct a SWOT analysis and prepare a development model for eliminating the emerging problems. It is also necessary to explore potential areas for ethno-tourism in the region and prepare an ethno-tourism route for this.

Research methods. To carry out research in the area, literature and archive materials were examined, statistical materials were obtained, structural-functional analysis, generalization, and historical and geographic modelling methods were used. Along with this, field research works were also conducted to get to know the region more closely and to study cultural-heritage tourism opportunities.

Research results. As a result of the conducted research, it was found that the region has a very rich ethnic composition and it is possible to witness this diversity in all districts. Although the region has rich ethno-tourism opportunities, they are still underutilized. This is due to the extremely low level of production and social infrastructure in the economic region. Unequivocally, although the social infrastructure is convenient in the ethno-diverse villages located near the district centres, the quality of the infrastructure decreases while moving away from the district centre. The second essential problem of the region is the lack of guest houses and hotels for overnight stays in the area or the location of most of them in the district centre and adjacent villages.

Conclusion. Taking into the general situation, it is possible to develop tourism, especially ethno-tourism, in the Shaki-Zagatala economic region, which is relatively backward in terms of sustainable development. To ensure the comfort of the tourists coming to this region, the construction or repair of roads along the ethno-tourism route, and the organization of catering and accommodation services are among the main priorities. The development of this type of tourism in the region will eliminate the problem of unemployment among the population in these places, assist in increasing the income of the population, and play a special role in protecting the ethnic diversity of the country and putting it on the map.

Keywords: Azerbaijan, Shaki-Zagatala, ethnic minorities, ethnic tourism, ArcGIS, cultural heritage, SWOT, development model.

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Introduction and research status. The Republic of Azerbaijan is among the countries distinguished by the diversity of the national-ethnic composition of its population. Representatives of more than 20 ethnic and national minorities have settled in the country. The primary reason why the country's national and ethnic composition is so diverse is the migration processes that took place in the area historically, the invasion of the area by foreign invaders and the settlement of the peoples who took refuge in the ancient lands of Azerbaijan. Shaki-Zagatala economic region is one of the regions of the country that is distinguished by the diversity of its national and ethnic composition. About 17,0% of the population of the economic regions are constituted by national and ethnic minorities [46]. This indicates the high opportunity of using the ethno-tourism potential of the area.

Before studying the ethno-tourism possibilities of the Shaki-Zagatala economic region, it is necessary to look at the explanation of the term "ethnic". According to historical sources, it can be enunciated that the word "ethnic" was a term used in Ancient Greece, which was used by the Dorians, Ionians and others to distinguish ethnic groups from each other [13]. The term was later used to refer to non-Jewish groups. In the middle of the 15th century, Jewish and non-Christian groups began to be called "ethnic peoples" [18]. Based on the above-mentioned, it can be enunciated that the usage area of the term "ethnic" has gradually decreased. This was probably related to the integration of civilization, globalization and the creation of a new innovative technological society.

But what is ethno-tourism or ethnic tourism? According to some researchers, ethnic tourism

is a type of tourism that aims to visit places of birth, relatives or friends's residences and it can be identified with nostalgia [26]. Ethno-tourism is a type of cultural-heritage tourism, which means understanding the cultures of different peoples [14; 42]. According to R. Wood, ethno-tourism is the interest of tourists in various forms of intercultural interaction [21; 31]. Ethno-tourism is also defined as a type of tourism in which people are motivated by the search for exotic cultural experiences [16]. According to L. Yang, ethnic tourism has emerged as a tool used by many countries to facilitate economic and cultural development and to help preserve ethnic heritage [33; 34; 35]. This branch of tourism has gained popularity since the end of the 20th century. The term ethnic tourism was first used in 1977 by D. Smith. D. Smith defined this type of tourism as the communication of "unusual" traditions of locals, especially "exotic" peoples to the public [24; 25]. This idea can be accepted correctly because it is known that today in many countries and regions of the world, the concept of "ethnicity" is promoted to attract tourists, earn income and bring foreign currency into the country [12]. Currently, ethno-tourism is widely used in many countries of the world for the purpose of ensuring economic and cultural development [8]. Generally speaking, tourism strengthens ethnic identity by promoting ethnic cultures, traditions, and ethnic events such as festivals, etc. [24; 25]. This, in turn, helps ethnic minorities to convey their traditions to the world, as well as to earn income. Undoubtedly, ethnic tourism is used in many countries of the world, and the main purpose of its use is to facilitate economic and cultural development and to help preserve ethnic heritage.

In our modern times, quite a lot of research has been done on how ethno-tourism affects the host country [32; 29; 27; 25; 17, 23]. Some studies have shown that ethno-tourism can have negative effects such as cultural heritage and environmental destruction [3; 4; 5; 6; 15; 25; 30]. Although ethno-tourism provides social and economic opportunities for a country or region, it can also negatively affect the lives and culture of ethnic groups. The commodification and marketing of ethnicity can cause anxiety among ethnic minorities. In many places, there is growing concern about how to balance the use of ethnicity as a tourist attraction with the preservation of ethnic minority cultures and the promotion of the ethnic group [22]. According to V. Berghe, ethno-tourism creates a situation similar to a "human zoo". In other words, their photos, videos and lifestyles are taken without their permission [28]. Taking these into account, it is necessary to use ethno-tourism in such a way that ethnic groups make efforts to develop this type of tourism and their socioeconomic interests are ensured. One of the main factors that is

important to consider here is the ability of ethnic groups to use ethno-tourism as their source of income. In areas with dense populations of ethnic groups, a small number of ethnic groups present their handiwork for visiting tourists, show the methods of its preparation, and host visitors in their homes. In addition, many ethnic groups perform national dances and serve national foods for visiting guests. In this case, it is possible to attract the interest of tourists, especially foreign tourists. Surely, the satisfaction and interest of tourists affect the number of tourists who can come in the following years. The issue of the promotion of ethnic tourism and ethnic groups of that area has a great role. That is, by showing their national values to tourists, ethnic groups can support the economic development of both themselves and the area they live in, and play an important role in the creation of new job opportunities.

It should also be noted that ethnic tourism is a multifaceted sector, a type of tourism with various options for development, such as rural tourism, national dance, national music, and so on [19; 20]. This type of tourism is highly dependent on the knowledge and values of the local people. Ethno-tourism is ideal for community-based tourism enterprises and has the potential for smart partnerships with established entrepreneurs. Local ownership of ethno-tourism products is easy to achieve and boosts the local economy. Small- and medium-scale ethno-tourism products are usually booked and paid for locally, thereby reducing capital outflows from the country and community [2]. That is, the local population can use their knowledge and skills to sell their local products and receive product orders from foreign countries. In this way, they can establish their small businesses to ensure their income and to promote the development of the area where they live. From this point of view, it is very important to study the national ethnic composition of the area, their customs and ways of turning these abilities into "marketable products".

As in the world countries, a lot of work has been done in the field of protecting the ethnic characteristics and cultures of ethnic minorities in Azerbaijan [11]. However, scientific research works related to ethnic tourism were not carried out at a sufficient level, and ethno-tourism was not promoted at a sufficient level, which was evident in the number of ethnic tourism enthusiasts and tourists who came to Azerbaijan.

The essential purpose of the research is to study the ethnic tourism potential in the Shaki-Zagatala economic region, to use this potential to increase the socio-economic power of the region and to prepare a development model to overcome the problems encountered. Moreover, the analysis of socio-cultural

issues related to ethno-tourism and the preparation of a suitable strategy for the development of this field of tourism in the Shaki-Zagatala economic region were considered. Therefore, the following tasks have been set for this:

- studying the ethnic composition and determining the modern settlement areas of ethnic minorities;
- compiling historical and cultural monuments and museums related to minority ethnic groups, mapping the obtained data and studying their traditions (music, folklore, cuisine, etc.);
- development of a special development model for determining ways of using ethno-tourism and solving problems;
- analysis of socio-cultural issues related to ethno-tourism and preparation of a development strategy for the field of ethnic tourism.

Theoretical and practical importance of the research work. The rich natural conditions of the area, the wealth of historical and cultural monuments, as well as the diversity of the ethnic composition can stimulate the development of ethno-tourism in the area. This indicates the importance of research from a theoretical point of view. Theoretically, numerous Azerbaijani scientists have studied the natural, historical and ethnic richness of the area. As an example, Z.T. Imrani, K.Z. Zeynalova, G.J. Javadov, N.R. Jafarova and others can be mentioned.

The development of ethno-tourism in the region can directly affect the preservation of historical monuments, the creation of new job opportunities

for the population based on ethnic tourism, and the development of social infrastructure and service areas, which indicates the high practical importance of the research.

Material and methods. The research work was carried out mainly in three stages. The first stage is the acquisition of literature and archive materials; the second stage is conducting field research; and the third stage is the preparation of the settlement map of ethnic groups and the map of historical and cultural objects and tourism routes based on the conducted research (Figure 1).

In the first stage of the research work, it is necessary to become familiar with the terms of tourism, including ethno-tourism, to study the ethno-tourism potential of Azerbaijan, to get acquainted with the works of scientists conducting scientific research in this field in Azerbaijan and around the world. Thus, in the research of the historical part of the research work, mainly the works of G.J. Javadov (2000), Z.M. Bunyadov (1989), F. Mammadova (2021) and other scientists, the collection of Azerbaijani toponyms, to study the development of the tourism sector in Azerbaijan, as well as ethnic tourism Z.T. Imrani's (2016, 2021), E.A. Ismayilova's (2017) scientific-research works, the data of the state statistics committee to assess the development dynamics of the tourism sector in the country, in the study of ethnic tourism on a world scale and in obtaining data in this field L. Yang, G. Wall (2013, 2023), J. Henderson (2003), R. Wood, D. Camison, J. Ryan, M. Aiken, E. Ismayilova (2017) and others, to conduct

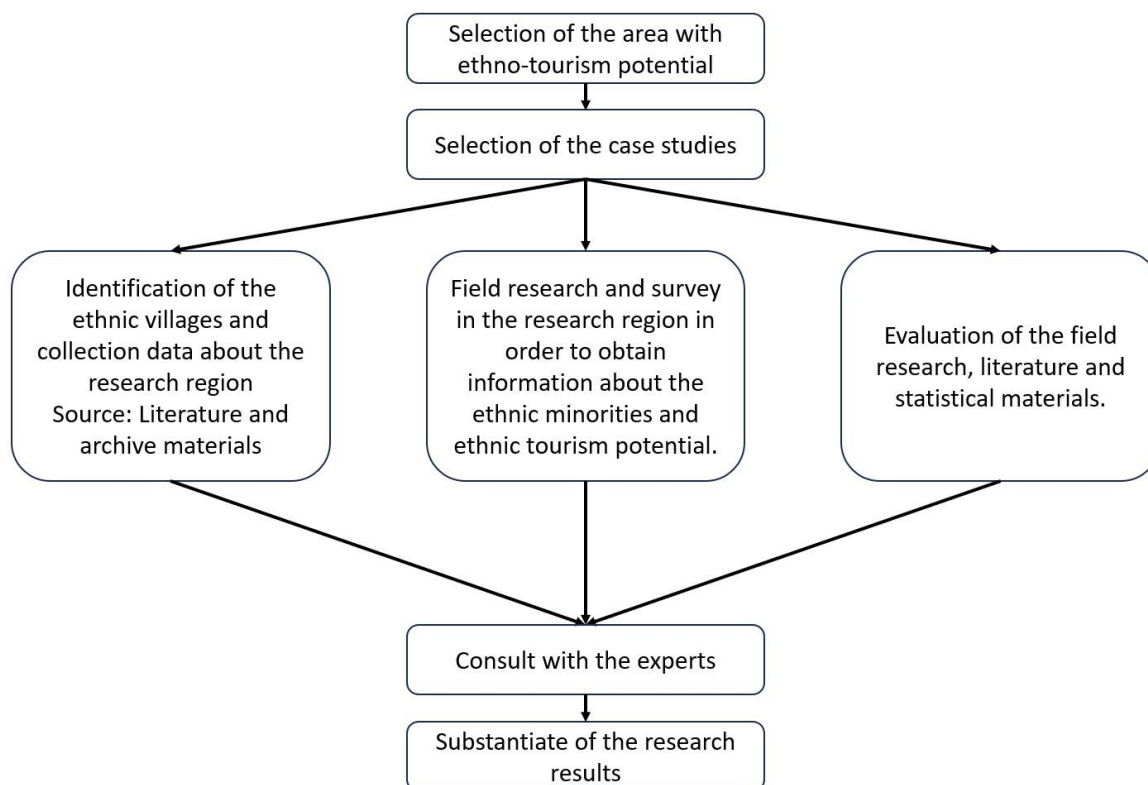


Fig. 1. Research procedure

SWOT analysis A. Harbiankova (2022), L. Gertsbergin (2022) and others research were scrutinised.

The second stage of the research is based on field research in the Shaki-Zagatala economic region during October-November 2023. With the help of local communities, the ethnicity of the economic region, the tourism potential of villages and settlements were studied, the current situation was closely familiarized with the local population, and the opinions and suggestions of the local population were recorded. The questionnaire was conducted in all administrative districts included in the economic

region, especially in the villages of these districts densely populated by ethnic minorities. During the survey process, 500 questionnaires were distributed to 5 ethnic groups (Avar, Tsakhur, Lezgin, Udi, Inghiloi) and 480 of these questionnaires were answered. In addition, teachers, executive representatives, mayors and people who organize tours to the area as amateurs participated in the survey.

According to the result of the survey (Table 1), it can be concluded that the region has a rich ethno-tourism potential and its development in the region may create several opportunities for the locals.

Table 1

Ethnic minorities' perception about ethnic tourism potential and its economic impact in the economic region

Statements*	Yes	No	Not sure	Total
Your village has the ethno-tourism (ET) potential	89%	11%	0%	100%
ET promotes local economic development	85%	12%	3%	100%
ET creates more business opportunities	78%	21,8%	0,2%	100%
ET improves living standards	77%	22%	1%	100%
ET increases locals' income	69%	20%	1%	100%
ET improves social infrastructure	88%	9,7%	2,3%	100%

*The survey was conducted at the villages where most of the population was accounted for by ethnic minorities and rich in the culture.

The third stage is the selection of ethnically diverse villages of the region, determination of the natural and cultural-heritage potential of the surrounding areas of the villages, preparation and justification of ethno-tourism routes, and as a result of this, the preparation of maps.

The research work was carried out using several methods. Thus, conventional methods, such as comparative analysis to compare tourism indicators in the region, a historical method to investigate the distribution and settlement of ethnic groups in the area, field research method to get to know the current situation in the region; non-conventional methods, such as SWOT analysis, cartographic (ArcGIS) for data mapping, and modelling methods for developing a development model were used.

Research area. Shaki-Zagatala economic region stretches along the southern foothills of the Greater Caucasus Mountains and covers the north-western part of the Republic of Azerbaijan. There are 6 cities, 7 small towns, and 336 rural settlements in the economic region. The total area of the region is 8,8 thousand km², and its population is 623,6 thousand people [38; 47]. In addition to Azerbaijanis, representatives of more than 10 minority ethnic groups have settled in the region. Avars mainly settled in the Balakan and Zagatala districts, Lezgins mainly in the Gabala, Shaki, and Oghuz districts, Tsakhurs in the Zagatala and Gakh districts, and Inghilois mainly in the Gakh and partially in the Balakan districts [9]. Turning to the national-ethnic composition of the population, Azerbaijanis account

for 83,1% of the population, and these figures are 7,9% for Avars, 4,0% for Lezgins, 2,2% for Tsakhurs, 1,6% for Georgians and Inghilois, 0,6% for Udis, and 0,6% for other ethnic and national minorities (Figure 2) [46].

Having various national and ethnic compositions has affected the traditional lifestyle of the population settling in any area, the formation of the natural-historical structure, the preservation of the cultural heritage, etc., which causes the interest of tourists visiting the economic region, stimulates their tourism activities for understanding [41].

Result and discussion. Shaki-Zagatala economic region is one of the developed areas of the Republic of Azerbaijan in terms of tourism. The tourism sector has high socio-economic and political potential and can increase and develop the effective activity of the state and various regions [1].

If we look at the dynamics of tourism indicators in the economic region, the number of hotels and similar enterprises in the region increased in the last decades, and the number of rooms doubled. In the same way, an increase in the one-time capacity, the number of accommodated persons and the number of overnight stays was recorded (Table 2). Based on the data, it can be enunciated that the Gakh, Gabala and Shaki districts have a special role in tourism indicators in the economic region.

As for the amount of income and expenses obtained from hotels and similar enterprises in the Shaki-Zagatala economic region, it can be said that the amount of both income and expenses increased

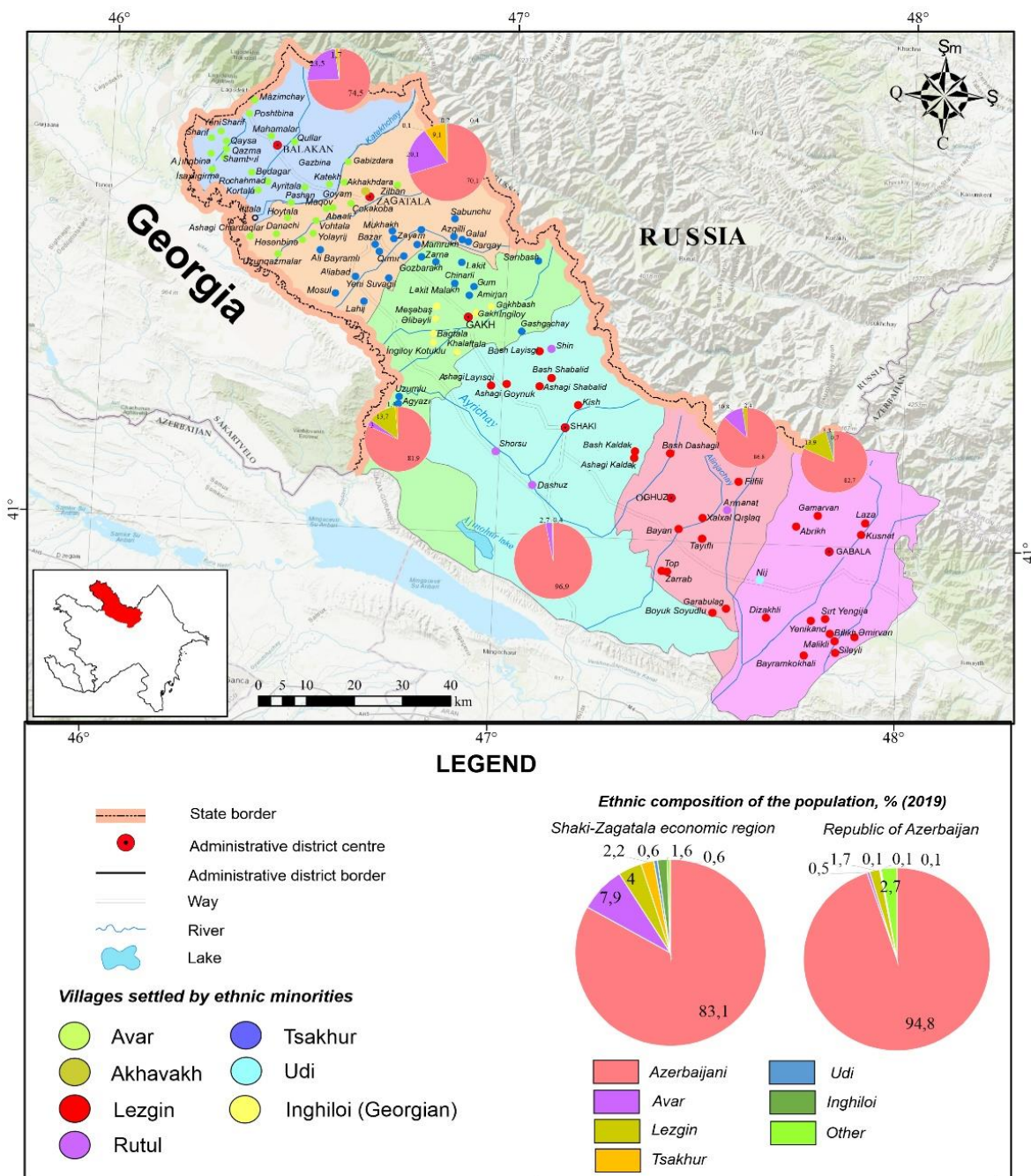


Fig. 2. National and ethnic composition map of the research area

Table 2

The main tourism indicators of the Shaki-Zagatala economic region

Districts	The number of hotels			The number of rooms			One-time capacity			The number of accommodated persons			The number of overnight stays		
	2010	2015	2022	2010	2015	2022	2010	2015	2022	2010	2015	2022	2010	2015	2022
Balakan	1	3	3	24	99	95	48	216	208	582	2363	3498	582	6544	5110
Gakh	10	11	18	212	225	331	484	564	862	3327	3525	13347	21194	13582	21771
Gabala	10	9	23	267	196	1157	602	503	2725	24330	5909	98728	25666	7653	171998
Oghuz	3	3	3	43	62	62	113	138	138	2668	1095	1312	2668	1194	1312
Shaki	15	17	18	269	320	354	576	785	786	6319	12826	7104	7471	15293	10152
Zagatala	11	11	13	155	170	178	357	377	395	4554	5562	8853	5293	6798	10245
Region	50	54	78	970	1072	2177	2180	2583	5114	41780	31280	132842	62874	51064	220588

Source: (Regions of Azerbaijan, 2023).

in the economic region in the last decades, and in 2022, the income in other regions except the Balakan district exceeded the costs (Table 3). Based on the indicators, although tourism in the region has developed compared to other regions of the country, there are still serious problems in the general tourism sector.

The presented indicators cover the general tourism sector in the Shaki-Zagatala economic region. Economic indicators related to ethnic tourism are generally not registered. Moreover, ethnic tourism has been developed only in a few villages of the

economic region. Although the ethnic composition of the population in the urban places is complex, the main part of the population is constituted by Azerbaijanis. In the settlements, the population of only three settlements consists of ethnic minorities. These are the settlements of Gabaghchol of the Balaken district, Nij settlement of the Gabala district, and Aliabad settlement of the Zagatala district. Among the villages, 39 in the Zagatala district, 29 in the Balakan district, 23 in the Gakh district, 13 in the Oghuz district, and 12 villages in the Shaki district are distinguished by their ethnic composition [10].

Table 3

Incomes and expenses of the hotel and hotel-type enterprises in the Shaki-Zagatala economic region

Districts	Incomes of hotels and hotel-type enterprises (in thousand manats)			Expenses of hotels and hotel-type enterprises (in thousand manats)		
	2010	2015	2022	2010	2015	2022
Balakan	9,4	344,4	324,3	10,6	570,7	535,2
Gakh	648,4	569,2	1839,3	524,7	450,7	1292,6
Gabala	717,5	382,8	28613,4	776,6	328,2	25113,6
Oghuz	132,1	56,0	109,1	78,3	68,1	98,6
Shaki	2210,5	1068,9	1103,3	609,6	3636,2	940,7
Zagatala	276,0	212,8	360,8	242,4	206,5	326,0
By region	3993,9	2534,1	32350,2	2242,2	5260,4	28306,7

Source: (Tourism in Azerbaijan, 2023).

Although there are several villages with a rich ethnic composition in the Shaki-Zagatala economic region, the tourism potential and opportunities of all of them are not at the level that they should be included in the ethnic tourism centres. Any historical monument, buildings, folklore group, museum, etc., which will reflect the history and culture of the ethnic minorities, are necessary for the development of tourism opportunities in these villages. There are no such important tourist facilities in some villages.

The Nij settlement is particularly different from the other settlements with touristic opportunities in the region. In other settlements, these opportunities are almost non-existent. Thus, the Nij settlement of Gabala district is mainly inhabited by Udis. This settlement received the status of a village until 2005, and then a settlement. Approximately 60% of the population of the town are Udis, and the rest are Azerbaijanis and Lezgins [39]. Nij settlement is far from the district centre, it is located 40 km away from Gabala district.

There is a lot of information about the history of the Udis living in the town. One of them is the fact that the Udis are descendants of the Utis, one of the 26 tribes living in Ancient Caucasian Albania [43]. The Udis settling in the Nij settlement worship the Orthodox branch of Christianity, while the remaining population of the settlement (Lezgins and Azerbaijanis) worship the Muslim religion. About the religious beliefs of the Udis, Z.Bunyadov writes

that when the Arabs occupied the lands of Azerbaijan, there was an attempt to subjugate the tribes living in the territory of Azerbaijan, including the Udis, to the Orthodox Church [37]. As a result, the Albanian language is excluded from being the language of worship. As a sign of protest, the Udis worshipped in their temples for many years, and in their own homes after the abolition of the Albanian temples. There are currently three churches operating in the Nij settlement. One of them is the Church of Jotaari, named after St. Elysæus, and the others are the churches of Tsilin and Bulun. In addition, one of the interesting tourist objects in Nij settlement is the “Azerbaijan Udi heart” located in the Gojabeyli neighbourhood. “Azerbaijan Udi Heart” ethnographic park museum was established in 2018 based on the decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Covering an area of more than 3,5 ha, the park museum houses exhibits that reflect the history and lifestyle of Udis. The centre was built on a wooden house at the end of the 17th century. Apart from that, visitors can get acquainted with modern Udi language books at the centre (Figure 3).

“Mayovka” is one of the main holidays of Udi considered among the Caucasian peoples. The people of Udi have their Caucasian clothes, national cuisine and traditions. Common Caucasian elements, especially Azerbaijani elements, prevail in the style of clothing of Udis. With a very rich cuisine, the Udis are said to have 60 types of food [44].



Azerbaijan Udi Heart



Jotaari Church



Tsilin Church



Bulun Church

Fig. 3. Historical and cultural monuments of the Nij settlement
Note: The photographs were taken by the authors during the research.

However, it should be noted that there are no inns, hotels or guesthouses for tourists to spend the night in the town of Nij.

If we analyze the ethno-tourism potential of the villages, we will see that the Ititala village of the Balakan region is particularly different. The village is located 26 km from the district centre and is inhabited by Muslims. The village of Ititala was founded in 1863 by Inghilois who moved from the Aliabad settlement of the Zagatala district [40]. There is a mosque in the village. In addition, the people of the village have their national clothes and cuisine. National costumes of the Christian Inghilois, especially women's clothing, are quite different from Azerbaijani women's clothing. However, the wedding customs of Muslim Inghilois are very similar to those of Azerbaijanis. Nuts are usually added to the dishes in Ingiloylari cuisine.

Katekh village in the Balakan district is very rich in terms of ethnic tourism. It is located 19 km from the district centre, and its population consists of Avars. In the village, in addition to getting acquainted with the culture of the Avars, visitors can also visit the Katekh temple, which is one of the historical remains of ancient Caucasian Albania. The temple located in the territory of the Zagatala reserve is located a few kilometres from the Katekhchay River. However, it is quite difficult to visit here and the temple is about to collapse.

Gakh district is also very different with its ethnic richness. The main ethnic groups of the region are Tsakhurs and Christian Inghilois. Tsakhurs settle

in the Aghyazi, Uzumlu, Amirjan, Ashaghi Malakh, Gum, Gashgachay, Lakit, Zarna, Chinarli, Lakit Malakh, Lakit Kotuklu and Saribash villages of Gakh district, and Ingilois settle in the Ingiloy-Kotuklu, Gakhingiloy, Gakhbash, Meshabash, Boyuk Alatamir, Kichik Alatamir, Garamesha, Ketgushan, Khalftala, Baghtala and other villages.

Among the villages inhabited by Tsakhurs, the village of Gum stands out for its specificity. According to the local population, the village located 8 km away from the city centre and 650 m above sea level was the village where Nizami Ganjavi (famous Azerbaijani poet) lived. A statue of Nizami Ganjavi was erected in the village near the village cemetery (located in the schoolyard). In addition, there are monuments such as Sirt Castle, Gum Basilica and others in the village [48]. In the upper part of the village of Gum, there is the Sirt fortress, which was built for defence in the 18th century, and in the heart of the mountains, there is a monument called Takhta Gaya. [51]. The Gum basilica is identified with the temple built in the Gomenc settlement whose name was mentioned by Movses Kaghankatvatsi in his "History of Albania". It is believed to have been built on the orders of the Albanian king Vachagan III Pious on the site where the Palestinian Christian missionary Elisey was killed by firefighters [45] (Figure 4).

Other interesting villages in the Gakh district are Lakit and the neighbouring villages of Lakit Malakh and Lakit Kotuklu. There are remains of an ancient Albanian temple 1 km away from the village



Katekh temple



Gum basilica



Nizami Ganjavi's statue



Sirt castle

Fig. 4. Historical and cultural monuments of the Gakh district.
Note: The photographs were taken by the authors during the research.

of Lakit. In the village of Lakit Kotuklu, there are the remains of the monastery “Seven Church”. Currently, it is possible to see only the ruins of the monastery, which is in a dilapidated state, which is of great interest to tourists.

In the past, the “Big Day” holiday was celebrated in all Tsakhur villages, including these villages. We have no information about the exact date of that holiday. The holiday was celebrated later in the “Ramadan holiday” and the Tsakhurs would cook pastries at home and share them when they visited their loved ones at the cemetery. In addition to the “Big Day” holiday, Tsakhurs also celebrated the “Seyran” holiday. This holiday usually coincided with spring. During the holiday, the Tsakhurs went out into the mountains singing songs. However, after the 1950s and 1960s, some of these customs were forgotten after ethnic groups mingled with local Azerbaijanis.

Saribash is one of the villages considered to be a tourist village of Azerbaijan and is mainly inhabited by the Tsakhurs. Saribash village was formed as a settlement in the 14th century, and the first permanent residents were Jalairs [36]. However, after 1556, local Azerbaijani and Tsakhurs (immigrating from Dagestan) families moved to the village [40]. Historically, 300-350 families settled in the Saribash village, and in 2013, the number of families decreased to 24 [49]. The population of the village, which is located at a distance of 18 km and an altitude of 1605 meters in the Gakh district, is more than 100 people. The social infrastructure in the vil-

lage is inadequate. It is very difficult to visit the settlement due to the condition of the roads. This hinders the development of ethnic tourism in the area. Undoubtedly, there are numerous obstacles to the development of ethnic tourism, and the remote location of the settlement is one of them. Since the mentioned village is located far away, it is quite difficult to go to that village. This is because the road infrastructure is quite inconvenient.

In the Gakh district, the villages inhabited by Inghilois are also important from the point of view of ethnic tourism. Thus, the village of Gakh Ingiloy stands out among these villages. The village population is made up of Christian Inghilois. The church of St. Georgia was built on the territory of the village in 1888 and is protected by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Azerbaijan [11].

Another village - Ititala is located on the banks of the Katekh River, in the Alazan-Ayrichay depression. The village was built in 1863 by families who moved here from Aliabad village of Zagatala district [40]. From the village of Ititala to the village of Kortala, along the river bank, the ruins of the city of Khanjaritan, belonging to the Albanian state, covering the IV-I centuries BC, have been discovered. At the same time, “Shalala” and “Grandmothers” folklore groups operate in the mosque (built in 1905) in the village under the religious community and culture house.

Totally, there are 7 churches in the Gakh district. Two of them (Allahverdi Church, Kumruk Temple) are located in the city of Gakh, one in the

village of Bagtala (Holy Virgin Church), one in the village of Gakh Ingiloy (St. George Church), one in the village of Meshabash (St. Michael Church), one

in the village of Alibayli (St. Nino Church), and the other in the village of Ingiloy Kotuklu (the Holy Trinity Church) (Figure 5).

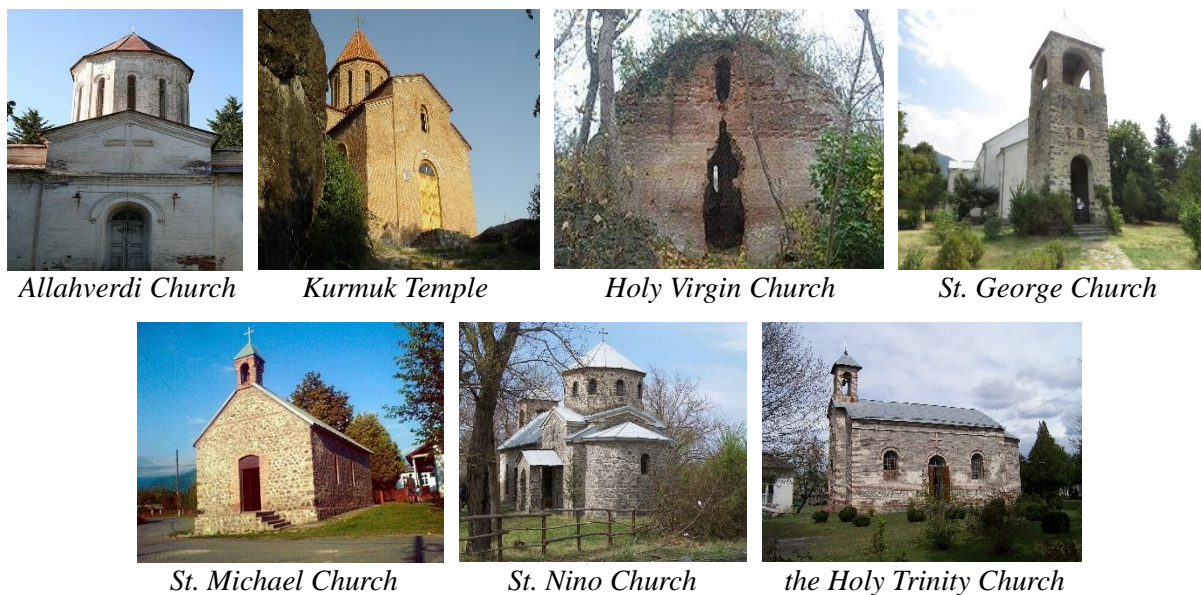


Fig. 5. Temple and churches located in the Gakh district.

Note: The photographs were taken by the authors during the research.

The role of Lezgins in ethnic tourism in the Gabala district is undeniable. They settled in villages such as Amirvan, Abrikh, Gamarvan, Kusnet, Yenikand, Dizakhli, Bilikh, Sileyli, Malikli, Syrt Yengice, Laza, and Bayramkokhali. But in these villages, they live mixed with Azerbaijanis. Although almost many of their villages have ancient temples, most of these temples have been destroyed by natural processes, and the rest are used as storage places by the villagers. Villages inhabited only by Lezgins, such as Laza, Gamarvan, Amirvan, etc., have their national costumes, folk groups and national cuisine.

The name Lezgins can be mentioned in the development of ethnic tourism in the Shaki and Oghuz districts. They settle in the Ashagi Goynuk, Ashagi Dashagil, Bash Kaldak, Ashagi Kaldak, Bash Layisgi and Ashagi Layisgi, Kish (part of the population of the village is constituted by Lezgins), Bash Shabalid and Ashagi Shabalid of the Shaki district; Filfili, Shirvanli, Bayan, Gumlug, Khalkhal Gishlag, Boyuk Soyudlu, Garabulag, Top, Zarrab, Bash Dashagil, Tayifli and other villages of the Oghuz district.

A small part of Kish village is made up of Lezgins. Tourists coming to the village can get acquainted with the national culture of the Lezgins and visit the Albanian temple, which reflects the history of Azerbaijan. The temple is protected by the state and is in good condition. Behind the temple, a statue of Thor Heyerdahl, who visited Azerbaijan and studied the ethnic minorities, is erected (Figure 6).

Rutuls living in the Shaki and Oghuz districts mainly live in the Shin, Shorsu, Dashuz and Kobar

Zayzid villages of the Shaki district, and in the Armenat village of the Oghuz district. Rutuls are one of the ancient Albanian tribes included in the territory of the Albanian state. A small part of the Rutuls, who are mainly engaged in nomadic animal husbandry, are engaged in agriculture.

The villages of Yeni Suvagil, Ali Bayramli, Galal, Gargay, Gozbarakh, Mamruk, Alasgar, Jimjimax, Mukhax, Zayam, Gimir, Findigli, Bazar, Meshlesh, Azgilli, Sabunchu, Lahij and other villages of Zagatala district are settled by Tsakhurs, and the village of Mazikh is settled by Avars.

Yeni Suvagil village, which is called the “eye of the Tsakhurs” by the local population, stands out among the villages of Zagatala. In this village, the population mainly speaks Tsakhurian and Azerbaijani languages. The local population has its folklore group.

Mazikh village is located 14 km from the district centre. In the village, besides getting acquainted with the national culture of the Avars, visitors can also visit the ancient Avar cemetery dating back to the 18th and 19th centuries. There are about 40 Avar graves in the cemetery (Figure 7).

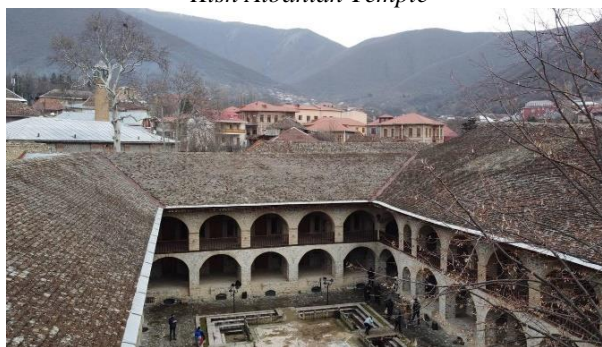
If we look at the grouping of various districts in the economic region according to their ethnic tourism potential, Gabala district differs greatly in terms of the number of hotels and historical-cultural monuments, and Zagatala region in terms of the diversity of ethnically diverse settlements and ethnic groups. According to the general assessment of all criteria, the Gakh and Shaki regions are in second place. According to these indicators, the Oghuz dis-



Statue of Thor Heyerdahl



Kish Albanian Temple



Caravansarai

Fig. 6. Historical and cultural monuments of the Shaki district
Note: The photographs were taken by the authors during the research.



Fig. 7. Ancient Avar cemetery in the Mazikh village
Note: The photographs were taken by the authors during the research.

trict ranks last (Figure 8).

To develop ethnic tourism in the Shaki-Zagatala economic region, first of all, ethno-tourism routes should be prepared. The ethnic tourism routes we offer can be organized as follows (Figure 9):

1. Balakan district:

a) Balakan city (Juma mosque, Galach Muhammed castle)-Katekh village (Katekh church, Katekh towers)-Mazikh village (Zagatala district) (ruins of the Albanian monument belonging to the





	 Number of hotels	 Number ethnic settlements	 Diversity of ethnic groups	 Number of historical-cultural monuments
1	Gabala (23)	Zagatala (41)	Zagatala (4)	Gabala (33)
2	Gakh (18) Shaki (18)	Balakan (31)	Remaining districts (2)	Shaki (16)
3	Zagatala (13)	Gakh (24)	-	Gakh (13)
4	Balakan (3) Oghuz (3)	Gabala (14) Oghuz (14)	-	Zagatala (9)
5	-	Shaki (13)	-	Balakan (8) Oghuz (8)

Fig. 8. Grouping of districts according to their ethnic tourism potential

VI-VII centuries, Avar cemetery dating back to the XVIII-XIX centuries);

b) Balakan city-Gullar village (Arilighbina church, Pari castle)- Mahamalar village (Murtuz castle, “Tabassum” dancing group)-Talalar village (Talalar church)-Tulu village (Tulu church)-Poshtbina village-Mazimchay village (Mazimgaray church).

2. Gakh district:

a) Gakh city (Allahverdi church, Torpaggala archaeological site)-Gakh Ingiloy village (St.George church)-Gakhash village (ovdan (step well for freshwater consumption))-Aghchay village (Boy castle, Girl castle)-Ilisu village (Jinli castle, Castle complex, Shamil castle, Sumug castle, Ulu bridge)-Saribash village (the most remote mountain village in the region);

b) Gakh city-Meshabash village (St.Michael Church)-Boyuk Alatomir village-Kichik Alatomir village-Alibayli village (St. Nino church)-Baghtala village (St. Virgin church);

c) Gakh city-Gum village (Gum basilica, mosque belonging to the XVIII century, Sirt castle)-Chinarli village (The settlement was created in the 17th century as a result of the settlement of people who migrated from the Tsakhur district of the Republic of Dagestan in a place called Chinarli and was named after the area where it was built);

d) Gakh city-Lakit village (“Seven Church” monastery complex)-Lakit Malakh village-Lakit Kotoklu village (monastery).

3. Gabala district:

a) Gabala city (an ancient defensive fortress, the octagonal mosque dating back to the 19th centu-

ry)-Kusnat village (man-made Pottery and printing)-Laza village;

b) Gabala city-Dashja village-Mirzabayli village (religious community)-Nij settlement (Udi heart, castle dating back to the IV-IX centuries, St.Elisæus church, Church of St. Mary the Mother, Tsilin church, Juma mosque);

c) Gabala city-Zaraghan village-Aydingishlag village-Boyuk Pirali village-Soltannukha village-Boyuk Amili village (Albanian temple)-Dizakhli (Piasharif castle)-Shamli village-Shafilil village-Chukhur Gabala village-Bayramkokhali (Ustajan castle).

4. Oghuz district:

a) Oghuz city (Lower Quarter Synagogue, Upper Quarter Synagogue, St.Elisæus Basilica, St.Elisæus Church, Albanian Temple)-Khalkhal Gishlag village-Armanat village (Gavurlar castle)-Khalkhal village;

b) Oghuz city-Bayan village-Karimli village (mausoleum dating back to the 15th century)-Padar village -Sinjan village (mosque belonging to the XVIII century)-Khachmaz Gishlag village-Khachmaz village -Filfilil village (Surxaykhan castle).

5. Shaki district:

a) Shaki city (Shaki Khan palace, Juma mosque, Gilahli mosque, Little minaret mosque, Khan mosque, Imam Ali Mosque, Omar Efendi Mosque, Nukha Trinity Church, Caravansarai)-Kichik Dahna village-Boyuk Dahna village;

b) Shaki city-Goxmug village-Okhud village-Kish village (Kish Temple, Maiden Tower, “Galasan-gorasan” castle);

c) Shaki city -Shorsu village-Dashuz village;

- d) Shaki city-Ashaghi Goynuk village-Bash Layisgi village-Shin village-Bash Goynuk village.
- 6. Zagatala district:
 - a) Zagatala city (Zagatala Castle, Zagatala Church)-Ashaghi Tala village (Omar Efendi Shrine, Tomb)-Aliabad settlement (Inghiloi folklore ensemble)-Yeni Suvagil village (Folklore house);

- b) Zagatala city-Magov village (“Hudulki” folklore group)-Danachi village (Kalantaroba Mosque, Hasanoba Mosque, Tinavazoba Mosque);
- c) Zagatala city-Mukhakh village-Chobankol village-Gozbarakh village-Mamruk village (Mosque belonging to the XVII century, Mamruk temple).

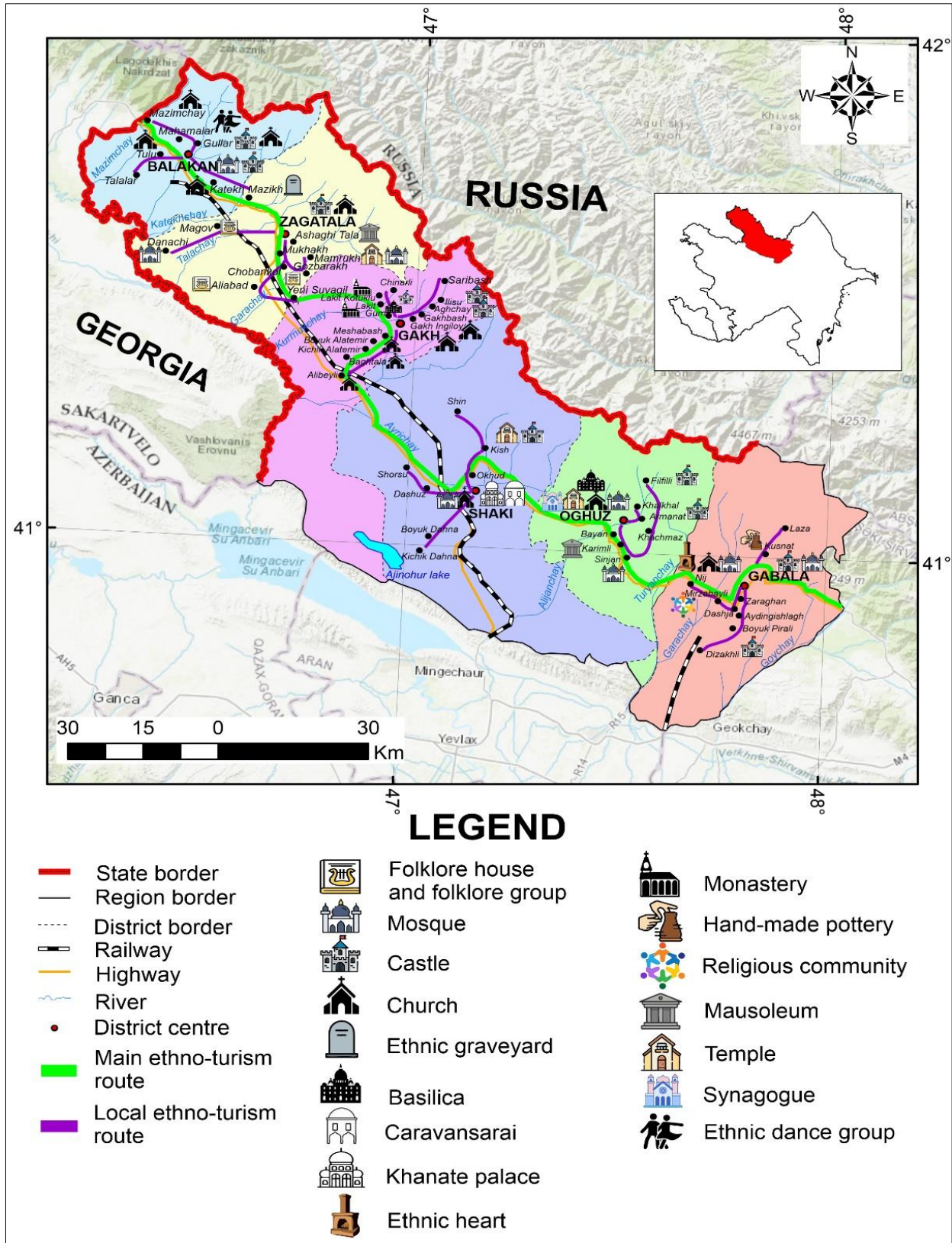


Fig. 9. Ethnic tourism route map of the economic region

To develop ethnic tourism in the region and overcome the problems that have arisen in the field of ethnic tourism, before developing a development model, it is necessary to get to know the ethnic tourism resources of the region more closely. For this, it was considered more appropriate to use SWOT analysis first. Because SWOT analysis is considered one of the main tools for strategic analysis of rural areas [7]. SWOT analysis can be used not only for the study of the necessary aspects for the economic development of rural areas but also for the study of their strengths and weaknesses in areas such as ethnic tourism.

The ethnic-tourism potential of the area was analyzed based on the results of the field research conducted in the area and the survey materials conducted among the local population. If we look at the results of the analysis, it can be seen that the main strengths of the Shaki-Zagatala economic region from the point of view of ethno-tourism are its rich ethnic composition, the presence of a historical and ethnographic centre, the use of individual residential houses as overnight accommodation for tourists, the organization of festivals and holidays, and so on. However, despite this, there are many weaknesses in the ethnic tourism of the economic region, and these problems mainly manifest themselves in the context of the location of ethnically diverse villages far from the district centres, their location in mountainous areas, non-operation of hotels, low quality of the service sphere, and other problems. Along with the possibilities of organizing festivals for the development of ethnic tourism in the economic region, the local population working in this field, and strength-

ening the economic potential of villages due to ethnic tourism, there are many dangerous sides. These are mainly the concerns of the ethnic groups about the coming tourists and the promotion of their culture in a negative way (Figure 10).

The development of ethnic tourism in the area can directly help the development of the region. As a result of the survey, it was found that one of the main problems of the population is unemployment. For this reason, the development of the sector that can create additional activity opportunities in the region can create conditions for employing the population. Because one of the main features of ethnic tourism is its role in creating jobs. In many cases, ethno-tourism creates employment in or near people's homes [2]. As a result, the population does not need to migrate to obtain income, that is, the income of the population is provided in their place of residence. In this case, migration processes from villages to cities or abroad may be prevented. This is especially important for areas with ethnic diversity. Because migration of the population in such areas can result in the destruction or disappearance of ethnic diversity. From this point of view, with the aim of developing ethnic tourism in the region we have studied, a development model for ways and possibilities of their elimination by studying the existing problems was developed (Figure 11).

In the prepared development model, 6 primary indicators were proposed for the development of ethnic tourism. The most important of them is conducting publicity work in the field of the development of ethnic tourism. The essential goal of these publicity works is to increase the income of the po-

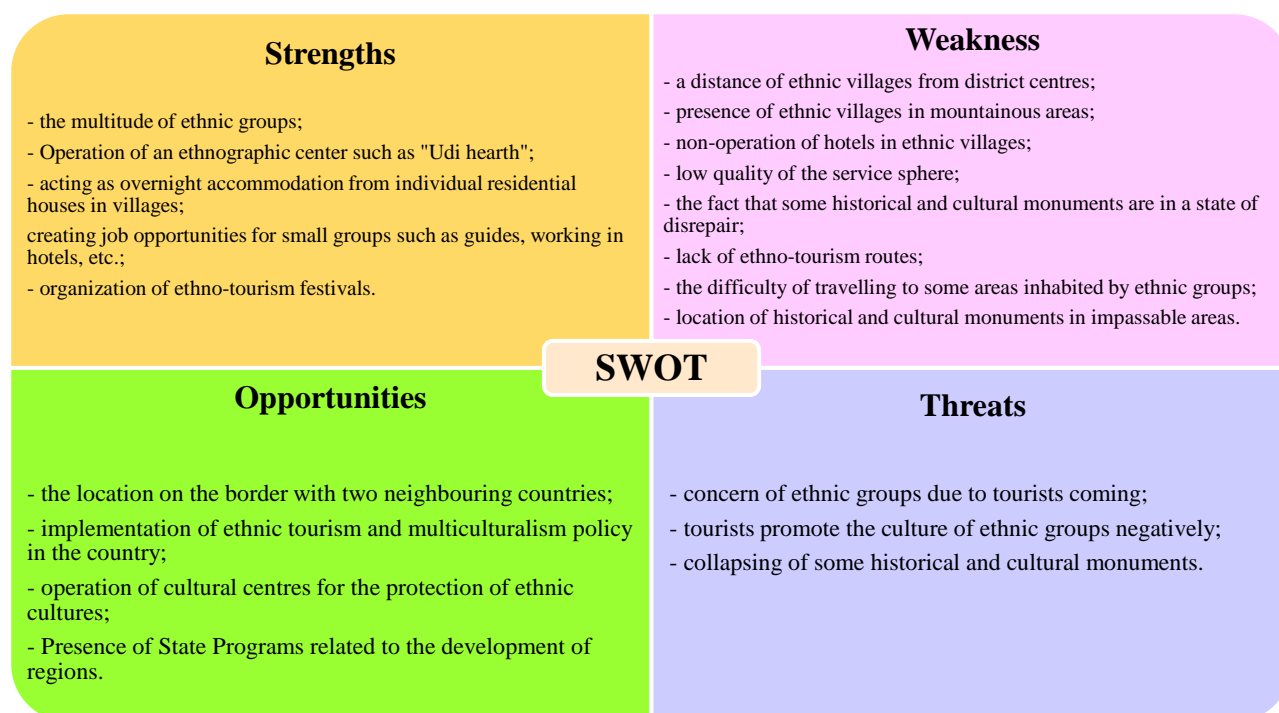


Fig. 10. Analysis of the ethnic tourism potential in the settlement of the region by SWOT analysis



Fig. 11. A development model of the ethnic tourism.

Note: the model was developed by Z.T. Imrani and B.A. Huseynova based on the opportunities and problems in the field of ethno-tourism.

pulation and promote the region. The second primary indicator is the construction of roads to villages with poor road infrastructure for the development of this field in the region, as well as the organization of accommodation facilities such as village houses, hostels, hotels, etc., as well as catering services for the accommodation of tourists. It is important to organize festivals once a year, as well as to increase the number of folklore and dance groups, to familiarize visitors with the historical and cultural monuments in the area, as well as to get to know the traditions of ethnic groups. One of the most important points is the appointment of ethno-tourism routes suitable for the area and guides who can provide information about the history, culture and ethnic characteristics of ethnic groups.

Conclusion. The Shaki-Zagatala economic region has a rich history and is distinguished by the diversity of its ethnic composition. The share of tourism indicators in the area has increased in recent years, but it is impossible to say based on the statistical materials that there is an increase or decrease related to individual tourism indicators. As a result of the survey, it can be said that the number of people who come to the area for ethno-tourism is not

high. The main destination of those who come for ethno-tourism is the settlement of Nij (Udi hearth). Poor or non-existent accommodation and catering services in the villages of the region cause tourists to return to the centre of the region and spend the night there. One of the important conditions for the proper organization of tourism routes in the region is the organization of village houses and accommodation in villages.

As a result of the conducted field research, it was found that some historical and cultural monuments located in the region are used as storage places by the villagers, and some are destroyed. In general, dance and folklore groups operate in several villages (Mahamalar, Magov, Yeni Suvagil) to promote the culture of ethnic groups, but most of the villages do not have these groups.

To develop ethno-tourism in the region, a SWOT analysis of the area was conducted and a development model was developed based on it. The development of this type of tourism in the area is very important in providing the local population with work opportunities, in promoting the culture of ethnic groups, and at the same time in protecting their national-ethnic characteristics.

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Етнотуристичний потенціал Шаки-Загатальського економічного району: можливості та проблеми

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Шеки-Загатальський економічний район розташований у північно-західній зоні країни і відрізняється різноманітністю етнічного складу. У дослідженні досліджено потенціал етнічного туризму Шеки-Загатальського економічного району, одного з регіонів з багатим етнічним складом, та можливості його використання, а також проблеми, що виникають. Основною метою дослідження є вивчення сучасного стану етнічного туризму в регіоні, вивчення можливостей його використання, усунення виникаючих проблем на науковій основі та проведення для цього SWOT-аналізу. Дослідницьку роботу проводили з використанням методів історичного, порівняльного аналізу, географічного моделювання та інших. Крім того, були проведені польові дослідження та проведено опитування населення. В результаті проведених досліджень в районі є багато населених пунктів, що відрізняються за своїм етнічним складом. Проте етнотуристичний потенціал регіону використано недостатньо. Основна проблема неможливості розвитку етнічного туризму в регіоні пов'язана з низьким рівнем соціальної інфраструктури. Особливо в регіоні очевидні такі проблеми, як недостатня популяризація етнічного туризму, мала кількість готелів, погане обслуговування громадського харчування тощо. В результаті можна розвивати туризм, особливо етнотуризм, у відносно відсталому з точки зору сталого розвитку Шеки-Загатальському економічному районі. Для забезпечення комфорту туристів, які приїжджають до цього регіону, одними з основних пріоритетів є будівництво або ремонт доріг уздовж маршруту етнотуризму, організація послуг харчування та проживання. У цих місцях це усуває проблему безробіття серед населення, сприяє збільшенню доходів населення та може відігравати особливу роль у захисті етнорізноманіття країни та донесення його до світу.

Ключові слова: Азербайджан, Шаки-Загатала, етнічні меншини, етнічний туризм, ArcGIS, культурна спадщина, SWOT, модель розвитку.

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Конфлікт інтересів: автори повідомляють про відсутність конфлікту інтересів

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