



Università
Ca' Foscari
Venezia

Master's Degree programme – Second Cycle (*D.M.*
270/2004)

in International Relations

Final Thesis

—

Ca' Foscari
Dorsoduro 3246
30123 Venezia

Analysis and Perspectives of Tourism in Azerbaijan

Supervisor

Prof. Aldo Ferrari

Co-Supervisor

Carlo Frappi

Graduand

Francesco Ricapito

Matriculation Number 832916

Academic Year

2014 / 2015

INDEX

Acknowledgements	5
Introduction	7
1. Chapter one: What is tourism and how it is considered on an international level	11
1.1: A short history of tourism	11
1.2: The origin of the term tourism	17
1.3: The academic definition of tourism	18
1.4: The international definition of tourism	21
1.5: The history, the role and the purpose of the UNWTO	24
1.6: The main numbers of today's tourism	29
2. Chapter two: The main facts about Azerbaijan	35
2.1: A geographical description	35
2.2: Population and languages	38
2.3: A short history of Azerbaijan	41
2.4: From the Nagorno-Karabakh was until today	45
2.5: Azerbaijan's economic situation	48
2.6: Azerbaijan today	51
3. Chapter three: Tourism in Azerbaijan	57
3.1: A short history of tourism in Azerbaijan	57
3.2: The numbers of tourism in Azerbaijan	59
3.3: Tourism and the Azerbaijani Government	68

3.4: The main critical points	72
3.5: Temporary conclusions on the phenomenon of tourism in Azerbaijan	79
4. Chapter four: The main tourism guides about Azerbaijan	81
4.1: On the tourism guides about Azerbaijan	81
4.2: Georgia Armenia & Azerbaijan	81
4.3: Azerbaijan, with and excursion to Georgia	84
4.4: Baku & the best of Azerbaijan	87
4.5: Other two examples of guides in English	89
4.6: The case of the German guide	90
5. Chapter five: The main websites about Azerbaijan	92
5.1: On the websites about Azerbaijan	92
5.2: The websites related to the printed guidebooks	93
5.3: Other specialized websites about Azerbaijan	93
5.4: The institutional websites	96
6. Chapter six: The main Azerbaijan's tourism attractions	99
6.1: About Azerbaijan's main attractions	99
6.2: Baku	99
6.3: Qobustan	110
6.4: Mountain villages in the North, Laza and Xınalıq	112
6.5: Shäki	115
6.6: Lahıc	117

7. Chapter seven: Other potential tourism destinations in Azerbaijan	120
7.1: The “secondary” tourism destinations of Azerbaijan	120
7.2: The Absheron Peninsula	120
7.3: The Southern Azerbaijan	128
7.4: Gänjä and its surroundings	131
7.5: The Nakhchivan Region	136
8. Chapter eight: Other potential sources of tourism interest	140
8.1: About the other potential sources of tourism interest	140
8.2: Mugham, the national music	140
8.3: The Azerbaijani cuisine	142
8.4: The art of carpet making	145
8.5: The modern architecture	146
8.6: Literature, theatre and other arts	148
Conclusion	151
Bibliography	159
Sitography	160

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all I would like to thank my supervisor Aldo Ferrari and my co-supervisor Carlo Frappi whose patience, availability and precious advices allowed me to complete this thesis directly from Azerbaijan and to graduate in the first session available.

Secondly I want to thank the International Office of Ca'Foscari and the one of Khazar University who managed to fix all the needed documents in a short amount of time.

Thank you to my parents who were always there when I needed suggestions and advices and who helped me in organizing everything from Azerbaijan. Thanks also to my sister who managed to keep my parents calm while I was travelling around Azerbaijan and the Caucasus.

Thank you to all the people I interviewed during my nine months in Azerbaijan and that contributed to form my opinion about the country: Mark Elliott, guidebook writer and a person that always has an interesting story to tell, Paola Casagrande, president of the *Associazione Italia-Azerbaijan*, Gianmaria Pistone, co-owner of the *Old City* Hostel in Baku, Ian Pert, editorial advisor for the review *Visions of Azerbaijan*, , my professors in Khazar University Qaya Mammadov and Baktyar Aslanov, Orhan Musa, Head Specialist in the International Office of the *Azerbaijan Tourism and Management* University who gave me many ideas and points of reflection, Cavid Qara, inventor and manager of *Camping Azerbaijan* with more people like him and his passion Azerbaijan could become a primary tourism destination, Murad Saftarli, friend with which I had many interesting conversations, Rufat my guide in Bärädä, Fikret Ismailov who showed me Göy Göl Town, Hussein who hosted me in Lerik and Arsham who helped me in obtaining the visa for Iran.

A very special thank you to Marco Lisiero, officially Erasmus colleague but first of all precious friend and trip mate with which I visited Ganja, Göy Göl Town, Yevlax, Barda, Georgia and Uzbekistan and with which I had many interesting conversations about the future of Azerbaijan and of the Caucasus.

Many thanks also to the other people who helped me in exploring the country, to Zsofi and Brigita with which I visited many villages of the Absheron Peninsula, Xinaliq and Laza, Alina with which I visited the Southern Regions, Nicola and Davide who joined me in Shäki and Lahic and Alessandro, Carolina and Mayman who came with me to the Besh Barmaq mountain, Emin, the

most energetic person I know and who guided me to the Candy Cane Mountains and to the Pirallahı Island.

Thank you to my lovely flatmates, Brigita, Mayman, Carolina and Zsofi, if my experience in Azerbaijan has been wonderful is also because of them.

Thank you to Sirius and Raya, amazing people and honest landowners, always available to solve our problems.

And finally thank you to all of my friends in Italy and around the world who always cheered me up during the bad moments.

“I have not told half of what I saw.”

Marco Polo

INTRODUCTION

“Good luck in Afghanistan!”

This was the text I received from a Croatian friend the day I left for my nine months experience as exchange student in Azerbaijan. Even if this mistake was probably caused by the automatic corrector, it represents in a good way the fact that Azerbaijan is still not very known among the European population. It might be a superficial reason, but the fact of being a country whose name ends in “-an” usually makes Azerbaijan just one of those dangerous or post-Soviet “-an” or “-stan” countries like Iran, Pakistan, Turkmenistan and obviously Afghanistan. That this name issue can be considered a real problem is testified by the idea of the President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, who in 2014 proposed to change the name of the country in *Kazakh Yeli*, in order to make it more appealing for tourists¹.

Unfortunately for an average tourist that is not interested in politics or in international relations, Azerbaijan still does not represent the most appealing country and there are many reasons why: first of all it is a Muslim country and today Islam is often feared in the Western world; the ISIS, the terrorists attacks to *Charlie Hebdo* in France, the appearance of armed groups related to ISIS also in Libya, the terrorist attacks in Tunis and the presence in a lot of European countries of xenophobic parties that insist about the danger of Islam for the Western countries are all factors that contributed to make Islam become a synonym of violence, intolerance and terrorism. This might be true for some groups of Islamic extremists and it is also true that there are some countries where a visitor must observe some rules that come directly from religion, however the true Islam is far from being violent and intolerant and in Azerbaijan this kind of extremism almost does not exist. In this

¹ The Economist, *Don't call me Stan*, 2014. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.economist.com/news/asia/21597006-president-wants-change-what-country-called-dont-call-me-stan>. (Accessed 03/04/2015).

country 85% of the population is Muslim, three quarter of them are Shi'ite and the rest are Sunnis² and as is often written in guidebooks and websites, religious tolerance is one of the national proud. The history of the country, made of continuous invasions and different cultural influences, together with the strong policies of religious eradication of the Soviet period³, created a reasonably tolerant environment where many religions co-exist together.

Another reason that makes Azerbaijan less appealing for tourism could be its position, between Russia and Iran, two countries, especially the second one, that are today at the center of the international attentions because of geopolitical reasons. It is interesting to notice that its closeness to Iran is probably more problematic than the fact of being still at war with Armenia. As a matter of fact not a lot of people know about the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, that today is defined with the unofficial term of “frozen conflict” but that in reality is still an ongoing conflict since very often the ceasefire is not respected all along the frontline⁴.

To stay in realm of politics, Azerbaijan is also usually known for being a non democratic country. The internal political situation has often been criticized because of the repression of a true political opposition and the monopoly of the presidential party. The last elections, held in 2013 and that saw the victory of the actual president, Ilham Aliyev with 84.5% of the votes, have been heavily criticized by OCSE for not being totally transparent and for not reaching the internationally recognized standards of freedom and equilibrium⁵. Also Azerbaijan is known for having many political prisoners in its jails and these are all features that affect the international reputation of the country⁶.

It is true that Azerbaijan still has some issues that need to be solved before it can be considered a fully developed country, and it is also true that politics and geopolitics in this country cannot be ignored when speaking about an economic activity like tourism. However Azerbaijan represents an interesting place where the potentials for the development of the sector are a lot and still not fully

² G. Bensi, *Le Religioni dell'Azerbaijan*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012, p. 17.

³ Ivi, pp. 69-73.

⁴ C. Frappi, *Nagorno-Karabakh, il congelamento di un conflitto*, ISPI Policy Brief, Milano, n. 2, 2006.

⁵ OCSE, *Election in Azerbaijan undermined by limitations on fundamental freedoms, lack of level playing field and significant problems on election day, international observers say*, OCSE, 2013. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/106908>. (Accessed 08/04/2015).

⁶ A. Geybullayeva, *2014: Azerbaijan, un anno di repressione*, Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso, 2nd of February 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.balcanicaucaso.org/Media/Multimedia/infografiche/2014-Azerbaijan-un-anno-di-repressione>. (Accessed 08/04/2015).

exploited. The purpose of this research is to demonstrate that Azerbaijan is more than just another “-an” or “-stan” country and that it can become a very important tourism destination. As a first step we will make a general introduction about tourism, we will take a look to the history of this typically human phenomenon, we will speak about its academic and international definitions and we will also spend some words about the main international organizations that deal with tourism, their role and their purposes and their most important statistics. Afterwards we will move to a general presentation of Azerbaijan, its main geopolitical and social details, its history, its economic situation and the organization of its today’s government. This will be followed by a more specific analysis of the phenomenon of tourism in Azerbaijan, how it developed through the years, which have been the role and the measures of the government to develop this sector and what say the main existing statistics about tourism in Azerbaijan. The following step will be to take a look to the existing promoting material about the country, first of all tourism guides and secondly the main websites that are specifically designed to give information for the people interested in visiting Azerbaijan. Other two chapters will be dedicated to a description and an analysis of the potential tourism destinations of Azerbaijan, firstly we will discuss about the ones that are more known and better promoted and secondly we will describe the ones that are still not considered as real tourism destinations but that nonetheless have some potential. The last chapter will be dedicated to some other issues that can help the development of tourism like art, culture, music and national cuisine. In the end we will try to conclude the research by stating how big is the potential of this country and how many chances it has to become an important tourism destination in the following years.

The method that has been followed to write this research is a combination of theory and practice: on the theoretical level I have used books, essays, articles, documentaries, magazines about Azerbaijan and written by recognized experts about the region, on the practical level I decided to exploit the fact of having the chance of living in Azerbaijan for nine months as Erasmus Munds student. I travelled the country as much as I could, visiting almost all of the primary and secondary destinations about which I speak in this research, I conducted many qualitative interviews with local people, exploring the locations and always trying to keep my eyes open to check the real tourism potential of that specific place. Together with this I also manage to get in touch with some people that are involved in the tourism sector in Azerbaijan, like Mark Elliott, author of *Azerbaijan, with*

*an excursion to Georgia*⁷ that is probably the best guidebook about Azerbaijan actually available, or also Paola Casagrande, President of the *Associazione Italia-Azerbaijiana*⁸.

The opinions and the judgments reported in this thesis are the result of the combination of all these factors that had all an equal importance during the writing phase. The personal opinion is that to write about a country, it is fundamental to know its history, its political situation and its main characteristics, but it is also important to see its historical sites, to observe its general situation, to experience the local life, to taste the local food and to learn the local traditions. Azerbaijan is a truly interesting place and this research wants to demonstrate that even if it still has many problems, it can become an appealing tourism destination able to compete with other more experienced countries in this sector.

⁷ M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010.

⁸ Associazione Italia-Azerbaijiana, *Associazione Italia-Azerbaijiana*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.italiaazerbaigian.org/index.html>. (Accessed 16/04/2015).

CHAPTER ONE

WHAT IS TOURISM AND HOW IT IS CONSIDERED ON AN INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

1.1: A short history of tourism

Travelling and moving are two things as old as humanity itself. According to Lickorish and Jenkins, the history of tourism can be divided in four main parts that are: prehistory (until the beginning of the 17th century), transport (from the Industrial Revolution to the First World War), interwar period (between the end of the First World War and 1939) and take-off (from 1945 until today)⁹. In general we can agree with this division however we cannot liquidate all the period before the 17th century without spending some words about those centuries.

Since the first days of our history, people moved, migrated and travelled all around the planet. In the past people did not move for leisure or for improving their cultures and see new places, they moved to find new resources, to escape from wars and to conquer new territories. Because of the lack of transportations these first travels were short-ranged experiences but especially among the first empires, travels for trade and military control started to become more extended and also more important. Moreover, since the first organized societies started to raise and create the first differences between wealthy people and less wealthy people, the rich part of these societies started to be more interested in moving and travelling, not for need but also for pleasure. This concept started to be socially accepted among the Greeks and it was also common also during the Roman period: the Romans often copied the methods of the Greeks¹⁰ and they can be considered the first inventors of the holiday industry. This occurred because of the combination of some fundamental factors:

- The existence of an upper and middle class with enough time and money to travel;
- A good system of infrastructures, roads, communication systems and also rest houses for travelers along the roads;

⁹ L. J. Linckorish, C. L. Jenkins, *An Introduction to Tourism*, Butterworth-Enieman, Oxford, 1997, p. 11-12.

¹⁰ M. Korstanje, *The Origin and Meaning of Tourism: Etymological Study*, e-Review of Tourism Research, Vol. 5, No.2, 2007, pp 101-102. (ONLINE) Available at:
http://www.academia.edu/353007/The_Origin_and_Meaning_of_Tourism_Etymological_Study. (Accessed 06/02/2015).

- A unique and accepted currency throughout the Empire;
- The use of the same common language;

During the 1st century Rome counted one million of inhabitants, a very significant number for that age. Living in the city was considered stressful and frenetic and this is why many wealthy families had one or more houses in the countryside. Soon they also started to build holiday houses next to the seaside, in particular in the Southern part of Italy. The increasing number of houses, spas and even hotels allowed the wealthy part of the Roman society to spend their holidays in very exclusive locations, spending their time in relaxing and in participating to high-society events. Health tourism was already popular at that time and it can be considered one of the oldest forms of tourism, a form that is still popular today. Romans had many famous destinations where people went to cure their health problems, places like Baiae, a location on the western coast of Southern Italy that was famous for its bath filled with warm mineral water and the saunas built by the Roman engineers using the sulfur springs in the underground. Other famous tourism destinations were the island of Capri, Pompeii and Herculaneum¹¹.

During the Middle Age travelling became more difficult. The collapse of the Roman Empire created a fragmentation of currencies, languages and transports. Moreover travelling became also a dangerous activity. A famous example of Middle Age travels are the Marco Polo's ones in the late 13th century: he is considered one of the most famous travelers of all times and the tales of his travels inspired many other explorers throughout history. His trip lasted twenty-four years, he started from Venice with his father and his uncle and together they crossed all the *Silk Road* until the most Eastern Part of China, visiting also the South-East Asia and coming back to Venice full of treasures and precious goods¹². It is interesting to notice that one of the paths of the *Silk Road* passed also through Azerbaijan and Marco Polo is believed to have passed through the territory of today's Azerbaijan during his travels. In a passage from his book he writes: "Di verso tramontana confina con Giorgens (l'attuale Georgia), e in queste confine è una fontana, ove surge tanto olio e in tanta abbondanza che 100 navi se ne caricherebbero a la volta. Ma non è buono a mangiare, ma sì da ardere, e buono da rognare e d'altre cose; e per tutta quella contrada non s'arde altr'olio"¹³.

¹¹ M. Melotti, *Il Mediterraneo tra Mito e Turismo*, Cuem – Università di Milano, Milano, 2007, pp. 21-25.

¹² G. Ferroni, *Profilo Storico della Letteratura Italiana*. Einaudi Scuola, Milano, 2000, Vol. 1, pp. 87-88.

¹³ "Towards north it has a border with Giorgens (today's Georgia), and in these lands there is a spring where it flows so much oil in such big quantities that 100 ships could embark it. But it is not good for eating, it is for burning, for cleaning the camels and other uses; and throughout all that region they do not burn any other oil", (My translation), M. Polo, *Il Milione*, a cura di V. Bertolucci Pizzorusso, Adelphi, Milano, 1975, pp. 12-13.

Marco Polo's travel can be seen as a particular case in that period because in general the new fragmented situation of Europe slowed down the movement of the upper and middle classes. However during the Middle Age for the first time we also had the movement of lower-class people that started because of the increasing number of pilgrimage destinations. Still today Christianity, Islam and Buddhism all have important traditions of pilgrimage: for Muslims the pilgrimage to Mecca (called *hajj*) is one of the five Pillars of Islam and all the believers must do it at least once in their life if their physical and financial situations allow them to do that. In Europe the most famous pilgrimage destination is for sure Santiago de Compostela, in the Northern part of Spain: according to the tradition here there are the remains of St. James the Great and since the 9th century millions of pilgrims have walked all the way that starts from Roncesvalles in the French part of the Pyrenees and that arrives in Santiago de Compostela, passing all through the northern part of Spain¹⁴. Other very famous and important pilgrimage destinations are Rome, Lourdes, Jerusalem and the river Ganges, just to name a few. A famous destination for Hindus and Zoroastrian pilgrims was also *Ateshgah* in the Absheron Peninsula, a few kilometers from Baku; a location with natural flames from the ground where during the 17th century it was also built a little temple that today is an interesting tourism destination¹⁵.

The fact of moving for religious and spiritual reasons allowed pilgrims to see the main sights on their way and some of the features that characterized pilgrims can be found in today's tourists, like the idea of taking back souvenirs from the visited places, something that started precisely among pilgrims. Even if these trips were made mainly for religious reasons, they often were seen also as a kind of holiday and it is very meaningful that this word itself comes from the union of the two words "holy" and "day"¹⁶.

With the Renaissance, between the 14th and 16th centuries, kingdoms started to have more territories under their control and this created a more suitable situation for the movement of people. Trade routes started to improve and the concept of travelling for pleasure slowly started to come back. A first real example of modern tourism can be seen in a phenomenon that started around the middle of the 17th century and this is why Linckorish and Jenkins consider this moment as the beginning of the second period of the history of tourism¹⁷. This phenomenon was the *Grand Tour* and it lasted

¹⁴ R. A. Fletcher, *Saint James's Catapult, The Life and Times of Diego Gelmirez of Santiago de Compostela*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984, pp. 53-55.

¹⁵ M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010, pp.154-155.

¹⁶ "Holiday", *www.oed.com*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.oed.com/>. (Accessed 04/02/2015).

¹⁷ L. J. Linckorish, C. L. Jenkins, *An Introduction to Tourism*, Butterworth-Enieman, Oxford, 1997, pp. 11-12.

until the beginning of the 19th century. On this period it became customary for the young men of the upper-class to make a trip around Europe, mainly in the Western and Northern part¹⁸.

During the 17th and the 18th centuries, thanks also to the advent of railways and steamships, this custom started to be common also among the middle-class and not only in England but in the continental Europe as well. The trip could last from some months to some years and it usually started and finished in the same city. Some of the preferred destinations were Italy and Greece and this is not a surprise if we think that the main value of this trip was considered to be the opportunity to get in touch with the fascinating cultures and the beautiful pieces of art of the classic age and of the Renaissance, two periods that had their centre in those countries. The most famous *Grand Tour* is for sure the one made by J. W. Goethe that is reported in his book *Italian Journey*¹⁹: in 1786 he left Karlsbad in Germany and for more or less two years he travelled all across the Italian Peninsula, visiting the most important cities from Venice to Palermo and from Florence to Rome. This trip influenced the rest of his life and improved his knowledge of the local cultures and traditions. His book is incredibly useful to understand what really meant to do a *Grand Tour* during that age and we can say without any doubt that is also because of these kinds of trips that the term tourism started to have that meaning of travelling for leisure that has today²⁰. Some also see the modern phenomenon of the backpacker as a sort of legacy of the *Grand Tour*²¹.

The official historically recognized beginning of travel for leisure is the Industrial Revolution in the UK²². The invention of the steam engine and the construction of the first railroads made the movement of people easier and cheaper and allowed more people to move from one place to another. Those times saw also the emerging of a new middle-class, all people that usually did not belong to the traditional aristocracy but that started to be the pillar of the British economy. This new part of the society had also new needs, for the first time society started to promote leisure time and in 1758 Richard Cox, an Englishman from the middle-class, founded the first travel company, the

¹⁸ M. Korstanje, *The Origin and Meaning of Tourism: Etymological Study*, e-Review of Tourism Research, Vol. 5, No.2, 2007, pp. 101-102. (ONLINE) Available at: http://www.academia.edu/353007/The_Origin_and_Meaning_of_Tourism_Etymological_Study. (Accessed 06/02/2015).

¹⁹ J. W. Goethe, *Italian Journey*, Translated by A. W. Morrison, The Perfect Library, 2015.

²⁰ M. Melotti, *Il Mediterraneo tra Mito e Turismo*, Cuem – Università di Milano, Milano, 2007, pp. 27-29.

²¹ Adam Matthews Digital, *The Grand Tour*. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.amdigital.co.uk/m-collections/collection/the-grand-tour/>. (Accessed 05/02/2015).

²² L. J. Linckorish, C. L. Jenkins, *An Introduction to Tourism*, Butterworth-Enieman, Oxford, 1997, pp. 11-12.

*Cox & Kings*²³. In that early period, tourism was basically restricted to the British market and this early dominance of British customers and organizers can be spotted still today because it is reflected in the names of some old Hotels all around Europe that often carry names like *Hotel Bristol*, *Hotel Carlton* and *Hotel Majestic*²⁴.

Another key figure in the history of tourism is Thomas Cook, who is considered the inventor of modern tourism^{25 26}. In 1841 he invented the first private organized excursion advertised to the public: he arranged a special price of one shilling per person for a group of five-hundred and forty people for a one-day trip from Leicester to Loughborough to see a rally. In the price of this eleven-miles trip were included the rail tickets and also some food for the lunch. Being the organizer, Cook was paid by the rail company with a part of the money earned from the tickets. In the following year he kept on organizing trips with the railway company, even if he met some difficulties because of his lack of experience, he continued to believe in the potentialities of this new sector of the economy and in 1855 he organized the first excursion abroad: he brought a group of people from Leicester to Calais in order to allow them to go to the *Paris International Exhibition*. For this kind of excursions he started to adopt a system in which everything was included in the price paid by the customer. During the 1860s he started organizing trips also to the rest of Europe and even in the United States and in Egypt. In 1872 he founded the *Thomas Cook & Son* and soon after he introduced the idea of Hotel vouchers. When Thomas Cook retired in 1879, his son John Mason Cook took his place and he ran the company, who expanded and started organizing trips also to the Middle East. They also opened offices in other countries that were part of the British Empire, especially in Australia and New Zealand. Today the company changed name and is known as *Thomas Cook Group*, but they can be considered without doubts the successors of the original company and they are one of the biggest and well known companies operating in the tourism sector²⁷.

²³ Cox & Kings Ltd, 2015. *Introduction*. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.coxandkings.com/about-us/index.shtml>. (Accessed 06/02/2015).

²⁴ L. K. Singh, *Fundamental of Tourism and Travel*, Gyan Publishing House, Dehli, 2008, pp. 189-190.

²⁵ L. J. Linckorish, C. L. Jenkins, *An Introduction to Tourism*, Butterworth-Eniemann, Oxford, 1997, pp. 17-18.

²⁶ M. Korstanje, *The Origin and Meaning of Tourism: Etymological Study*, e-Review of Tourism Research, Vol. 5, No.2, 2007, pp. 101-102. (ONLINE) Available at: http://www.academia.edu/353007/The_Origin_and_Meaning_of_Tourism_Etymological_Study. (Accessed 06/02/2015).

²⁷ All information on the history of the Thomas Cook Group at Thomas Cook Group, 2014, *Thomas Cook History*. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.thomascokk.com/thomas-cook-history/>. (Accessed 06/02/2015).

When other people saw the big potentials of this business other companies started to appear on the market, but this was still limited to the UK context. In 1871 the British Government adopted the *Bank Holidays Act* that stated the right for the workers to have holidays and by the end of the century this new sector of the economy was growing fast and holidays started to become a sort of tradition for the middle-class²⁸.

With the improvement of the means of transportation, in particular of sea transportations, the movement of people kept on increasing also during the first half of the 20th century, in particular in the period between the two World Wars²⁹, but we cannot speak about mass tourism until the end of the Second World War³⁰. At the end of the conflict there was a big number of aircrafts and pilots ready to transport goods and people all around the world and agencies started to use them for their purposes. New technologies gave the possibility of moving a lot of people in a shorter period of time and to a bigger number of destinations and the arrangements of new modern package holidays affordable by a bigger number of people, allowed tourism to increase gradually through the years. This went together with an international regulation on tourism and air transportation, and obviously with the advent of computers and internet that gave to this sector a lot of new possibilities for a further development³¹.

In the last few decades we have also seen some new trends in the tourism sector, trends that are dictated by the changes in the society: people started to take also short holidays that last for example just for a week-end, there has been a specialization of some sectors for example with the creation of specific resorts for people of the same age or interested in the same activities or just for families or groups, the low-cost air companies allowed people to visit also minor destinations especially in Europe and finally the creation of flexible packages that can be modified following the taste of the customer created possibilities basically for everyone³².

²⁸ UK Government Web archive, *Historical Note*, 2009. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20090609003228/http://www.berr.gov.uk/whatwedo/employment/bank-public-holidays/bank-public-holidays/page18882.html>. (Accessed 06/02/2015).

²⁹ L. J. Linckorish, C. L. Jenkins, *An Introduction to Tourism*, Butterworth-Enieman, Oxford, 1997, pp. 17-18.

³⁰ Ibidem.

³¹ I. Batinić, *The Role and Importance of the Internet in Contemporary Tourism Travel Agencies Business*, International Journal of Cognitive Research in Science, Engineering and education, Vol. 1, N. 2, 2013. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.ijcrsee.com/index.php/ijcrsee/index>. (Accessed 06/02/2015).

³² L. J. Linckorish, C. L. Jenkins, *An Introduction to Tourism*, Butterworth-Enieman, Oxford, 1997, pp. 29-30-31.

Today tourism is a global phenomenon and it is considered a fundamental part of the global economy. In 2012, for the first time in history, more than one billion of international tourists travelled around the world³³, nowadays the movement of people is fast and cheap, many countries are investing on tourism and throughout the world there are hotels or resorts ready to host people in every period of the year. The term tourism also started to be divided in more specific types like sustainable tourism, educational tourism, adventure tourism, cultural tourism and unfortunately also sex tourism. Space tourism will probably become the next frontier in this sector but our actual technology is still not advanced enough to make it affordable for the mass market.

1.2: The origin of the term tourism

Still today the academic debate about the origin of this term is unresolved. Nonetheless there are three main different theories: the first one is called the *Semitic School*³⁴, its main proponent was Arthur Houlot who affirmed that the term *tourism* comes from the old Aramaic *tur*, a term used to describe the movement of people in the Bible. In particular, the first time that this word is used in the book is when Moses starts to explore the territory of Canaan.

A second theory is called the *Onomastic School*³⁵: according to them the term *tourism* comes from *Dalla Tour*, a last name of the French aristocracy. When Charles V signed a peace treaty with England in 1516, he agreed to give to the *Della Tour* family the exclusive right of commercial transport and the monopoly on other businesses. This would mean that originally the term *tourism* was related to a commercial activity of movement of goods from one country to another.

The third theory is the most recognized among scholars and it states that term *tourism* comes from the Latin term *tornare*, and also from the Greek one *tornos*³⁶. These two terms basically had the same meaning: a movement around a central axis. A similar term can be found in the Saxon language: *torn*, which can be translated as *departure with the intention of returning*. Originally the noun form of this term was *torner* and in the 18th century the term *torn* was used by the English noblemen to describe the trips that they used to make for exploration, personal education and for

³³ UNWTO, *Tourism Highlights 2014 Edition*, UNWTO, Madrid, 2014, p. 2. Available at:

<http://www2.unwto.org/content/why-tourism>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

³⁴ M. Korstanje, *The Origin and Meaning of Tourism: Etymological Study*, e-Review of Tourism Research, Vol. 5, No.2, 2007, pp. 102-103-104. (ONLINE) Available at:

http://www.academia.edu/353007/The_Origin_and_Meaning_of_Tourism_Etymological_Study. (Accessed 06/02/2015).

³⁵ Ibidem.

³⁶ Ibidem.

gaining more knowledge of their territories in order to rule them in a more effective way. Always during the 18th century the term *torner* was converted in *tornist*, switching from the use of the Saxon suffix *-er*, to the Latin one *-iste*. Following the same logic the term adopted to describe the action of *torning* became *tornism*. In the following centuries these words changed and converted in tourism thanks to the French influence and a clear example of this the French expression *Grand Tour*, a phenomenon about which we already spoke in the last paragraph.

The first known uses of the word *tourism* dates back to the 18th century: according to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term appeared for the first time in 1811³⁷ and the same says the Online Etymology Dictionary³⁸. About the word *tourist* always the Online Etymology Dictionary reports that it appeared even before, in 1772³⁹, however the Oxford English Dictionary says that the first real use of this term can be found in an advertisement dated 1780 in which there was the phrase “He throws the piece only into the way of actual tourists”⁴⁰. Also significant is the reference reported after this one that is by S. Pegge in 1880 who wrote it in an essay about the English language: “A traveler is nowadays called a tourist”⁴¹.

The term *tourist* is today widely used and recognized, during the 20th century the idea of what exactly is tourism changed according to the changes in the society. The term in itself remained the same but its definition changed throughout the years.

1.3: The academic definition of tourism

If the origins of the term *tourism* are still source of debate, we can say the same about the definition of tourism. Still today there is not a unique definition shared by everyone about what exactly is tourism. The first attempt to define it was made in 1905 by Guyer Feuler who described it as “a phenomenon unique to modern time which is dependent on the people's increasing need for a

³⁷ “Tourism”, www.oed.com, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at:

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/203936?redirectedFrom=tourism#eid>. (Accessed 07/02/2015).

³⁸ “Tourism”, www.etymonline.com, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at:

http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=tourism&searchmode=none. (Accessed 07/02/2015).

³⁹ “Tourist”, www.etymonline.com, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at:

http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=tourist&searchmode=none. (Accessed 07/08/2015).

⁴⁰ “Tourist”, www.oed.com, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at:

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/203937?rskkey=Vdo6Dj&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>. (Accessed 07/02/2015).

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

change and relaxing, the wish of recognizing the beauties of nature and art and the belief that nature gives happiness to human beings and which helps nations and communities approaching to each other thanks to the developments in commerce and industry and the communication and transportation tools' becoming excellent"⁴². It is impressive how this sentence can still be applied to today's situation even if it has been written more than one hundred years ago. However it is not precise enough to give us a proper idea of tourism.

A second definition of tourism is the one made in 1910 by the economist Hermann Von Shullard, who described it as the "sum total of operators, mainly of an economic nature, which directly relate to the entry, stay and movement of foreigners inside and outside a certain country, city or a region"⁴³. In this case is clear that the definition is restricted just to the economic aspect of tourism, while the Guyer Feuler's definition included both the economical and social aspect. The social dimension, as well as the political one is left out and this is why this definition can work just from an economic point of view.

In 1942 the Swiss professor Walter Hunziker, together with another Swiss scholar, Kurt Krapf, published *Grundriß Der Allgemeinen Fremdenverkehrslehre*⁴⁴ that has been translated as *Outline of General Teaching of Tourism*, a book that became the basis for the analysis of tourism at that time. In this text there was the first widely accepted definition of tourism: "Tourism is the sum of the phenomena and relationships arising from the travel and stay of non-residents, in so far as they do not lead to permanent residence and are not connected with any earning activity."⁴⁵ Both the authors continued to study the phenomenon of tourism for the rest of their careers and Hunziker in particular tried to present the study of tourism as a new part of the social studies. He tried to consider the many aspects and implications of tourism and he was one of the first people who wanted to analyze the impact that tourism has on the destinations: this impact can be negative as well as positive, negative because it can endanger the values and the traditions of the tourism destinations, positive because it can contrast the feelings of racism and xenophobia that usually are

⁴² Bahar 2005, as cited by Ş. Esen, H. Uyar in *Competitiveness of Tourism and the Evaluation of Turkey According to the International Tourism Criteria*, Bartın University, 2010. (ONLINE) Available from the abstract at: http://www.researchgate.net/profile/Hande_Uyar. (Accessed 07/02/2015).

⁴³ As quoted by D. C. Gilbert in *Tourism, Critical Concepts in the Social Sciences*, Edited by S. Williams, Routledge, London, 2003, Vol. 1, p. 49.

⁴⁴ W. Hunziker, K. Krapf, *Grundriß Der Allgemeinen Fremdenverkehrslehre*, Polygraph Verl. Zurich, 1942.

⁴⁵ As quoted by D. C. Gilbert in *Tourism, Critical Concepts in the Social Sciences*, Edited by S. Williams, Routledge, London, 2003, Vol. 1, p. 51.

created by a superficial knowledge of another culture. Being a tourist in a foreign country opens the mind of people and gives a unique occasion to improve the knowledge of a different culture.

In 1979 we have another attempt of definition: this time from the British Tourism Society that stated: "Tourism is the temporary, short-term movement of people to destinations outside the places where they normally live and work and their activities during the stay at each destination. It includes movements for all purposes."⁴⁶ In this definition the focus is just on the mere movement of people, it does not matter for which purpose people move, what really matters is that they do something that is out of their "usual" life and work. This means that also a person that travels for business for some days to a foreign country can be considered a tourist, a concept that is not new but that finds here a first recognition.

In 1982 we have another attempt of defining tourism, this time by Mathieson and Wall: "The temporary movement of people to destinations outside their normal places of work and residence, the activities undertaken during their stay in those destinations, and the facilities created to cater to their needs"⁴⁷. Here we do not have a specific activity that characterizes the tourist, an important detail that we can find in this definition is the consideration of the fact that tourism destinations usually create facilities for hosting tourists and this obviously has some impacts on the local economy.

Today, the already mentioned Oxford English Dictionary defines tourism in this way: "the theory and practice of touring; travelling for pleasure. (Orig. usually depreciatory). Also, the business of attracting tourists and providing for their accommodation and entertainment; the business of operating tours"⁴⁸. It is interesting to note how the term evolved during the centuries; nowadays it includes not only the activity of travelling for leisure, but also the business that there is around this activity as well as the theory of it. The fact that the definition in the dictionary includes also the word "theory" is a demonstration of how tourism is today considered a subject of study, a subject that can be analyzed in a scientific way and that can be measured and judged like any other known subject.

⁴⁶ Ibidem.

⁴⁷ As quoted by A. Franklin in *Tourism an Introduction*, SAGE Publications Ltd, London, 2003, p. 27.

⁴⁸ "Tourism", www.oed.com, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at:

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/203936?redirectedFrom=tourism#eid>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

1.4: The international definition of tourism

On a more international and political level, one of the first times that the term *tourist* was used in an official document was in 1937 when the League of Nations, for statistical purposes, defined “international tourist” as someone travelling abroad for at least twenty-four hours⁴⁹. This is clearly a merely political definition of the term, its applicability is restricted to this area but it can be seen as a first attempt to define who can be considered a tourist by the states, states that need to have some clear criteria in order to calculate the number of tourists that arrives in their territories. In the following years with the advent of UN many meetings and conferences were held in order to better define the concepts of “visitor”, “tourist” and “excursionist”, very important in this sense was the *United Nations Conference on International Travel and Tourism* held in Rome in 1963⁵⁰.

Another very important conference was the *World Tourism Conference* that took place in Manila in 1980. The conference wanted to take into consideration all the aspects of the tourism phenomenon in order to individuate the role that tourism would have played in the following years. The conference ended with the *Manila Declaration on World Tourism* a short but very meaningful document that on its first point states:”Tourism is considered an activity essential to the life of nations because of its direct effects on the social, cultural, educational and economic sectors of national societies and on their international relations”⁵¹. This is not a real definition of tourism, but in this first paragraph the importance of tourism on the international relations level is officially accepted and defined. The effects of tourism for the single nations are seen as “essential” and this recognition was probably one of the reasons why in the following years emerged the need to find a unified method of measurement of tourism. In the other points of the document tourism is seen also as a peace promoter because it implies relations between different populations, it can also help poor countries to develop faster, giving to the local populations enough money and resources to become tourists as well.

Some of the points that were emphasized in the *Manila Declaration* are still relevant today: the direct effects on national societies both positives and negatives, how deep is the role of tourism in contributing to the global development, how effective is the promotion of mutual knowledge and understanding among the different cultures that are put in contact with tourism and the relations

⁴⁹ UNWTO, *Recommendations on Tourism Statistics*, UN, New York, 1994, p. 3. Available at: http://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/Seriesm/SeriesM_83e.pdf. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

⁵⁰ Ibidem.

⁵¹ UNWTO, *Manila Declaration on World Tourism*, UN, Manila, 1980, p. 1. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.univieur.org/cuebc/downloads/PDF%20carte/65.%20Manila.PDF>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

between governments and tourism enterprises. There are also many issues that came out after the *Manila Declaration* and for this reason they are not included in it, like the involvement of local populations in the tourism planning or the concept of sustainable tourism. However this declaration represents still today a key moment for the international recognition of tourism as a relevant phenomenon for international relations.

In June 1991 the United Nations World Tourist Organization (UNWTO)⁵² organized the *International Conference on Travel and Tourism Statistics*, in Ottawa, Canada, after which it was published the *Resolutions of the International Conference on travel and tourism statistics*⁵³. To this conference attended the major representatives of National Tourism Administrations, of the tourism sector itself and of some National Statistical Offices. The purpose of the conference was to set the main rules for the statistical calculation in the tourism sector. The definition of tourism that was adopted during and after the conference was: “the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes”⁵⁴. This definition finally goes beyond the traditional conception that limited tourism only to holiday activities.

This conference resulted also in the adoption in 1993 of the *Recommendations on Tourism Statistics* by the UN⁵⁵. This document was based on the results of the *Ottawa Conference* but it also considered the previous work that had been made in the years before. Inside this document there were the general instructions for the statistical calculation and measurement of the tourism phenomenon, the general concept of tourism that is considered inside this document is the same one that was adopted during the *Ottawa Conference*⁵⁶. Moreover the document defines three types of tourism⁵⁷:

⁵² In reality before 2003 the UNWTO was not an official specialized agency of the UN so its real name was just WTO. In order to be clearer we will refer to it always with the acronym UNWTO except in the paragraph 1.5 where we will speak about the history of UNWTO.

⁵³ UNWTO, *Resolutions of the International Conference on travel and tourism statistics*, UN, Ottawa, 1991. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://repository.uneca.org/bitstream/handle/10855/3921/Bib-29976.pdf?sequence=1>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

⁵⁴ Ivi, p. 3.

⁵⁵ UNWTO, *Recommendations on Tourism Statistics*, UN, New York, 1994. (ONLINE) Available at: http://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/Seriesm/SeriesM_83e.pdf. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

⁵⁶ Ivi, p. 3.

⁵⁷ Ivi, p. 5.

- Domestic tourism: which includes tourist of a specific country who travels inside the borders of that country;
- Inbound tourism: that is referred to foreign citizens visiting that specific country;
- Outbound tourism: that is about local residents visiting a foreign country;

According to the document these three definitions can also be recombined together to form the categories of internal tourism (domestic and inbound), national tourism (domestic and outbound) and international tourism (inbound and outbound).

Another very interesting definition included in this document is the one of tourist, or visitor, as it is called. There are three main criteria that distinguish a visitor from another traveler⁵⁸:

- The trip should have as destination a location that is out of the usual environment of the person;
- The trip should not last more than twelve months, after which the person will statistically become resident of that place;
- The reason of the trip should not have the purpose of being engaged in remunerated activities by someone within the borders of the visited country. This means that people travelling abroad for business but in representation of their company, can be considered tourists from a statistical point of view;

The *Recommendations on Tourism Statistics* had a big importance in unifying the different ideas and opinions about the measurement of the tourism phenomenon, it also required the UNWTO to create some manuals and guidelines to help countries and develop the ideas included in the document. Five manuals have been created in 1995 and they all deal with different aspects of tourism statistic measurement, creating international standards and facilitations that are fundamental for the today's understanding of tourism⁵⁹.

In 2008 it was written the *International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics 2008 (IRTS)*⁶⁰; it can be seen as a revision and a refreshment of the *Recommendation on Tourism Statistics* of 1993⁶¹.

⁵⁸Ivi, p. 7.

⁵⁹ UNWTO, *Collection of Tourism Expenditure Statistics, Technical Manual*, UN, New York, 1995, p. i. (ONLINE) Available at: <https://pub.unwto.org/WebRoot/Store/Shops/Infoshop/Products/1034/1034-1.pdf>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

⁶⁰ UNWTO, *International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics*, UN, New York, 2010. (ONLINE) Available at: http://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/SeriesM/seriesm_83rev1e.pdf. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

⁶¹ UNWTO, *Manila Declaration on World Tourism*, UN, Manila, 1980, p. 1. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.univeur.org/cuebc/downloads/PDF%20carte/65.%20Manila.PDF>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

It was written mainly by the UNWTO, in collaboration with the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Statistics Division. It basically gives to the national governments an updated version of the indications for the measurement and the evaluation of the tourism sector. The document maintains the division of types of tourism that we can find in the version of 1993. The definition of tourism that we can find in this paper is described as “the activity of visitors” and visitors are defined as “a traveler taking a trip to a main destination outside his/her usual environment, for less than a year, for any main purpose (business, leisure or other personal purpose) other than to be employed by a resident entity in the country or place visited”⁶². This is basically the same definition that was adopted after the *Ottawa Conference* in 1991⁶³ and that is likely to remain unchanged for the next years if there will not be huge changes in the tourism market and in our conception of tourism.

1.5: The history, the role and the purposes of the UNWTO

We already mentioned the UNWTO in the last paragraphs, in the next ones we will focus on its history and on its importance for today’s tourism. The UNWTO is today the leading international organization dedicated to the tourism sector, it is officially defined as an inter-governmental body and specialized agency of the UN⁶⁴. As a matter of fact the international cooperation about tourism can be traced back to 1908 when France, Spain and Portugal created the Franco Hispano-Portuguese Federation of Tourist Association. After World War One more European countries felt the need for collaboration on the tourism sector and this is why in 1924 it was created the International Union of Official Organizations for Tourism Propaganda that changed name in International Union of Official Tourism Propaganda Organizations in 1934. This one was substituted in 1946, when a congress of tourism bodies decided to create the International Union of Official Travel Organizations (IUOTO)⁶⁵. In 1947 they also organized the First Constitutive Assembly in The Hague, this new organ was meant to substitute the International Union of Official Tourism Propaganda Organizations. In the following years this organ was given a status of advisor

⁶² UNWTO, *International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics*, UN, New York, 2010, pp. 9-10. (ONLINE) Available at: http://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/SeriesM/seriesm_83rev1e.pdf. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

⁶³ UNWTO, *Recommendations on Tourism Statistics*, UN, New York, 1994, p. 3. Available at: http://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/SeriesM/SeriesM_83e.pdf. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

⁶⁴ UNWTO, *About UNWTO*, 2013. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www2.unwto.org/unwto-factsheets>. (Accessed 09/02/2015).

⁶⁵ N. Jayapalan, *Introduction to Tourism*, Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 181-182.

inside the UN and they also created the first Regional Commission, the European Travel Commission (ETC)⁶⁶. IUOTO represented over one hundred tourist offices from different countries, together with other eighty-eight private associations, companies and consumer groups. It had a General Assembly, some Executive Committees and Secretariat General in Geneva. Its main purposes were to promote tourism and also to present it as a valuable trade resource and a profitable economic sector especially for the developing countries⁶⁷.

In 1967, the 20th IUOTO General Assembly, reunited in Tokyo, stated the need for a more modern international organization that could be able to collaborate with other UN agencies. Following these indications, in 1970 IUOTO organized an extraordinary General Assembly in Mexico City; on the 27th of September they voted in favor of forming the World Tourism Organization (WTO), that was meant to take the place of IUOTO but preserving the same statuses. WTO became operative after the ratification of the 51st state on the 2nd of January 1975. In May of the same year the first WTO General Assembly met in Madrid and from the 1st of January 1976 the WTO's official headquarters were definitely settled in Madrid. Since then WTO organized and participated to the most important international conferences and meetings about tourism.^{68 69} We already spoke about the World Tourism Conference held in Manila in 1980 and the *Manila Declaration on World Tourism*⁷⁰, but that year is important also the inauguration of the *World Tourism Day* that is celebrated every year on the 27th of September. We also already spoke about the *International Conference on Travel and Tourism Statistics* held in Ottawa in 1991⁷¹, but during the 1990s WTO adopted also some more regional programs like the *Samarkand Declaration on the Silk Road Tourism*⁷² and the *Accra Declaration on the WTO-UNESCO cultural tourism programme "The Slave Route"*^{73 74}.

⁶⁶ UNWTO, *History*, 2010. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www2.unwto.org/content/history-0>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

⁶⁷ N. Jayapalan, *Introduction to Tourism*, Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 183-184.

⁶⁸ Ivi, pp. 189-190.

⁶⁹ UNWTO, *History*, 2010. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www2.unwto.org/content/history-0>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

⁷⁰ UNWTO, *Manila Declaration on World Tourism*, UN, Manila, 1980, p. 1. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.univeur.org/cuebc/downloads/PDF%20carte/65.%20Manila.PDF>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

⁷¹ UNWTO, *Resolutions of the International Conference on travel and tourism statistics*, UN, Ottawa, 1991. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://repository.uneca.org/bitstream/handle/10855/3921/Bib-29976.pdf?sequence=1>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

⁷² *Samarkand Declaration on Silk Road Tourism*, Samarkand, 1994. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://silkroad.unwto.org/en/content/declarations>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

⁷³ *Accra Declaration on the WTO-UNESCO cultural tourism programme "The Slave Route"*, WTO-UNESCO, Accra, 1995. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.e-unwto.org/content/w04028mxu37527r0>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

In 1999 the General Assembly of the WTO adopted the *Global Code of Ethics for Tourism* (GCET)⁷⁵. It is not a legally binding document, but it gives some indications and principles for the organs involved in the tourism sector. Its main purpose is to limit the negative effects of tourism and to emphasize the positive ones. In this logic, in 2004 it was created the World Committee on Tourism Ethics, one of the official Committees of the UNWTO who deals with the promotion of the GCET and who evaluate its results and achievements⁷⁶. The GCET includes ten principles that cover all the aspects and the shades of modern tourism. It represents a good instrument to clarify the priorities of today's tourism and also to point out which are tourism's critical points and problematic issues.

In 2003, resolution number 453 approved during the 15th WTO General Assembly agreed to transform WTO into a UN specialized body. This proposition was accepted by the UN General Assembly with the resolution A/RES/58/232. As a result the name of WTO was changed into UNWTO⁷⁷. This fact has a big importance because it can be seen as the last step in the recognition of tourism as a fundamental human activity that has also some influences in the realm of international relations.

Today UNWTO has one hundred and fifty six country members, six associate members and more than four hundred affiliate members who represent the private sector, tourism associations, consumer societies and local authorities⁷⁸. Its structure is composed of five main bodies⁷⁹:

- General Assembly: it is composed by the members and the associate members. They meet every two years to approve the budget and the program, they discuss the main issues related to the tourism sector and they elect a Secretary General every four years;
- Executive Council: it can be considered the executive power of UNWTO. They take care that the program and the budget are respected and they meet at least twice a year. Its

⁷⁴ UNWTO, *History*, 2010. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www2.unwto.org/content/history-0>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

⁷⁵ UNWTO, *Global Code of Ethics for Tourism*, UN, New York, 1999. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://dtxqt4w60xqpw.cloudfront.net/sites/all/files/docpdf/gcetpassportglobalcodeen.pdf>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

⁷⁶ UNWTO, *World Committee on Tourism Ethics*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://ethics.unwto.org/en/content/world-committee-tourism-ethics>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

⁷⁷ UNWTO, *History*, 2010. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www2.unwto.org/content/history-0>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

⁷⁸ UNWTO, *Who we Are*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www2.unwto.org/content/who-we-are-0>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

⁷⁹ UNWTO, *Structure*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www2.unwto.org/content/structure>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

members are elected by the General Assembly and there is a member every five members of the General Assembly;

- Committees: there are six specialized Committees who help the members in their work and who also propose and manage specific programs and projects related to their areas of competence;
- Regional Commissions: they meet at least once a year and they are composed by the members of one of the six geographical regions that are Africa, the Americas, East Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Middle East and South Asia;
- Secretariat: the Secretary-General of UNWTO is elected by the UNWTO General Assembly for a renewable term of four years. He or she has the roles of supervising the work in the UNWTO headquarters in Madrid and of representing UNWTO at international meetings and conferences. The actual Secretary-General is Taleb Rifai from Jordan, who started his second term in January 2014;

UNWTO is globally recognized as the main international organ authority in the tourism sector, it promotes tourism all around the world by spreading knowledge about the matter, educating the future tourism managers and promoting projects in more than one hundred countries. It is also a trustable source of statistics about tourism.

The main goals and purposes of UNWTO are⁸⁰:

- The sustainable development of tourism: the concept of sustainable tourism is usually linked with the protection of the local environment, but it has also a social aspect, in general it can be defined as a kind of tourism that has only a positive impact for the environment and for the society. This concept is clearly linked with the one of sustainable mobility, which means environmentally friendly transportations, but there is also an economic aspect that is included. UNWTO wants to promote a “responsible tourism” that could minimize the negative side-effects, especially in the developing countries. The importance of sustainable tourism for UNWTO is testified by the *Sustainable Tourism for Development Guidebook*⁸¹, a document issued in 2013 that gives some instructions and advices about sustainable tourism;

⁸⁰ UNWTO, *About UNWTO*, 2013. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www2.unwto.org/unwto-factsheets>. (Accessed 09/02/2015).

⁸¹ UNWTO, *Sustainable Tourism for Development Guidebook*, UN, Madrid, 2013. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://icr.unwto.org/content/guidebook-sustainable-tourism-development>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

- Mainstreaming tourism in the global agenda: increase the consideration of tourism as a driver of development and growth in the economic sector as well as in the social one. Tourism must be considered one of the top priorities on the international level;
- Tourism and development: tourism can be a perfect tool to promote development and alleviate poverty in the least developed countries. It is important that the development of the tourism sector goes together with the development of the local society as a whole;
- Competitiveness: this topic is dedicated to a number of programs (some of them are also on a regional level), that have the aim of measuring the phenomenon of tourism in order to give some precise indications about which sectors of tourism will be more profitable in the future and which others have more potential to become profitable;
- Fostering knowledge, education and capacity building: supporting emerging countries in the sector of education and training in tourism-related professions;
- Building partnerships: get in touch with the private sector, also on a more local and academic level in order to build a stable network of collaboration;

Another internationally recognized organ for tourism is also the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC). Founded in 1990, the WTTC is a non-profit organization that gathers together the Chairs, Presidents and CEOs of more than one hundred tourism companies or tourism-related sectors of the economy like hotels, airports, airlines, cruise ships, tour operators and travel agencies. They have the purpose of keeping tourism at the center of the international political agenda and they promote the research in the sector to demonstrate how important it is for the global economy. While the UNWTO deals mainly with the public part of the tourism business, WTTC has the ability of dealing with the private part, the collaboration between these two organs has become more intense in the last years and it will probably continue in the next ones⁸².

UNWTO and also WTTC are just the result of the growing importance of tourism for the global economy. The more people have the possibility to move, the more there is the need for a regulation and for a proper evaluation of the issue on an international level. An internationally controlled management of tourism can be problematic for some aspects related to the single needs of the single countries, some of which are probably not ready to host a trustable and stable tourism business. Pressures for the development of tourism from the UNWTO can create problems of social impact in these societies as well as safety problems for the tourists. The priorities of UNWTO clearly follow the directions taken by UN, whose main purposes are peace, stability and environmental protection.

⁸² All information at: WTTC, *World Travel & Tourism Council*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.wttc.org/>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

UNWTO plays an important role and it contributes to the fulfillment of these goals, dealing with a sector that is becoming everyday bigger and more important for the field of international relations.

1.6: The main numbers of today's tourism

The most trustable statistics and numbers available about tourism on a global scale are for sure the ones provided by the UNWTO and in particular by the Committee on Statistics and the Tourism Satellite Account (STSA). The program related to this committee follows the IRTS of 2008⁸³ and provides countries and enterprises with statistics and trends of the tourism markets. In 2013 the STSA launched a new program of *Issue Paper Series*, a program that is meant to develop the study and the measurement of tourism. This project is divided in three main areas: Governance for the tourism sector and its measurement, regional tourism satellite account and the economic impact of tourism, overview and examples of macroeconomic analysis⁸⁴.

A useful and clear tool to have a general overview about world tourism is the *UNWTO Tourism Highlights*⁸⁵, published every year, together with the more general *UNWTO Annual Report*⁸⁶. The last numbers available at the moment are the 2014 editions that report the main statistics and projects of 2013.

The most meaningful statistics that we can find in the first pages of the *UNWTO Tourism Highlights*⁸⁷ can give a general idea of the dimension of the tourism phenomenon worldwide: tourism counts as the 9% of the global GDP, one on every eleven jobs in the world is in the tourism sector, tourism is the 5th largest export sector with 1.3 trillion US dollars per year, from the 25 million tourists in 1950 we arrived to 1087 million in 2013 and forecasts say that in 2030 this number will reach 1.8 billion, this means an average annual growth of more or less 4%. Also very important is the share of this big cake that is the tourism business, in 1980 emerging economies had

⁸³UNWTO, *International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics*, UN, New York, 2010. (ONLINE) Available at: http://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/SeriesM/seriesm_83rev1e.pdf. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

⁸⁴ UNWTO, *Press Release, UNWTO Statistics and TSA Issue Papers Series highlights relevance of tourism measurement and analysis*, UN, Madrid, 2013. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://media.unwto.org/press-release/2013-10-14/unwto-statistics-and-tsa-issue-papers-series-highlights-relevance-tourism-m>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

⁸⁵ All following information at: UNWTO, *Tourism Highlights 2014 Edition*, UN, Madrid, 2014. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www2.unwto.org/content/why-tourism>. (Accessed 08/02/2015),

⁸⁶ All following information at: UNWTO, *Annual Report*, UN, Madrid, 2014. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www2.unwto.org/annual-reports>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

⁸⁷ UNWTO, *Tourism Highlights 2014 Edition*, UN, Madrid, 2014. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www2.unwto.org/content/why-tourism>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

the 30% of market share, in 2013 they had the 47% and this number will probably grow in the next years⁸⁸.

These are clearly positive numbers for the tourism sector, but in 2013 numbers also exceeded expectations in spite of the global economic crisis. The strongest growth was recorded in the Asia and the Pacific Region, where it has been registered an increase of 6% of the arrivals, in absolute terms Europe is still the preferred destination with 563 million of people and a growth annual rate of 5%.

More than a half of these people travelled by air (53%) and by road (40%). This is important because it testifies that flight connections are important but also local infrastructures and internal communications are also crucial for the development of tourism. About the reasons for travelling, 52% of the people travelled for holidays and leisure, 14% travelled for business and 27% for other reasons like health, religion and visiting friends or relatives.

Very interesting is to analyze the amount of international tourism receipts around the world. Just to clarify, the international tourism receipts are the earnings generated in the destination countries by the expenses of international tourists: accommodation, transportation, food and drinking, entertainment, shopping, they all count as international tourism receipts. These earnings grew of the 5% in 2013, Europe had the bigger part of these earnings, 42% in absolute terms, but in relative terms the Asia and the Pacific had the largest increase, +8%. This positive trend is supposed to continue in the future.

As we said, tourism travel and transportation is today the 5th biggest export category on a global level after fuels, chemicals, food and automotive. However it is on the first position in many developed countries where tourism is a crucial source of jobs, development and foreign currency. Tourism becomes a fundamental resource when a country lacks natural resources or a developed services sector but it is not rare also for countries with rich resources to invest a lot of money in the tourism promotion. Azerbaijan belongs to this latter category.

In the next two charts, always taken from *UNWTO Tourism Highlights*⁸⁹, there are the top ten of the most visited countries and the top ten of the international tourism receipts in 2013:

⁸⁹ All information at: WTTC, *World Travel & Tourism Council*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.wttc.org/>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

Rank	Country	UNWTO Region	International Tourist Arrivals (2013)	International Tourist Arrivals (2012)	Change (2012 to 2013)	Change (2011 to 2012)
1	France	Europe	84.7 million	83.0 million	+2.0	+1.8
2	United States	North America	69,8 million	66.7 million	+4.7	+6.3
3	Spain	Europe	60.7 million	57.5 million	+5.6	+2.3
4	China	Asia	55.7 million	57.7 million	-3.5	+0.3
5	Italy	Europe	47.7 million	46.4 million	+2.9	+0.5
6	Turkey	Europe	37.8 million	35.7 million	+5.9	+3.0
7	Germany	Europe	31.5 million	30.4 million	+3.7	+7.3
8	United Kingdom	Europe	31.2 million	29.3 million	+6.4	-0.1
9	Russia	Europe	28.4 million	25.7 million	+10.2	+13.5
10	Thailand	Asia	26.5 million	22.4 million	+18.8	+16.2

Rank	Country	UNWTO Region	International Tourism Receipts (2013)	International Tourism Receipts (2012)	Change (2012 to 2013)	Change (2011 to 2012)
1	United States	North America	\$139.6 billion	\$126.2 billion	+10.6	+9.2
2	Spain	Europe	\$60.4 billion	\$56.3 billion	+7.4	-6.3
3	France	Europe	\$56.1 billion	\$53.6 billion	+4.8	-2.2
4	China	Asia	\$51.7 billion	\$50.0 billion	+3.3	+3.2
-	Macau, China	Asia	\$51.6 billion	\$43.7 billion	+18.1	+13.7
5	Italy	Europe	\$43.9 billion	\$41.2 billion	+6.6	-4.2
6	Thailand	Asia	\$42.1 billion	\$33.8 billion	+24.4	+24.4
7	Germany	Europe	\$41.2 billion	\$38.1 billion	+8.1	-1.9

8	United Kingdom	Europe	\$40.6 billion	\$36.2 billion	+12.1	+3.3
-	Hong Kong, China	Asia	\$38.9 billion	\$33.1 billion	+17.7	+16.2
9	Australia	Oceania	\$30.9 billion	\$31.7 billion	-2.8	+4.5
10	Turkey	Europe	\$27.9 billion	\$25.3 billion	+6.8	+2.4

The confirmation of Europe as preferred destination is quite clear; however we have to notice the surprisingly good result of Thailand that has the biggest relative growth rate among the top ten destinations. It is also interesting to compare these two charts: a lot of countries are present in both of them but there are also many changes in the positions, this reflects the efficiency of every single market, but also the fluctuations of the exchange rate between the national currencies and the US dollar. The best example is the fact that USA is on the second position for international tourism arrivals, but it is the first, and also with a great advantage, in the list of international tourism receipts.

Another interesting fact is that four out of five international travels still have departure and destination in the same region and this happens in particular in the richest areas, where there are the most advanced economies. These regions (mainly Europe and North-America) are also the main sources of international tourism and Europe is the leader with more than a half of the world's international arrivals coming from there, but other areas like Asia and Middle East have been growing rapidly in the last years.

About Azerbaijan and the other two states of the Southern Caucasus the statistics available inside the *UNWTO Tourism Highlights*⁹⁰ are the ones that follow:

Country	International Tourist Arrival (2012)	Change (2011 to 2012)	International Tourism Receipts (2013)	Share in the European Region (2013)
Armenia	843000	+11.3	\$454 million	0,1%
Azerbaijan	1986000	+27.1	\$2365 million	0,5%

⁹⁰ UNWTO, *Tourism Highlights 2014 Edition*, UN, Madrid, 2014, p. 8. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www2.unwto.org/content/why-tourism>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

Georgia	1790000	+35.7	\$1720 million	0,4%
---------	---------	-------	----------------	------

These numbers reflect the economic situation of the three countries: Azerbaijan and Georgia are having a more positive trend, while Armenia is having some economic troubles. The tourism receipts are clearly in favor of Azerbaijan, mainly because of a quick increasing in the sector of business tourism that usually brings a bigger amount of money than the traditional one. Anyways the trend is positive in the whole region even if the total shares in the European Region are still very low. This is also due to the fact that these are young countries that still have many internal problems, while the European tourism market is the oldest and also the most competitive in the world. It is not unlikely that in the future the Caucasus will gain a bigger slice of the European market, even if this will take time and investments.

The last part of the *UNWTO Tourism Highlights*⁹¹ ends with a reference to *UNWTO Tourism towards 2030*⁹², a research project that started in the 1990s and that has the purpose of helping UNWTO in the making of long-term projects and strategies. Very important are the projections of international tourism demand for the next twenty years: according to the statistics the international tourist arrivals in the world will increase of 3.3 % every year from 2010 to 2030, which in absolute numbers is 43 million of new tourists every year. These new arrivals will be directed mainly towards the emerging economies and markets in particular in Asia and the Pacific.

Numbers are clear: tourism is an increasing phenomenon. The international recognition of tourism as a key sector continued in the last years, in June 2012 tourism was included for the first time in a final declaration of the G20 leaders after their meeting in Los Cabos^{93 94} and in 2013 the World Trade Organization identified tourism as one of the key sectors with a big potential for

⁹¹ All information at: WTTC, *World Travel & Tourism Council*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.wttc.org/>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

⁹² UNWTO, *Tourism Towards 2030, Global Overview*, UN, Republic of Korea, 2011. (ONLINE) Available at: http://dtxq4w60xqpw.cloudfront.net/sites/all/files/pdf/unwto_2030_ga_2011_korea_1.pdf. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

⁹³ G20, *G20 Leaders Declaration*, G20, Los Cabos, 2012, p. 4. (ONLINE) Available at: https://g20.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/G20_Leaders_Declaration_Final_Los_Cabos.pdf. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

⁹⁴ UNWTO, *Press Release, G20 recognizes Travel & Tourism as a driver of economic growth for the first time and commits to work on travel facilitation*, UN, Madrid, 2012. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://media.unwto.org/en/press-release/2012-06-20/g20-recognizes-travel-tourism-driver-economic-growth-first-time-and-commits>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

development^{95 96}. In the future it will become even easier to move people around the world and it is expected that countries will continue to increase their investments in the tourism sector. In this situation of expansion the competition is tough, not all countries have enough resources to invest in the tourism sector and sometimes the ones who have the resources do not have the right “know how”. This is the situation today and this is the context in which Azerbaijan wants to propose itself as a competitive and appealing tourism destination, in the next chapters we will try to analyze and understand how it is doing this and which are its potentialities.

⁹⁵ WTO, *Fourth Global Review of Aid for Trade: "Connecting to value chains"*, (ONLINE) Available at: http://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/devel_e/a4t_e/global_review13_e.htm. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

⁹⁶ UNWTO, *Press Release, Tourism identified as key sector for high impact in Aid for Trade*, UN, Genève, 2013. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://media.unwto.org/press-release/2013-07-16/tourism-identified-key-sector-high-impact-aid-trade>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

CHAPTER TWO

THE MAIN FACTS ABOUT AZERBAIJAN

2.1: A geographical description⁹⁷

Variety, this is the best word to describe the Caucasian Region from a geographical, and also demographical, point of view. The geographical beginning of this region can be seen in the clash between two continental masses that occurred more or less twenty-five million years ago⁹⁸. This phenomenon created a natural border of mountains that still marks a separation between Europe and Central Asia. Mountains are the main geographical feature of the area, but not the only one, the variety of landscapes, flora, fauna and climates are the best frame for the incredible number of populations, cultures, religions and languages that have characterized this region since the first centuries of mankind's history. Geographically speaking we can divide the Caucasus in two parts⁹⁹:

- The Northern part, also known with the name of *Ciscaucasus*, it includes the Southern part of Russia together with the Northern part of Georgia and Azerbaijan;
- The Southern part, also known as *Transcaucasus*, it includes all Armenia and the rest of Georgia and Azerbaijan;

The mountain range of the Greater Caucasus is considered the border between these two main regions. It is more or less one thousand and two hundred kilometers long and it goes from the Black Sea almost to the Caspian Sea, creating a long line of mountains that sometimes can also reach five thousand meters high. The Lesser Caucasus range runs parallel to the Greater Caucasus one and together with the Talysh Mountains mark the border of Azerbaijan respectively with Armenia and Iran. These two mountain ranges are less high than the Great Caucasus and their climate is more influenced by the Caspian Sea. The three mountain ranges together occupy more or less the 40% of the territory of Azerbaijan marking a big part of its land borders and leaving a big flat territory in the centre of the country.

⁹⁷All the main geographical details have been taken from: State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Azerbaijan in Figures 2014*, State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Baku, 2014, pp. 154-155. (ONLINE) Available at: http://www.stat.gov.az/menu/6/statistical_yearbooks/indexen.php. (Accessed 10/02/2015).

⁹⁸ C. King, *The Ghost of Freedom, a history of the Caucasus*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2008, p. 3.

⁹⁹ A. Ferrari, *Breve Storia del Caucaso*, Carocci Editore, Roma, 2007, p.14.

Azerbaijan is one of the three countries of the Southern Caucasus and with its 86.600 square kilometers it is also the biggest among them, in this number we also have to include the Nakhcivan exclave, a detached part of the country that is separated from the rest by the Armenian territory and the region of Nagorno-Karabakh that according to the International Law belongs to Azerbaijan but that is under Armenian occupation since 1994.

Azerbaijan has a total of 2648 kilometers of land border with Armenia, Iran, Russia, Georgia and Turkey, the coast is in total 800 kilometers long. The bilateral agreement with Russia and Kazakhstan fixed the sea-border between those countries and Azerbaijan; however there are still some controversies with Turkmenistan and Iran about the definition of the sea border and this is mainly due to the rich oil and gas resources that lay under the seabed¹⁰⁰.

As it is proudly said in many of the tourism promotion websites or reviews about Azerbaijan, the country has nine of the existing thirteen climatic zones¹⁰¹ and to realize how big is the variety of landscapes and environments one just have to take a bus or a taxi and go South or North of Baku for two or three hours: the territory around Baku is basically desert, by going North this desert slowly becomes more similar to a steppe and after it turns into a hillside landscape. At this point if one turns left to go more far from the coast, in a couple of hours it is possible to see the magnificent and breath-taking heights of the Great Caucasus whose deep valleys hide fascinating mountain villages and untouched landscapes. By going South, after more or less seventy kilometers of desert the landscape start turning into a green and fertile flatland where the abundant agriculture provides a big part of the national needs for fruits and vegetables, it is calculated that almost the 55,1% of the national territory is dedicated to agriculture, while the 12% is covered by forests. The mountains of the South are not as tall as the ones of the Greater Caucasus but the higher level of rains typical of this region blessed them with a bigger variety of flora. Together with the variety of flora also the variety of fauna is noticeable: a lot of different species of birds are present throughout the country, it is well known that bears and wolves still inhabits the mountains and in the *Shirvan National Park* the main attractions are some rare Caucasian gazelles¹⁰². If one from Baku decides to go to West, the landscape will slowly turn into green hillsides with thick forests and woods rich with animals. In this region the lovely villages of Shäki and Lahıc are surrounded by wonderful landscapes that give their best especially in spring.

¹⁰⁰ A. Petersen, *Azerbaijan in Global Politics: Crafting Foreign Policy*, Chashioglu Publishing House (for the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy, 2009, pp.176-177.

¹⁰¹ C. Frappi, *Azerbaijan, Crocevia del Caucaso*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012, p. 17.

¹⁰² M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010, pp. 71-72.

In general, temperatures and rains change a lot throughout the country, together with the composition of the soil. The minimum temperature recorded was -33° C and the maximum was 46° C. Rains can go from the 200-300 millimeters per year in the region around Baku, to the 1000-1300 millimeters per year of the Länkärän Region in the South¹⁰³. Moreover, the coast of Azerbaijan has a long series of sand beaches that even if they cannot compete with the ones on the Black Sea or on the Mediterranean Coast of Turkey they still have some tourism appeal for local people, in particular in the Northern part of the Absheron Peninsula.

Azerbaijan is rich with rivers, there are more than eight thousand but only twenty-four of them are longer than one hundred kilometers. The longest of these is the Kur that starts in Turkey, passes through Georgia and arrives to the coast of the Caspian Sea, with a path of more or less one thousand and five hundred kilometers. Together with the river Araz they form the big flatland that characterizes the central part of the country¹⁰⁴. Lakes in Azerbaijan follow the same logic of the rivers, on the national territory there are a lot of them, about two hundred and fifty, but a big part are small. The biggest one is the lake Sarisu that has a surface of 65.7 square kilometers. The total percentage of the national territory that is covered by water is 1.7%¹⁰⁵.

Azerbaijan is famous for its big resources of hydrocarbons, in particular oil and natural gas. This big quantity of fossil materials in the underground is the cause of some curious natural phenomenon like natural flames from the ground and mud volcanoes. The first ones caused the creation, especially in the Absheron Peninsula, of some religions that had the fire as the main divinity, like Zoroastrianism and other animist religions. According to some theories, also the name Azerbaijan in the past meant “land of fire” or also “land of the fire’s guardians”¹⁰⁶. Fire is still today considered one of the symbols of Azerbaijan as is testified by the presence of flames in the official symbol of the Republic. The second ones are a rare and bizarre natural phenomenon: more than a half of the existing mud volcanoes are in Azerbaijan and the biggest group is in Qobustan¹⁰⁷.

¹⁰³ C. Frappi, *Azerbaijan, Crocevia del Caucaso*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012, p. 17.

¹⁰⁴ Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Azerbaijan Republic, *Rivers, Lakes and Reservoirs of Azerbaijan Republic*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.eco.gov.az/en/hid-chay-gol-suanbar.php>. (Accessed 11/02/2015).

¹⁰⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁶ “Azerbaijan”, *www.etymonline.com*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.etymonline.com/>. (Accessed 11/02/2015).

¹⁰⁷ M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010, p. 64.

Azerbaijan was one of the first territories where started the industrial extraction of oil in the second part of the 19th century¹⁰⁸. Since then the extraction never stopped and during the Soviet domination this already bad situation for the environment worsened because of the chemical industry and of the use of chemical substances for the local cultivations. Unfortunately today the signs that these industries left on the environment are so evident that some consider the Absheron Peninsula one of the most polluted and devastated territories in the world. Not only the land but also the sea is polluted because of the oil leaking from the off-shore platforms and from the refineries on the coast¹⁰⁹. Nonetheless, a big part of the country fortunately remained untouched by this massive pollution, especially in the mountains.

2.2: Population and languages

Azerbaijan is the most populated country of the Southern Caucasus with an estimated population of 9.5 million of inhabitants. The population growth is slightly positive and the median age is thirty years¹¹⁰. The main urban center is the capital city, Baku, with 2.1 million of inhabitants. The other main cities are Sumqayit, Ganja and Mingachevir but none of them has more than 400.000 inhabitants.¹¹¹ The amount of people living in urban area is 53.6% of the total¹¹² and the population density is 109 inhabitants per square kilometer. Life expectancy grew constantly in the last years and it is now seventy one years for men and seventy six for women¹¹³.

The literacy rate reached almost 100% in 2010¹¹⁴, this together with a long list of interventions, especially in the countryside allowed to have today an acceptable level of development supported by a positive economic situation. These factors were the main cause of the positive migration trend reached by Azerbaijan in the last years.

¹⁰⁸ D. Yergin, *The Prize, the epic quest for oil, money and power*, Simon & Shuster, New York, 1991, pp.57-58.

¹⁰⁹ Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Azerbaijan Republic, *The ecological situation in Baku and Absheron peninsula*. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.eco.gov.az/en/es-baki-absheron-veziyyet.php>. (Accessed 11/02/2015).

¹¹⁰ State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Azerbaijan in Figures 2014*, State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Baku, 2014, pp. 165-167. (ONLINE) Available at: http://www.stat.gov.az/menu/6/statistical_yearbooks/indexen.php. (Accessed 11/02/2015).

¹¹¹ C. Frappi, *Azerbaigian, Crocevia del Caucaso*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012, p. 20.

¹¹² State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Azerbaijan in Figures 2014*, State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Baku, 2014, p. 165. (ONLINE) Available at: http://www.stat.gov.az/menu/6/statistical_yearbooks/indexen.php. (Accessed 11/02/2015).

¹¹³ Ivi, p. 167.

¹¹⁴ C. Frappi, *Azerbaigian, Crocevia del Caucaso*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012, p. 24.

Among the different ethnic groups that we can find in the country, the dominant one is by far the Azerbaijani with the 91.6% of the total population. The other main ethnic groups are Lezgians, Russians, Armenians and Talysh. It is important to notice that almost all of the Armenians calculated in these data live in the Nagorno-Karabakh Region¹¹⁵.

Speaking about religion, Islam is the official religion of the country as it is testified by the green stripe and the half-moon on the national flag; almost the totality of the Azerbaijani and Lezgians are Shias¹¹⁶. However seventy years of Soviet domination have made local Islam less strict than in other Islamic countries. Especially in Baku, women do not have to cover their heads and shoulders and alcohol is normally consumed and sold without any problem. A peculiarity of the Azerbaijani Islam is also the influence of Zoroastrianism and other animist religions; these influences are reflected in a big number of superstitions, pilgrimage locations and peculiar traditions throughout the country¹¹⁷. For example in the Absheron Peninsula there are a lot of pilgrimage sites, but there are some also in other regions, like the *Besh Barmaq* mountain situated next to the Northern coast of the country or also *Qara-Atli Baba Pir*, a cave situated near the city of Qobustan and that is considered holy by the locals.

In Azerbaijan there are also a certain number of Christian communities, mainly Russian Orthodox and Armenian, that is also called Apostolic or Gregorian¹¹⁸. There is also a certain number of Catholics but the big part of the Catholic community in Azerbaijan is composed by foreigners who live and work in Baku, nonetheless Pope John Paul visited Azerbaijan in 2002 and on that occasion he blessed the first stone of a new Catholic church financed by the government. It is also interesting the presence in Azerbaijan of some Jewish communities: in Baku for example there are two working synagogues and close to the city of Quba there is the village of *Krasnaya Sloboda*, one of the few only-Jewish villages outside Israel. These people are also called *mountain Jews*¹¹⁹ and today their village is almost included in the bigger town of Quba, however it still represents an interesting curiosity for the visitors that are directed to the mountains or that are coming from there. The Azerbaijani population, proudly consider itself tolerant and open-minded about religion, while visiting one of the two Synagogues of Baku, the rabbi stated that Baku is one of the few cities in the

¹¹⁵ CIA, *The World Factbook*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/aj.html>. (Accessed 12/02/2015).

¹¹⁶ C. Frappi, *Azerbaijan, Crocevia del Caucaso*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012, p. 22.

¹¹⁷ G. Bensi, *Le Religioni dell'Azerbaijan*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012, pp.83-91.

¹¹⁸ C. Frappi, *Azerbaijan, Crocevia del Caucaso*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012, p. 21.

¹¹⁹ G. Bensi, *Le Religioni dell'Azerbaijan*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012, pp. 113-114.

world where there is no anti-Semitism. Moreover almost every local Azerbaijani person will tell you that every religion is welcomed in Azerbaijan; this probably has been caused by the repression of every type of religion during the Soviet domination, when after the independence the freedom of religion was restored, the religious feelings of the population were not so deep and intolerant not to allow a peaceful coexistence of different beliefs. Unfortunately the Soviet aversion for religion had also some negative effects, during the 1930s Stalin's crusade against every type of religion brought to the destruction of many mosques and churches throughout the country¹²⁰. Some of these buildings have been rebuilt today, like the impressive *Bibi Heybat* mosque, immediately out of the Baku city center. In other places new mosques have been built, the best examples can be seen in the villages of Shuvälän and Nardaran but many have been the losses for the cultural patrimony of Azerbaijan and not all of this patrimony can be rebuilt.

The official language of the country is Azerbaijani, a language that belongs to the Turkic family and that is spoken as first language by 91% of the population¹²¹. The official alphabet in use is the Latin one and as everybody says in the country, it is very similar to Turkish and the two populations can understand each other when they speak in their own language. However Azerbaijani has also some influences from Russian and from Persian. Russian is for obvious reasons the second spoken language of the country. Today basically all the over thirty population knows Russian throughout the country and also a big part of the younger population receives a part of its education in Russian schools, especially in Baku. Outside Baku it is more likely that an under thirty person does not know Russian¹²². English is spoken by many young people in Baku, but outside the capital it is hard to find someone that knows more than "hello" and "goodbye". For independent travelers that want to visit the country, at least a little knowledge of Russian can be necessary, especially in the regions next to the borders and to the occupied zone where the police might ask some questions to foreigners.

In Azerbaijan there is also a big variety of minorities that still speak their own languages or dialects¹²³¹²⁴. In the South, Talysh is often the main spoken language, Lezghian is spoken in the North, close to the border with Russia, Udi is spoken in the Shäki and Qäbälä regions and other

¹²⁰ C. Frappi, *Azerbaijani, Crocevia del Caucaso*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012, p. 55.

¹²¹ CIA, *The World Factbook*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/aj.html>. (Accessed 12/02/2015).

¹²² M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010, p. 53.

¹²³ C. Frappi, *Azerbaijani, Crocevia del Caucaso*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012, pp. 22-23.

¹²⁴ A. Ferrari, *Breve Storia del Caucaso*, Carocci Editore, Roma, 2007, pp.16-17.

spoken languages are Avar and Tssakhur. It is also interesting to notice that some villages, especially in the mountains, still have their own local languages; the best example is Xinaliq, where the everyday language is Xinalıqi and where it can happen that some old inhabitants do not speak Azerbaijani but just Xinalıqi and maybe Russian¹²⁵.

In general Azerbaijani people are incredibly hospitable and friendly, they like to speak with foreigners, especially outside the big cities, where the amount of tourists is still reduced and with some rare exceptions they are also open-minded and curious. A foreigner can have some troubles in the regions next to Nagorno-Karabakh, in Nakhchivan and also in the districts close to the borders with Russia and Iran. In these places registration to the local police office might be required when a foreigner arrives and especially in Nakhchivan the presence of a foreigner can be seen with suspicion. However this phenomenon has been reducing in the last years and if we think about it, is quite normal considering that the country is officially still at war with Armenia.

2.3: A short history of Azerbaijan

As Charles King stated in his book, “The name “Azerbaijani” has no clear ethnic sense at all until the twentieth century”¹²⁶. This sentence basically resume in itself the fact Azerbaijan has been a territory of conquest throughout its history and this created an incredible *mélange* of populations, religions, cultures, languages and traditions. While all around Azerbaijan there are some of the oldest cultures of the world, Persian, Armenian and Georgian, Azerbaijan’s identity remained unclear until not so much time ago and this is reflected today in the strong national feelings spread among the population, that are also a consequence of the Karabakh War and of the strong propaganda of the government. Since the first independence in 1918 the term Azerbaijan had also a clear territorial identity, today’s Azerbaijan territory is a little bit different from the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan created in 1918 but we will refer to both of them with the term Azerbaijan not to create confusion.

Azerbaijan is widely recognized as one of the earliest locations with human settlements. The first signs of human presence that have been found in Azerbaijan date back to the *Paleolithic*. The famous petroglyphs of Qobustan go from the *Stone Age* to the *Iron Age* and they testify the human

¹²⁵ M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010, p. 53.

¹²⁶ C. King, *The Ghost of Freedom, a history of the Caucasus*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2008, p. 14.

presence on the territory as well as a different environment and a higher level of the Caspian Sea on that period¹²⁷.

Since the first real human civilizations Azerbaijan was a territory of migration and movement of people, the first effects of this were cultural and military confrontations. The first occupation of Azerbaijan is considered the one made by the Medes during the 7th century BC, the second one was made by the Persians during the 6th century BC and to them is also attributed the introduction of Zoroastrianism in Azerbaijan. The Persians were defeated by Alexander the Great during the 4th century BC and this allowed the diffusion of the Greek culture in the region even if the Persian influence will be present in Azerbaijan for a big part of its history¹²⁸. After Alexander's death there was what is considered to be the first independent organized form of ruling on the territory of Azerbaijan: the Kingdom of Albania that during its history managed to keep a reasonable level of independence, especially from the Roman Empire who started to have some interests in the region from the 1st century BC. Soon after the Kingdom of Albania was defeated by Pompey and became part of the Roman Empire even if it still maintained its political order¹²⁹. An interesting fact about the Roman presence in Azerbaijan is the discovery of an old Roman remain that has been found close to the town of Qobustan, thirty kilometers South of Baku: it is a graffiti carved on a rock by a Roman soldier who was exploring this region with its legion and it is considered the Easternmost sign of Roman presence ever found.

With the crisis of the Roman Empire the Albanian Kingdom started to fall under the sphere of influence of the Sasanids¹³⁰. This period ended with the Arab invasion of 664 AC with which Azerbaijan became part of the Caliphate. The population of Albania knew an extended process of conversion to Islam that was by far more successful than in Georgia and Armenia where the ethnic identities and the Christian religion had more deep roots among the population¹³¹.

Very important in that period was the influence of the Khazar population in the Northern part of the Caucasus, this element, together with the weakening of the Arab Empire, brought to the creation of the Kingdom of the Shirvanshas, an independent entity on the territory of Azerbaijan that was meant to protect the rest of the Arab Empire against the incursions from the North. This Kingdom

¹²⁷ C. Frappi, *Azerbaijan, Crocevia del Caucaso*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012, p. 35.

¹²⁸ Ibidem.

¹²⁹ A. Ferrari, *Breve Storia del Caucaso*, Carocci Editore, Roma, 2007, pp. 22-29.

¹³⁰ C. Frappi, *Azerbaijan, Crocevia del Caucaso*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012, p. 37.

¹³¹ A. Ferrari, *Breve Storia del Caucaso*, Carocci Editore, Roma, 2007, p. 32.

lasted until 1538, and it is considered the peak of the Caucasus Golden Age¹³². Many remains of its glory can still be found in Azerbaijan, the most noticeable is the Shirvanshah's Palace in Baku's Old City.

The Shirvanshas had to deal with three Mongol invasions that devastated their territories, its resources and its population. The period between these invasions and the end of the Shirvanshah's Kingdom is seen as a Dark Age for the region, a period full of violence and without a single political entity able to control the territory¹³³. After these troubles Azerbaijan became part of the Safavid's Empire, who soon started a confrontation with the Ottoman Empire that had conquered the Eastern part of the Caucasus. The conflict between these two empires in the Caucasus lasted for two centuries¹³⁴. During the 18th century the Safavid's control became less strict and this was one of the causes of the creation in Azerbaijan of many Khanates that fragmented the political situation but that also gave to the territory of Azerbaijan much more freedom and independence than before¹³⁵. In this period also Russia started to be interested in the region and during all the 18th century it invaded and occupied some parts of the Caucasus. In 1813, at the end of the war with the Persians, Azerbaijan and its Khanates became officially part of the Russian Empire¹³⁶.

Russian rulers encountered many troubles in imposing their authority to the local populations. The geographical conformation of the territory allowed the rebels to find refuge in the mountains of the Caucasus, especially the ones of the Greater Caucasus and the figure of the Northern Caucasian rebel became strongly tied with the figure of the highlander¹³⁷. Many rebellions occurred and the colonialist logic adopted by the Russians did not help to conquer the support of the population. During the second part of the 19th century some big changes occurred in the Azerbaijani society, the development of the economy in this period and the creation of a new middle-class of local people contributed to the rising of some new ideas of national consciousness. This economic development was mainly based on oil; the Absheron Peninsula was one of the first places where someone dug the ground looking for oil to establish an industrial production and at the beginning of the 20th century half of the world oil production came from Baku, as a matter of fact the production of Baku and of the Absheron Peninsula was comparable only to the one in the USA. An important contribution to

¹³² C. Frappi, *Azerbaijani, Crocevia del Caucaso*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012, pp. 38-39.

¹³³ Ivi, pp. 38-39.

¹³⁴ A. Ferrari, *Breve Storia del Caucaso*, Carocci Editore, Roma, 2007, p. 49.

¹³⁵ C. Frappi, *Azerbaijani, Crocevia del Caucaso*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012, pp. 40-41.

¹³⁶ C. King, *The Ghost of Freedom, a history of the Caucasus*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2008, p. 150.

¹³⁷ A. Ferrari, *Breve Storia del Caucaso*, Carocci Editore, Roma, 2007, pp. 60-63.

this first oil boom was given by the Nobel brothers who established in Baku their oil company and who gave an effective organization and management to the local oil production¹³⁸.

In this context the local population was still underestimated and for a big portion kept in poverty, the big part of the managers and of the upper part of the society were mainly Russians and Armenians and not Azerbaijanis¹³⁹. New feelings of rebellion and independence started to grow, in 1905 a lot of fighting and protests occurred in Baku and these contributed to the formation of new political parties and associations¹⁴⁰.

The complex political situation due to the combination of First World War and the Russian Revolution brought to the proclamation in 1918 of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, a relatively weak entity that lasted until April 1920 when Azerbaijan was conquered again by the Soviets but that is still seen as the first example of a totally independent Republic of Azerbaijan¹⁴¹.

The Soviet Era lasted until 1991. At first the purpose of the Soviet rulers was to consolidate their control over the difficult territories of the Caucasus; they adopted a policy that granted some autonomy for the different national groups but still these territories were politically controlled by Russian managers and politicians. Like in other parts of the Soviet Union, the agricultural reforms and economic planning caused many acts of violence and many contrasts between local people and the Soviet rulers¹⁴². During World War Two Azerbaijan became crucial for its oil production and this is also why Hitler tried to invade Baku but without any positive result¹⁴³. After the war Azerbaijan knew a deep economic crisis, new resources had been found in safer regions of the Soviet Union, investments started to go in that direction and so the local oil production dropped drastically¹⁴⁴. In those years made his first appearance the person who is today considered the father of the modern Azerbaijan: Heydar Aliyev. He was a man with a strong political personality, he was well inserted in the Soviet ruling class and thanks to its abilities he managed to have a big amount of autonomy from the central government. With this power he restarted the local economy, revitalizing Azerbaijan's situation¹⁴⁵. The signs of the Soviet era are still easy to see in Azerbaijan,

¹³⁸ D. Yergin, *The Prize, the epic quest for oil, money and power*, Simon & Shuster, New York, 1991, pp.57-58.

¹³⁹ C. Frappi, *Azerbaijan, Crocevia del Caucaso*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012, pp. 46.47.

¹⁴⁰ D. Yergin, *The Prize, the epic quest for oil, money and power*, Simon & Shuster, New York, 1991, pp. 129-131.

¹⁴¹ C. King, *The Ghost of Freedom, a history of the Caucasus*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2008, pp. 166-168.

¹⁴² C. Frappi, *Azerbaijan, Crocevia del Caucaso*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012, pp. 52-58.

¹⁴³ D. Yergin, *The Prize, the epic quest for oil, money and power*, Simon & Shuster, New York, 1991, pp. 336-338.

¹⁴⁴ C. Frappi, *Azerbaijan, Crocevia del Caucaso*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012, p. 57.

¹⁴⁵ Ibidem.

many houses, buildings, trains, buses and also bridges clearly belongs to that period, but what is really a heavy legacy is the environmental pollution that has its example in the Absheron Peninsula where the poor maintenance of the oil wells, the big number of heavy industries and the unregulated use of dangerous chemical products for the agriculture devastated the landscape and polluted the air and the waters¹⁴⁶.

2.4: From the Nagorno-Karabakh war until today

The history of Azerbaijan from the late 1980s until today has been marked by the conflict with Armenia for the control of the Nagorno-Karabakh Region. Being the conflict still not finished speaking about Armenia during a conversation with Azerbaijani people can cause some embarrassments and incomprehension, however educated Azerbaijani people that have spent some time abroad are usually open-minded and happy to discuss the issue with some foreigners, this is counter-balanced by the presence of many other people with more strong ideas, like the marshrutka's driver who told me that Armenians are like germs and they should be considered a virus for the world.

At the beginning of the 1980s the majority of the population of Nagorno-Karabakh (80%) was Armenian¹⁴⁷ even if there was still a considerable number of Azerbaijanis. Between 1987 and 1988 Armenians renewed some old claims on the region, this together with the poor understanding of the situation by the Soviet authorities and the tensions accumulated through the years, resulted in some first acts of violence between the two ethnic groups and in a first movement of Azerbaijani refugees¹⁴⁸. Following these acts, some pogroms were made against Armenians living in the territory of Azerbaijan especially in the cities of Sumgait and Baku¹⁴⁹.

The war began officially in January 1992¹⁵⁰ so after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and for this reason it has been considered a war fought between two new independent nations. The first part of the war was a disaster for Azerbaijan and this was also caused by the difficult political situation that started to improve only when Heydar Aliyev became president in 1993¹⁵¹.

¹⁴⁶ Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Azerbaijan Republic, *The ecological situation in Baku and Absheron peninsula*. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.eco.gov.az/en/es-baki-absheron-veziyyet.php>. (Accessed 11/02/2015).

¹⁴⁷ A. Ferrari, *Breve Storia del Caucaso*, Carocci Editore, Roma, 2007, p. 112.

¹⁴⁸ C. King, *The Ghost of Freedom, a history of the Caucasus*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2008, pp. 213-214.

¹⁴⁹ Ivi, p. 213.

¹⁵⁰ C. Frappi, *Azerbaijan, Crocevia del Caucaso*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012, p. 59.

¹⁵¹ Ivi, P. 60.

In 1994 finally a ceasefire was signed in Bishkek in Kirghizstan and the high-intensity phase of the conflict ended¹⁵². An armed border was established between the occupied regions and the rest of Azerbaijan and it is the one that still exists today. It is not accurate to say that the conflict ended because, since the ceasefire, many occasional fights and incursions occurred from both parts¹⁵³, especially in the last years. It is also not rare that snipers occasionally kill soldiers on both sides of the frontline. The unofficial term of “frozen conflict” has been coined to describe this particular situation but it is still not accepted by everyone on the academic level¹⁵⁴. On the international level it has been created a specific OCSE group who should work as a mediator, the so-called Minsk Group, but the conflict is still far from a resolution^{155 156}. Azerbaijan raises the principle of territorial integrity clearly violated by the Armenian invasion, on the other side Armenia raises the right of self-determination of people since today almost the totality of the population in the region is Armenian and a big part of it was Armenian when the conflict started. Almost the unanimity of the international community declared the invasion illegal and four resolutions of the UN Security Council were adopted during the high intensity phase of the conflict but without any result¹⁵⁷. Many attempts have been made to find an agreement between the parts but in the last years there has not been any improvement in the negotiations, Armenia is adopting a policy of settlements in Nagorno-Karabakh, sending people there in order to create a *de facto* situation that could make impossible the return of the territory to Azerbaijan¹⁵⁸. Azerbaijan is trying to press the international institutions to improve their efforts in the negotiations but among the Azerbaijani population it is raising the feeling that the only way to get that region back is with violence.

¹⁵² A. Petersen, *Azerbaijan in Global Politics: Crafting Foreign Policy*, Chashioglu Publishing House (for the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy, 2009, p. 287.

¹⁵³ C. King, *The Ghost of Freedom, a history of the Caucasus*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2008, p. 217.

¹⁵⁴ F. Morar, *The Myth of “Frozen Conflicts”, transcending illusive dilemmas*, Per Concordiam, Journal of European Security and Defense Issues, vol. 1, n. 2, 2010, pp. 10-17. George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies. (ONLINE) Available at:

http://www.marshallcenter.org/mcpublicweb/MCDocs/files/College/F_Publications/perConcordiam/pC_V1N2_en.pdf. (Accessed 12/02/2015).

¹⁵⁵ A. Petersen, *Azerbaijan in Global Politics: Crafting Foreign Policy*, Chashioglu Publishing House (for the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy, 2009, pp. 286-293.

¹⁵⁶ C. Frappi, *Nagorno-Karabakh, il congelamento di un conflitto*, ISPI Policy Brief, Milano, n. 2, 2006.

¹⁵⁷ UN Security Council, Resolutions Number 822, 853, 874, 884, UN, New York, 1993. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.un.org/en/sc/documents/resolutions/1993.shtml>. (Accessed 13/02/2015).

¹⁵⁸ A. Petersen, *Azerbaijan in Global Politics: Crafting Foreign Policy*, Chashioglu Publishing House (for the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy, 2009, pp. 283-286.

At the end of the war the situation in Azerbaijan was tragic: the administration was in a situation of chaos, the South-Eastern region of the country was destroyed by the consequences of the conflict and many were the refugees escaped from Nagorno-Karabakh that needed help and assistance¹⁵⁹. Aliyev demonstrated to be a skillful politician, he reorganized the country and he achieved some important goals like the so-called “Contract of the Century”: this contract was signed between Azerbaijan and a consortium of oil companies and it regulated the extraction of the big oil resources of Azerbaijan. The companies with the biggest share were BP, Amoco and LUKoil. Azerbaijan’s share in this contract is 30% and the oil production is managed by SOCAR, (State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic)¹⁶⁰. Aliyev also managed to bring on the difficult relations with Russia, in order not to create a new possible source of tensions he decided to direct some of the first oil exports, the so-called “early oil, to Russia, but at the same time he planned to export a big part of the remaining oil resources to Europe, a project that became real with the construction of the BTC pipeline (Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan), officially opened in 2005¹⁶¹.

Aliyev was reelected in 1998 and under its presidency Azerbaijan knew an economic boom mainly due to the oil revenues. He died in 2003 and his son Ilham was elected President after him. The lack of a unified opposition and the suspects of irregularities in the elections helped this transition of power¹⁶². Ilham Aliyev is still President of Azerbaijan, he won the elections in 2008 and 2013 with a large majority but there have been some doubts about the regularities of these elections.

For many aspects Heydar Aliyev built today’s Azerbaijan on the ruins of the war with Armenia and he managed to create the conditions for an economic boom that allowed Azerbaijan to gain an important position among the post-Soviet countries. However Aliyev’s style has been often judged too much authoritarian and its family management of the country has been criticized by many international institutions¹⁶³. This and the continuations of a similar style by his son Ilham, together with a low respect of human rights, gave to Azerbaijan a political image of corruption and authoritarianism that from an international level makes it similar to the other post-Soviet republics, even if the economic situation and the development of these countries is not at the same level of Azerbaijan.

¹⁵⁹ Ivi, pp. 225-228.

¹⁶⁰ Ivi, pp. 228-231.

¹⁶¹ C. Frappi, *Azerbaijan, Crocevia del Caucaso*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012, pp. 103-104.

¹⁶² A. Ferrari, *Breve Storia del Caucaso*, Carocci Editore, Roma, 2007, pp. 130-131.

¹⁶³ C. King, *The Ghost of Freedom, a history of the Caucasus*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2008, pp. 226-228.

2.5: Azerbaijan's economic situation

Since the first oil boom in the second part of the 19th century the economy of Azerbaijan has been dominated by the oil industry. Today the situation still sees the domination of oil and its related sectors in the national economy: in the 2013 the hydrocarbons sector contributed to 44%¹⁶⁴ of the GDP and it represented the 93%¹⁶⁵ of Azerbaijani exports. One of the biggest challenges that today stand in front of the government is the diversification of the economy.

As we said Azerbaijan was one of the first places where the oil business started. In 1829 there were already some hand-dug wells in the Absheron peninsula, by 1873 some new wells were drilled and the first refineries were open. Thanks to the innovations introduced by the Nobel brothers, to the investments by the Rothschild family and to the new regulations adopted by the Russian authorities, Baku knew a first oil boom between the last years of the 19th century and the first years of the 20th century. In this period the oil production reached incredible levels and in 1898 it even became bigger than the American one¹⁶⁶.

During the Soviet period Azerbaijan continued to be an important source of energy resources, this started to change after World War Two but oil continued to be the center of the local economy and many off-shore platforms were installed in the Caspian Sea in those years. In the last part of the Soviet period the economy of Azerbaijan was already controlled by Heydar Aliyev who was the First Secretary of the Azerbaijan Communist Party from 1969 to 1982. In this period he managed to improve the bad economic situation that there was in Azerbaijan after World War Two. Industry, agriculture and per-capita income started to grow again until the late 1980s when the first acts of violence occurred in Nagorno-Karabakh¹⁶⁷.

The war's legacy on the economy was very heavy: during all the period of the high-intensity conflict Azerbaijan's economy knew a deep crisis that was worsened by the big number of refugees and internally displaced people (IDP). The planned economy typical of the Soviet Union left Azerbaijan with an acceptable system of infrastructures but on the other hand the general economic system was not diversified enough to sustain the entire needs of an independent nation. The year

¹⁶⁴ State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Azerbaijan in Figures 2014*, State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Baku, 2014, p. 205. (ONLINE) Available at: http://www.stat.gov.az/menu/6/statistical_yearbooks/indexen.php. (Accessed 11/02/2015).

¹⁶⁵ Ivi, p. 260.

¹⁶⁶ D. Yergin, *The Prize, the epic quest for oil, money and power*, Simon & Shuster, New York, 1991, pp. 58-63.

¹⁶⁷ C. Frappi, *Azerbaijan, Crocevia del Caucaso*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012, pp. 56-58.

1994 can be considered the turning point for the economy of Azerbaijan. First of all it was reached a ceasefire with Armenia and secondly the “Deal of the Century” was signed. The new foreign investments made possible to increase the oil production from the off-shore fields, where lay the big part of the national oil and gas resources and they also made possible to increase the efficiency of the oil industry by renewing the old Soviet plants and refineries. Oil started to be transported to the European and Russian markets through pipelines like the Baku-Supsa one, the Baku-Novorossijsk one and the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan one¹⁶⁸.

Since then we can say that Azerbaijan managed to complete the post-Soviet transition of its economy, the years from 1999 to 2009 were marked by a spectacular growth of the Azerbaijani economy with an average growth of the GDP of 15% per year^{169 170}. This was considered a second oil boom, after the one that occurred one century before and to manage of the huge amount of money that resulted from the oil production the Azerbaijani government in 1999 created the State Oil Fund of the Republic of Azerbaijan (SOFAZ), an organ that reinvests part of the oil earnings in other economic activities¹⁷¹. The clearest marks of this second oil boom can be seen in Baku where the amount of new buildings and skyscrapers gradually increased in the last years, the Flame Towers, the Heydar Aliyev Centre and the SOCAR Tower (still under construction) are just the most famous.

Since 1997 the oil production in Azerbaijan was constantly growing, however from 2010 this trend changed and the production started to fall¹⁷², it grew again in 2013 but BP forecasted a decline in the production for 2014, a decline that could continue also in 2015. This decline in the oil production can be seen as the first cause of the decreased growth of the GDP: in 2013 the GDP of Azerbaijan grew of 5.8% and in 2014 of 2.8%. According to *Standard & Poor's* this trend will continue in 2015 with a growth of the GDP of just 1.9%. Always *Standard & Poor's* has recently downgraded the outlook on Azerbaijan from stable to negative, giving as reasons for this the effects

¹⁶⁸ A. Petersen, *Azerbaijan in Global Politics: Crafting Foreign Policy*, Chashioglu Publishing House (for the) Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy, 2009, pp. 225-252.

¹⁶⁹ C. Frappi, *Azerbaijan, Crocevia del Caucaso*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012, p. 104.

¹⁷⁰ A. Kanan, I. Zonrab, A. Rovshan, M. Azer, *Assessment of Economic Export and Diversification*, AFA Translation LLS, Baku, 2013, pp. 14-15.

¹⁷¹ SOFAZ, *General Information*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: http://www.oilfund.az/en_US/about_found/history/uemumi-melumat.asp. (Accessed 13/02/2015).

¹⁷² A. Kanan, I. Zonrab, A. Rovshan, M. Azer, *Assessment of Economic Export and Diversification*, AFA Translation LLS, Baku, 2013, pp. 14-15.

of the decreasing prices of oil in the international market¹⁷³. It is also because of these forecasts that Azerbaijan is actually trying to improve its natural gas production: it has been estimated that Azerbaijan has more than one trillion of cubic meters of natural gas reserves, most of these are located off-shore and it is likely that there are more reserves that have not been found yet. The production of natural gas started some years ago and it gradually expanded, Azerbaijan became an exporter of gas just in 2007 and for the future the government is also thinking about starting to produce shale gas in order to improve the total production¹⁷⁴. In this logic are very important the BTE pipeline (Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum Pipeline), the TANAP (Trans Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline) and the TAP (Trans Adriatic Pipeline). The first one started to operate in 2006 and it brings the natural gas until the Mediterranean coast of Turkey, the other two are now under construction. And they will transport the natural gas from the Caspian Sea all through the Anatolian Peninsula and the Balkans until the Adriatic Sea where it will arrive on the coasts of Italy. From a geopolitical point of view this represents a little revolution because it will allow Europe to diversify its energy sources and be less dependent from Russian gas. Azerbaijan would also like to become an energy hub for the natural resources from the Central Asian countries, especially Kazakhstan, Iran and Turkmenistan. These countries are very interested in improving their economic relations with Europe, a trans-Caspian pipeline for example would allow Turkmenistan to transport there its gas but since an agreement on the status of the Caspian Sea has not been found yet, this project is still just an idea¹⁷⁵.

As we said the economy of Azerbaijan is still too much concentrated on the energy sector and this makes the country sensible to the changes of the prices of the energy resources, it seems like a paradox that even if the oil sector is the most important for the national economy, the amount of people working in this industry is incredibly little¹⁷⁶. An opposite situation can be found in the agricultural sector: about 55%¹⁷⁷ of the national land is agricultural land, in 2013 38%¹⁷⁸ of the

¹⁷³ Caspian Barrel, *S&P downgrades outlook of Azerbaijan's sovereign rating to negative due to global oil prices*, 02/02/2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://caspianbarrel.org/?p=26562>. (Accessed 13/02/2015).

¹⁷⁴ US Energy Information Administration, *Azerbaijan*, 2014. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.eia.gov/countries/cab.cfm?fips=aj>. (Accessed 13/02/2015).

¹⁷⁵ K. Beckan, *Everything you always wanted to know about Russian gas supplies to Europe*, Energy Post, 2014. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.energypost.eu/everything-always-wanted-know-russian-gas-supplies-europe/>. (Accessed 13/02/2015).

¹⁷⁶ State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Azerbaijan in Figures 2014*, State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Baku, 2014, p. 176. (ONLINE) Available at: http://www.stat.gov.az/menu/6/statistical_yearbooks/indexen.php. (Accessed 11/02/2015).

¹⁷⁷ Ivi, p. 155.

employed population worked in the primary sector but they contributed just for 5.5%¹⁷⁹ of the national GDP. The main causes of this can be found in the lack of a unique system of contracts that allows the purchase of the products directly from the farmers and in the lack of a national mid and long-term plan for agriculture. The government is strongly trying to support this sector because it is a good way to promote development in the rural areas and because it is widely recognized that the potentials are huge: Azerbaijani products, especially cotton, grape, rice and grain, are competitive and suitable to be exported to the other markets in the region. Just by having a walk in a Bazaar in Baku one can realize that the variety and also the quality of fruits and vegetables that is possible to find in Azerbaijan make this sector competitive and gives it a very big potential.

As we said the industrial sector is dominated by the oil and gas extraction and its related industries. However Azerbaijan has also a reasonable number of manufacturing industries that accounts for the 4% of the national GDP. The main manufactures are food products and metallurgic¹⁸⁰.

The services sector is the one that suffered more the incredibly fast growth of the Azerbaijani economy. Today this sector is for sure more developed than in the past, almost half of the population is currently employed in it and they contribute for the more or less the 30% of the GDP, however services in Azerbaijan are still not efficient enough to use in the best way the huge possibilities given by the oil revenues¹⁸¹. For instance the banking sector has often been judged underdeveloped by the international observers and this can represent a problem in the long-term¹⁸². The government also made some important investments for a general modernizing of the country: telecommunications today are acceptable, the road system has been developing even if there are still a lot of mountain villages that can be isolated during winter and the number of airports increased gradually in the last years. Railways connect the main cities but in general trains and railways still belong to the Soviet period. However the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway actually under construction will represent a sensible step forward in the process of modernization of the national railways. Tourism is an increasing sector of the Azerbaijani economy but we will speak about it in a more detailed way in the next chapters.

¹⁷⁸ C. Frappi, *Azerbaijani, Crocevia del Caucaso*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012, pp. 108-109.

¹⁷⁹ State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Azerbaijan in Figures 2014*, State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Baku, 2014, p. 205. (ONLINE) Available at: http://www.stat.gov.az/menu/6/statistical_yearbooks/indexen.php. (Accessed 11/02/2015).

¹⁸⁰ Ibidem.

¹⁸¹ C. Frappi, *Azerbaijani, Crocevia del Caucaso*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012, pp. 109-110.

¹⁸² Caspian Barrel, *S&P downgrades outlook of Azerbaijan's sovereign rating to negative due to global oil prices*, 02/02/2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://caspianbarrel.org/?p=26562>. (Accessed 13/02/2015).

Thanks to its oil and gas industries Azerbaijan is in general an export country: 92.8% of its exports are from this industry, the other main exports are food products and machineries. In 2013 the principal export partners of Azerbaijan have been Italy (25%), Indonesia (11.5%) and Thailand (6.9%). Azerbaijani imports value is almost half of the export one, the main imports are machinery (25.7%), vehicles (13.4%) and metals (12.1%). The main import partners in 2013 have been Italy (18%), Indonesia (8.1%) and Russia (7.4%)¹⁸³.

It is also important to notice, even if it is not surprising, that in 2013 Azerbaijan spent 5.2% of its GDP for military expenditures, arriving on the 5th position in the list of the countries that spend more, in relation with their GDP, for their military budgets¹⁸⁴.

As we said, in the future the growth of Azerbaijan is expected to continue, even if with a slower rate. The energy industry will continue to be dominant in the national economy but there will probably be an increasing role of the natural gas production that will compensate a possible shortage of the oil production. The challenge of the diversification will continue to be central in the economic policies and the government will have to deal with some critical points like the establishment of a good environment for foreign investments and the promotion of laws that can assure competition and easier bureaucratic procedures¹⁸⁵. About the non-oil sectors, a growth is expected in the next years in the sectors of agriculture, chemical industry and tourism. This will be important to compensate the persisting predominance of the energy sector that in the last months has been threatened by the drop of the oil prices and by the shale gas revolution that is happening now in the USA and that will probably start soon in other countries. This sensibility of the Azerbaijani economy to the resource's prices was the main cause of the recent downgrading of its outlook by *Standard & Poor's*, however as the agency also stated, the outlook could become positive again if the government will adopt the necessary measures to make the national economy less sensible to the fluctuations of the oil and gas prices¹⁸⁶.

¹⁸³ State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Azerbaijan in Figures 2014*, State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Baku, 2014, pp. 258-260. (ONLINE) Available at: http://www.stat.gov.az/menu/6/statistical_yearbooks/indexen.php. (Accessed 11/02/2015).

¹⁸⁴ CIA, *The World Factbook*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/aj.html>. (Accessed 12/02/2015).

¹⁸⁵ A. Kanan, I. Zonrab, A. Rovshan, M. Azer, *Assessment of Economic Export and Diversification*, AFA Translation LLS, Baku, 2013, pp. 5-9.

¹⁸⁶ Caspian Barrel, *S&P downgrades outlook of Azerbaijan's sovereign rating to negative due to global oil prices*, 02/02/2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://caspianbarrel.org/?p=26562>. (Accessed 13/02/2015).

2.6: Azerbaijan today

Today Azerbaijan is an independent republic based on the Constitution that was approved after a referendum in 1995¹⁸⁷. The Head of the State is the President of the Republic, who is directly elected by the population with a term of five years. Since 2009 some constitutional amendments abolished the limit of two consecutive mandates, allowing Ilham Aliyev to be re-elected for the third time in 2013. The President of the Republic is the center of the constitutional system, he represents the country abroad, he decides the foreign and internal policies, he is the commander in chief of the army and he names the ministers and the other chiefs of the army. Under the President there is the Prime Minister, proposed by the President and elected by the Parliament. Its role is to manage the works of the cabinet of Ministers, following the indications of the President. The actual Prime Minister is Artur Rasizade.

The Milli Majlis is the only branch of the parliament; it has one hundred and twenty five Deputies who are elected by the population for a mandate of five years. The Milli Majlis detains the legislative power.

The national territory is divided in fourteen urban districts, sixty six regions and one thousand seven hundred and twenty seven rural territorial units¹⁸⁸. A particular case is the Autonomous Republic of Nakhchivan where the local government is elected by the local Parliament instead of being appointed by the President of the Republic like in the other region.

Azerbaijan became part of UN in 1992 and since then it worked to establish itself as a trustable country on the international level. An important achievement was reached in 2012 when Azerbaijan became the first post-Soviet republic that held the position of non-permanent member of the UN Security Council¹⁸⁹. In Azerbaijan there is also one of the offices of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), precisely in Baku¹⁹⁰. The office was open in 1992 soon after the independence and at first it dealt with the problems caused by the conflict with Armenia, especially the issues related to the refugees and the internally displaced people, issues that are still relevant

¹⁸⁷ All the information about the institutional structure of Azerbaijan: Heydar Aliyev Foundation, *Azerbaijan.az*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: http://azerbaijan.az/portal/StatePower/General/generalInfo_e.html. (Accessed 13/02/2015).

¹⁸⁸ State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Azerbaijan in Figures 2014*, State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Baku, 2014, p. 154.

¹⁸⁹ UN Security Council, *Countries elected members of the Security Council*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.un.org/en/sc/members/elected.asp>. (Accessed 13/02/2015).

¹⁹⁰ All the information about UNDP in Azerbaijan at: UNDP, *About Azerbaijan*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.az.undp.org/content/azerbaijan/en/home/countryinfo/>. (Accessed 13/02/2015).

today. After the end of the conflict they started some long-term projects directed to improve the everyday life of local citizens throughout the country. Some of the data given by the UNDP are very interesting to understand the situation of Azerbaijan today: in 2012 the poverty rate in Azerbaijan was 7%, the per capita income was 5,5USD per day and human development index was 0.73. The unemployment rate was 5.4% and the internet users every one hundred inhabitants were sixty five. These dates in general make Azerbaijan an Upper Middle Income Country, but there are still some critical points that are reflected in the types of programs activated in Azerbaijan by the UNDP; these programs follow the directions given by the *Millennium Development Goals* and in Azerbaijan they have four main areas¹⁹¹: democratic governance, sustainable development, crisis prevention and recovery and women's empowerment. These projects mainly want to decrease the clear differences that there are between Baku and the rest of the country, especially in the most remote mountain regions where people still live in difficult conditions and there is a lack of modern infrastructures and facilities. It is clear that Azerbaijan made an incredible progress in the last twenty years, especially if compared to the other post-Soviet republics, but it still has to work a lot to solve some critical issues whose resolution would make possible the improvement of its tourism appeal in markets like the European one.

Azerbaijan in the last years also established important relations with the EU and the NATO: in 2004 it entered in the *Neighborhood Policy* of the EU and in 2010 it started a negotiation for an Association Agreement. At the same time Azerbaijan established good economic relations with many countries of the EU¹⁹², especially Italy. However an acceptance of Azerbaijan as a full member of the EU is today not realistic and if it happens it will be in the long term.

Azerbaijan entertains also good relations with NATO, these started in 1994 and were characterized by the signing of many collaboration agreement. In 2014 it was signed the fourth *Individual Partnership Action Plan* (IPAP) who poses some new purposes of the collaboration between the two parts¹⁹³. However as in the case of the relations with the EU, it is unlikely that these good relations will evolve in a full membership of Azerbaijan. The geopolitical implications of this action

¹⁹¹ All the information about UNDP projects in Azerbaijan: UNDP, *Our Projects*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.az.undp.org/content/azerbaijan/en/home/operations/projects/overview.html>. (Accessed 13/02/2015).

¹⁹² European Union External Action, *Azerbaijan*, 2014. (ONLINE) Available at: http://eeas.europa.eu/azerbaijan/index_en.htm. (Accessed 13/02/2015).

¹⁹³ NATO, *NATO's relations with Azerbaijan*, 2012. (ONLINE) Available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49111.htm?selectedLocale=en#. (Accessed 13/02/2015).

would be too much and moreover NATO is not very willing to accept among its members a nation that is still at war with another country.

Azerbaijan is very active on the international arena and it is member in other thirty five international organizations, among these the most important are the OCSE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe), the Council of Europe, the CIS (Commonwealth of the Independent States) and the OIC (Organization of Islamic Cooperation). Azerbaijan is also one of the founding members of GUAM (Organization for Democracy and Economic Development) together with Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova, in 2006 it was elected for a term in the Human Rights Council and it has also the official status of Observer in the WTO (World Trade Organization)¹⁹⁴.

Azerbaijan has many diplomatic and bilateral relations with a lot of countries all around the world: the most remarkable are with Georgia, Turkey, Ukraine, Belarus and Italy as well. The relations with Russia reached an acceptable level but they are often made more complicated by the close relations existing between Russia and Armenia. Anyways, through the years and especially soon after the independence, Azerbaijan managed to conduce a policy of distinction from the interests of Russia, the already mentioned export of some of the so-called “early oil” to Russia with the Baku-Novorossiysk pipeline is for sure the best example and as a matter of fact this move allowed Azerbaijan to sign the “Contract of the Century” and later to build the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, without having to deal with bad reactions from Russia. A big source of contrast between Russia and Azerbaijan is the status of the Caspian Sea: Russia together with Iran would prefer not to allow a free use of the waters of the Caspian in order to avoid the construction of a trans-Caspian pipeline from Turkmenistan to Azerbaijan. This scenario would hurt the interests of Russia because it would give to Europe a very good alternative for its gas needs¹⁹⁵.

Also the relations with the USA have often been difficult due to a slight preference of the American establishment for the Armenian side. From the Azerbaijani point of view this is caused by the presence of a significant Armenian lobby in the USA and also by a basic lack of interest in the region. The bilateral relations between Azerbaijan and USA have been deeply marked by the Amendment 907 of 1992 that banned any kind of help from the USA to Azerbaijan, making it the only exception among the ex-Soviet republics. A waiver was approved to this amendment in 2004 and it gives the possibility to the president to waiver this section, this partly solved the question but

¹⁹⁴ Heydar Aliyev Foundation, *Azerbaijan.az*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at:

http://azerbaijan.az/portal/WorldCommunity/General/generalInfo_e.html. (Accessed 13/02/2015).

¹⁹⁵ A. Petersen, *Azerbaijan in Global Politics: Crafting Foreign Policy*, Chashioglu Publishing House (for the) Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy, 2009, pp. 174-178.

as a matter of facts the President can still forbid any kind of help from the USA to Azerbaijan. In general the relations between these two countries are not perfect, Azerbaijan would like to build a solid and trust-based relation but the USA repeatedly demonstrated that this is not one of its priorities, as well as the resolution of the conflict with Armenia¹⁹⁶.

The relations with Georgia are based on the transit of oil and gas and also on more extended projects of regional development. The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway project is the main example outside of the pipeline and gas line context. Between the two countries there is a consistent trade obviously based on oil and oil-related products.

The relations with Iran are necessary and are mainly based on the transportation of resources to the Nakhchivan Region. There are also some cultural similarities between the two countries and in the Northern part of Iran lives a big community of ethnically Azerbaijani people that speak a Turkish dialect. A big source of conflict, as we mentioned, is the disagreement about the status of the Caspian Sea¹⁹⁷.

Far better are the relations between Azerbaijan and Turkey. The concept of “one nation, two states”, coined by Heydar Aliyev explains in a good way the bilateral relations between these two countries, who share a common history, a common culture and also a very similar language. Turkey was the first nation who recognized Azerbaijan when it became independent and it was the first nation that established economic and diplomatic relations with it. Today both countries have a common problem that are the relations with Armenia; the border between Turkey and Armenia is still closed and even if there have been some negotiations between them, Turkey in more than one occasion affirmed that it will not reopen the border until a solution for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict will be found. Very significant for the geopolitical situation of the region was the *Agreement on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Support* that came into force between Azerbaijan and Turkey in 2011: it is basically an agreement for military cooperation and support in case of a conflict. The relations with Turkey are important also because of the nine kilometers border between Turkey and Nakhchivan that allows Turkey to provide the autonomous region with energy and commodity supplies¹⁹⁸.

¹⁹⁶ Ivi, pp. 109-129.

¹⁹⁷ Ivi, pp. 160-164.

¹⁹⁸ Ivi, pp. 157-160.

Azerbaijan has also very good relations with Italy that is the main destination for Azerbaijani's exports¹⁹⁹. These exports are in big part oil or oil related products and they accounted for the 23% of the Azerbaijani exports in 2013. Ilham Aliyev visited Italy four times since 2005, the last time in July 2014 and during his these meetings many agreements and protocols have been signed. These relations are likely to improve in the next years thanks also to the bilateral investments and the numerous programs of cultural exchange and promotion²⁰⁰.

Azerbaijan is still a young country but in just twenty five years it managed to reach an unexpected level of development and participation on the international arena. Among the ex-Soviet republic is probably the one who reached the biggest economic welfare and gained the more economic independence from Russia. Azerbaijan still has many issues that need to be solved; the conflict with Armenia is for sure the first one, but also the respect of human rights, the development of the rural areas, the creation of a true internal competitive market, the establishment of a true internal political debate and the diversification of the economy are fundamental for the future of the country. All these issues are at the moment influencing the growth of the tourism sector in Azerbaijan, a sector that in this country has some big potentials that have not been exploited yet, in the next chapters we will see which are the policies of the government for the promotion of tourism, what is the situation of tourism and which are the main areas of interests for tourism in Azerbaijan.

¹⁹⁹ State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Azerbaijan in Figures 2014*, State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Baku, 2014, p. 259. (ONLINE) Available at: http://www.stat.gov.az/menu/6/statistical_yearbooks/indexen.php. (Accessed 11/02/2015).

²⁰⁰ G. Bifulchi, *Oltre 20 anni di relazioni tra Italia e Azerbaijan*, Magazine Via della Seta, Associazione Italia-Azerbaijan, Baku, n. 2, 2014, p. 12.

CHAPTER THREE

TOURISM IN AZERBAIJAN

3.1: A short history of tourism in Azerbaijan²⁰¹

Throughout its history Azerbaijan has been a territory of transit where different cultures got in touch with each other. The first travels in this region can be considered the caravans of the Great Silk Road that used to pass through the territory of the ancient kingdom of Albania. A lot of the goods from India and China used to pass there and cities like Ganja, Nakhchivan, Ordubad and Shäki were important stops for the caravans. With the passing of the centuries also the importance of Baku started to increase thanks to its strategic position and to the improved maritime trade in the Caspian Sea.

From the 19th century the development of an organized tourism in Azerbaijan was managed basically by Russia. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Azerbaijan indicates 1908 as the year of the beginning of organized tourism in Azerbaijan: on that year a mountain club was opened in Baku and it started to organize some trips around the country. In that period the Caucasus in general had a big appeal among the European and Russian societies, its exoticism and its fascinating history made of fights and rebellions gave it a special consideration among travelers. As Charles King wrote in its book *The Ghost of Freedom*, “the Caucasus remained a peculiar kind of fantasy, a place of freedom and liberation of sorts”²⁰².

The oil boom in Baku caused also the birth of a new middle class with new needs for goods and services. In 1922 there were already some excursion circles that organized trips mainly in summer and principally on the Caspian coast. In general during the Soviet period the Caucasus region was one of the preferred destinations for holidays and leisure time and already before World War Two the Council of People Commissars of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic adopted some measures for the development of tourism.

After World War Two tourism started to increase again in Azerbaijan, in 1950 a tourist center was created in Baku and others followed in the next years. A lot of new structures and centers were built

²⁰¹ All information about the history of tourism in Azerbaijan: Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *About Tourism in Azerbaijan*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.mct.gov.az/service/lang/en/page/35/>. (Accessed 27/02/2015).

²⁰² C. King, *The Ghost of Freedom, a history of the Caucasus*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2008, p. 206.

throughout the country during the 1960s and the 1970s. In 1983 Heydar Aliyev, who at that time was First Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers decided to create some resort zones on the coast of the Caspian Sea.

According to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism the peak of Azerbaijani tourism during the Soviet period was reached in 1987 when in Azerbaijan arrived in total 300.000 tourists, 250.000 from other parts of the Soviet Union and 50.000 from foreign countries.

With the first acts of violence in Nagorno-Karabakh in 1988 the number of tourists started gradually to decrease, the tourism organizations stopped their initiatives and hotels and tourism centers in the following years were used to host the refugees of Nagorno-Karabakh. Tourism almost stopped during the 1990s and also the government did not have a precise policy about it, the problems related to the conflict, the border security, the refugees assistance and the economic recovery were the main priorities during that period.

This trend started to change at the end of the century when the resources of the new oil boom started to be reinvested also in the tourism promotion of the country. Today Azerbaijan has placed the tourism promotion among its top priorities mainly for two reasons: firstly because of a more general need to diversify its economy that at the moment is still too much dependant on the energy sector. Secondly because tourism is seen as a powerful contributor to the process of nation building, a process that Azerbaijan is currently bringing on; the development of tourism is helped by a development of the diplomatic relations and for this we can say that Azerbaijan is using tourism promotion also for improving its role on the international arena. The Government has decided that tourism could be one of the sectors in which Azerbaijan has more possibilities to develop on a significant level and this is why many investments and many progresses have been made in this direction in the last years²⁰³.

3.2: The numbers of tourism in Azerbaijan²⁰⁴

²⁰³ A. Kanan, I. Zonrab, A. Rovshan, M. Azer, *Assessment of Economic Export and Diversification*, AFA Translation LLS, Baku, 2013, pp. 105-106.

²⁰⁴ In the next paragraphs we will try to analyze the main statistics about tourism in Azerbaijan, we will try to understand the role of the Government and of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and we will describe the situation as it is today as precisely as possible. I recognize that statistics and figures found in the official websites might not be enough for a complete analysis of an economic sector, it would be better to get some fresh information by people that work inside the local institutions. I personally managed to have some interviews with people that work inside the tourism sector in Azerbaijan and I will speak about that in the next paragraphs and chapters, I also tried several times to

The *Tourism and Services in Azerbaijan*²⁰⁵ and the *Azerbaijan in Figures*²⁰⁶, published by *The State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan*²⁰⁷ are two Yearbooks that report the main statistics about tourism in the country. Together with the *Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2014*²⁰⁸ dedicated to Azerbaijan and published by *The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC)*²⁰⁹, they are very useful tools that give a general overview on the tourism sector and its development in Azerbaijan. Some other useful statistics can be found in the already mentioned *UNWTO Tourism Highlights of 2014*²¹⁰. Obviously not all of the statistics that is possible to find in one of this sources can be found automatically also in the other ones, this is why we will take in consideration all of them, in order to have a broader picture of the situation of tourism in Azerbaijan.

enter in contact with someone in the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Azerbaijan who could help me; after many failed attempts I managed to have an appointment with Mr. Mahir Gahramanov, Head of division of Tourism Development in Regions, in his office in the Government House in Baku. Mr. Gahramanov was very kind and told me to send him an e-mail with all my questions about tourism in Azerbaijan so he could ask to someone in his staff to prepare for me some material. I wrote him two e-mails but he never answered. The following analysis of tourism in Azerbaijan are based on the other available materials that I could find and on the information and opinions I obtained by interviewing people who are inside the tourism sector but that are not working in the institutions. The Ministry on words might be interested in the promotion of the country, but apparently does not care too much about people making researches about it, or at least does not care too much about a foreign Master student doing its thesis.

²⁰⁵ State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Tourism and Services in Azerbaijan*, State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Baku, 2014. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.stat.gov.az/source/tourism/indexen.php>. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

²⁰⁶ State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Azerbaijan in Figures 2014*, State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Baku, 2014. (ONLINE) Available at: http://www.stat.gov.az/menu/6/statistical_yearbooks/indexen.php. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

²⁰⁷ State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Home, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.stat.gov.az/indexen.php>. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

²⁰⁸ WTTC, *Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2014, Azerbaijan*, The Authority on World Travel & Tourism, London, 2014. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.wttc.org/-/media/files/reports/economic%20impact%20research/country%20reports/azerbaijan2014.pdf>. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

²⁰⁹ WTTC, Home, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.wttc.org/>. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

²¹⁰ UNWTO, *Tourism Highlights 2014 Edition*, UN, Madrid, 2014. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www2.unwto.org/content/why-tourism>. (Accessed 18/03/2015).

As a first step in our analysis we have to distinguish between two types of contribution that tourism can have on a national economy²¹¹:

- Direct contribution: it is the one generated by the industries directly involved in the tourism sector like hotels, airlines and various transports, restaurants and other leisure structures;
- Indirect contribution: they are the contributions that are supported by the investments spent in the tourism sector, the government collective spending for information, promotion and administration, and the domestic purchase of goods and services that are necessary for the functioning of the industries directly related with tourism;

When we speak about the contribution on the tourism sector to a national GDP we should also consider a third type of contribution that is the induced one, in which are included the spending of those who are directly or indirectly employed in the tourism sector²¹².

According to the WTTC the total contribution of tourism to the GDP of Azerbaijan in 2013 was 8.8% and it is forecasted to rise by 5.3% in 2024. However if we consider just the direct contribution, tourism represents the 2.4% of the GDP, less than in 2012, but the forecasts say that this percentage will start to increase again in the next years. Another thing that we should consider is that also the total GDP of Azerbaijan will grow in the future, so even if, in absolute terms there will be a general growth of the sector, in relative terms the contribution of tourism to the GDP will probably remain more or less on the same level, 8.6% according to the statistics²¹³.

In comparison to the other one hundred and eighty three countries analyzed by the WTTC, Azerbaijan occupies the 98th position for the contribution of tourism to the national GDP in 2013, it is on the 172th position for the growth of tourism contribution to the GDP always in 2013 and it is on the 51th position for the forecasted long-term growth from 2014 to 2024²¹⁴. The general trend that we can deduce from these statistics is that the tourism sector in Azerbaijan will not grow in the short-term, but in the mid and long-term it will develop in absolute terms even if not with a spectacular rate.

²¹¹ WTTC, *Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2014, Azerbaijan*, The Authority on World Travel & Tourism, London, 2014, p. 2. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.wttc.org/-/media/files/reports/economic%20impact%20research/country%20reports/azerbaijan2014.pdf>. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

²¹² Ibidem.

²¹³ Ivi, p. 3.

²¹⁴ Ivi, pp. 7-8-9.

This overall trend can also be found in the tourism's total contribution to the national employment: in 2013, 8% of the employment in Azerbaijan was created by the tourism sector for a total value of 352 million manat²¹⁵. If we take a look to *Azerbaijan in Figures* there is not a precise number of people employed in the tourism sector, however there is a distribution of employees by economic activity and if we sum the numbers of sectors that are linked with tourism (accommodation and food, administrative and support service activities, art entertainment and recreation and other services and activities) the total result is 7.8%²¹⁶ that with the due approximation is a good confirmation of the statistics provided by the WTTC. According to *Tourism and Services in Azerbaijan*, the number of tourist enterprises in which most of these employees work has been growing in the last years and in 2013 they were one hundred and ninety seven²¹⁷. The forecasts provided by WTTC for 2014 say that this share of people employed in the tourism sector will decrease of 3% in the next years but it will go back to 8% before 2024, reaching a total of 367 million manat²¹⁸, so again we have to consider that in relative terms there will be no growth (the share will always be of the 8%) because of the growth of the national GDP, instead there will be some growth in absolute terms.

By taking a look to these numbers it is impossible not to notice that tourism is clearly not balanced in Azerbaijan because it interests mainly the city of Baku: tourism enterprises are concentrated mainly there and even if the numbers about the number of hotels in every economic region is not available, in *Tourism and Services in Azerbaijan* we have an interesting statistic about the number of rooms in hotels and hotel types enterprises by economic region; for a total number of 16.559 rooms throughout the country, almost half of them, 7409, are in Baku or in the surrounding

²¹⁵ Ivi, pp. 4-5.

²¹⁶ State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Azerbaijan in Figures 2014*, State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Baku, 2014, p. 173. (ONLINE) Available at: http://www.stat.gov.az/menu/6/statistical_yearbooks/indexen.php. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

²¹⁷ State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Tourism and Services in Azerbaijan*, State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Baku, 2014, p. 17. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.stat.gov.az/source/tourism/indexen.php>. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

²¹⁸ WTTC, *Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2014, Azerbaijan*, The Authority on World Travel & Tourism, London, 2014, p. 4. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.wttc.org/-/media/files/reports/economic%20impact%20research/country%20reports/azerbaijan2014.pdf>. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

²¹⁸ State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Tourism and Services in Azerbaijan*, State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Baku, 2014, p. 17. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.stat.gov.az/source/tourism/indexen.php>. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

Absheron Region²¹⁹. Even more impressive is the statistic about the number of people engaged in tourism enterprises by economic regions: in 2013 on a total of 1729 employees, 1642 were working in Baku or in the Absheron Region²²⁰. It is clear that Baku represents the main destination of the tourism investments and this makes perfectly sense because it is also the main tourism destination, but as it happens for the Azerbaijani economy that is almost monopolized by the oil sector, the tourism business of Azerbaijan is also too much unbalanced in Baku and its surrounding region.

About the number of arrivals of people in Azerbaijan both UNWTO²²¹ and WTTC²²² reports give us the number of foreign tourists arrivals (also called international tourists arrivals), that is the number of foreign citizens arrived in Azerbaijan for purposes of leisure and business and who left the country before reaching a total period of stay of twelve months. These have been 1.98 million in 2012 and the trend has been positive if we consider the years before. Always according to WTTC in 2024, 3.14 million of foreign tourists will arrive in Azerbaijan²²³.

These numbers are more or less the same if we take a look to *Tourism and Services in Azerbaijan*. First of all in this Yearbook they often do not use the term *tourist* but the more general *persons* or *citizens*. Secondly the numbers are more focused on the movement of people through the borders of Azerbaijan, even if there is also a specific chart about foreigners arrived in Azerbaijan with purposes of tourism and this chart says that in 2012 these people have been 1.98 million²²⁴. This number coincides with the one by UNWTO and WTTC that we already mentioned in the last paragraph. However in this Yearbook we also have the statistic for the year 2013: tourist arrivals on that year increased, arriving to a total of 2.12 million of people. It is interesting to notice that business tourists occupies the second position, immediately after leisure and recreation tourism and very distanced from treatment tourism, religious tourism and other tourism purpose²²⁵ that occupy

²¹⁹ Ivi, p. 119.

²²⁰ Ivi, p. 111.

²²¹ UNWTO, *Tourism Highlights 2014 Edition*, UN, Madrid, 2014, p. 8. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www2.unwto.org/content/why-tourism>. (Accessed 18/03/2015).

²²² WTTC, *Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2014, Azerbaijan*, The Authority on World Travel & Tourism, London, 2014, p. 5. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.wttc.org/-/media/files/reports/economic%20impact%20research/country%20reports/azerbaijan2014.pdf>. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

²²³ Ibidem.

²²⁴ State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Tourism and Services in Azerbaijan*, State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Baku, 2014, p. 38. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.stat.gov.az/source/tourism/indexen.php>. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

²²⁵ Ibidem.

the last two positions. Business tourism is also the sector that knew the biggest relative growth between 2012 and 2013. However, considering all the meetings, conferences, conventions and events related to business that take place in Azerbaijan, it seems strange that business tourism is just on the second position. A reason why official statistics report this might be because a lot of the people that come to Azerbaijan to do business, do it with a tourism visa, that is easier and faster to obtain than a business visa, especially now that for many foreign citizens it is possible to obtain a visa on arrival in the international airports of the country. This issue, that must be considered a personal reasoning, is supported by the empirical evidences that are possible to observe in Baku: the number of foreign businessmen in the city is far bigger than the number of tourists.

About the nationality of these tourists unfortunately *Tourism and Services in Azerbaijan* does not give a list of them divided per nationalities, the closest thing that we can find is a chart with the numbers of people that crossed the border of Azerbaijan, including also the international airports, divided per nationality. Unfortunately these numbers, even if very interesting, contain a basic limit, that is the fact that they count the border crossings but they do not count the people. For example if the same foreign citizen has crossed the border ten times, the statistic will just count ten border crossings. Considering that a lot of foreign citizen come to Azerbaijan and that some of them often cross the border many times in one year, we can say without any doubt that the real number of tourists that came to Azerbaijan with leisure purposes is slightly smaller than it is suggested in the numbers we will analyze in the following lines and that were the only ones available at the moment of the research. With this limit in mind, we can start with the first statistic that is the one about the foreign people that crossed the border of Azerbaijan in 2013, that have been 2.51 million²²⁶. A big part of them came from Russia, Georgia and Iran, the neighborhood countries. On the fourth position there is Turkey and in the rest of the top ten we have Great Britain, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, USA, Germany and Uzbekistan²²⁷. Even if we do not have the statistics about the nationalities of the arrived tourists, we can reasonably suppose that these would not be that different from the ones about the foreign citizens that entered in Azerbaijan. In this way we can observe that the big part of these arrivals are from countries of the same geographical region, Russia, Georgia and Turkey for example occupy three of the four first positions and the fact that their citizens do not need a visa to enter Azerbaijan is probably not a case. The arrivals of people from big tourists markets like the

²²⁶ This number is bigger than the number of arrived tourist because in it are included also the people who arrived in Azerbaijan not for tourism purposes.

²²⁷ State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Tourism and Services in Azerbaijan*, State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Baku, 2014, p. 81. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.stat.gov.az/source/tourism/indexen.php>. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

European Union or Eastern Asia is still quite limited and this is logic because as we saw, a big part of the tourists come here for business tourism and Azerbaijan's strong economic relations with Russia, Georgia and Turkey represent a push factor for business tourism. A particular case is Italy: as we said in the last chapter Italy is Azerbaijan's main economic partner²²⁸ but even if the number of Italian citizens who arrived in Azerbaijan has been increasing in the last years, in 2013 these have been just 8566, placing Italy only on the 17th position of the list²²⁹ of foreign citizens arrived in Azerbaijan in 2013. This is a demonstration of the fact that proximity and also visa policies matters in determining the tourists arrivals in a country.

Another interesting statistic given by the WTTC is the division of the total tourism expenditures in the country between leisure spending and business spending. In 2013, 72% of the spending came from the leisure tourism whether 28% came from the business tourism²³⁰ ²³¹that, as we saw, in Azerbaijan is particularly common and concentrated in the area of Baku. Also related to this is the distinction between the domestic and the foreign visitor spending (also called international receipts). In 2013 the domestic spending accounted for 42% of the total and the foreign visitors spending for the 58%²³².

At this point it would be interesting to spend some words about internal tourism in Azerbaijan, but unfortunately we do not have enough precise statistics about this topic: internal tourism is more difficult to measure than the foreign people's tourism because people inside a country can move for other purposes, like visiting relatives, work, health and even when these movements are made for leisure purposes they can be difficult to calculate because for example they can be short day trips

²²⁸ State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Azerbaijan in Figures 2014*, State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Baku, 2014, pp. 258-260. . (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.stat.gov.az/source/tourism/indexen.php>. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

²²⁹State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Tourism and Services in Azerbaijan*, State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Baku, 2014, p. 81. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.stat.gov.az/source/tourism/indexen.php>. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

²³⁰ WTTC, *Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2014, Azerbaijan*, The Authority on World Travel & Tourism, London, 2014, p. 6. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.wttc.org/-/media/files/reports/economic%20impact%20research/country%20reports/azerbaijan2014.pdf>. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

²³¹ As we already said, this numbers might have some limits because of the fact that often people with business purposes come to Azerbaijan with a tourism Visa and so their expenditures are counted as leisure spending.

²³² WTTC, *Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2014, Azerbaijan*, The Authority on World Travel & Tourism, London, 2014, p. 6. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.wttc.org/-/media/files/reports/economic%20impact%20research/country%20reports/azerbaijan2014.pdf>. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

made by private transportations. For instance a trip of some days made by a family to visit some relatives, by private car and during which they stay in their relative's house can be considered tourism but it will not be calculated in the statistics because there are not expenditures made by the family in some structures like hotels or restaurants. To calculate just the expenditures is useful in order to understand how much the population spends for travelling and for leisure. In *Tourism and Services in Azerbaijan* there are some charts about internal tourists²³³ but they are not enough detailed to make a precise analysis about internal tourism in Azerbaijan. However they still give us some interesting facts: for example the big part of the internal tourism is directed to and comes from Baku and also from the available statistics it is also evident that the movement of people inside the country has been increasing in the last years and as we saw, the domestic spending accounts for 42% of the total tourism spending²³⁴, that is still a significant part. Even if we still do not have precise numbers about the internal tourism in Azerbaijan, it is enough to spend some days in Baku to understand that this sector is still not very developed. People in Azerbaijan mainly move for purposes of work, study and visiting friends or relatives, a real internal tourism industry is still missing. This is logic if we think that for example, prices in Baku, especially for the accommodation, can be high even for citizens from the European Union. The same can be said for the main tourism structures like the *Shahdag Ski Resort*, or the Naftalan Resorts or also the beaches of the Absheron Peninsula where prices are often quite high and can be afforded just by the upper part of the Azerbaijani society that is probably the responsible of that already mentioned 42% of domestic tourism expenditures.

According to the WTTO, if we consider Azerbaijan's statistics on a global context, the country is often placed under the average global level, at least for the statistics about the actual situation and the short-term forecasts. This fact changes a bit if we take a look to the global forecasts for the mid-term period, precisely the 2014-24 one. In this period Azerbaijan is expected to gain some positions and to improve its tourism industry even on the global level²³⁵.

²³³State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Tourism and Services in Azerbaijan*, State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Baku, 2014, pp. 103-105. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.stat.gov.az/source/tourism/indexen.php>. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

²³⁴ WTTC, *Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2014, Azerbaijan*, The Authority on World Travel & Tourism, London, 2014, p. 6. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.wttc.org/-/media/files/reports/economic%20impact%20research/country%20reports/azerbaijan2014.pdf>. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

²³⁵ WTTC, *Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2014, Azerbaijan*, The Authority on World Travel & Tourism, London, 2014, pp. 7-11. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.wttc.org/-/media/files/reports/economic%20impact%20research/country%20reports/azerbaijan2014.pdf>. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

Numbers about Azerbaijan must be analyzed with a critical eye and always remembering the peculiarities that we already mention, but they are still very useful to understand the situation of the tourism sector in the country and if we consider the overall situation, these numbers are clearly not kind with Azerbaijan. The country at the moment has a reduced number of tourist arrivals, tourism is not a fundamental part of its GDP and the employment in this sector is not very significant. However while we analyze these statistics there are some considerations that we have to keep in mind: first of all the tourism market is expected to grow worldwide in the next years, so in order to gain some positions in these statistics a country not only has to develop its tourism, but it also has to do it with very good rates because a normal positive rate would only compensate the global growth and it will result in an absolute growth but not in a relative growth. Let's also not forget that the competition in this industry is tough and in particular Azerbaijan suffers the one with the close European market that is the oldest and biggest tourism market in the world. Azerbaijan also has to deal with the concurrence on the regional level of Georgia and Armenia: the statistics provided by UNWTO that we saw in chapter one showed that tourism is a growing phenomenon also in these other two countries. If we also consider the statistics by the World Bank, we can see that in 2013, Georgia became the leader in the region for the number of tourist arrivals, with more than 5 million, followed by Azerbaijan with 2 million and Armenia 1 million²³⁶. This competition factor will probably be crucial in the future if Azerbaijan will continue to have stricter visa policies than Armenia and Georgia, for which basically all of the Western countries do not need a visa.

Even if it is clear that Azerbaijan is not actually a top tourism destination and it will not probably become one in the next years, its progress in this sector have been quite impressive and it reflects the massive promotional policies of the Azerbaijani Government. Just twenty years ago tourism in Azerbaijan did not exist; the country was signing a ceasefire with Armenia that basically deprived it of a consistent part of its national territory and that also left a situation of protracted and unresolved conflict. However, soon after the ceasefire, the country also signed a contract that would have been the key factor for its fast development. This development occurred in a really fast way but tourism is something that needs experience and infrastructures and Azerbaijan is still in the process of acquiring both of them.

²³⁶ The World Bank, *International Tourism, number of arrivals*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/ST.INT.ARVL>. (Accessed 18/03/2015).

3.3: Tourism and the Azerbaijani Government

The official organ for the regulation and development of tourism in Azerbaijan is the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Through the years there have been many institutional changes in this sector: its official origin is considered to be the establishment of the Ministry of Culture in 1953, this lasted until 2001 when the competences about tourism were given to the new Ministry of Youth, Sport and Tourism in order to help the development of tourism in the country that since at that moment it was still suffering for the consequences of the war with Armenia. This process saw a last development in 2006 when the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Youth, Sport and Tourism were annulled to create the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the Ministry of Youth and Sport²³⁷.

Today the Minister of Culture and Tourism is Abulfas Garayev and he is helped in its job by one First Deputy Minister and three Deputy Ministers. Inside the Ministry there are different departments and sectors, tourism is managed by the Tourism Department, which is divided in three sectors: development of tourism sector in the regions, work with tourism industry and planning and development²³⁸.

After the independence, the first steps of Azerbaijan in the tourism sector have been made in 1999 by the former President Heydar Aliyev, when the National Assembly approved a new *Law on Tourism*²³⁹, this initiative was crowned with a good achievement two years later when Azerbaijan became officially member of UNWTO²⁴⁰. Taking a look at the projects and at the policies adopted by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism since its creation in 2001 it seems clear that the development of tourism is one of the top priorities the Azerbaijani Government. A first step in this direction can be seen in the State Program called *The development of tourism in the Republic of Azerbaijan for years 2002-2005*²⁴¹, this program, together with the *State Program on Socio-*

²³⁷ Azerbaijan.az, *The Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: http://azerbaijan.az/portal/StatePower/Ministers/ministersCabinet_e.html. (accessed 18/03/2015).

²³⁸ Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Structure and Co-workers*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.mct.gov.az/service/lang/en/page/4/>. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

²³⁹ Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Tourism-related projects and events*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.mct.gov.az/service/lang/en/page/36/>. (Accessed 19/03/2015).

²⁴⁰ UNWTO, *Member States*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Tourism-related projects and events*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www2.unwto.org/members/states>. (Accessed 19/03/2015).

²⁴¹ Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Tourism-related projects and events*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.mct.gov.az/service/lang/en/page/36/>. (Accessed 19/03/2015).

*Economic Development of Regions (2004-2008*²⁴²) started to give the first directions for the development of tourism and it also started to attract the first investments from international companies that worked in the tourism sector. In 2008 we also had the approval of the *Exemplary Charter of Tourism and Recreation Areas*²⁴³ that was followed soon by the *2010-2014 State Program on Tourism Development*²⁴⁴.

The year 2011 was also declared by the President Ilham Aliyev *Year of Tourism*²⁴⁵. On that year some five stars hotels were opened in Baku, many other projects like the *Shahdag Ski Resort* started²⁴⁶ and important investments were made in the tourism sector. This development of the tourism structures is also clear in the statistic about the number of hotels in Azerbaijan that passed from three hundred and seventy in 2008 to five hundred and thirty in 2013²⁴⁷. In 2012 Azerbaijan had the chance to host the *International Contest Eurovision 2012*²⁴⁸, an occasion that the Government took as a big chance to show the new Azerbaijan to the world and this is exactly the spirit with which Azerbaijan is now preparing itself to host the first edition of the *European Games*²⁴⁹, that will be hosted in Baku in June 2015. We will give more information about this event and also about the future events that are planned to be organized in Baku and in Azerbaijan when we discuss about Baku as tourism destination, for the moment we just need to know that the Government has the evident strategy of promoting Azerbaijan through the organization of important

²⁴² A. Kanan, I. Zonrab, A. Rovshan, M. Azer, *Assessment of Economic Export and Diversification*, AFA Translation LLS, Baku, 2013, p. 107.

²⁴³ Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Tourism-related projects and events*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.mct.gov.az/service/lang/en/page/36/>. (Accessed 19/03/2015).

²⁴⁴ A. Kanan, I. Zonrab, A. Rovshan, M. Azer, *Assessment of Economic Export and Diversification*, AFA Translation LLS, Baku, 2013, p. 107.

²⁴⁵ Center for Economic and Social Development (CESD), *CESD Policy Report on Tourism Sector in Azerbaijan*, CESD, Baku, 2011, p.3. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://cesd.az/new/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/CESD-Tourism-Paper.pdf>. (Accessed 19/03/2015).

²⁴⁶ Visit Azerbaijan, *Azerbaijan as Tourism Destination*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://azerbaijan.travel/en/pages/17-Azerbaijan-as-tourism-destination>. (Accessed 19/03/2015).

²⁴⁷ State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Tourism and Services in Azerbaijan*, State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Baku, 2014, p. 83.. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.stat.gov.az/source/tourism/indexen.php>. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

²⁴⁸ Eurovision Song Contest, *Eurovision Song Contest 2012 Grand Final*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.eurovision.tv/page/baku-2012/about/shows/final%20>. (Accessed 19/03/2015).

²⁴⁹ Baku 2015, 1st European Games, *Home*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.baku2015.com/>. (Accessed 19/03/2015).

international events. For example the budget for the *European Games* is still not known for sure, unofficial sources say that the budget has reached the impressive number of eight billion dollars²⁵⁰.

The information about new Governmental Programs on tourism is a few and not official. According to some newspaper and websites the Ministry of Culture and Tourism is now working on a draft program called *Tourism Development Strategy for 2015-2024*²⁵¹. This does not sound unlikely to happen also because it would be in line with the methodology of the Government that prefer to work with this multi annual programs dedicated to single subjects. However there is no official information about this future project in the website of the Ministry as well as there is not really a lot of information about the achievements of the previous projects and programs.

Also the information about the investments made by the Government for the development of tourism is scarce and not precise enough, the same thing can be said about the role of the foreign investments in the development of local tourism structures. However it is quite clear that the money of the oil revenues played an important role in fast transformation of Baku with its brand new skyscrapers and modern buildings. Projects like the *Flame Towers*, the new *Olympic Stadium* or also the now in the making *Baku White City*²⁵² and *Khazar Islands*²⁵³ are all results of an oil boom that captured the attention of foreign investors. This last project in particular is about the construction of a complex of artificial islands on the coast of the Caspian Sea, more or less twenty kilometers South of Baku. The project is scheduled to be finished in fifteen years and among the ultra modern buildings and skyscrapers that will be part of this complex, there will also be the new tallest building in the world, the Azerbaijan Tower, that will probably have a cost of more or less two billion dollars and that will be 1257 meters tall²⁵⁴.

²⁵⁰ Azadlı Radiosu, *Azerbaijan Is To Spend 8 Billion Dollars On Inaugural European Games*, 2014. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.azadliq.org/content/article/26707738.html>. (Accessed 01/03/2015).

²⁵¹ News.az, *Azerbaijan sees increase in the number of tourists*, News.az, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://news.az/articles/economy/94576>. (Accessed 19/03/2015).

²⁵² Baku White City, *Baku White City*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.bakuwhitecity.com/>. (Accessed 19/03/2015).

²⁵³ Khazar Islands, *Home*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://khazarislands.com/>. (Accessed 19/03/2015).

²⁵⁴ R. Dewsbury, *Azerbaijan reveals plans for world's tallest building at 3500ft high*, Daily Mail Online, 12/04/2012. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2128870/Azerbaijan-reveals-plans-worlds-tallest-building-3-500ft-high.html>. (Accessed 19/03/2015).

All these details together put in evidence the fact that the main idea of the Government of Azerbaijan is to make Baku a sort of “Dubai of the Caucasus”²⁵⁵, the attention that is given for the development of this city is far more than the attention that is given to the rest of the country, even if it must be said that there have been some important progresses also outside Baku, among the main tourism structures outside Baku we can mention the *Shahdag Ski Resort*, the Naftalan Resorts, the Absheron Beach Resorts or also the Fun Park in Qabala, but to use a typical Italian expression, they are like “Cathedrals in the desert”; these locations and resorts are disconnected from their surroundings, they are just single and little spots where a lot of money have been invested, without thinking also about the development of the surrounding area.

The role of the national Government of Azerbaijan for the promotion and the development of tourism is fundamental and some of the goals that have been achieved demonstrate that the intentions are good. This is also testified by the *Azerbaijan International Travel & Tourism Fair*, an event officially supported by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Azerbaijan that is organized every year in Baku since 2002. This event gathers together enterprises, businessmen and entrepreneurs interested in the tourism development of Azerbaijan and is always a good occasion for the attraction of new investments²⁵⁶.

We will discuss more deeply about the initiatives managed by the government for the promotion of tourism in chapters four and five when we will analyze the existing promotional materials about Azerbaijan. For the moment we can say that even if it is not officially declared, the overall impression is that the Government is aiming to develop more a high level tourism: the tendency of directing internal and foreign investments towards the construction of mainly luxury resorts and business centers, the low presence of a big quantity of mid and low level hotels and hostels are all signs that Azerbaijan is giving more priority to the improvement of the quality of its tourists and not the quantity. This choice can be seen as a result of the delicate geopolitical situation of Azerbaijan: local authorities probably still think about tourism as a trade-off with national security, in particular having a lot of tourists that go freely around the country, especially in delicate areas like Nakhchivan or the regions close to the occupied zone, is still considered a potential risk. This

²⁵⁵ B. Illis, *Baku, Azerbaijan: Dubai of the Caucasus*, the Telegraph, 2012. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/middleeast/azerbaijan/9287045/Baku-Azerbaijan-Dubai-of-the-Caucasus.html>. (Accessed 01/03/2015).

²⁵⁶ AITF, *Azerbaijan International Travel & Tourism Festival*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.aitf.az/2015/>. (Accessed 03/03/2015).

choice brought to some critical points, some of which we just mentioned here, that represent some serious obstacles for the development of tourism in Azerbaijan.

3.4: The main critical points

As we just said the development of tourism in Azerbaijan knew a noticeable growth in the last years, however it has faced and it is facing now some challenges that are preventing it from becoming really significant for the national economy, we will now analyze some of these difficulties:

- Visa policies: since we are dealing with the topic of tourism, in this paragraph we will focus only about the tourist type of visa and not about other types and since we are dealing with tourism in Azerbaijan and not from Azerbaijan we will not analyze the visa requirements that the Azerbaijani citizens need to go abroad. We will also not mention the other complicated migration procedures that are necessary to obtain a permission of temporary staying in Azerbaijan that is always a topic related to the migration issues but that is out of our analysis about tourism. According to the websites of some Azerbaijani embassies abroad, the countries that do not need a visa to enter in Azerbaijan are nine: Belarus, China, Georgia, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan²⁵⁷. Moreover the citizens of Turkey and Israel that arrive in one of the Azerbaijan's international airports (Baku, Ganja or Nakhchivan) can obtain the visa directly there²⁵⁸. For obvious reasons Armenian citizens cannot enter in the territory of Azerbaijan. For all of the other countries is required a visa before the arrival in Azerbaijan. The procedure can have some different requirements and duration according to the single nationalities, but in general the required documents for a normal one entry tourism visa are: photocopy of the passport, two passport-size photos, a filled application form, a state fee whose amount can vary and an invitation letter from a hotel, an Azerbaijani citizen or a national organization. Usually the visa can be issued in a period of one or two weeks²⁵⁹. As is proudly said in the official website *Visit Azerbaijan*, since 2013 it has been adopted a new e-visa procedure: just by contacting one of the authorized travel companies and sending the required documents one can obtain an electronic visa that the tourist just need to print. The

²⁵⁷ Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the United States of America, *Visa-waiver countries*, 2015. (ONLINE). Available at: <http://www.azembassy.us/visa-service/visa-free-countries.html>. (Accessed 20/03/2015).

²⁵⁸ Azerbaijan24, *Azerbaijan Tourist Visa*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://azerbaijan24.com/visas/azerbaijan-visa-support/>. (Accessed 20/03/2015).

²⁵⁹ Ibidem.

price for this is twenty dollars and the website also provides a list of the tourism agencies authorized to issue the e-visas that at the moment are fifty five²⁶⁰. All foreigners visiting Azerbaijan must register with State Migration Service of Azerbaijan if they stay for more than ten days, this procedure can be done also online just by sending the requested form and a copy of the passport²⁶¹. About visa facilitations, it is also interesting to notice that some measures have been adopted for the *European Games*; from the 2nd of June 2015 until the end of the Games, a person who buys a ticket for the Games will be able to obtain a thirty days visa on the arrival in one of the international airports of Azerbaijan. Together with the ticket and the passport the visitor will also have to give two passport-size photos, an application form and the fee based on the bilateral agreement between Azerbaijan and the country of origin of the visitor²⁶². Officially there are no restrictions for people that want to enter in Azerbaijan (with the exception of Armenian citizens and people that have been in Nagorno-Karabakh), however on an unofficial level an Armenian stamp in the passport of a foreign citizen can be source of questions at the border control, especially when crossing the border by land. I received multiple reports about people who entered in Azerbaijan with Armenian stamps in their passports but who were asked details about their staying in Armenia. Also to obtain a visa for Azerbaijan can be more difficult with the presence of Armenian stamps in the passport. One thing that is officially and explicitly said by the Azerbaijani authorities is that any person that enters in the Nagorno-Karabakh region without a special permission from Azerbaijan, will be immediately declared *persona non grata*, i.e. it will not be possible for this person to obtain a visa to enter in Azerbaijan in the future and any attempt to enter in Azerbaijan will have deportation as a consequence²⁶³. Even though there has been a clear progress about the facilitations of the visa policies of Azerbaijan, these are still less competitive than the ones of the other two countries of the Southern Caucasus, Georgia and Armenia, where for example a big part of the foreign citizens do not need a visa or can obtain a visa upon arrival. This factor can still be

²⁶⁰ Visit Azerbaijan, *Electronic Tourist Visas*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://azerbaijan.travel/en/pages/138/>. (Accessed 20/03/2015).

²⁶¹ State Migration Service of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *e-service*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://en.e.migration.gov.az/>. (Accessed 20/03/2015).

²⁶² Baku 2015, 1st European Games, *Visa for Azerbaijan*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.baku2015.com/tickets/article/visa-for-azerbaijan-29100.html>. (Accessed 20/03/2015).

²⁶³ Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the United States of America, *Travelling Warning on the visit to occupied territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.azembassy.us/visa-service/tourist-visa.html?id=304>. (Accessed 20/03/2015).

considered an obstacle towards a future development of tourism in Azerbaijan, national authorities evidently want to balance the need for a developing tourism with the need for controlling the flow of foreign citizens that arrive in the country, being the country still officially in a conflict situation. But for example a bilateral agreement with the European Union to create at least a regime of visa upon arrival for the European citizens would be a good idea to open the country to the big European tourists market;

- Hotels and accommodation: we already gave some numbers about accommodation structures in Azerbaijan and we already said that there is a clear disequilibrium between the number of hotels inside and outside Baku. A specific problem that is also reported in the main guide books about Azerbaijan is the price of accommodation in Baku²⁶⁴. In the capital city there are many luxury options for high-level tourists, some of the most famous hotel brands like Hilton²⁶⁵, Four Seasons²⁶⁶ or Kempinsky²⁶⁷ opened a five star hotel in there and the number of luxury restaurants and bars is also increasing. The problem in itself is not the price of these luxury hotels because the people who chose them are usually expecting to pay a lot of money. The real problem is the lack of a good number of cheaper choices for lower budget tourists. Unfortunately there are not available statistics with the number of existing hotels divided by categories and by levels of price, some opinions I received by people involved in the local tourism business²⁶⁸ said that it is true that in Baku is still missing a low-middle level of hotels, they also confirmed the opinion, often expressed also in the main guidebooks, that in reality the standards of these luxury hotels are not enough for the stars

²⁶⁴ Time Out, *Baku & the best of Azerbaijan*, Time Out, 1st edition, London, 2012, p. 86.

²⁶⁵ Hilton Hotel & Resorts, *Hilton Baku*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at:
http://www.hilton.com/en/hi/promotions/hi_baku/index.jhtml. (Accessed 20/03/2015).

²⁶⁶ Four Seasons, *Four Seasons Hotel Baku*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at:
http://www.fourseasons.com/baku/landing_3/?source=gaw12bakuS03&creative=26631220128&KW_ID=s83ZEJ6iF_dc|pcrid|26631220128&gclid=CjwKEAjiwiq-oBRC9gvHCsvDdn2cSJACV3DFRtBAcYtIZGVN4EXP0L48LJcbOqat05v1WE4qJNQB-yBoCYSbw_wcB.
(Accessed 20/03/2015).

²⁶⁷ Kempinsky Hotel, *Kempinsky Hotel Badamdar Baku*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at:
[http://www.kempinski.com/en/baku/hotel-badamdar/special-offers/early-booker/?campaign=Google-Baku+\(english\)-Baku+Hotel&source=S46992213&s_kwcid=TC|21680|%2Bbaku%20%2Bhotel||S|b|52826189914&gclid=CjwKEAjiwiq-oBRC9gvHCsvDdn2cSJACV3DFRdeAcnDn_pTCRqjJLhOGtkfgWOfol6SJzVVnYfe3KBoCFRzw_wcB](http://www.kempinski.com/en/baku/hotel-badamdar/special-offers/early-booker/?campaign=Google-Baku+(english)-Baku+Hotel&source=S46992213&s_kwcid=TC|21680|%2Bbaku%20%2Bhotel||S|b|52826189914&gclid=CjwKEAjiwiq-oBRC9gvHCsvDdn2cSJACV3DFRdeAcnDn_pTCRqjJLhOGtkfgWOfol6SJzVVnYfe3KBoCFRzw_wcB).
(Accessed 20/03/2015).

²⁶⁸ Since many of the people to which I asked personal opinions about this topics asked me not to mention their names if writing their opinions, I prefer to maintain their privacy and not write their names.

they claim to have, also the level of the staff is usually not judged adequate²⁶⁹, but we will analyze more into details this critical point in the next paragraph. About the low price accommodation possibilities, I personally had the chance to meet Gianmaria Pistone, an Italian man who is the co-owner of a hostel in Baku that is the *Baku Old City Hostel*. When speaking with him he told me that the culture of the hostel is still almost unknown in Azerbaijan, similar structures in Baku can be counted on one hand and one of them is placed right in front of his own, in the Old City. He said that often the owner of that hostel come to his one to see how they are managing it and which are its facilities because they clearly do not have a proper experience about how a hostel should be. He said also that he is now going to open another hostel in Baku, bigger and with more beds in the Nizami Rayonu and that usually his clients are backpackers that stay in Azerbaijan for a couple of days before going to Georgia or taking a plane to go to Central Asia. About accommodation in the rest of the country, we already mentioned the fact that there are some luxury hotels and resorts spread around the country, one of them is also in Nakhchivan²⁷⁰, but the presence of these resorts is not counterbalanced with the presence of a good choice of mid-low budget hotels. The problem of the bad ratio between price asked and quality offered can be found also in cities like Ganja or Länkaran, in smaller towns there are usually some little and acceptable hotels but in the small mountain villages the main option is still to be hosted by a local family, that is for sure a good occasion to meet local people and to experience local everyday life and food, but this can be appealing just for a certain part of tourists, a bigger part of them would probably prefer to have proper room in a proper hotel. In general Azerbaijan should try to develop its accommodation system, it should create a bigger range of options for all types of budget and it should also improve the quality of its luxury hotels in order to respect the international standards;

- The employees of the tourism sector: as we were saying in the last paragraph, one of the critical points of the tourism sector in Azerbaijan, that is also often reported in tourism guides²⁷¹ and in the feedbacks available among the main booking websites, is the quality of the staff and of the personnel in hotels and other tourism structures. This can be seen as a consequence of the lack of a good number of people trained and educated for working in the

²⁶⁹ Time Out, *Baku & the best of Azerbaijan*, Time Out, 1st edition, London, 2012, p. 86.

²⁷⁰ Visit Azerbaijan, *Nature*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://azerbaijan.travel/en/experience/161/63?regionA=70>. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

²⁷¹ Time Out, *Baku & the best of Azerbaijan*, Time Out, 1st edition, London, 2012, p. 86.

tourism sector²⁷². About this issue I was also said that another problem is that in the Azerbaijani law there is nothing written about the figure of the tourism guide, here this professional figure is still related to the one of the accompanist, that is the person who usually brings the tourists from the airport to the hotel or that give the main information about the country when the tourists arrive. In countries like Italy the figure of the tourism guide is usually occupied by professional trained people specialized in that job and who can operate just in their area of competence. The problem of the lack of enough qualified people is accompanied also by the linguistic problems: English is well spoken by the personnel in the main tourism locations and structures, however in many areas of the countryside the only spoken languages are still Azerbaijani and Russian and this can represent a real problem for almost all kind of tourists. The government seems to be aware of these problems and this is why in 2006 it has created the *Azerbaijan Tourism and Management University*²⁷³, an institution with the aim of training and educating people able to manage the different aspects of tourism on a professional level²⁷⁴. I personally had the chance of interviewing Orkhan Musa, Head Specialist in the International Office of this University. During our interview he explained me that for the moment this structure is still the only one of its kind in Azerbaijan, but other universities will soon start new programs about tourism because the demand for people that can work in this sector is very high. This is the reason why students of this University once they graduate they can easily find a job in Baku. The actual number of students is 2700, courses are taught mainly in Azerbaijani but there are also some in Russian and English. The University is particularly interested in sending its students abroad for exchange periods and this is why they have many programs and agreements with Turkey, Germany, Austria and also Israel. He also told me about a future agreement some French Universities and with the Italian *Società Dante Alighieri*. For the future they are also thinking of moving to a new campus where students could also have the possibility making some practical activities by managing a real hotel owned by the University. This Institute still represents a unique case in Azerbaijan and is probably not enough to fill the gaps of local personnel that Azerbaijan needs at the moment, however as

²⁷² For example an Italian chef I met one evening told me that the personnel he had in his kitchen was all composed by young Azerbaijani people with a lot of passion and interest but without a proper education or background to work in a high quality restaurant.

²⁷³ Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Tourism Education*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.mct.gov.az/service/lang/en/page/108/>. (Accessed 20/03/2015).

²⁷⁴ Azerbaijan Institute of Tourism, *Azerbaijan Institute of Tourism*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: http://www.tourism.edu.az/index.php?option=com_content&id=6&lang=en. (Accessed 20/03/2015).

also Mr. Orkhan said, Azerbaijan entered in the business of tourism not so much time ago, it needs some time to gain some experience and build its own system. This and the development of new tourism structures together with the ongoing projects of promotion of the country make possible to say that in the future this situation will probably get better. As we already said tourism is a sector that needs experience and the fact that Azerbaijan still does not possess a good number of employees with the professional skills of employees with the same job but from more experienced countries is the demonstration of the fact that its economic development has been faster than its social and cultural development;

- The transportation system: the transportation system in Azerbaijan underwent a clear development since the end of war, the country today has an acceptable road system (especially around Baku) that reaches the big part of the existing towns a villages, a rail system that connects the main cities and also some internal flights, even if mainly directed to and from Nakhchivan. However there are still some critical points, according to the CIA World Factbook²⁷⁵ Azerbaijan has 52.942 kilometers of roadways, but almost a half of them, 26.153 kilometers, are unpaved and this is particularly evident when going to the mountain regions of Azerbaijan where often some villages can be unreachable in winter because of the bad road conditions. According to the only national statistics available about the number of highway kilometers, from 2009 to 2013 this remained constantly around 19.000²⁷⁶. About the railways, according to the official documents of the State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan²⁷⁷ there has been no development of the existing lines in the last five years and these lines are in total 2068 kilometers long, moreover just 1240 kilometers of these are electrified. According to the official website of the *Azerbaijan Railways*²⁷⁸ at the moment there two main projects that aims to improve the railway system, one is the already mentioned *Baku-Tbilisi-Kars* and the other one is the *North-South* project. Both of these projects aim to reinforce the already existing lines so for the moment there will not be an extension of the railroads. Trains in Azerbaijan are not the fastest way to travel this is why it is common to use night trains, especially the ones that connect Baku with Tbilisi (via

²⁷⁵ CIA, *The World Fact book*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/aj.html>. (Accessed 21/03/2015).

²⁷⁶ State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Transport in Azerbaijan*, State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Baku, 2014, p.43. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.stat.gov.az/source/transport/indexen.php>. (Accessed 21/03/2015).

²⁷⁷ Ivi, p.53.

²⁷⁸ Azerbaijan Railways LTD, *Home*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://railway.gov.az/index/en/>. (Accessed 21/03/2015).

Ganja), Astara (via Länkaran). There are also two lines that go North; one towards Shäki and the other towards Quba and the border with Russia. Many trains still belong to the Soviet period but nonetheless are comfortable and safe, however it is clear that this choice of transportation is still not the best for an average tourist but it represents a choice for more “adventurous” tourists. About the national airports, the two main ones obviously are the *Heydar Aliyev International Airport of Baku*²⁷⁹ and the *Ganja International Airport*. In particular the first one has a modern structure and it serves the main destinations of the region and also of Europe, in particular London, Frankfurt and Rome. Due to the relatively small dimension of the country, internal flights are limited to the Nakhchivan region that is very well served by the national company *Azal*²⁸⁰ which has four daily flights directly from Baku to Nakhchivan City. The waterways of Azerbaijan are limited and used just for commercial purposes, for the moment they cannot be considered as a possibility for passenger transportation. Same thing can be said about the sea transportations, even if according to *Transport in Azerbaijan*, in 2013 there have been 137.000 passengers²⁸¹, we can say without fear of being wrong that these people are mostly workers and employees of the cargos. Crossing the Caspian by boat is long and complicated but we will deal with this issue in a more detailed way in chapter six when analyzing the transport system specifically in Baku. The fastest way to get around in Azerbaijan is still by bus or local minibuses that are called marshrutki. These lasts in particular are very common and used by local people, and also for this reason are really cheap, even if they do not represent the maximum of the comfort. Many buses and marshrutki leave from the Baku International Bus Terminal and reach a many destinations throughout the country. There are also many long distance buses that link Baku especially with Tbilisi, Istanbul, Teheran and even Moscow. However there are still places that are not served even by buses and marshrutki or where transports are limited to the first hours of the morning, like the mountain villages of Laza and Xinalıq or even the site of mud volcanoes in Qobustan. In these cases the only option is to take a taxi, something that is easy to do throughout the country, even if for foreigners it is usually more expensive than for locals and it can also be complicated without knowing Azerbaijani or

²⁷⁹ Heydar Aliyev International Airport, *Home*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.airport.az/>. (Accessed 21/03/2015).

²⁸⁰ Azal, *Home*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.azal.az/>. (Accessed 21/03/2015).

²⁸¹ State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Transport in Azerbaijan*, State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Baku, 2014, p.55. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.stat.gov.az/source/transport/indexen.php>. (Accessed 21/03/2015).

Russian. As we said transports in Azerbaijan made some progresses in the last years, but there are still some areas where investments are needed. To create a fast and efficient network of roads and railroads in order to make easier the movement of people is one of the keys to create the conditions for the development of tourism, it does not have to be considered just a consequence of tourism;

- Lack of a clear unique direction: As we already said, Azerbaijan has nine of the thirteen existing climatic zones²⁸². This is something very characteristic and peculiar of this country but from a tourism point view one of the main consequences is that Azerbaijan is not able to specialize itself on a particular type of tourism. Summer tourism, winter tourism, sport tourism, health tourism, cultural tourism, business tourism, adventure tourism, all these types of tourism have some potential in Azerbaijan and some of them already have some structures and facilities, but the lack of a specific sector in which the country is an excellence is a big problem because it creates the need for a clear and straightforward direction that at the moment is missing. A preference in the last years seemed to be towards sport and business tourism, together also with health tourism but anyways, to develop every type of tourism at the same time is too much for a country without an extended experience in this sector, Azerbaijan has the potentialities to develop many types of tourism but it should start by investing and specialize in one specific type in order create for itself an international reputation and after that be able to move to some other sectors.

3.5: Temporary conclusions on the phenomenon of tourism in Azerbaijan

In this chapter we gave a general idea about the phenomenon of tourism in Azerbaijan, starting from the years after the independence we tried to describe the development of this sector, the measures adopted by the government and also the main difficulties that the country is currently facing. In the next chapters we will go more into details, analyzing the local situations in the main and in the secondary tourism destinations, in order to judge which the real tourism potential is. We will also speak about the promotion of Azerbaijan made by the governmental organs but also by the non-governmental ones. Anyways we can already reach a couple of conclusions, first of all it is clear that the government is putting a lot of efforts in the development of the country, the main tool is the organization of important international events meant to show the country to the world but it is also clear that their main aim is to attract more a high-level tourism. As we already said this is probably an effect of the ongoing conflict with Armenia, whose resolution is obviously the first

²⁸² C. Frappi, *Azerbaigian, Crocevia del Caucaso*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012, p. 17.

priority of the government. The overall impression is that Azerbaijan is really interested in improving this sector of the economy, not only for purposes of mere economic diversification but also because there is a genuine will to show that Azerbaijan can now be considered a truly independent and wealthy country who managed to come out of the simple definition of post-Soviet Republic and who can play its role in the international arena. Azerbaijan is interested in improving this sector, but until a certain level and this explains the relatively strict visa policies and also the apparent preference towards a more reduced tourism of a higher level. The issue of the economic diversification is related to tourism also from another point of view: since, as we said in the last chapter, Azerbaijan is mostly dependant on the oil revenues, in the last months the forecasts of its national growth have been going down and becoming less optimistic because of the lowering price of the oil²⁸³. This in the future could have the double consequence of putting more pressure on the government to find new sources of income, like tourism, but on the other side a lowering of the revenues will also decrease the amount of capitals available to invest in the development of tourism. So the fact is that Azerbaijan still needs the oil revenues to invest in other sectors of its economy and tourism here still needs to be improved and developed in order to become relevant and efficient. Tourism in Azerbaijan is a new business and it will need time and investments to reach the level and the efficiency of other older and more experienced countries, nonetheless we can say that if the government keeps on investing energy and resources in it, the results will not take a long time to arrive.

²⁸³ Caspian Barrel, *S&P downgrades outlook of Azerbaijan's sovereign rating to negative due to global oil prices*, 02//02/2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://caspianbarrel.org/?p=26562>. (Accessed 21/03/2015).

CHAPTER FOUR

THE MAIN TOURISM GUIDES ABOUT AZERBAIJAN

4.1: On the tourism guides about Azerbaijan

In this chapter we will analyze the main existing tourism guides about Azerbaijan; the possible reading material about this country is quite big: books, essays, articles, reviews, websites, however in this chapter we will just analyze those books that are specifically written and designed for tourists, people who visit the country and who need basic indications like what to see, where to spend the night and which bus or underground they need to take to reach their destinations. Here we will consider the printed guides or at least their printed versions if they also have an online version, this decision is due to the fact that even if internet is becoming everyday more efficient and easy to use, it is still more practical to travel with a printed book that does not need a connection or does not run out of power like a smart-phone or a tablet. Good travel guides can be important for the promotion of a country and they are fundamental for the tourists to understand as much as possible of the place they visit and also to ensure that they can visit and enjoy the “hidden” places that in developing countries like Azerbaijan are many and really fascinating but that can be missed if one does not know where to look.

In particular we will analyze with attention three guides (two of them available just in English, one in more languages), that are basically the firsts that someone can find on the internet when doing a quick research and they are also the easiest to find and to buy in the libraries. Moreover we will speak about two other minor guide books (written in English) that are less detailed and less easy to find and in the end we will also briefly spend some words about one last guide book that is written in German. This because it represents a different point of view on the country and it can be useful to give us a broader overview about the promotion of Azerbaijan made through tourism guides. It is also interesting to observe how the various guides deal with the Nagorno-Karabakh issue because they all have different ways to approach this topic.

4.2: Georgia, Armenia & Azerbaijan²⁸⁴

Lonely Planet is today the largest and most famous publisher of travel guidebooks throughout the world and their publications have been translated in eleven different languages. Their books

²⁸⁴ J. Noble, M. Kohn, D. Systemans, *Georgia, Armenia & Azerbaijan*, Lonely Planet, 4th edition, 2012.

basically cover all the world, not only travel guides but also phrasebooks, books dedicated to single cities or single countries, or even entire continents, they also produce magazines and many information or applications can be found in their website²⁸⁵. *Lonely Planet* started in 1973 with the publication of *Across Asia on the Cheap*²⁸⁶ by Tony and Maureen Wheeler after their trip throughout Asia. Since then *Lonely Planet* never abandoned its first spirit of being an informal guide for backpackers and independent travelers with not a low budget, however they extended the information in their books including also less cheap options for all types of travelers²⁸⁷.

Lonely Planet does not have a single book just for Azerbaijan but it has one book dedicated to the whole Southern Caucasus (so together with Georgia and Armenia); this is not an isolated case, for example the *Lonely Planet's* book dedicated to Central Asia covers five countries (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kirghizstan)²⁸⁸. Here we will focus and comment just on the sections about Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh. The last edition of the guide was the fourth one and it was released in 2012, the next one is scheduled for 2016²⁸⁹.

The guide in itself has all the features of a standard *Lonely Planet's* travel guide: maps of the different countries and of the main cities, some basic vocabulary, phrases and language tips, practical information about transports, health and safety and general practical tips. They also have some very useful itineraries that are scheduled according to the length of the travel and on which countries a person wants to visit. On a general level all this information are valid and precious for creating an overview of the region. The authors decided to solve the question of Nagorno-Karabakh by creating a specific section about it that is placed at the end after the sections of the other three countries. The history of the region is presented in some paragraphs in an impartial and neutral way and the region is defined following the most common opinion on the international level:” It is a self-declared republic recognized by no one”²⁹⁰.

Among the three countries of the Caucasus, Azerbaijan is the one that has fewer pages inside this travel guide, sixty six if we exclude the few pages about Nagorno-Karabakh. It is also the one that

²⁸⁵ Lonely Planet, *Lonely Planet*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/>. (Accessed 24/02/2015).

²⁸⁶ T. Wheeler, M. Wheeler, *Across Asia, on the cheap*, Lonely Planet, Footscray, 2013.

²⁸⁷ All information about *Lonely Planet's* history and philosophy at: Lonely Planet, *About Us*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/about/>. (Accessed 24/02/2015).

²⁸⁸ B. Mayhew, M. Elliott, T. Masters, J. Noble, *Central Asia*, Lonely Planet, Footscray, 2014.

²⁸⁹ Lonely Planet, *Georgia, Armenia & Azerbaijan travel guide*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://shop.lonelyplanet.com/europe/georgia-armenia-and-azerbaijan-travel-guide-4/>. (Accessed 24/02/2015).

²⁹⁰ J. Noble, M. Kohn, D. Systemans, *Georgia, Armenia & Azerbaijan*, Lonely Planet, 4th edition, 2012, p.267.

has less *highlights*, that are the best things to see and to do and that are indicated at the beginning of every section: it has only five of them and they are all located in the Northern part of the country. This is quite a small number if compared to the eight *highlights* of Georgia, or to the nine of Armenia. Moreover Azerbaijan is also the territory with the lowest rates (together with Nagorno-Karabakh) in the “regions at glance” section²⁹¹.

Twenty two of the sixty six pages of the Azerbaijan’s section are dedicated to Baku and a big part of them is occupied by information about hotels, restaurants, bars and clubs. Following its original philosophy of “low-cost travelling”, the guide gives a lot of information about low and middle price locations but in order to answer also to the needs of a different type of readers, it gives also some information about some high level hotels and restaurants. Because of the fact that this guide has been published three years ago a lot of the phone numbers provided and also a lot of the prices indicated have now changed. There are also cases in which some pubs or restaurants are now closed, like the “Soviet Union”²⁹², a nostalgic Soviet pub that is now closed. Moreover there is no information about the *Heydar Aliyev Center* or about the *National Flag Square*, both opened in 2012 for the *Eurovision Contest* and so after the publication of this guide. The new edition of 2016 will for sure contain some paragraphs about them.

The description of the rest of the country is divided by areas: around Baku, North, North-West, Center, South and Nakhchivan. On a general level the information are good, however sometimes they lack some details: a lot paragraphs about little towns or villages often do not have enough information about what to see and what to visit there but they are more focused on how to arrive there and where to spend the night, ignoring many things that might not be the most exciting or interesting, but that still have some appeal and are worth seeing if passing in these towns or villages. Maps are generally good and precise, however they are quite a few, excluding Baku, whose city center is very well covered, there are only other eight maps and just five of them are about cities, the other ones are about regions. However this few maps are precise and contains basic and useful information. Spread throughout the book there are also some very interesting and useful blue charts that give some extra information about some specific topics, in the case of the Azerbaijan’s section the most noticeable are “Eating Piti”²⁹³ and “Don’t mention Armenia”²⁹⁴.

²⁹¹ Ivi, pp. 22-23.

²⁹² Ivi, p. 218.

²⁹³ Ivi, p. 242.

²⁹⁴ Ivi, p. 259.

As for the sections dedicated to Georgia and Armenia, the one about Azerbaijan ends with a very useful part called “Understand Azerbaijan”²⁹⁵ that contains three short sections: Azerbaijan today, history and arts and food & drink. After these there is also a second section called “Survival guide”²⁹⁶ which basically contains the most common practical information that one would need before leaving. The overall style of the writing reflects the original philosophy of *Lonely Planet* and it is informal, fresh, ironic and most importantly, direct, quick and easy to read.

In conclusion, this travel guide represents a valid tool for a tourist, it has all the main needed information and it is clearly the result of a long-time experience in this sector and of an accurate research on the ground made by competent people, it is also the only guide about Azerbaijan that is actually available in more languages. It is definitely a good guide to buy for a short holiday of a week-end but also for a longer one of a couple of weeks when someone will probably concentrate its time in visiting Baku and some of the other main attractions of Azerbaijan out of the city. However its being often not detailed enough does not make it the best choice for longer periods of stay in which someone would have more time to see also some secondary attractions of the country, that in the book are often mentioned without giving enough detailed information.

4.3: Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia²⁹⁷

After the guide by *Lonely Planet*, this one is the easiest to find, but it is for sure more detailed and precise. As a matter of fact almost the whole book is dedicated just to Azerbaijan: out of the three hundred and forty pages of the guide (without considering appendix, glossary and index), just thirty are dedicated to Georgia, and all the other three hundred and ten are about Azerbaijan. The guide is actually available only in English.

The author of this guide is Mark Elliott, a fifty three years old Englishman from Brighton who spent a big part of his life travelling throughout the world, especially in Asia. He started by writing a book with some practical information for foreign teachers in Japan after he spent three years teaching English there. His first real guidebook was *Asia Overland – A Route and Planning Guide*, after that he continued collaborating with the publishing house *Trailblazer* and during the second part of the 1990’s he decided to concentrate on Azerbaijan because it was one of the “new” countries that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union and nobody knew anything about it, even if there was a lot of potentially interested visitors. In eighteen months he travelled in almost every corner of

²⁹⁵ Ivi, p. 260.

²⁹⁶ Ivi, p. 264.

²⁹⁷ M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010.

the country, mostly by car, he collected information, he draw maps, he spoke with local people and he unveiled many hidden interesting locations throughout Azerbaijan. He published the first edition of his guide about Azerbaijan in 1999 and since then he published other three more editions, the last one in 2010^{298 299}. In the second part of 2015 he will probably publish the 5th edition, on which he is actually working. Mark Elliott is also a collaborator for *Lonely Planet*; among his contributions we can quote the ones in the guides about Myanmar³⁰⁰, India³⁰¹ and Central Asia³⁰².

I personally had the chance to meet Mark Elliott in Baku during the fall of 2014 and in spring 2015; he often came to Azerbaijan in that period because he was collecting information for the new edition of the guide. I met him in a pub in downtown Baku and I had the occasion of seeing him working, asking information to the pub tenders and drawing maps of the street in a notebook. By speaking with him one can understand that he has an incredibly deep knowledge about Azerbaijan, his passion and experience for travelling made him a real globe-trotter with a big number of interesting stories about his travels that are worth listening.

The first part of the guide is a long and detailed presentation of the country, starting from the visas procedures, passing through transportation to arrive in Azerbaijan, climate, an historical overview, cultural information, holidays, arts, museums, main attractions and ending with a short section about flora and fauna. The other chapters follow a geographical logic, like in the case of the *Lonely Planet*; they start from a chapter about Baku that is followed by a chapter about the surroundings of Baku. After these two chapters the others are called: the North, Shamaka-Shäki route, Central Azerbaijan, the South and Nakhchivan. Chapter number nine is dedicated to Georgia. About the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, Mark Elliott deals with the question by dedicating four pages of quick information about the region³⁰³ and about the towns close to the frontline but he specifically writes to read the guide by *Lonely Planet* to have more information about it. Since the Azerbaijani government considers illegal to enter in the Nagorno-Karabakh Region without their permission, the author could not visit and write about it, as a matter of fact a person with a stamp of Nagorno-Karabakh on the passport cannot enter in the territory of Azerbaijan and he or she is declared “persona non-grata”. Even going close to the border with the occupied zone can cause problems

²⁹⁸ Ibidem.

²⁹⁹ Trailblazer, *Mark Elliott*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://trailblazer-guides.com/author/mark-elliott>. (Accessed 24/02/2015).

³⁰⁰ S. Richmond, A. Bush, D. Eimer, M. Elliott, N. Ray, *Myanmar (Burma)*, Lonely Planet, Footscray, 2014.

³⁰¹ S. Singh, M. Benanav, M. Elliott and others, *India*, Lonely Planet, Footscray, 2013.

³⁰² B. Mayhew, M. Elliott, T. Masters, J. Noble, *Central Asia*, Lonely Planet, Footscray, 2014.

³⁰³ M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010, pp. 275-280.

with the police and this is why the information about this part of the country is quick and not very detailed.

All the chapters start with a general presentation of the area and after go more into details by analyzing every part of that area. All of the information that is possible to find in the guide by *Lonely Planet* can be found in this guide, however we cannot say the opposite: Mark Elliott does exactly what the *Lonely Planet*'s guide does not do, he goes more in the details: the description of Baku is accurate and also more extended, comprehending also some parts that are outside of the city center, the information about hotels, restaurants and pubs are at the same level of *Lonely Planet*, also in this case we can deduce a certain preference for low and mid priced places but there are also information for people with more high budget possibilities.

The chapters about the rest of the country have the same level of precision and provide the reader with many useful tips even for the most remote locations of Azerbaijan, including also Nakhchivan that is very well described and analyzed in the chapter dedicated to it.

Probably the most valuable thing about this guide are the maps: they are all hand-drawn by Mark Elliott, sometimes they are not perfect in the distance proportion but they are by far more handy than the ones in the *Lonely Planet* guide: the indications on them at a first sight might seem ridiculous and useless, some good examples are “tiny kiosk decorated with Lenin photos”³⁰⁴, “foot bridges to nowhere”³⁰⁵, “old man sitting here”³⁰⁶ and “small pond”³⁰⁷, but when using them they turn out to be incredibly effective and useful when trying to find the right way. Many of these maps are about little villages and towns that sometimes are not even mentioned in other guides and the ones about more famous places are also incredibly useful and accurate. Places like Xinaliq, Laza, Lerik or Yardimli are mentioned in the other guidebooks but they have limited information about how to get there and how much to pay for the taxi or the bus. Instead Mark Elliott often provides phone numbers of taxi drivers or explains precisely where and when to find a bus or a marshrutka and how much do they cost.

The general style of the writing is characterized by an intense British humor that makes the reading easy and entertaining at the same time. Information is given clearly in a precise and methodical way and is often followed by some quick anecdotes about the author's experiences during his trips in

³⁰⁴ M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010, p. 154.

³⁰⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 169.

³⁰⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 181.

³⁰⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 290.

Azerbaijan. Moreover there is also a section at the end of the book, with very good pictures that have been taken all around the country and that show its highlights.

In conclusion, we can say without any doubts that this one is the best guide about Azerbaijan available at the moment, it is clear that it is dedicated more to independent travelers with a certain adventure spirit, but it can be useful also just for normal tourists who come to Baku just for a few days. I personally tested the qualities of this guide by travelling around Azerbaijan and I can say that the information it provides gave me the possibility of visiting far more places and seeing far more parts of Azerbaijan that I would have never seen just by reading the other guides. We have to say also that since the last edition of the book in 2010 many things have changed especially in Baku so for example there are many things that are not mentioned like the *Flame Towers* or the *Heydar Aliyev Center* however all these things, together with more information about some other remote parts of the country, will be contained in the next edition due for the second part of 2015.

4.4: Baku & the best of Azerbaijan³⁰⁸

Time Out was founded in 1968 and since then it grew and became one of the leading companies in the realm of guidebooks, it is specialized in big cities but it also has a good number of travel books and magazines. Moreover *Time Out* offers also many online services, the website is full of good information about a lot of cities all around the world and there are also many applications available for smart-phones³⁰⁹, even if there are not any for Azerbaijan and Baku. The guide is available only in English and it is interesting to notice that among the collaborators of the Baku's guidebook there is also the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Azerbaijan.

As the title says, this guide is mainly dedicated to Baku, out of the two hundred and four pages of the guide one hundred and twenty one are dedicated to it. The guide starts with some pages dedicated to the highlights of the country and it also proposes an itinerary for a forty four hours trip to Baku. The rest of the book is divided in the following chapters:

- In context: it gives some historical background information together with some tips about food, wildlife and architecture;
- Sights: it contains the information about the most important things to see in the different part of the city together with some maps;

³⁰⁸ *Time Out, Baku & the best of Azerbaijan*, Time Out, 1st edition, London, 2012.

³⁰⁹ All information about *Time Out: About Time Out*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.timeout.com/about/time-out-group/about-time-out>. (Accessed 25/02/2015).

- Consume: information about hotels, restaurants, bars and shops;
- Arts & entertainment: about festivals, theaters and other cultural events;
- Best of Azerbaijan: information for trips outside Baku;

If the two previous guides were dedicated to more mid and low budget tourists, in this case the information about hotels, restaurants and shops tell us that this guide has been written for a high-budget category of tourists. There is also a specific chart dedicated to the best five hotels in Baku that is called “The Fab-Five”³¹⁰. Many of the cheaper options that exists and that are reported in the other guides are not in this one, who concentrates more on other aspects. However this guide is at the moment the newest available and so it has the advantage of having many information about the city that are not in the other two guides like the flame towers, the *Baku Crystal Hall* and also the new Carpet museum.

About the rest of the country, as we said the amount of pages dedicated to them is quite limited. It gives some information about the highlights of every region analyzed (Absheron, North, South, West and Nakhchivan) but the indications about hotels and transportations are sometimes too general to be really helpful. Moreover there are not maps, the only ones are about Baku and they are accurate and precise enough to be easy to use. About Nagorno-Karabakh the guide has solved the issue by explaining the situation in a chart³¹¹ in a quick and also impartial way, or at least, considering that one of the collaborators of the guide was the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Azerbaijan we can say that the authors managed to keep a good level impartiality.

The general style is a little bit more formal than the other guides however it maintains a good level of clarity and accuracy that fits perfectly for a travel guide. Throughout the book there are a lot of very interesting charts about history and culture and there are also many good pictures, something that for example is missing in the *Lonely Planet* guide. Some overall indications about transports, embassies, health care and other services are provided at the end of the book, together with a small vocabulary with the most common words and expressions both in Azerbaijani and in Russian.

All in all, the main advantage of this guide is, as we said, the fact that at the moment it is the newest available and because of this it has the most fresh information, but this is something that will not last long since the new editions of the other guides will be published in the next year. For the rest we can still say that for a short period of stay in Baku, this book is for sure a good choice, it is also more appropriate for high-budget tourists, like business tourists that in Baku are numerous so we

³¹⁰ Time Out, *Baku & the best of Azerbaijan*, Time Out, 1st edition, London, 2012, pp. 90-91.

³¹¹ Ibidem, pp. 176-177.

can say that it is directed more to a different group of people than the other two guides, however it is still not at the same level as the others for what it concerns the accuracy and the quantity of information provided.

4.5: Other two examples of guides in English

When making a research about Azerbaijan's tourism guidebooks, the first results will be the three already analyzed books, nonetheless there are other two books that are less known and more difficult to find. The first one is *A Hedonist's Guide to Baku*³¹² and the second one is *Azerbaijan, Live, Work, Explore*³¹³, that is available also in a "mini" version just about Baku³¹⁴. Both of these guides are not easy to find in libraries; however it is easy to find them online, for example on Amazon.

A Hedonist's Guide to Baku belongs to a series of books published by Hg2, this society has published many books about cities all around the world and as the title says, they are more focused on the entertainment side. Their website contains a lot of information about these cities and there is also the possibility of downloading some applications for smart-phones, moreover the guide is available also in an e-book format³¹⁵.

Ben Illis, the author of this guide, is a freelance writer and photographer from London who in the last ten years specialized in Azerbaijan³¹⁶; this explains why in the book there are many good pictures about Baku. The guide is available only in English and as one can expect the only information in guide are about Baku, these are quite detailed but they incredibly concentrated on Hotels, Restaurants, Pubs, Shops and other leisure possibilities, there is a quick introduction about the city and also some maps, but all in all the indications about museums, places to visit and to see are quite limited. Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhchivan are not even mentioned, some locations near Baku are named (Qobustan, Yanar Dag and Ateshgah) but nothing more.

Even if it is limited in its being concentrated just on Baku, this guide provides a lot of trustable indications about Baku's hotels, restaurants and leisure possibilities. The type of tourists to which this guide is directed is clearly a business-type tourist with not a lot of time, but some good

³¹² B. Illis, *A Hedonist's Guide to Baku*, Hg2, London, 2010.

³¹³ Explorer, *Azerbaijan, Live Work, Explore*, Explorer Publications, 1st edition, 2011.

³¹⁴ Explorer, *Baku, Mini Visitor's Guide*, Explorer Publications, 1st edition, 2011.

³¹⁵ Hg2, *Hg2 Baku*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.hg2baku.com/>. (Accessed 25/06/2015).

³¹⁶ B. Illis, *Biography*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.benillis.com/biography.html>. (Accessed 25/02/2015).

financial possibilities, so a high-level tourism. Being also a little and elegant-looking book, this guide can be considered a good choice for a businessman who comes to Baku for a weekend.

Azerbaijan, Live, Work, Explore is pretty much impossible to find in normal libraries, even in *Chirag Books*, a book shop in Baku where one can find all the most common guides and information materials about Baku and Azerbaijan; however it is available in Amazon, even if not in e-book version. The publishing house, *Explorer*, is a company specialized in guidebooks, mainly about the UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and other countries of the Middle East. They also offer a big range of applications for smart-phones and e-books but not for Azerbaijan.

There are two existing versions of their guide about Azerbaijan, the first one is dedicated to the whole country and the second one is dedicated just to Baku, this one is available also in Arabic. As in the case of the *Time Out's* guide, also here one of the collaborators of the book is the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Azerbaijan. Both of these guides are thought basically for business tourists. The one about the whole country includes a lot of useful information for foreigners who move to Azerbaijan for work. There is practical information about housing, health-care and migration procedures together with some other indications that are common in every other guide-book. The guide about Baku is thought for short-periods holidays, from a weekend to a week. It is a small book and its information is limited to hotels, restaurants, clubs and main attractions.

These other guides do not have the same amount of information of the previous ones; however they are coherent with the ideas and the needs that brought to their creation, i.e. the possibility to have some guidebooks dedicated to a business or high-level tourists that in Baku are quite common. The *Explorer's* guide about the whole Azerbaijan is also a very useful book for foreigners who live in Baku but it still does not have the accuracy and the precision of Mark Elliott's guide.

4.6: The case of the German guide

Among the limited possibilities of guidebooks about Azerbaijan not written in English we can find just the translations of the *Lonely Planet's* one and the *Explorer's* one in its Arabic translation. However there is another guidebook that it is interesting to mention and it is written in German.

This guide is called *Aserbaidtschan*³¹⁷: the focus of this guide is more on the local culture of Azerbaijan, in particular there is a chapter that is called "country and people" where it also speaks about Nagorno-Karabakh and the actual President. In this section the guide also speaks about some

³¹⁷ P. Von Oppeln, *Aserbaidtschan*, Trescher Verlag, 2nd Edition, 2012.

critical points that are missing in the other guides like the fact that the political opposition in Azerbaijan is basically missing or also the problem of the oil revenues that go just to a small part of the citizens. There are also two pages about Nagorno-Karabakh in which they explain how to get the visa to enter in the region. The information provided is good also for regions outside Baku, they have indications for all types of budgets but they are not as detailed as Mark Elliott's or the *Lonely Planet's* guides and also the numbers of hotels, restaurants and clubs described are far less than the other guides. Being this guide dedicated to the German market, there is a particular focus on the German village close to Ganja. Maps are not a lot and they are not the clearest, however throughout the book there are a lot of good pictures. At the end there are also some information about visas, transportations, embassies and a short linguistic guide from German to Azerbaijani. The style is more formal than for example *Lonely Planet* or mark Elliott's guides but it fits for a guide that is more focused on a cultural presentation of the country³¹⁸.

³¹⁸ Since I do not know German, all opinions and details about this guide are the result of the discussions with my German flat mate who had this guide and who had the chance to test it on the ground by travelling around Azerbaijan.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE MAIN WEBSITES ABOUT AZERBAIJAN

5.1: On the websites about Azerbaijan

In this chapter we will analyze the main existing websites that provides information about Azerbaijan. We will speak about some of the websites that are related to the guidebooks we analyzed in the previous chapter, we will mention other specialized websites and we will take a look also to the “institutional website” of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism to see which information they give. We will not speak about booking websites like the Italian one *Tripadvisor*³¹⁹ or *Booking.com*³²⁰ or *Hostelworld.com*³²¹ that are specialized websites in which it is possible to find information about hotels, hostels and restaurants throughout the world, here we will be interested in the websites dedicated just to Azerbaijan or that at least have valuable information about the country that it is not possible to find in normal booking websites. What is really interesting in this research is to find the websites that do not just give information about Azerbaijan, but also try to promote it and to contribute to the improvement of the tourism sector in this country.

5.2: The websites related to the printed guidebooks

As we said in the previous chapter some of the publishing houses that have printed guidebooks about Azerbaijan also have some good information and materials inside their websites, however these information are often not easy to find, one needs to know the name of the website and after make a specific research for Baku or Azerbaijan inside that website.

The first website is the *Lonely Planet*'s one³²²: just by typing “Azerbaijan” in the “search” spot it is possible to find most of the practical information that is also possible to read in the guide. There is also a specific section dedicated to a general presentation of the country with basically the same information that one can find in the printed guide, even if on the website they are a little bit less

³¹⁹ Tripadvisor, *Tripadvisor*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.tripadvisor.it/>. (Accessed 25/02/2015).

³²⁰ Booking.com, *Booking.com*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.booking.com/index.en-gb.html?aid=376372;label=it-flMupqHx6plmBCXSi4jzcAS33962441313%3Ap1%3Ata%3Ap1%3Ap2603.000%3Aac%3Aap1t1%3Aneg;sid=55972e9e4ad816d923ab4b6bff354798;dcid=4>. (Accessed 25/02/2015).

³²¹ Hostelworld, *Hostelworld.com*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.hostelworld.com/>. (Accessed 25/02/2015).

³²² Lonely Planet, *Lonely Planet*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/>. (Accessed 24/02/2015).

specific and precise. The information on the website are more concentrated on hotels, restaurants and sights however they are really precise and accurate, providing prices, ratings and customer's opinions. All these information is recent and always updated; they represent a valid source of knowledge and a useful tool for tourism promotion. However this is valid only for the English version of the website, versions in other languages often do not have information online but they just suggest buying the printed version of the guide.

The *Time Out's* website³²³ is available only in English and it offers many online guides for cities that they cover in their guidebooks, but not for Baku. By typing "Azerbaijan" or "Baku" in the search spot the only valid result will show you the cover of their printed guide so we cannot really consider this website a source of information about Azerbaijan.

The website of *Hg2*³²⁴ instead offers a lot of information about Baku and Azerbaijan. As for the guide these information are more about hotels, restaurants and other leisure structures in Baku, which are very detailed and updated; through the website it is also possible to book a hotel. There are also many indications about sights in and outside the city but they are quite general and without any practical information. The style of the website follows the one of the guide and it is more dedicated to business and high level tourists so for example there is no information about the South or the North but just about Qobustan, Lahic and Shäki. There is also no information about visas, transports, health-care and other practical issues and also Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh are not even mentioned. According to what is written on the website it is also possible to download applications and other online materials but for the moment these possibilities are not available for Baku but just for some other cities.

The last website that is related to a printed guidebook is the *Explorer's* one. As we said in the previous chapter, they offer a big range of e-books and applications for smart-phones but not for Azerbaijan, for which the only suggested option is to buy the printed guide.

5.3: Other specialized websites about Azerbaijan

One of the most common websites about Azerbaijan is the one of *The Europe Azerbaijan Society*³²⁵(TEAS); this project started in 2008 as an evolution of the *London Azerbaijan Society* that was

³²³ Time Out, *Time Out*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.timeout.com/travel/>. (Accessed 25/02/2015).

³²⁴ Hg2, *Hg2 A Hedonist's guide to...*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.hg2.com/>. (Accessed 25/02/2015).

³²⁵ The European Azerbaijan Society, *The European Azerbaijan Society*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://teas.eu/>. (15/02/2015).

launched some years before. Its purposes are of developing the knowledge of Azerbaijan in Europe and to make stronger the ties between them by improving the economic relations. They do not mention tourism directly but if we take a look to the “publications” section of the website we can see that they participate in some projects of promotion of the country: for example they collaborated for the creation of *Azerbaijan: 100 Questions Answered*³²⁶, a book that cannot be considered a tourism guide but that contains a lot of useful information for people that are interested in the country. The society also collaborated in the making of the already mentioned *Hg2's Baku*. One last interesting publication of this society is *Visions of Azerbaijan*³²⁷: this is a bi-month magazine that started its publications in 2006, its articles are written by local and foreign experts about Azerbaijan and they cover all the topics from culture to politics and from society to history. About tourism they also have some interesting articles and reportages of travels around Azerbaijan, some of them written by Mark Elliott. I personally had the chance to visit the office of the magazine in Baku and to speak with one of the Editorial Advisers, Ian Pert. Inside the office there are a lot of young Azerbaijani people working, however when I visited the office I was told that they were a little bit late with the last number of the magazine and as a matter of fact now in the archive that is available on the website, the last uploaded number is the one of July-October 2014. The magazine also deals with the Nagorno-Karabakh issue and as one can expect it has a more one-sided point of view but nonetheless the issue is treated with a good level of impartiality. During my visit to the office I was told that the magazine does not receive funds from the government, but one of the main funder is actually governor of one of the Azerbaijani regions.

Another interesting website that promotes tourism in Azerbaijan is *Azerbaijan.com*³²⁸. This website is part of the *travelagents.com*³²⁹ group that offers online services of booking and trips planning for many destinations worldwide. The website about Azerbaijan presents some overview information about the country, geography, history, economy and so on but Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh are not mentioned. Moreover there are some basic indications about the main “things to do” and places to visit. Information about restaurants, hotels and other structures are mainly given for Baku but

³²⁶ T. Bagiyev, T. Heyradov, J. Novruzov, *Azerbaijan: 100 Questions Answered*, Azerbaijan Boyuk Britaniya Ganjlari Jamiyyati, 3rd Edition, 2008.

³²⁷ *Visions of Azerbaijan*, *Visions of Azerbaijan*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.visions.az/>. (Accessed 26/02/2015).

³²⁸ *Azerbaijan.com*, *Azerbaijan.com*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.azerbaijan.com/about/>. (Accessed 25/02/2015).

³²⁹ *Travelagents.com*, *Travelagents.com*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://travelagents.com/>. (Accessed 25/02/2015).

there are also some tips about the rest of the country. There are also some quick links that give the possibility to organize a holiday in a short amount of time by booking the flights, the hotel and even some information for car rental. Even if not detailed and too much general this website offers an easy source of information for someone that wants to organize its holiday quickly and who maybe already has some background information about Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan24 is a travel agency whose website gives a lot of useful information about Azerbaijan³³⁰. There is no information available about the agency in itself but it has offices in Baku and also in London. The website is well-built, with appealing pictures of the country's highlights and easy links about culture, geography, traditions and history. The information about people and traditions are particularly detailed and interesting. Moreover there are also some practical information about hotels in the main cities of Azerbaijan, visa policies and also some very interesting suggested tours that follow some specific thematic like history, religion, mountains or general. This website is probably one of the best that is possible to find even if it does not seem to be regularly updated and refreshed with new information. It is interesting to notice that many descriptions about cities, places and attractions are copied letter by letter from Mark Elliott's guide.

Another very useful tool of promotion of Azerbaijan is the *IRS-Heritage*³³¹, a magazine available in thirteen languages and that according to the information available in the website it has the aim of spreading the knowledge about Azerbaijan using the support of the Azerbaijani people living abroad. The articles cover many different cultural topics and they are written by competent people with a deep knowledge of Azerbaijan. All these main topics are present in the website, from where one can easily see the previous numbers and read the articles inside. There is also a specific section dedicated to the articles about Nagorno-Karabakh in which there are many historical analysis and researches. This magazine and its website do not deal with the practical aspect of tourism, they do not have information about flights, visas and hotels, however they represent a good tool for the promotion of Azerbaijan and its being published in thirteen different languages makes it one of the most diffused specialized magazines about Azerbaijan.

A very interesting case is the one of the *Associazione Italia-Azerbaijani*³³²; the association was created in 2013 and we can say that it is the result of the good relations existing between these two countries. These relations improved mainly in the last ten years and today Italy is the main

³³⁰ Azerbaijan24, *Azerbaijan24*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://azerbaijan24.com/>. (Accessed 25/02/2015).

³³¹ IRS-Heritage, *IRS-Heritage*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://irs-az.com/new/>. (Accessed 25/02/2015).

³³² Associazione Italia-Azerbaijani, *Associazione Italia-Azerbaijani*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.italiaazerbaigian.org/index.html>. (Accessed 25/02/2015).

economic partner of Azerbaijan. These economic relations brought to a reciprocal increased interest of the citizens from both countries and so it started to be the need for some cultural exchange programs and projects. This is exactly the aim of the association that also wants to increase the relations in the sectors of economy, education, politics and tourism. We can also say that this Association has the same ideas of *The Europe Azerbaijan Society*, but more specifically concentrated on Italy. I had the chance to meet the President of the association, Paola Casagrande, who told me about the activities and the events organized by the association and how this works. She told me that about tourism Azerbaijan made an incredible progress in the last ten years, but there is still a lot of work to do because the potentialities of the country are incredible and not all of them are still exploited in an efficient way. The Association's website in itself does not give a lot of information about Azerbaijan however the association also publishes a bi-month magazine, *Vie della Seta Magazine*³³³. This magazine started to be published not so long ago, in November 2014 and it is very interesting because it is published in Italian and Azerbaijani and also because it distributed for free, indeed it is possible to download the copies of the previous numbers from the website. In the magazine there are articles and reportages about many different topics, the political relations between Italy and Azerbaijan, interviews with Italians living in Azerbaijan and Azerbaijani living in Italy, projects of exchange between cities of both countries, special articles about the history of the two countries and reportages about Italian and Azerbaijani cities and regions. The projects of the *Associazione Italia-Azerbaijan* and its magazine represent an interesting attempt of promotion of the country made on a bilateral level, the ties between Italy and Azerbaijan are likely to keep on improving in the future and Italy can become a good source of tourists for Azerbaijan.

5.4: The institutional websites

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism has two main websites where one can find information about the country. The first one is the official website of the Ministry³³⁴; inside it is possible to find information about the projects and the activities of the Ministry, official documents, useful contacts and also much useful information about the country. There are pages dedicated to culture, people, cities, regions and highlights, there is also a very good page called "only in Azerbaijan" that shows a list of attractions that one can find just in this country. Being this a governmental source

³³³ Associazione Italia-Azerbaijan, *Vie della Seta Magazine*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.italiaazerbaigian.org/viadellaseta.html>. (Accessed 25/02/2015).

³³⁴ Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.mct.gov.az/>. (Accessed 27/02/2015).

obviously the Nagorno-Karabakh issue is treated following the official position of the Government: there is a page with a detailed history of the region but obviously from just the Azerbaijani point of view.

The second website that is financed by the Ministry of Tourism is *Visit Azerbaijan*³³⁵. This website is one of the first that is possible to find when searching on *Google* “Tourism Azerbaijan” and it is probably the best made and organized one available at the moment. It is available in seven languages (even Chinese), it is easy to use and it contains basically all the information that one could need before travelling to Azerbaijan. There are sections dedicated to a general presentation of the country, one about the visa procedures, transportations, hotels and leisure activities. In particular there is a very useful section in which there is the possibility of choosing a city from an interactive map, and by clicking on it one can discover if there are hotels available in that city and how many are they. A curious thing is that in the pages where they describe the single territories and cities, they also have some descriptions of the occupied territories of Nagorno-Karabakh with pictures and number of inhabitants, however at the end of every description it is written that at the moment it is not recommended to go there because of the occupation. This is an interesting solution of the problem of the occupation and it is also unique among the other previous guidebooks and websites we analyzed. Another useful section is the one with the contacts of many Azerbaijani travel agencies that are not easy to find if someone is organizing a holiday from another country. As we said this website can be considered a good source of general information about the country, however we do not have to forget that it is an institutional website, there are many little details that are not mentioned, the fact that trains are often old and slow, the fact that many roads outside Baku are not in good conditions, the possible police controls that foreigners can have in the regions close to the borders or in Nakhchivan and also the lack of a real public transport system from the Baku airport to the city center. So it is good to look for information in this website but always keeping in mind that it would be better to check also some other more independent sources.

An interesting case of promotion of the country organized by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism is the sponsorship of *Atlético Madrid*³³⁶. Since 2013 the football team of Madrid has on its shirts the appealing writing “Azerbaijan, land of fire”. In the last period this writing changed in “Baku 2015, 1st European Games” in order to advertise the upcoming Games that will be held in Baku in June 2015 and in which the government is investing a lot of money and energy. This choice often

³³⁵ Visit Azerbaijan, *Azerbaijan*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://azerbaijan.travel/>. (Accessed 27/02/2015).

³³⁶ Atlético de Madrid, *Much More Than a Sponsorship*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://en.clubatleticodemadrid.com/noticias/much-more-than-a-sponsorship>. (Accessed: 27/02/2015).

brought some critics to *Atlético Madrid*, accused of sponsoring a country that is not free and where people are not allowed to criticize the government, however since 2011 *Atlético Madrid* have reached very good results in national and international competitions and this probably has also been possible with the financial support of its sponsors.

CHAPTER SIX

THE MAIN AZERBAIJAN'S TOURISM ATTRACTIOS

6.1: About Azerbaijan's main attractions

In this chapter we will analyze the main tourism attractions of Azerbaijan. In order to select these attractions we will follow the *Lonely Planet's* guide³³⁷, which suggests five main destinations that one should see when visiting Azerbaijan. These places are Baku, Qobustan with its petroglyphs and mud volcanoes, the mountain villages of the North (Xinalıq and Laza), the village of Shäki and the village of Lahıc. These destinations are the most commonly suggested not only in the *Lonely Planet's* guidebook but also in the other ones and in most of the websites we already analyzed. We can say that they represent the highlights of the country, they are the most known outside Azerbaijan and the information about them are the easiest to find. For these reasons we will describe the locations, we will try to see if there are some tourism structures, if it is easy to reach them and we will try to judge which is their real potential.

6.2: Baku³³⁸

According to historians the origins of Baku are quite far in time however one would hardly think this just by visiting the city today. In the last twenty years Baku basically became a boomtown thanks to the oil revenues of the *Contract of the Century* and today it is a multi-cultural city impatient to show itself to the rest of the world.

Since the beginning of history, the Absheron Peninsula, where Baku is located, has been populated and the region was known mainly for the bizarre natural phenomenon caused by the massive presence of natural gas and oil under the surface. Oil was also the main reason why merchants from Europe and India arrived in Baku even if the city was out of the main path of the Silk Road. Baku knew its first golden age between the 10th and the 12th centuries during the realm of the Shirvanshahs, in which it was one of the most important cities; in those centuries the Shirvanshahs build what today is known as the *Old City*, one of the main attractions of Baku. The kingdom of the Shirvanshahs lasted until 1538 when the Safavids arrived. After a war between Iran and Russia, in 1813, Baku and the territory of today's Azerbaijan were given to the Russian Empire and this

³³⁷ J. Noble, M. Kohn, D. Systemans, *Georgia, Armenia & Azerbaijan*, Lonely Planet, 4th edition, 2012, pp. 226-227.

³³⁸ Main information about Baku's history: Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Baku*, 2015. (ONLINE). Available at: <http://www.mct.gov.az/service/lang/en/page/33/rg/4/nid/9/>. (Accessed 01/03/2015).

domination lasted until 1918³³⁹. Between the 19th and the 20th centuries Baku knew its first oil boom, the city grew in population and became one of the most modern and active cities throughout the Empire³⁴⁰. In 1918 in the aftermath of the First World War it was created the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan that lasted two years before being conquered by the Red Army in 1920. Baku had a crucial importance for the Soviet Union during World War Two because of the oil production, however after the war the Soviets started to concentrate the production in other parts of the Union. Nonetheless Baku was still one of the most important industrial centers of the Soviet Union and it was close to the coasts of Baku that the explorations for the first off-shore wells started³⁴¹. After independence 1991 Baku became the capital city of the Republic of Azerbaijan and since then it kept on growing and developing, nowadays it is the biggest city of the region and for sure one of the main economic hubs of the Caucasus.

Today old Soviet buildings have been destroyed to create space for new parks and futuristic-looking skyscrapers, long promenades with fancy clothes shops make the city center look like an European city, the Park Bulvar became the favorite destination for couples having a romantic stroll next to the sea and the general life-style of the inhabitants changed quite quickly. Some articles and texts refer to Baku as the “Dubai of the Caucasus”³⁴² and the comparison perfectly fits: as in Dubai, also in Baku there is the same will to capture the attention of the world with impressive constructions and massive restorations of the city.

This idea of “showing Baku to the world”, reached its peak in 2012 when Baku hosted the 57th edition of the *Eurovision Contest*: on that occasion they managed to hold the event in the new *Baku Crystal Hall*, built in just eight months and with a capacity of 25.000 people³⁴³. Something similar is happening now with the organization of the first edition of the *European Games*³⁴⁴, a sport event that will be held in Baku in June 2015. The official number of the investments has not been declared by the authorities but once in Baku, to understand how much the government cares about

³³⁹ C. Frappi, *Azerbaijan, Crocevia del Caucaso*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012, pp.38-45.

³⁴⁰ D. Yergin, *The Prize, the epic quest for oil, money and power*, Simon & Shuster, New York, 1991, pp.57-63.

³⁴¹ C. Frappi, *Azerbaijan, Crocevia del Caucaso*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012, pp.48-58.

³⁴² Ben Illis, *Baku, Azerbaijan: Dubai of the Caucasus*, the Telegraph, 2012. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/middleeast/azerbaijan/9287045/Baku-Azerbaijan-Dubai-of-the-Caucasus.html>. (Accessed 01/03/2015).

³⁴³ Traxon Technologies, *Crystal Hall-Baku, Azerbaijan*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: http://www3.traxontechnologies.com/showcase/showcase_details/14085. (Accessed 03/03/2015).

³⁴⁴ All information about the European Games: Baku 2015, 1st European Games, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.baku2015.com/>. (Accessed 01/03/2015).

this kind of events, one just need to go the *Koroglu* metro station and see the brand new *Baku National Stadium*, that has a capability of 68.000 people and that has been built ex-novo together with the new Olympic village next to it. Also throughout the city giant billboards remind to the population about the games, all the so called “London taxis”, that are the city taxis provided by the Ministry of Transport now bring the logo of the event and even the night illumination of the *Flame Towers* sometimes take the shape of an athlete. These games can also be seen as a test to prove the capabilities of Baku to host big sport events, the Azerbaijan’s Olympic Committee³⁴⁵ already tried unsuccessfully to obtain the organization of the *Olympic Summer Games* of 2016 and 2020. They will try again for the edition of 2024 and the results of the organization of the *Europeans Games* will be for sure taken into consideration. Another example of big events organized in Baku is the already scheduled *Grand Prix of Formula 1* that will take place in 2016 in the city center³⁴⁶.

According to the last statistics available Baku has more or less two million of inhabitants³⁴⁷ and it is by far the first tourism destination in the country³⁴⁸. It is clear that the government is aware of that and wants to make Baku a modern city able to impress visitors; this resulted in an increased difference between Baku and the rest of the country.

We will now analyze into details Baku’s main attractions:

- Içəri şəhər (the Old City): as is reported in many websites, the Old City of Baku, together with the Palace of the Shirvanshahs and the Maiden Tower, have been inserted in the UNESCO world heritage list in 2000³⁴⁹. Historians say that the first walls here date back to the 12th century and on that period those walls also represented the limits of the city. With the first oil boom one of the two existing rows of the walls was destroyed to allow the city to expand³⁵⁰. Today the Old City is located in the very center of Baku and it is easily reachable by bus or by metro thanks to the close *Içərişəhər* metro station. Inside the walls many parts

³⁴⁵ Azerbaijan Olympic Committee, *From Candidate to Host City*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.olympic.org/host-city-election>. (Accessed 01/03/2015).

³⁴⁶ Autosport.com, *Baku street track for 2016 F1 European Grand Prix unveiled*, 2014. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.autosport.com/news/report.php/id/116213>. (Accessed 01/03/2015).

³⁴⁷ Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Baku*, 2015. (ONLINE). Available at: <http://www.mct.gov.az/service/lang/en/page/33/rg/4/nid/9/>. (Accessed 01/03/2015).

³⁴⁸ State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Tourism and Services in Azerbaijan*, Statistical publication, Baku, 2014. Available at: <http://www.stat.gov.az/source/tourism/indexen.php>. (Accessed 01/03/2015).

³⁴⁹ Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Baku*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://azerbaijan.travel/en/region/47-Baku>. (Accessed 02/03/2015).

³⁵⁰ Time Out, *Baku & the best of Azerbaijan*, Time Out, 1st edition, London, 2012, pp. 59-60.

of the city have been restored and today the old houses and constructions look newer than they really are. To have a stroll around the narrow streets of the Old City is one of the most popular things to do for a tourist in Baku and it is also one of the most suggested itineraries in the guidebooks. Throughout the Old City there are some guest-houses and little hotels, together with restaurants and tea-houses. There are also many foreign embassies and souvenir shops, as a matter of fact this is one of the few places in Baku where it is possible to buy souvenirs. The Palace of the Shirvanshahs is situated inside the Old City, it was built around the 15th century and since then it had been restored many times until the beginning of the 20th century³⁵¹. Today it is considered one of the highlights of İçəri şəhər, the ticket for the entrance is reasonably cheap and it is also possible to have a kind lady who will guide you during the visit. The exposition inside the Palace gives to the visitor the main information about the history of the Old City and about the life at the times of the Shirvanshahs, musical effects and interactive screens also take away this place from being just a normal museum. Particularly beautiful to see are the harem next to entrance and the two little Royal Mosques. The other main highlight of İçəri şəhər is for sure the Maiden Tower: its unique shape has been a big source of debate for historians and made it the most famous landmark of Baku. It was constructed during the 12th and there are many legends about the origin of its name. Today for two manat (forty cents for students) it is possible to enter the tower and climb it. Inside many billboards and maps explain the history of the tower and the legends related to it. On the top the sight on the Caspian Sea and the on the Boulevard is really good and worth the price of the ticket. Close to the Maiden Tower there is also the main concentration of souvenir shops of the whole Baku. The Old City represents one of the “must” for visitors coming to Baku and it is for sure one of the best places to admire some architectural examples of the period of the Shirvanshahs;

- The Baku Boulevard: known also as National Park, the Baku Boulevard is a long promenade on the shores of the Caspian Sea. Its first origin can be dated in 1909 when during the first oil-boom the new middle-class living in Baku felt the need for a place where they could relax and spend their free time³⁵². Through the years it knew many projects of enlargement and in 1999 it was given the status of National Park by Heydar Aliyev³⁵³. The future

³⁵¹ Ibidem.

³⁵² Ivi, pp. 70-71.

³⁵³ M. A. Gischler, *Beautifying the Bay*, Azerbaijan International, summer 2000, pp. 40-42. (ONLINE) Available at: http://www.azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/82_folder/82_articles/82_boulevard_project.html. (Accessed 02/03/2015).

projects for the Boulevard are of a further expansion, up to twenty-five kilometers, in order to make it the longest park in the world, some of these projects like the *Baku White City*³⁵⁴, are now in the making. Today this park, with its 3750 meters, is the second largest in Europe³⁵⁵ and it goes from Freedom Square, in front of the Governmental House, to the National Flag Square. A shopping mall, the Baku Ferris wheel, the Carpet Museum and the Baku Crystal Hall are the main landmarks of the Boulevard and they are also very interesting to see thanks to their particular design. Together with them there are also many restaurants, one of them has been called *Venezia* because it has a sort of canal all around it, tea-houses, some clubs, beautiful fountains and also some carousels for kids. Many locals come here for a stroll and it is not rare to see people jogging and exercising. Another interesting attraction is for sure the National Flag Square, placed in the newest part of the Boulevard. Here there is the third tallest flagpole in the world, situated next to the Baku Crystal Hall; boat trips through the Baku bay arrive here leaving from the other side of the Boulevard. Passing in front of the Old City and of the city center the Boulevard is in a very strategic position and it has many good points with beautiful view of Baku and of its bay. It is reasonably close to all the others main attractions and it is popular for strollers also at night. Benches, lamps, rubbish bins and even the fences next to the water have a modern design and teams of sweepers clean the park everyday at every time, especially close to the National Flag Square. Parallel to the Boulevards runs the big and always trafficked Neftçilər prospekti; to reach the Boulevard there are some pedestrian subways it in the most strategic points but they are not enough and crossing the street is quite dangerous and also forbidden. A good idea could be to build more pedestrian subways or to add some zebra crossings in order to make it easier for the people to reach the park;

- West Baku: in this part of the city, on the top of the Sabayil Hills, there are some very interesting things to see; to get there one can take a bus or also the handy funicular close to the Boulevard. Here there are the new *Flame Towers*, a complex of three skyscrapers shaped like flames that became one of the symbols of Baku and have the peculiarity of being incredibly photogenic from every position and with every kind of weather. At the moment these buildings are finished but still closed and empty, with the only exception of the Northern tower where there is one of the best hotels in Baku, the *Fairmont Baku Flame*

³⁵⁴ Baku White City, *Baku White City*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.bakuwhitecity.com/en/project/12>. (Accessed 02/03/2015).

³⁵⁵ Azernews, *Baku Boulevard to be the Largest in Europe*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.azernews.az/azerbaijan/61643.html>. (Accessed 02/03/2015).

Towers that opened in 2013³⁵⁶. With the funicular it is possible to arrive basically at the base of the *Flame Towers*, here there is also the little but good-looking *Shhidliq Mosque*. In front of them there is the Parliament Building and close by there is also the *Martyr's Alley*, a memorial dedicated to the one hundred and thirty Azerbaijani people killed by the Red Army on the 20th of January 1990 while they were demonstrating for the Independence of Azerbaijan³⁵⁷. That day is national holiday and every year in this memorial there is an official commemorative ceremony. All along the alley there are marble stones with the faces and the names of the victims and at the end there is an archway with an eternal flame³⁵⁸, from that position the sightseeing on the Caspian Sea is really beautiful and a stroll here is very interesting and touching. In this part of the city there is also the *Faxri Xibayani*, a ceremonial cemetery where among other famous Azerbaijani people there is also the grave of the beloved President Heydar Aliyev and his wife³⁵⁹. When going there passing in front of the parliament is better to be careful in taking photographs, policemen are quite suspicious, same thing if one instead of taking the funicular decides to climb the stairway that runs parallel to it. Not very far from the *Flame Towers*, very close to the *Nəsimi* metro station there is another interesting attraction, the brand new *Heydar Mosque*, a giant mosque officially opened on the 26th of December 2014 by the President Ilham Aliyev. The mosque has four minarets ninety five meters tall, two domes and it covers a total area of 12.000 square meters. The style is the same of the other rebuilt mosques all around Baku and the Absheron Peninsula and because of its dimension is really impressive to see and it represents a good new tourism attraction, even if at the time of my visit, in April 2015, it was not still possible to visit the inside³⁶⁰;

- Museums of Baku: Baku offers a vast option possible museums and cultural places. The most modern and impressive is for sure the *Heydar Aliyev Center*: this incredibly futuristic building has been finished in 2012 and thanks to its shape and its curve lines it represents one of the most particular buildings all around the world. Inside it hosts some permanent exhibitions and also some non-permanent ones. The two main exhibitions are the *Heydar Aliyev Museum* and the *Azerbaijan Treasures*. The first presents the life and the

³⁵⁶ Fairmont Baku Flame Towers, *Fairmont Baku, Flame Towers*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.fairmont.com/baku/>. (Accessed 02/03/2015).

³⁵⁷ C. Frappi, *Azerbaijan, Crocevia del Caucaso*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012, p.59.

³⁵⁸ Time Out, *Baku & the best of Azerbaijan*, Time Out, 1st edition, London, 2012, pp. 66-67-68.

³⁵⁹ M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010, p. 103.

³⁶⁰ News.az, *Azerbaijani President attends opening of Heydar Mosque*, 26th December 2014. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://news.az/articles/official/94612>. (Accessed 02/03/2015).

achievements of the former President, while the second one is a sort travel around the tradition and the history of the country³⁶¹. Both exhibitions are conceived in a very modern and interactive way, touch screens, audio guides, and interactive maps help people in enjoying more the visit and make worth a visit to this center. The other main museums of Baku are: Azerbaijan State Museum of Carpet and Folk Applied Arts, Museum of Azerbaijani Literature, Museum of Modern Art, Museum of Natural Science, Museum of the History of Azerbaijan³⁶². All these museums are in very good conditions and even if sometimes prices can be quite high (for example ten manat for Literature Museum), they have been organized following a precise design and they are very interesting. A peculiar case is the Museum of the Nobel Brothers (Villa Petrolia), situated close to the still in construction Baku White City. This sort of compound was built to host and give good living standards to the personnel and the oil workers of the Petroleum Production Company Nobel Brothers and Villa Petrolia was the official residence of the Nobel family. Today the villa hosts an exclusive business club, the *Baku Nobel Heritage Fund* (BNHF)³⁶³. Inside the villa there is a small museum (six rooms) with photos and objects that belonged to the Nobel Brothers including also their office. The museum in itself is very interesting but it is not open to the public. To visit it the only possibility is to go there, knock on the door and hope that the guardian will let you in. I personally managed to get in and during the visit the guardian said that the Museum is not open because the President of the BNHF does not want it to be public. The curious thing is that this Museum is named in the Baku Museum's list available on the official website *Visit Azerbaijan*³⁶⁴;

These ones are the main attractions that usually are considered the “things to do” when someone visits Baku. However there are also some less famous locations that are worth a visit if someone has more time, for example to visit one of the bazaar's of Baku is a good way to enter in touch with the everyday life of the local citizens. Probably one of the most characteristic is the *Taza Bazar*, in the *Nasimi District*. Here one can buy almost everything but food is particularly good: vegetables,

³⁶¹ Heydar Aliyev Center, *Heydar Aliyev Center*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://heydaraliyevcenter.az/#main>. (Accessed 02/03/2015).

³⁶² Visit Azerbaijan, *Museums*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://azerbaijan.travel/en/culture-life/15/40/1?regionA=47>. (Accessed 02/03/2015).

³⁶³ Baku Nobel Heritage Fund, *Baku Nobel Heritage Fund*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.bakunobel.org/home.html>. (Accessed 02/03/2015).

³⁶⁴ Visit Azerbaijan, *Museums*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://azerbaijan.travel/en/culture-life/15/40/1?regionA=47>. (Accessed 02/03/2015).

fruits, meat, fish, dried fruits, bread, jams, home-made jars with salads, dolma leaves, marmalades and many other local food that are hard to find in the main supermarkets. Another example of bazaar is the street market that is organized every Saturday and Sunday close to the *Həzi Aslanov* metro station. This market is specifically dedicated to fruits and vegetables, the quality of the products is really good and bargaining the price with the sellers can be a peculiar experience. Another unusual place to visit is for sure the *Bibi Heybat* Mosque that as Mark Elliott says in his guide, is the “first Stalin-destroyed mosque in the former USSR to have been totally rebuilt”³⁶⁵. It is a big mosque situated close to the seaside from which there is a good view of the city and to visit it is an occasion to see one of the numerous pilgrimage destinations of the Absheron peninsula. Being it quite far from every metro station the only way to get there is by bus or by taxi.

Baku has recently been classified on the 10th position in the list of *Top 10 Nightlife Cities* by National Geographic³⁶⁶. It is true that in the last years Baku developed a big number of restaurants, clubs and pubs, but putting Baku on the 10th positions is probably exaggerated: these places are usually attended just by the upper part of the Azerbaijani society who “enjoy their new-found wealth” as is written in the *Time Out*’s guidebook³⁶⁷, and by expatriates, mainly English and American people working in the oil business or Russian businessmen who came to Baku just for some days. We also have to say that nightlife in Baku is not really the cheapest: there are a good number of bars and pubs attended by locals where prices are good, especially close to Fountain Square, however the main pubs and restaurants that are usually mentioned in the guidebooks have prices that are often close or even higher than the European ones. The strict visa policies also caused that internationally famous bands, singers, DJs and performers usually do not come to Baku for concerts and events so the choice of live music is usually limited to some cover bands or local jazz bands. From the cultural point of view Baku offers many possibilities but mainly for Azerbaijani and Russian speakers. There are a good number of theaters and concert halls but the offer is quite limited to national or Russian performers. Speaking about international festivals, the

³⁶⁵ M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010, p. 104.

³⁶⁶ National Geographic, *Top 10 Nightlife Cities*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel/top-10/nightlife-cities/>. (Accessed 02/03/2015).

³⁶⁷ Time Out, *Baku & the best of Azerbaijan*, Time Out, 1st edition, London, 2012, p. 117.

most famous in Baku are the *Baku Jazz Festival*³⁶⁸, the *Azerbaijan International Travel & Tourism Fair*³⁶⁹ and the *Caspian Oil & Gas Exhibition*³⁷⁰.

About the accommodation, hotels in Baku are usually a problem for budget visitors and this has been a chronic problem for the city in the last years, there is a fundamental lack of a good number of three and two stars hotels³⁷¹. This is due to the fact that usually visitors in Baku are businessmen who have everything paid by their companies; independent travelers might have difficulties in finding a hostel or a guesthouse for less than twenty manat but these choices cannot be considered as having two or three stars. I also received some reports by some travelers and foreign workers about the service in the supposed four and five stars hotels that apparently is not adequate to the level they claim to have and to the price they ask. This is probably one of the results of the fast development of the city; money and investments allowed Baku to become a modern city with famous hotel brands but there is still a lack of good personnel educated in specific schools that is able to work in high-level structures³⁷².

About public transport Baku has a good system of autobus that reach all the parts of the city and its surroundings, the price is very affordable, twenty qəpik per ride for an urban bus and thirty if the bus goes outside the city. Because of the usual traffic and the local use of stopping the bus not only at the bus stops to allow passengers to get on and off, these buses are not the fastest but they are a good option if someone is not in a rush, even if there is not a precise schedule for them. In some bus stops in the city center there are some screens where one can check which bus pass in that stop and with which frequency but they often do not work. The underground is probably the fastest way to travel around, it has the same price of the autobus but for the moment it is quite limited, some works to extend the two existing lines (red and green) and creating two new ones are actually on

³⁶⁸ Azerbaijan.com, *Festivals*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.azerbaijan.com/v/festivals/>. (Accessed 03/03/2015).

³⁶⁹ AITF, *Azerbaijan International Travel & Tourism Festival*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.aitf.az/2015/>. (Accessed 03/03/2015).

³⁷⁰ Caspian Oil & Gas Exhibition, *Caspian Oil & Gas Exhibition*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.caspianoilgas.az/2015/>. (Accessed 03/03/2015).

³⁷¹ Time Out, *Baku & the best of Azerbaijan*, Time Out, 1st edition, London, 2012, p. 86.

³⁷² A good example of this happened to me when, during a dinner in a very fancy wedding palace close to the Neftçilər metro station, the waiter poured some wine in my glass without noticing that I already had some wine and that the wine I already had was different one from the one he was pouring me.

their way³⁷³ and the plan is to have five lines and seventy-six stations by 2030³⁷⁴. Although usually quite crowded, noisy and hot, trains are very frequent and fast. More expensive is to take a taxi: with the only exception of the already mentioned “London Taxis” that have a counter, in the other cases one would have to bargain the price with the driver and usually these prices become much higher for foreigners. Baku is also the central hub for the national transport system and from it is possible to reach every part of the country. The train station is situated in the city center and it has many comfortable night trains for Ganja, Astara, Shäki and also Tbilisi. The main bus station is situated in the north-western part of the city and there are many buses and also overcrowded marshrutki directed in almost every corner of the country and also for many other international destinations like Tbilisi, Istanbul, Teheran and even Moscow³⁷⁵. Quite uncomfortable is the fact that the bus station is not served by an underground station. The closest one is *20 Janvar*, on the green line, but it is necessary to take a short bus ride to reach the bus station. However the expansion plans of the metro line will soon solve this problem and a new underground stop is already under construction close to the bus station. About air transportation, the Heydar Aliyev International Airport is situated twenty minutes by car from the city center and it provides flight with many destinations around the world³⁷⁶. It has a new and modern terminal recently built and a large and fast highway that connects it to the city but what is lacking is a good system of public transportations that could link it to the city center. There are no trains getting there and the only buses are the public one that stops outside the airport, on the main road that is at least five-hundred meters from the entrance. Basically the only way to get there is by taxi and this would cost at least fifteen manat if booking it before. Taking a taxi at nighttime directly from the airport to the city center requires a traditional bargaining and it can also happen that the taxi driver can ask the incredible price of sixty manat for this. It is also possible to arrive in or leave Baku by boat, however this is more a kind of an adventure just for the bravest: there are ferries directed to Kazakhstan, Russia and Turkmenistan but they mainly transport goods not people. I received reports by people who took these boats and apparently one ticket costs around one hundred and ten manat and there are no precise dates about the departure and the arrival. Moreover the harbor is situated more than thirty kilometers South of Baku.

³⁷³ Bakı Metropoliteni, *Bakı Metropoliteni*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://metro.gov.az/en/index.html>. (Accessed 02/03/2015).

³⁷⁴ N. Orujova, *Good News for Baku's Metro Users*, Azernews, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.azernews.az/azerbaijan/69559.html>. (Accessed 11/03/2015).

³⁷⁵ MTrans, *Mtrans*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://mtrans.az/index.php/eng/>. (Accessed 02/03/2015).

³⁷⁶ Baku Airport, *About the Airport*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.airport.az/about.php?id=1>. (Accessed 02/03/2015).

In conclusion, we can say that today Baku is a modern and developed city, it has all the basic standards of a capital city of a developed country, it is cosmopolitan, globalized and multicultural, many people from different cultures live together but one should not judge the country just by visiting Baku: there are many things that one can see in the city that are not very common in the rest of the country. For example it is normal to see young couples walking around hand in hand or to see a woman driving and there are no clothing restrictions like in some other Muslim countries. On the other hand it is hard to see young couples going around in other cities like Gänjä or Quba and almost impossible to see a woman driving. It is clear that the government decided to invest money in the city, to make it a sort of shiny and elegant introduction for the rest of the Azerbaijan however Baku still brings the sign of a city that developed too fast and maybe also in a chaotic way. I heard many people saying that a lot of old and good-looking houses were destroyed just to leave the space for a new park or a new skyscraper³⁷⁷, moreover it is necessary just to go a little bit out of the city center to see that there the situation is really different, roads can be almost impossible to drive if it rains, people live in big and old Soviet-style buildings that are not safe in case of earth-quakes, in many places there is rubbish between the houses and also nowhere in the city there are bike paths. In the future Baku will probably go on developing, we mentioned some of the new projects that will make Baku even more modern and fascinating to visit, the tourism potential here have been almost all created in the last fifteen years, without the oil money Baku would have been just a normal city with less to offer than for example Tbilisi or Yerevan, the oil revenues and the investments in the renovation of the city made Baku what it is today, but the historical heritage and the cultural aspects are undoubtedly less than cities like Tbilisi, Teheran or Tabriz. On its side Baku has a vibrant atmosphere of rapid change and the fascination of a new place still not very famous around the world, as Mark Elliott once told me “Everything happens in Baku, you just have to know where to look for it.” The newly created landmarks of the city are definitely worth a visit together with the historical sites we described but all in all one can visit Baku’s main attractions in three days and the average price, together with the visa policies, of three days in Baku can be quite problematic for independent travelers. A lot have been made to make the city an appealing tourism destination and a lot will probably be done in the future, many progresses have been made but having Baku some limitations the government should also care more about improving the situation in the rest of the country instead of concentrating the big part of their investments in creating this sort of shiny and fancy shelter that is Baku today.

³⁷⁷ Radio Free Europe, *Baku’s Building Boom*, 2012. (ONLINE). Available at: http://www.rferl.org/media/photogallery/azerbaijan_building_projects/24476817.html. (Accessed 02/03/2015).

6.3: Qobustan

Qobustan in itself is a sad post-Soviet village sixty kilometers South of Baku. Its name is famous because it is located close to some of the most interesting attractions of Azerbaijan, the mud volcanoes and the petroglyphs.

The petroglyphs are now included in what is called the *Qobustan National-Artistic Reserve*, an area that has been inserted in *the UNESCO World Heritage List*. The Reserve has an area of 537 hectares and it counts more than four thousand petroglyphs³⁷⁸. These are basically some carvings that have been made on some rocks by the first inhabitants of this region during the Stone Age. The most famous representations are about hunting, fishing, everyday life, animals, and there is also a sort of boat. Most of these petroglyphs are concentrated on the same little area that has been quite well prepared for tourists with ready paths and indications towards the main petroglyphs. Included in the price of the ticket there is also the visit to the brand new little museum that is located close to the Reserve's entrance. Rumors say that years ago the petroglyphs were filled with toothpaste to increase the contrast and make them more visible in order to take better promotional pictures³⁷⁹. Today the toothpaste is not there anymore and so these petroglyphs are not very easy to spot or to photograph as one can expect just by seeing the promotional pictures. Being the petroglyph site on the top of a little hill, there is a very good landscape on the surrounding desert area and on the coast. Inside the Reserve there is also a famous Latin inscription, made by a Roman soldier during the 1st century AD. The inscription is carved on a rock five minutes from the petroglyph site, it surrounded by a fence and it is considered the easternmost sign ever found of the Roman Empire³⁸⁰. Always inside the Reserve there is another almost unknown potential attraction, the *Qara-Atli Baba Pir*: it is little cave that local people think it brings good luck to who comes here in pilgrimage. Not only is the site fascinating from a cultural point of view, but also the surrounding landscapes is really breath-taking and make someone think to be on the moon's surface. Next to the cave there is also a house where lives a family who often offers some tea to the visitors. The only guidebook that mentions this place is the Mark Elliott's one³⁸¹ but this location has a clear potential that today is

³⁷⁸ Visit Azerbaijan, *Gobustan (Reserve)*, (ONLINE) Available at: [http://azerbaijan.travel/en/region/153-Gobustan-\(Reserve\)](http://azerbaijan.travel/en/region/153-Gobustan-(Reserve)). (Accessed 03/03/2015).

³⁷⁹ Smithsonian Institution, *A Survey of the Rock Substrates of Petroglyphs at Gobustan, Azerbaijan*, 2012, p.20. (ONLINE) Available at: http://agt.si.edu/uncover_more/GobustanPetroglyphSurveyOnlineD1.pdf. (Accessed 03/03/2015).

³⁸⁰ Time Out, *Baku & the best of Azerbaijan*, Time Out, 1st edition, London, 2012, p. 159.

³⁸¹ M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010, p. 143.

totally ignored and not exploited. For example it could be a perfect place to build a restaurant where visitors could rest after having visited the volcanoes and the petroglyphs.

Outside the Reserve but reasonably close, six kilometers south of Qobustan, lays another good attraction, the mud-volcanoes. This is a very curious phenomenon caused by the natural gas under the ground. Azerbaijan is the country with the biggest number of mud volcanoes in world, three hundred and fifty out of the eight hundred spread throughout the world³⁸², and the group located close to Qobustan is one of the biggest and the easiest to access. This is definitely a very interesting destination for tourists and it represents something peculiar and not easy to see in other countries.

The attractions of Qobustan are among the most interesting things to see in Azerbaijan, their position make them perfect for a one-day trip from Baku and even people that come to Baku just for a weekend should consider to visit them. These locations are quite well promoted by guidebooks and websites however they are not really easy to visit. There are mainly two ways to arrive to Qobustan from Baku, the first one is by taxi, this option will cost around seventy manat to visit the volcanoes, the petroglyph, the Roman inscription and go back to Baku but it can happen that the taxi driver does not know how to arrive there. The second option is to take a public bus that goes in that direction; there are some that are directed to other cities after Qobustan but that stop there. This option is fairly cheap (eighty qəpik), but buses are often crowded and also they leave from Bayil, that is quite far from the city center and every underground station. Once in Qobustan the only way to get to the mud volcanoes and to the site of the petroglyphs is renting a taxi, although they are easy to find, it might cost between thirty-five and fifty manat to visit both sites plus the Roman inscription. I paid a visit to *Qara-Atli Baba Pir* three extra manat when I visited the site.

It is curious to notice that while the conditions of the road are fine to reach the petroglyphs and the Roman inscription, the road that takes to the mud volcanoes is quite difficult for a normal car and it becomes impossible if it rained in the days before. This because the volcanoes are outside of the reserve and this is also clear by the big amount of rubbish that one can see on both sides of the road. One of the best and most attractive locations of the whole country is difficult to reach and not well preserved, the work needed to make this location more tourists friendly should be one of the priorities of the local authorities.

As we said Qobustan represents the perfect one-day trip from Baku, excursions can be organized by hotels and travel agencies and a good work have been made for the site of the petroglyphs with the

³⁸² Visit Azerbaijan, *10 reasons to visit Azerbaijan*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://azerbaijan.travel/en/facts/148>. (Accessed 03/03/2015).

new museum, a good road and all the infrastructures directly on the site. However the difficult conditions of the site of the mud volcanoes, and also the not exploited potential of the *Qara-Atli Baba Pir* are a clear example of how things could be improved just by doing a little bit more. Qobustan is definitely worth a visit but the authorities should make this possibility easier for everyone and not only for the people staying in the best hotels that can organize private trips.

6.4: Mountain villages in the north, Laza and Xinalıq

Heading North from Baku to admire the wonderful mountains of the Greater Caucasus is one of the most suggested itineraries in Azerbaijan, especially in summertime. Hidden in these mountains there are many little, timeless villages where people speak their own language and that are often cut outside of the world during the whole winter³⁸³. A trip here is definitely a good idea for the ones who want to see another aspect of Azerbaijan that is totally different from Baku.

To get to this region the only way is to take a marshrutka to Quba or Qusar and from there try to find another one to get to the mountains. In alternative one can also take a taxi even if, because of the increasing number of tourists that started to arrive here in the last years, prices for taxis tend to be higher than in other parts of the country, like in the South for example. The main destinations are usually two: Laza and Xinalıq, two little fascinating villages truly in the middle of the mountains.

About Laza, to reach it one need more than one hour by car from Qusar. At the end of the valley the road turns left and start going up until it reaches the brand new *Shahdag Ski Resort*. This complex is the jewel of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, its construction started in 2009 and the Resort opened for the first time in 2012³⁸⁴. Still now it is not totally completed and there are many projects still in the making as is written in the official website of the resort³⁸⁵. This project have been possible thank you also to some foreign investments, especially from Switzerland³⁸⁶, it is one of the firsts and the biggest ski resort of Azerbaijan and the final project includes also many other hotels and chalets that have the aim to create good conditions also for summer tourism, making possible to keep the resort open all year long. This is one of the most impressive projects that the government

³⁸³ Time Out, *Baku & the best of Azerbaijan*, Time Out, 1st edition, London, 2012, p. 190-191.

³⁸⁴ J. Bayramova, *Skiing on Shahdag, King of the Mountains*, Visions of Azerbaijan, January- April 2013. (ONLINE) Available at: http://www.visions.az/travel_tourism,477/. (Accessed 04/03/2015).

³⁸⁵ Shahdag Mountain Resort, *Future Plans*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.shahdagmountainresort.com/eng/shahdag/future-plans/>. Accessed (04/04/2015).

³⁸⁶ Shahdag Mountain Resort, *Investment and Contractors*, 2015. (ONLINE) <http://www.shahdagmountainresort.com/eng/shahdag/investment-and-contractors/>. (Accessed 04/04/2015).

started about tourism and it will probably be quite successful in the future. One thing that is now missing is a bus service from Qusar, many websites says that this will be provided in the future but there are no signs of that at the moment.

Continuing on the road that passes next to the resort, a large dirty road some kilometers long arrives to a little valley where there is the lovely village of Laza, from where one can see one of the most impressive landscapes throughout Azerbaijan. The village in itself is very little and villagers are mainly shepherds, there are not hotels or hostels and usually to be hosted by a local family is the only way to spend the night there. The location is beautiful and worth the ride from Qusar, however the construction of the new resort brought some problems for this little pearl in the middle of the Caucasus: for example the area where now there is the resort, before it was used by the shepherds who used to water their flocks there³⁸⁷. Moreover the continuous movement of big trucks from the resort to one of the hills next to Laza is creating some problems: trucks go there to take some ground that is dug from the hills around the village, this ground is needed for the construction of the resort but this digging is creating a sort of scar in the landscape around Laza, not to mention the air and noise pollution caused by these trucks especially in summertime. It is obvious that with the development of the resort, Laza will see a lot of changes but the overall impression is that the authorities are not really thinking about the preservation of this amazing location.

The second most famous mountain village in this region is Xinalıq, it is actually not very far from Laza but the valley that links them is a National Park that at the moment is not accessible for tourists. Both in Laza and in Xinalıq there is a military post where soldiers will stop every attempt to cross the borders of the National Park. To reach Xinalıq one has to go to Quba and from there take a taxi. The road is more or less sixty kilometers long and it is one of the most impressive of the whole country. The spectacular mountains of the Greater Caucasus created a natural obstacle for all the populations that invaded the country throughout the centuries and still today they are still untouched and wild. The village in itself has seen little changes in the last years because of the big number of tourists that came here but it is still incredibly attractive and totally worth a visit. In the village there is a sort of hostel but also here the most common option is to be hosted by a local family, which is also a good occasion to visit a local house and to taste some home-made food. Like in Laza, trekking possibilities here would be numerous but being the village close to the border with Russia there are many regulations that make trekking difficult for foreigners. As we already said, the way from Laza to Xinalıq is known for being one of the best for trekking but is inside a National Park and so not accessible for foreigners without a special permission from the Ministry of Ecology

³⁸⁷ M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010, p. 189.

and Natural Resources, and the list of documents required to obtain these permissions is incredibly long³⁸⁸. This is truly a missed occasion for the development of tourism in this region; Xınalıq has already a certain number of tourists who come here during summer however it is still not easy to reach. It could become a real trekking paradise if rules were less strict but the government should also be careful because a massive flow of tourists would cause big damages for this region that has his main fascination in the fact of being still untouched.

Together with Laza and Xınalıq there are also some other villages in this region that can have some tourism potential like Buduq, Qächräsh, Qriz³⁸⁹ and many others that are usually reachable just with a 4WD car, but to find information about them is very difficult and the life conditions there are not appealing for most of the visitors. Also worth to be mentioned are the Lezghian villages in the extreme North, close to the border with Russia. To get there one needs to pass Qusar and after go on almost until the border. Roads become progressively more difficult and at a certain point the only possibility is to find a local person with a tough old Soviet jeep that can drive you there. The trip can be uncomfortable but the landscape and the timeless atmosphere of these little villages inhabited by this national minority make it really worth. These places are still almost unknown even by Azerbaijani citizens, however we can say that probably the North of Azerbaijan is the region with the widest tourism potential in the whole country. Following the example of neighboring Georgia, Azerbaijan could improve its winter tourism by building more resorts and infrastructures to increase the arrivals of tourists from Eastern Europe, who usually in winter prefer to go to Georgia than in Italy, Switzerland or France because is far cheaper. This market could be really perfect for Azerbaijan, together with the Russian one but at the moment the region is still not ready for hosting a lot of people because of the difficulties in reaching it and the small amount of information that are available. The North of Azerbaijan today represents an amazing opportunity for adventurers and independent travelers, it could become an incredible location also for the other types of tourists but it needs more investments and infrastructures that could provide villages with the needed requirements for hosting people and entertain them.

³⁸⁸ Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Shahdag National Park*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.eco.gov.az/en/shahdag/qaydalar.php>. (Accessed 04/03/2015).

³⁸⁹ M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010, pp. 179-186.

6.5: Shäki

Shäki is widely recognized as one of the most attractive destinations of Azerbaijan. It is a lovely location with also a rich history and culture. This combination made it one of the most advised places to see when visiting Azerbaijan.

Shäki's history had its peak during the Khanate's period, from 1743 to 1819 when the city was annexed to the Russian Empire³⁹⁰. It was one of the strongest Khanates of the region and one of the main trade's cities of the Caucasus however the original location of the town, on the left side of the river Kish, changed after a terrible flood in 1772 and is still there now. After that event the city was renamed Nukha and this remained its name until 1968 when it was changed again into Shäki³⁹¹.

Today the main attraction of the town is the *Khan's Palace*: it was completed in 1762 and it was just one of the forty buildings that were inside the fortress but today is the last one remained. It was used for administration purposes and in itself is not very big; its finely decorated walls and interiors and the fact that it has been built without using a single nail make it one of the most fascinating buildings of Azerbaijan³⁹², also the surrounding garden is very pleasant and enjoyable. Unfortunately the heavy restorations conducted here destroyed some of its ancient fascination however its elegant windows decorated with colorful glasses are still astonishingly good to see. The palace is located inside the old walls of the city, together with it there are some other old buildings which inside host some small museums about local history and traditions. Even more intrusive restorations have been made in the *Xan Evi*, the Khan's House that is a second palace, quite close to the walls of the old city that was used as summer house by the Khan. It was just recently opened to visitors, before the only way to visit it was by trying to convince the guardian who lived in the house next to the palace³⁹³: the interventions that have been made here are really massive and even if the façade still maintains some of its old charm, inside the rooms look like a modern restaurant, white walls and new wooden doors and floors are totally hiding the real age of those walls making them loose a lot of their appeal.

Also outside the walls of the old city, the little streets of Shäki and its old houses are very good to see just by walking around. One of the "musts" of the city is for sure the *Caravansarai Hotel*: to spend a night here is one of the things to do when visiting Shäki. This hotel is located in an old, big

³⁹⁰ A. Ferrari, *Breve Storia del Caucaso*, Carocci Editore, Roma, 2007, p. 49.

³⁹¹ M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010, p.222.

³⁹² J. Noble, M. Kohn, D. Systemans, *Georgia, Armenia & Azerbaijan*, Lonely Planet, 4th edition, 2012, p. 238

³⁹³ Time Out, *Baku & the best of Azerbaijan*, Time Out, 1st edition, London, 2012, p.166.

Caravansarai, the internal courtyard offers a splendid overview over the local architecture style and the rooms, even if basic, are really charming and original³⁹⁴. Moreover the prices for one night in this hotel are usually quite affordable considering the beauty of the building. Close to this hotel there is a big concentration of souvenir shops, a thing that is quite rare to find in Azerbaijan. Shäki is also famous for its *halva*, a local version of *paxlava* that is sold in a lot of specialized shops, and for *piti*, a sort of traditional soup cooked in closed clay pots that can be tasted in basically any of the good restaurants spread around the town.

Shäki can also be the point of departure for some day trips in the mountains and in the villages around. The most famous is for sure the village of Kish, where there is one of the few remained Albanian churches of Azerbaijan. Some claim that this one in particular has been the first church ever built. There are no proofs of this and officially this structure has been dated back to the 12th century³⁹⁵. Inside the church there is a little museum about the Caucasian Albania and the lady that manages the place is usually happy to give some extra information about the church. Close to the church there are also the small ruins of the fortress of *Gelersen Görəsəsen*, that dates back to the 15th century³⁹⁶ and that today are almost hidden by the vegetation. The only way to get there is by taxi and one will still need to do a short walk of fifteen minutes to reach the top of the hill where the fortress is placed. The ruins might not be really impressive, but the view of the valley makes the trip worth making.

Being a very popular destination even for Azerbaijani tourist's, Shäki is more "tourism friendly" than many other locations throughout the country, there is a well organized tourist office with English speaking staff and where one can organize trips outside the town and other guided tours. There are many possibilities for accommodation and not only home stays or old post-Soviet hotels. We already mentioned the beautiful *Caravansarai Hotel* but there are also many other newer hotels and information about them are easy to find in the website *Visit Azerbaijan*³⁹⁷. Especially outside the town there is the possibility of being hosted by a local family for a quite small price.

³⁹⁴ Ivi.

³⁹⁵ M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010, pp.227-228.

³⁹⁶ Visit Azerbaijan, *Sheki*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://azerbaijan.travel/en/region/56-Sheki>. (Accessed: 04/03/2015).

³⁹⁷ Visit Azerbaijan, *Hotels*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://azerbaijan.travel/en/accomreg/?regionA=56&typeA=4>. (Accessed 12/03/2015).

For transportation Shäki offers basically the same possibilities of the other Azerbaijani towns plus the advantage of being quite close (ten kilometers) to the railroad. The transports to and from Baku are assured by daily buses and also a quite comfortable night train. Marshrutki, buses and taxis represent the main options for moving around, they might be not the most comfortable or the fastest but they are really cheap and easy to find.

Shäki represents a good example of how Azerbaijan's potential can be exploited. There are places with more potential than Shäki, however the town is well-known and well promoted inside and outside the county, it is easy to find information about it both on the guidebooks and on the internet and as we said life for tourists is easier because there are more possibilities for accommodation and eating and there is also a tourism office. It is not very close to Baku, about three-hundred kilometers so it cannot be considered a one-day trip destination, nonetheless it can be taken into consideration as a two or three days destination for visitors that are staying in Azerbaijan for one week or more. It can also be a good stop for tourists directed to Georgia or also coming from Georgia. The beautiful landscape around Shäki and also the landscape that one can admire on the way to Baku add value to this town which can also be considered a point of departure for some trekking excursions in the mountains of the Greater Caucasus.

Reasonably close to Shäki there is also the little town of Gakh, famous for its mineral water and for its significant Georgian population³⁹⁸. The nice bazaar of Gakh is interesting to see and the town in itself is good for having a pleasant walk around. The main attractions of the region are usually considered some ruins of Albanian churches in the surrounding area and also the beautiful village of Ilisu from which it is easy to start some trekking in the lovely mountains around³⁹⁹. Few tourists usually arrive here because they all stop in Shäki but as for the rest of the Northern Region, the potential is really good, especially for what it concerns the natural landscape.

6.6: Lahıc

Among the numerous mountain villages that one can visit in Azerbaijan, Lahıc is for sure one of the most fascinating and most popular. Thanks to its relatively close distance from Baku and to the fact that there are already some structures ready to host tourists it became one of the most advised destinations for foreigners and also for local tourists.

³⁹⁸ M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010, p. 229.

³⁹⁹ Visit Azerbaijan, *Gakh*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://azerbaijan.travel/en/region/54-Gakh>. (Accessed 07/05/2015).

Lahic was founded over one thousand years ago by some silk merchants from Iran and this is the reason why the local dialect that is still spoken there has many things in common with Farsi⁴⁰⁰. Throughout the years it became one of the biggest settlements of the region and the population also started to produce copper objects that still today are the main reason why this village is famous. As a matter of fact the shops and the smithies on the main street are for sure the main attraction of the village and they are really beautiful and interesting to see. It is still possible to see some of the artisans making these objects and obviously buy some of them as souvenirs.

Like in the case of Shäki, this village has always been considered a destination for tourists and so here life is easier for tourists than in the rest of rural Azerbaijan, especially in summertime; there are many young people who speaks English and there is also a tourist office that can organize trips in the mountains around Lahic and also help visitors in finding an accommodation⁴⁰¹. About accommodation, the official website *Visit Azerbaijan* curiously does not give any indication about hotels or possibilities of accommodation in the page dedicated to Lahic⁴⁰² but they prefer to spend a lot of words about the old water supply and sewage system of the village. However all the other guidebooks give a lot of information about some possibilities that are mainly home stays but also hotels or bed & breakfast. This is the demonstration of the fact that the official sources of tourism promotion tend to be directed to a more high-level tourism that for example is not interested in a home stay in a rural village of Azerbaijan but who would prefer a well-equipped hotel with all the comforts, that is something on the making in Lahic: at the moment there are many new hotels and resorts that are being built or renovated and that offer a more decent standard than a lot of other locations around Azerbaijan.

Lahic can be considered a point of departure for some really good trips to the fascinating mountains of the Greater Caucasus, in particular around the village there are a couple of sites with the ruins of some fortresses that can be easily reached by foot or by horse. In the *Lonely Planet*'s guide there is also an entire paragraph dedicated to an interesting excursion to Mount Babadağ, a holy mountain

⁴⁰⁰ M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010, p. 206.

⁴⁰¹ When I visited Lahic in April 2015, I easily managed to find the tourism office but it was still closed because apparently the manager was in Baku for some days. So it seems that as in many other places around Azerbaijan, some tourism structures for the moment work just during summer.

⁴⁰² Visit Azerbaijan, *Lahij*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://azerbaijan.travel/en/region/152-Lahij>. (Accessed 12/03/2015).

3629 meters high that is believed to realize the wishes of the people who climb it. Lahıc is the main point of departure to reach the camping next to this mountain⁴⁰³ and is curious that even in Mark Elliott's guide this fascinating excursion is barely mentioned.

The only ways to reach Lahıc are by bus and by taxi. The main departure point is from the city of İsmayılı but there are also buses from Shäki and Baku. As the guidebooks suggest, one of the best things about Lahıc is the road that takes there: this used to be in very bad conditions but when I visited the village in April 2015, only the last three kilometers were not asphalted, the rest of the road was in good conditions, even if the risk of landslides is still high. The charm of this road lays in the fact that it passes next to steep canyons and slopes that offers some stunning views and great opportunities for taking good pictures.

For some things Lahıc can be considered similar to Shäki, they are both two mountain villages with a fascinating history and some peculiar characteristics that makes them really appealing for tourists. They are also more ready to host tourists than the rest of rural Azerbaijan: they have a local tourist office, some people who speak English, more possibilities of accommodation and also many possible excursions to the mountains around. They are both worth a visit and to combine them in one trip starting from Shäki, going to Lahıc and finally returning to Baku would be a good idea to see together two of the main attractions of Azerbaijan. However tourism here remains more a summer business, in other periods these places are still not easy to reach, Lahıc in particular and tourists in this season might have more troubles in finding accommodation and also transportations can be difficult because, even if many progresses have been made, roads can still have some structural problems, especially in autumn and winter. Probably there is not enough potential to transform these locations in winter tourism destinations like they are doing with the *Shahdag Ski Resort*, nonetheless it would be good if the Government invests more money for the street maintenance or for transportation in order to make easier the access to these locations.

⁴⁰³ J. Noble, M. Kohn, D. Systemans, *Georgia, Armenia & Azerbaijan*, Lonely Planet, 4th edition, 2012, p. 235.

CHAPTER SEVEN

OTHER POTENTIAL TOURISM DESTINATIONS IN AZERBAIJAN

7.1: The “secondary” tourism destinations of Azerbaijan

In this chapter we will analyze the other possible tourism destinations of Azerbaijan. These locations are usually named and described in the guidebooks and in the websites but the amount of information and the precision with which these are given are usually lower than the main other locations that we described in the last chapter. These “secondary” destinations that we will analyze are: the rest of the Absheron Peninsula around the Baku’s area, the South of Azerbaijan, in particular the city of Länkärän and the mountain towns of Lerik and Yardımlı, the city of Gänjä and its surroundings and finally the Nakhchivan exclave. We will use the same logic and the same criteria we already used in the previous chapters and we will state how is the situation in these locations, which is the tourism potential and how tourism could be improved there.

We will not speak about the remaining parts of the country, that are the South-West Region, the Zaqatala Region and the area between Gänjä and the borders with Georgia and Armenia. This because, even if there are some interesting locations, these zones are in a very unhappy position, especially the Central and South West Regions are very close to the occupied zone and foreigners here can have some troubles with policemen and be seen with suspicion by the local authorities. This situation can also be found in Nakhchivan but this region has also some other peculiar characteristics about which we will speak about. Anyways, the development of tourism in these regions will have to wait for an improvement of the geopolitical situation in the whole Southern Caucasus, something that for the moment seems to be hard to achieve in the short term.

7.2: The Absheron Peninsula

The Absheron Peninsula represents the most Eastern part of Azerbaijan, it is sixty kilometers long and its Southern part is occupied by the bay of Baku⁴⁰⁴. Today this territory is officially under the Baku district and its history also reflects its strong ties with the city. The whole territory has been

⁴⁰⁴ C. Frappi, *Azerbaijan, Crocevia del Caucaso*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012, pp. 16-17.

inhabited since ancient times and it still has some historical monuments that testify this^{405 406}. The region was very vulnerable from the sea and it has never been a major destination for trades, however it was a fertile land where also some curious natural phenomena attracted visitors and probably inspired the Zoroastrian fire worshippers⁴⁰⁷. Since the first oil boom the Absheron Peninsula has been one of the main sources of oil of the whole country, the first oil wells were hand-dug on its land and unfortunately during the Soviet period many chemical industries were built here, especially in the city of Sumqayıt. These industries, together with the oil one, caused a massive pollution that made the Peninsula one of the most polluted area of the world and made many parts of its land uncultivable⁴⁰⁸.

As is written in the *Lonely Planet*'s guide, the Absheron Peninsula is "a perversely fascinating place"⁴⁰⁹. There are many reasons why we can say that this territory could be a good tourism destination, as a matter of fact it is one of the most interesting places of the whole Azerbaijan, in this small territory it is possible to find curious natural phenomenon, old fascinating castle towers, a lot of old and new mosques most of which are famous pilgrim's destinations, local people's preferred beaches, a natural park and also an historical reserve. All this is placed in a landscape that truly brings the scars of pollution, new and old oilfields, kilometers of rusty pipes, ponds of oily water, old factories, a small amount of vegetation with almost no trees, all this features together creates a unique sensation of "industrial desert" and it is not exaggerated to say that some parts of the Peninsula are so ugly that are fascinating. These locations would be perfect to develop what is known as "industrial archeology" a particular subject that deals with the preservation and the study of the remaining of the industrial past⁴¹⁰. The idea of "industrial tourism" is not new, but it represents one of the most modern trends in the sector of tourism and it has a very big potential in Azerbaijan. A good idea would be even to create an amusement park based on the theme of oil where visitors could visit these locations and at the same time learn something about the history of the oil industry that in the Absheron Peninsula is really interesting. For example close to the *Bibi*

⁴⁰⁵ Visit Azerbaijan, *Absheron District*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://azerbaijan.travel/en/region/48-Absheron-district>. (Accessed 13/03/2015).

⁴⁰⁶ G. Bensi, *Le Religioni dell'Azerbaijan*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012, p. 85.

⁴⁰⁷ Azerbaijan 24, *History of Absheron Peninsula*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: http://azerbaijan24.com/about/azerbaijan_cities/absheron_peninsula/history_of_absheron_peninsula/. (Accessed 13/03/2015).

⁴⁰⁸ Ibidem.

⁴⁰⁹ J. Noble, M. Kohn, D. Systemans, *Georgia, Armenia & Azerbaijan*, Lonely Planet, 4th edition, 2012, p. 224.

⁴¹⁰ Society for Industrial Archeology, *About*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.sia-web.org/about/>. (Accessed 04/05/2015).

Heybat Mosque there is the place where the first real oil well was dug in Azerbaijan, or there are also some places where one can still see some previous hand-dug wells that can be considered some of the first wells dug specifically for the extraction of oil.

Always speaking about industrial remaining, an amazing potential tourist attraction could be *Neft Dashlari* that we can translate as “Oily Rocks”: it is the world’s biggest and oldest town built entirely on stilts and it is situated forty five kilometers from the coast of Azerbaijan⁴¹¹. It was built in 1949 by the Soviets to increase the extraction of oil from the Caspian Sea and it was supposed to host five thousand workers, a cinema, a soccer field and even a park. Today the structure is still partially in function but it is slowly falling apart, some parts are flooded and a big part of the original three hundred kilometers of roads are now not usable because of poor maintenance. Some people are still working there but the government is still very sensible about the access of foreigners to this structure. The only way to get there is by invitation of Socar, the national oil company⁴¹², and this is really a pity because it represents an incredibly appealing attraction for tourists: it is unique in its genre and it offers a huge number of possibilities, it would need just some investments for maintenance and modernizations but as for the other industrial remaining, for the moment the local authorities still prefer to “hide” them and they discourage visitors to see them, as if they were ashamed of their presence in their country.

Apart of the possible old industrial attractions, as we said there are many other locations that are easier to access for foreigners and that can be considered interesting and good destinations for trips from Baku, here after we will list the most interesting:

- Yanar Dağ: literally translated as the “Fire Mountain”, it is a little hillside with a burning front ten meters long and a couple of meters high. This curious phenomenon is caused by the infiltrations of natural gas from the underground. It is said that the flames started burning in 1958 when a shepherd accidentally threw a cigarette on the ground⁴¹³. Since then the flames never stopped and today this is one of the most popular tourism attractions outside Baku. To reach it one can take a taxi directly from Baku, even if there are many taxi drivers who do not know how to get there. As an alternative there are two public buses whose final stop is right in front of the entrance of the site. Tickets cost four manat, in front of the flame front there is an old and quite dismissed tea house where a tea with some jams might

⁴¹¹ M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010, p. 152.

⁴¹² J. Metcalfe, *Visit a Crumbling, Soviet-Era Floating “Oil City”*, Citylab, 2014. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.citylab.com/design/2014/02/visit-soviet-era-oil-city-floating-caspian-sea/8512/>. (Accessed 04/05/2015).

⁴¹³ M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010, p. 155.

be quite expensive. There is also a brand new souvenir shop but it seems to work just during summer. The site in itself represents a curiosity with a good tourism potential. It is also possible to climb the hill and from the top there is a reasonably pleasant view on the surrounding area. The location is well promoted and mentioned in all the main guides about Azerbaijan, however its potential could be exploited in a better way than it is now; as the situation is now, the risk is that people just go there, look at it for a couple of minutes before getting bored. It would be a good idea to place some charts with explanations about the phenomenon, how and when did it start, why does it happen and it would also be good to restore the tea house and maybe transform it in a restaurant or something that could look more appealing than an almost abandoned tea house, that is how it looks today. It would also be a good idea to keep the location open at night because the effects created by the lights of the flames could be really fascinating to see. A very successful business would probably be to combine the last two ideas together and so open a restaurant that could serve its clients dinner next to the eternal flames;

- Ateshgah: situated in the sad and grey town of Suraxanı, the “Fire Temple” is, together with Yanar Dağ, the most popular attraction of the Absheron Peninsula. The temple that is possible to see today was built in the 18th century by some Indus merchants⁴¹⁴, however this site was already known before because of the presence of a natural gas vent similar to the one in Yanar Dağ. The site was holy to the followers of Zoroastrianism since the 6th or 7th centuries BC and it is mentioned also in some historical documents⁴¹⁵. Today, as we said it is one of the most visited locations of the Peninsula; the temple in itself is quite little but fascinating, unfortunately the fire that burns in its center is not original anymore since the natural gas vent exhausted long ago, today the fire is kept alive thanks to a pipe directly from Baku⁴¹⁶. The temple is surrounded by old walls that create a sort of courtyard around it. In the walls there are many rooms where have been placed some creepy mannequins that reproduce some of the ascetic traditions of the pilgrims that used to live here. The ticket costs around four manat and is usually possible to have a guide for some manat more. The site in itself is fascinating and particular but not unforgettable, more impressive is the massive oil field that is right behind the temple where one can walk next to a couple of working oil wells positioned between the houses. If one walks five minutes more it is also

⁴¹⁴ Azerbaijan 24, *Ateshgah*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at:

http://azerbaijan24.com/about/azerbaijan_cities/absheron_peninsula/ateshgah2/. (Accessed 13/03/2015).

⁴¹⁵ M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010, p. 155.

⁴¹⁶ J. Noble, M. Kohn, D. Systemans, *Georgia, Armenia & Azerbaijan*, Lonely Planet, 4th edition, 2012, p. 224.

possible to see an incredibly ugly landscape that is really fascinating: rusty pipes, ruined oil wells, trash on the ground, dirty roads and almost no vegetation, all these characteristics together create an absolutely fascinating atmosphere of industrial disaster. Unfortunately local authorities do not like foreigners to walk around the oil fields so one would better be careful not to spend too much time there. As for Yanar Dağ the only two alternatives to reach Ateshgah are by taxi or by public buses;

- Castle Towers: as we said the Absheron Peninsula in the past was quite vulnerable for its position, this is the reason why through the centuries many castle towers were built for defense purposes. Only a few of them today are still there, two of these are situated in the town of Märdäkän, more or less half an hour by bus from Baku. Both of these towers have been restored⁴¹⁷, one is round and the other one is squared but of the two, the squared one is by far the more interesting. It is placed next to a little garden and surrounded by high walls, it is possible to enter inside and also to climb it but the keys are held by a local inhabitant that is not easy to find. The style of the tower, its color and its lines make it similar to a castle of sand and it worth a visit from Baku, however, more impressive is the castle tower in the village of Ramana, not very far from Märdäkän. This castle tower is less promoted than the ones in Märdäkän, probably because the village is surrounded by oil fields where a lot of signals on the road say explicitly not to take pictures. This little castle has probably been built around the 11th century and it has been recently fully restored⁴¹⁸. The keys to enter in it can be asked to the lady who lives in one of houses next to the castle, who usually asks three manat per person. It is possible to climb the walls of the castle and from the top there is a good sight on the oil fields around the village. One last example of castle is the one placed in the town of Nardaran. It is less tall than the other two but the gate is always open and it is also possible to have stroll on its surrounding walls;
- Mosques and pilgrimage destinations: the Absheron Peninsula is probably the best place to observe the influences of some old animist cults in the actual Muslim culture of Azerbaijan. This region is considered one of the most religious of the whole country and during the Soviet period the Russian authorities tried to eradicate those beliefs by destroying the old

⁴¹⁷ Azerbaijan 24, *Mardakan*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at:

http://azerbaijan24.com/about/azerbaijan_cities/absheron_peninsula/mardakan/. (Accessed 13/03/2015).

⁴¹⁸ Time Out, *Baku & the best of Azerbaijan*, Time Out, 1st edition, London, 2012, p. 154.

mosques and transferring people⁴¹⁹. After independence many of these mosques have been rebuilt and today they represent a common destination for local believers. The most impressive of these mosques is for sure the *Rehime Khanım Mosque* in the town of Nardaran⁴²⁰; it has been built in 1999 and is the biggest religious structure of Azerbaijan. People come here to pay visit to the grave of *Rehime Khanım*, one of the sisters of the 7th Imam that is situated under the mosque⁴²¹. Nardaran is considered the most religious city of Azerbaijan as is testified by the numerous pro-Islam slogans that are written on the walls next to the road that takes to the mosque. Another curious destination for local pilgrims is the *Mir Mövsüm Ağanın* situated in the village of Shuvälän. In this recently built mosque there is the grave of *Mir Mövsüm*, a man who died 1950 and who was affected by a problem to his bones that made him unable to walk and move properly. He was believed to have the power to make come true the wishes of the people who visited him, after his death people started to visit his grave asking for his help and people still do it: they come here, they make three turns around the grave and they ask his help for their health problems and if, after the visit, they get better, they come back with some gifts (usually some sweets but also some raw meat) and they give them to the first people they meet on the place⁴²². While visiting the site I was given a bag of candies by an old lady who got better from her illness after visiting the grave. This tradition is particular, but for sure not as original as the one that it is possible to see in *Pir Asan*, in Märdäkän. Here people come next to the little dome that here is placed, to have a bottle smashed on their heads as a cure for stress⁴²³. Today the bottles are not broken on the heads anymore but on a piece of metal, however people still keep on coming here, especially during the week ends. The bottle theme can found also in another place in the Absheron Peninsula: Buzovna. In this small village close to the Northern coast of the peninsula there are the remaining of an old Medieval Dome, the place is called *Tarsane* and people come here before leaving for a long trip and brake a bottle or tie a rag on the walls of the ruins to ensure themselves a safe travel. Today the ruins are surrounded

⁴¹⁹ Azerbaijan 24, *History of Absheron Peninsula*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at:

http://azerbaijan24.com/about/azerbaijan_cities/absheron_peninsula/history_of_absheron_peninsula/. (Accessed 13/03/2015).

⁴²⁰ M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010, p. 151.

⁴²¹ Azerbaijan 24, *Nardaran*, 2015 (ONLINE) Available at:

http://azerbaijan24.com/about/azerbaijan_cities/absheron_peninsula/nardaran/. (Accessed 13/03/2015).

⁴²² M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010, p. 154.

⁴²³ Azerbaijan 24, *Mardakan*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at:

http://azerbaijan24.com/about/azerbaijan_cities/absheron_peninsula/mardakan/. (Accessed 13/03/2015).

by broken glasses and even if very little, this location represents an interesting curiosity⁴²⁴. In Buzovna there is also the *Ali Ayağı* shrine: another recently-built mosque where inside is preserved an old footprint of Imam Ali. This footprint looks too big to be considered original but local people often come here to pay respect to it⁴²⁵. One last noticeable Mosque is *Bibi Heybat*, immediately South of Baku, on the coast of the Caspian Sea. Here there is the grave of another sister of the 7th Imam, *Okuma Khanum*. The original Mosque was totally destroyed by the Soviet authorities but it has been rebuilt in 1998⁴²⁶. As in the other religious locations we already mentioned people still come here to pay respect to *Okuma Khanum*, moreover from outside the mosque there is an interesting view of the some shipyards all along the coast of the Caspian Sea;

- Absheron National Park⁴²⁷: this National Park was created in 2005 and it occupies the easternmost part of the Absheron Peninsula. It has an area of 783 ha and it is more or less eight kilometers long. Its main attractions are the Caspian seals, a species of seals that is endemic of the Caspian Sea moreover the park hosts also a big variety of birds and plants. The place in itself offers a good opportunity to escape the noise and the traffic of Baku; although the landscape is not the most impressive, it can be really interesting for the fans of bird watching. Some guides report that the place can be full of insects during summer⁴²⁸ and that it is also common to find some snakes that many years ago escaped from an old farm in a close village where they used to produce anti venoms. One curious thing about this park is how to enter in it: as is written in the official website of the park⁴²⁹, a visitor before going there must go to a specific bank in Baku, pay the fee for the entrance that for foreigners is four manat, and after that go to the park and show the receipt and an identity document to the policemen on the gate. The reason why it is not possible to pay the fee directly at the park's entrance is not known. This park might not be the most impressive but it can be considered a good destination if inserted inside a one day tour that includes also other attractions of the Absheron Peninsula;

⁴²⁴ M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010, pp. 147-148.

⁴²⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁴²⁶ Ivi, p. 104.

⁴²⁷ Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Absheron National Park*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.eco.gov.az/en/ab-milli%20parki/>. (Accessed 14/03/2015).

⁴²⁸ Time Out, *Baku & the best of Azerbaijan*, Time Out, 1st edition, London, 2012, p. 153.

⁴²⁹ Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Absheron National Park, Payment Prices*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.eco.gov.az/en/ab-milli%20parki/odenis.php>. (Accessed 14/03/2015).

- Beaches: to quote Mark Elliott “Azerbaijan isn’t a beach paradise”⁴³⁰. The same opinion can be found also in the other guides even if the Absheron Peninsula offers a good range of equipped beaches on its Northern coast. The main locations are for sure Märdäkän and Novxani where there is the bigger number of equipped beaches, resorts, restaurants and other tourism structures. These beaches have been cleaned and the quality of the water is also reasonable. On the *Visit Azerbaijan* website there is a list of the most popular beaches with enthusiastic descriptions, prices and contacts⁴³¹. Other websites and guidebooks reports that usually these locations are attended by local people, in particular the new upper class that emerged thanks to the oil money, even the President of the Republic has a *dacha* close to Märdäkän⁴³², so these places are becoming more and more exclusive and often prices reflects this trend. In summer a trip to one of these beaches can be a good idea to go out from Baku and enjoy some sun, however it is hard that in the future there will be tourists coming in Azerbaijan just because of its beaches;
- Qala Historical Reserve: this reserve was created in 2008 in the village of Qala, in the very center of the Absheron Peninsula and it is usually one of the most recommended places to visit around Baku. It is a sort of open-air museum and features numerous artifacts and monuments that demonstrate the rich history of this territory⁴³³. In the reserve there are also many re-created houses and laboratories where sometimes there are some demonstrations⁴³⁴. Some camels and donkeys contribute to make this a perfect destination for local school’s trips but the collection of artifacts and historical ruins, even if is interesting, is not really impressive for someone that is not passionate about history and archeology. Nonetheless it is one of the most promoted locations around Baku and the Government made a good job in trying to increase its appeal as a tourism destination.

The Absheron Peninsula is for sure a place that contains a lot of tourism potential despite of its bad environmental conditions. History, nature, religion, fascinating architecture, and old traditions are all elements part of this territory. The overall development conditions here are slightly better than in the rest of the rural Azerbaijan even if roads in some places should be renewed and they can often

⁴³⁰ M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010, p. 62.

⁴³¹ Visit Azerbaijan, *Sun&Beach*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://azerbaijan.travel/en/experience/35/19?regionA=48>. (Accessed 14/03/2015).

⁴³² Time Out, *Baku & the best of Azerbaijan*, Time Out, 1st edition, London, 2012, p. 156.

⁴³³ F. Abdullayev, *Qala – History in Action*, Visions of Azerbaijan, September-October 2010, pp. 64-68. (ONLINE) Available at: http://www.visions.az/travel_tourism,216/. (14/03/2015).

⁴³⁴ Time Out, *Baku & the best of Azerbaijan*, Time Out, 1st edition, London, 2012, p. 154.

be difficult if it rains, transportations are efficient and they reach almost every corner of the peninsula but we are speaking about old, crowded and not very comfortable public buses that are not very appealing for the average tourist. Absheron's position close to Baku is an amazing advantage because there are many locations that could be considered as one day trip destinations for tourist staying in Baku. A good idea would be to create organized thematic trips like *pilgrimage destinations*, or *fire locations*, or *natural sightseeing* or *oil locations* or also *historical monuments*, during which tourists can be brought to more than one of the previously mentioned locations in order to have a broader overview on this territory. The Absheron Peninsula represents a perfect counterpart for the city of Baku because it offers some things that one cannot find in a big and modern city and because it gives an interesting view on the other side of Azerbaijan, the one that is not possible to see in the modern and fast-growing Baku.

7.3: The Southern Azerbaijan

Driving towards the South of Azerbaijan is a good way to observe the big variety of landscapes and climatic regions that characterize this country: at first one can observe the typical desert landscape that is all around the Baku, after more or less sixty kilometers the big highway becomes narrower and its conditions get a little bit worst, the landscape starts changing and it becomes progressively greener and flatter. By turning right and leaving the Caspian behind, in one hour is possible to reach some fascinating mountain locations with typical mountain weather. This is the South of Azerbaijan and it is considered the most fertile part of the country, a lot the national agricultural production comes from here. This big fertility is due to the frequent rains and as a matter of fact this is the wettest region of Azerbaijan, especially in autumn. The Talysh Mountains on the extreme South mark the border with Iran and they are really nice to visit, especially in spring. In general the landscape is less dramatic than for example in the North of Azerbaijan however this part of the country reserves some good curious attractions for tourists who want to see a lesser known part of Azerbaijan.

Coming from Baku, the first interesting location that one can visit is for sure the *Shirvan National Park*. This Park was established in 2003 and it was created mainly for the protection of the *Caucasian Gazelle*, an animal typical of this region that was in danger of extinction some years ago. Fortunately to enter in the park there is no need for paying the fee in advance in a local bank as it is for the *Absheron National Park*: in this case one can buy the ticket directly at the entrance for four

manat⁴³⁵. The park in itself looks really flat and not very exciting however it has a couple of locations that are really worth a visit, like the *Flamingo Lake*⁴³⁶ and some good beaches on the coast where there are also the remaining of a submerged village⁴³⁷. The *Lonely Planet's* guide does not even mention this park but the Mark Elliott's and the *Time Out's* ones give a lot of information about it and also about possible accommodation or camping inside the Park⁴³⁸. This place has some good potential but conditions are still not very easy for tourists, being the Park quite extended it is necessary to have a car to go around and if one does not own a car or does not rent one, the only way is to try to find a local unofficial guide with a 4WD car since there are not officially organized tours.

The main city of the Southern Region is Länkärän: it is famous mostly for the production of tea and for having many beautiful gardens. During summer and spring it is a lovely and quiet city, instead during the rest of the year is not that different from other Azerbaijani towns. Despite the enthusiastic description that one can find the official website *Visit Azerbaijan*⁴³⁹, this town has not that much to offer with the exception of a couple of curious towers, some good gardens and a *History Museum*⁴⁴⁰. Länkärän has a good range of possibilities for accommodation⁴⁴¹ and it is linked to Baku by many daily marshrutki and also by a comfortable and quite cheap night train.

Länkärän can be considered a good point of departure to explore the good-looking Talysh Mountains and in particular the village of Lerik, that is situated more or less sixty kilometers from Länkärän. This village is not an exciting place however the road that brings to it passes through some really good landscapes that are often described as one of the highlights of the region⁴⁴². Lerik is known in Azerbaijan for its big number of centenaries and particularly famous is the case of *Shirali Muslimov* who was said to be one hundred and sixty eight years old when he died in 1973⁴⁴³.

⁴³⁵ Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Shirvan National Park*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.eco.gov.az/en/shirvan/>. (Accessed 15/03/2015).

⁴³⁶ Time Out, *Baku & the best of Azerbaijan*, Time Out, 1st edition, London, 2012, p. 194.

⁴³⁷ M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010, p. 281.

⁴³⁸ Time Out, *Baku & the best of Azerbaijan*, Time Out, 1st edition, London, 2012, p. 195.

⁴³⁹ Visit Azerbaijan, *Lankaran*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://azerbaijan.travel/en/region/63-Lankaran>. (Accessed 15/03/2015).

⁴⁴⁰ C. Castagna, *Lankaran, La Patria Azerbaijaniana del tè*, Magazine Vie della Seta, Associazione Italia-Azerbaijiana, Baku, n. 2, 2014, pp. 92-93-94.

⁴⁴¹ Visit Azerbaijan, *Hotels*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://azerbaijan.travel/en/accomreg/?regionA=63&typeA=4>. (Accessed 15/03/2015).

⁴⁴² M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010, p. 279.

⁴⁴³ Time Out, *Baku & the best of Azerbaijan*, Time Out, 1st edition, London, 2012, p. 196.

A stroll around Lerik can be very pleasant and relaxing and for the more adventurous there are also some trekking paths in the mountains around. In Lerik there are not many hotels, and especially during winter they might be closed and the only possibility would be a sort of guest house called *Hussein's Canteen*, which offers simple rooms and very good homemade food for a very reasonable price. Daily marshrutki link Länkärän to Lerik, the other possibility to reach the village is to take a taxi that usually is surprisingly cheap if compared to taxi prices for example in the North of Azerbaijan.

Some kilometers North of Länkärän there is the little town of Masallı, that as well as Länkärän can be considered a good point of departure to visit the lovely Talysh Mountains. Masallı in itself has little to offer but on the road that links it to the mountain village of Yardimli there are more interesting locations. First of all, the road in itself offers some very good landscapes that are even better than the already beautiful road from Länkärän to Lerik, plus, close to this road there is also the *Masallı Istisu*, a sanatorium with a spring of hot natural water usually attended by local people that can be a nice stop on the road to Yardimli⁴⁴⁴. All along the road there are many campings, guest-houses and restaurants that in summer and spring offer a beautiful atmosphere of relax in the middle of nature⁴⁴⁵. Another interesting stop can be a lovely waterfall some kilometers after *Masallı Istisu*.

In more or less one hour by car one can arrive in Yardimli, a little village where it is worth spending some hours just to walk around and enjoy the landscape. As in Lerik there are many trekking possibilities but because of the closeness with the Iranian border, it is better to be careful and always ask information to local people that are usually really kind and happy to help. In the village there is just one hotel and even if quite little and simple it has been recently built and so is in good conditions. During winter it is usually closed so one would need to ask information to local people who might be able to call the owner of the hotel. From Yardimli, every morning some marshrutki go directly to Baku.

The Southern Azerbaijan is a really pleasant and good-looking region: its bright green landscape and its nice people represent a good base for a future development of tourism. However the South for the moment cannot really compete with the North, the dramatic landscapes of the Greater Caucasus are more appealing than the pleasant ones of the shorter Talysh Mountains and it is also

⁴⁴⁴ Visit Azerbaijan, *Masallı*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://azerbaijan.travel/en/region/65-Masallı>. (Accessed 15/03/2015).

⁴⁴⁵ M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010, pp. 288-289.

clear that the investments of the Governments in the last years were more directed to the North than to the South, we just have to think about the *Shahdağ Ski Resort* as the brightest example. In the South there is also the limitation that during winter and autumn the weather conditions can be quite prohibitive for tourists and these mountains are still not equipped for winter sports. On the other hand, an advantage of the South is that it is fairly cheaper than the North. For some visitors who come to Azerbaijan for a period of ten days or two weeks it would probably be more memorable to go to the North or to go to Shāki and Lahıc, the South for the moment can be considered more a tourism destination for local people or for foreign workers that live in Azerbaijan. It is one of the most pleasant parts of the country and even if it lacks some proper tourism structures, it is worth paying a visit there to see another different aspect of the country.

7.4: Gänjä and its surroundings

The central part of Azerbaijan is characterized by the big and extended plain that there is between the two mountain ranges of the Greater and the Lesser Caucasus. The landscape in itself does not have the beauties of the North or the green vegetation of the South and it can be monotonous. Even if these lands are full of history, what remains of this history is really not that much, a good example is the town of Bärda that had a good importance during the Arab domination⁴⁴⁶ but where today the remaining of that past glory are really not a lot: there is a sort of tower mausoleum that now is under restoration and there are also the ruins of an old Arab bridge⁴⁴⁷, but after having visited them Bärda has a little more to offer to a tourist. In general, from the tourism point of view, in this region the potential is limited to some locations like the mountains close to Ganja or the resorts in Naftalan, but we are speaking about isolated and single cases. Moreover we have to add the fact that the Southern border of this region is with the occupied zone so even if it is not dangerous because it is almost impossible to reach the frontline without being stopped by the military and even if in the last years even the possibility of hassles by the police forces has been reducing, the tourism appeal of this region is still affected by the geopolitical situation of the Southern Caucasus.

A curious attraction that I want to mention because it has some tourism appeal is situated in the town of Yevlax, more or less sixty kilometers from Ganja. In this really not memorable town, hidden in a sort of rubbish dump close to some abandoned factories, there is a big bisected statue of

⁴⁴⁶ C. Frappi, *Azerbaijan, Crocevia del Caucaso*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012, p. 36.

⁴⁴⁷ M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010, pp. 248-249-250.

Lenin that has probably been moved here after the collapse of the Soviet Union⁴⁴⁸. The overall scene, of this broken Lenin surrounded by trash is obviously so full of possible meanings and metaphors that a quick stop here could be a very good experience.

Another interesting location in this region is represented by the little town of Naftalan. As the name says this city is known for its oil, but in this case oil is not used for energy purposes but for curative ones. As a matter of fact, the curative properties of the oil of Naftalan have been known since the ancient times and even Marco Polo, who never visited Azerbaijan but who passed close by, is known to have written some lines about them⁴⁴⁹. Also during the Soviet times this town was well known throughout the Union, especially during the '80s. Unfortunately the flux of visitors stopped for a period during the war with Armenia and many were the refugees who arrived here and who still live here⁴⁵⁰. However today many investments from the government are trying to bring Naftalan back to its past popularity, there are at least five resorts and sanatoriums that offer complete packages of accommodation, food and oil treatments⁴⁵¹. The fact of being reasonably close to Gänjä make this destination relatively easy to reach from Baku, we can say that its particular specialization and also its growing popularity makes it an appealing tourism destination both for locals and foreigners⁴⁵². The case of Naftalan can be considered very similar to the one of the *Shahdag Ski Resort*, where massive investments have been done to create a tourism attraction. In the Naftalan's case this might be less spectacular and clear because it was a location that was already famous in the past and the resorts were just restored and not built ex-novo, but the concept behind it is exactly the same, and also the tourism level to which it is directed, a medium-high level, is the same.

The main city of this region is Gänjä that with its 316.300 inhabitants⁴⁵³ is the second city of Azerbaijan. Like many other places in Azerbaijan it has a very long and fascinating story, but the remaining of this history today is sadly few. The city has been repeatedly destroyed during its history by invaders or also by earthquakes and because of this most of its ancient buildings are not

⁴⁴⁸ Time Out, *Baku & the best of Azerbaijan*, Time Out, 1st edition, London, 2012, p. 161.

⁴⁴⁹ M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010, pp. 251-252.

⁴⁵⁰ M. Longano, *L'altra Faccia del Petrolio: Naftalan*, Magazine Vie della Seta, Associazione Italia-Azerbaijan, Baku, n. 2, 2014, pp. 96-97.

⁴⁵¹ Visit Azerbaijan, *Hotels*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://azerbaijan.travel/en/accomreg/?regionA=58&typeA=4>. (30/03/2015).

⁴⁵² Visit Azerbaijan, *Naftalan*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://azerbaijan.travel/en/region/58-Naftalan>. (30/03/2015).

⁴⁵³, Ivi, p. 20.

there anymore. Gänjä was also the capital of the *Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan* that lasted from 1918 to 1920⁴⁵⁴, but the city is mainly known in Azerbaijan for being the hometown of a poet that is considered one of the main contributors to the national cultural heritage, *Nizami Gänjävi* (1141-1209)⁴⁵⁵. This is the reason why one of the most advertised tourism attractions in town is the *Nizami Mausoleum*, a few kilometers from the city center: here there is a big decorated tower that is the resting place of the poet. Around the tower there are many sculptures representing some scenes of Nizami's poems. The site is worth a visit but not really as much impressive as is often shown in pictures⁴⁵⁶. In the centre of Gänjä it is possible to have a nice stroll through the Soviet period main square, where there are a couple of brand new fountains with a statue of Heydar Aliyev. In this square there are also a very interesting Abbas mosque that belongs to the 17th century and has a couple of really photogenic minarets, a few meters from the mosque there are also the brick domes of a fascinating hammam.

Around the city there are some old Albanian or Russian Orthodox churches, most of them are now used as theaters and they are interesting to see from outside. A particular one is situated a couple of kilometers from the city center, it is an old Armenian church and this is probably the reason why today is totally abandoned and in ruins but nonetheless interesting to visit. Another curious thing to see in Gänjä is the so-called bottle house: this is a house that has been fully decorated with glass bottles and mosaics; the author was the inhabitant of the house, who did that to commemorate his brother who never came back from WWII⁴⁵⁷. The accommodation possibilities in Gänjä are surprisingly good, there are many hotels with reasonable prices and the quality is usually all right. The most famous hotel is probably the *Gänjä Hotel*, situated on the main square, right in front of the City Hall: it is placed in an old Soviet-style building but it is clean and it has all the basic comforts of a normal hotel⁴⁵⁸. About transportations, Gänjä has its own *Gänjä International Airport* that has direct flights to Baku, Istanbul and Moscow⁴⁵⁹, there are also many daily buses or marshrutki that leave from the main *Yeni Avtoqazal*, four kilometers from the city center and that

⁴⁵⁴ A. Ferrari, *Breve Storia del Caucaso*, Carocci Editore, Roma, 2007, pp. 90-91-92.

⁴⁵⁵ C. Frappi, *Azerbaigian, Crocevia del Caucaso*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012, p. 25.

⁴⁵⁶ Visit Azerbaijan, *Gänjä*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://azerbaijan.travel/en/region/57-Gänjä>. (Accessed 29/03/2015).

⁴⁵⁷ Time Out, *Baku & the best of Azerbaijan*, Time Out, 1st edition, London, 2012, p. 163.

⁴⁵⁸ Visit Azerbaijan, *Hotels*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://azerbaijan.travel/en/accomreg/?regionA=57&typeA=4>. (Accessed 29/03/2015).

⁴⁵⁹ Visit Azerbaijan, *Gänjä*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://azerbaijan.travel/en/region/57-Gänjä>. (Accessed 29/03/2015).

reach many other destinations in the region. From Baku it is also possible to take the comfortable and reasonably cheap night train.

Generally speaking Gänjä has some things that are worth seeing but we cannot say that it should be considered as a first choice possibility for trips of two or three days from Baku. It is true that it is a city full of history and culture but the remaining of these things unfortunately are not that much and probably the enthusiastic terms with which the city is described in the official website *Visit Azerbaijan*⁴⁶⁰ are a bit exaggerated, also if compared with the more realistic descriptions and opinions reported in the main guidebooks. Another problem is that the city is relatively close to the occupied zone; all the main guidebooks say that because of this, foreigners can be asked some questions by over-zealous policemen about the purpose of their visit and also to take too many pictures can catch the attention of local authorities⁴⁶¹. During my visit in Gänjä in March 2015 I did not have any problem in this sense so, considering that all of the main guidebooks have been published some years ago, it is likely that the situation is slowly getting better and police forces are getting more used to the presence of foreigners around the city. All in all Gänjä is a pleasant and quiet city and it can be recommended to visit it if for example someone is visiting the entire region or it can be considered a good stop on the way to Georgia, but it is hard to say that Gänjä alone can be considered a tourism destination because its potential is frankly limited.

What could help the development of tourism in Gänjä are the mountains of the Lesser Caucasus, that are very close from the city and that are really beautiful to see. Unfortunately they are even closer to the occupied zone so first of all their tourism appeal is drastically reduced by this fact and secondly it is even more difficult for a foreigner to go around without any special permission because policemen and militaries can get really suspicious.

A very interesting village that is located fifteen minutes from Gänjä and where still there are no particular problems for foreigners is Göl Göl Town, previously known as Xanlar: this little village was founded by some German colonists in 1819⁴⁶² and this German heritage is still clear by the style of many houses that have some very beautiful wood decorated facades. Among these houses the most interesting one is probably Viktor Klein's house: Viktor Klein was the last German man

⁴⁶⁰ Ibidem.

⁴⁶¹ M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010, p. 273.

⁴⁶² Visit Azerbaijan, *Goygol*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://azerbaijan.travel/en/region/60-Goygol>. (Accessed 30/03/2015).

who lived here and he died in 2007⁴⁶³, since his death the keys of his house have been held by his friend Fikret Ismailov, an eighty one years old energetic man that lives close by and that is occasionally happy to accompany tourists to visit the house that inside has an incredible collection of objects and furniture that clearly belongs to the 19th century. When I visited the village, I personally managed to meet Fikret Ismailov, who was very nice and kind, he showed me his house, he answered to all my questions and in the end he brought me to Viktor Klein's house, where today all objects have been catalogued because in the next future they will probably open a museum right in the house. This museum could probably become one of the main attractions of the region because the objects and the furniture are really a lot, moreover the fact of finding a German village in the middle of the Caucasus is for sure something original with a lot of tourism appeal. Another very interesting building is also the Lutheran church in the center of the town that is now used as a museum⁴⁶⁴. This village has the potential for becoming a good one day trip from Gänjä and if the museum will be completed it will add a very interesting attraction to a place that is already interesting in itself.

From Göl Göl Town it is possible to rent a taxi to visit some of the other villages around the area, it is also quite popular among locals, especially people from Gänjä, to come here to relax in one of the numerous restaurants or tea houses placed in the lovely woods and forests, where you can also have a wonderful view of the mountains, especially of the weird shaped mount *Kyapaz*.

One of the main highlights of the region seems to be the *Goygyol National Park*⁴⁶⁵, mentioned in all the main guidebooks and also in the official website *Visit Azerbaijan*⁴⁶⁶. There are no information about how to access the National Park on the website of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources and usually this means that is closed for civilians and in this case it would be also understandable because the lake is really close to the frontline. Information about this topic are not a lot, on the official website *Visit Azerbaijan* the lake is very well described as a good tourism destination and there is no mention about its proximity with the frontline⁴⁶⁷, but this is normal if we think that on this website there are even descriptions of cities and regions that are now in the

⁴⁶³ M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010, pp. 259-260.

⁴⁶⁴ Visit Azerbaijan, *Goygol*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://azerbaijan.travel/en/region/60-Goygol>. (Accessed 30/03/2015).

⁴⁶⁵ Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Goygyol National Park*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.eco.gov.az/en/goy-gol/>. (Accessed 29/03/2015).

⁴⁶⁶ Visit Azerbaijan, *Gänjä*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://azerbaijan.travel/en/region/57-Gänjä>. (Accessed 29/03/2015).

⁴⁶⁷ Ibidem.

occupied region of Nagorno-Karabakh. I received some unofficial information by local people in Göl Göl Town according to which the park is open in summer. I was also shown some pictures taken by a person (probably without permission) who has been there in March 2015. From the pictures, taken from the shores of the lake, it was possible to see the two frontlines so even if, according to the pictures it is possible to find on the internet, the Göy Göl Lake is an amazing location with wonderful landscapes and a big tourism potential, we cannot consider it a safe or even appealing tourism destination for the moment.

As we said in the beginning the tourism potential of the central part of Azerbaijan is not the highest in the country, there are some isolated cases like Naftalan, Göl Göl Town and the *Goygyol National Park*, but as we saw we are speaking about single cases and the last one is even not accessible. The real potential of this region is in the mountains of the Lesser Caucasus and on its characteristic villages and landscapes, tourism here would be easy to promote and to develop but the proximity of this area with the frontline makes it hard to promote and maybe national authorities do not even want to promote it since they are usually quite concerned about foreigners going around these “sensible” parts of the country.

7.5: The Nakhchivan Region

When looking at a map of Azerbaijan, the attention is soon caught by a detached part of its territory: the official name of this territory is Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic⁴⁶⁸, it has a population of 445000 people, a territory of 5502 square kilometers and it shares a big part of its borders with Iran and Armenia, having also a short eleven kilometers long border with Turkey⁴⁶⁹. This territory is very well considered among the population of Azerbaijan, also because it is the birthplace of the former and beloved President Heydar Aliyev.

Like in many other territories in the Caucasus, the first signs of human presence in Nakhchivan are quite far in history, probably five thousand years ago⁴⁷⁰. Throughout history the region knew almost the same invasions and troubles of the surrounding territories and it has always been disputed between different populations. Historically the people of this territory have always been quite

⁴⁶⁸ Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, *Home Page*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.nakhchivan.az/portal-en/index-22.htm>. (Accessed 16/03/2015).

⁴⁶⁹ Ibidem.

⁴⁷⁰ Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, *The History*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.nakhchivan.az/portal-en/tarix.htm>. (Accessed 16/03/2015).

mixed, with also an important Armenian component⁴⁷¹ and for Azerbaijan it has always been considered important because it is the only land connection between Azerbaijan and Turkey. The region was officially given to Azerbaijan by the Soviet authorities during the 1920s, together with the Nagorno-Karabakh Region, even if they had both the status of autonomous province. However Nakhchivan was separated from Azerbaijan by the territory of Zangezur that was given to Armenia⁴⁷². This region managed to preserve its status of autonomy, according to the Constitution of Azerbaijan approved in 1995 the region has its own Constitution, a Parliament of forty five deputies and its own authority that is the *Supreme Official*, who together with the President of the Azerbaijan Republic can appoint the heads of the local administrations inside the region⁴⁷³.

For a tourist the options to reach this region are quite limited. Nakhchivan City, the capital city of the region, has its own airport but it is hard to find information about it, according to some websites it has direct flights only to Baku, Gänjä, Istanbul and Moscow but the easiest way to get information about this topic is to contact *Azal*, the Azerbaijan national air company⁴⁷⁴. I personally sent an e-mail to their office asking for information about flights to Nakhchivan and they answered me that from Baku there are four flights everyday to Nakhchivan City, the price for foreigners is seventy manat each way and the ticket must be bought in person in one of the company's office one month before. From outside Azerbaijan it is possible to find flights to Nakhchivan through the main specialized websites like *Sky Scanner*⁴⁷⁵, *eDreams*⁴⁷⁶ or also through the *Turkish Airlines* website⁴⁷⁷. The other two options to reach this region are via Turkey or via Iran, but the Iranian option can be more difficult for European and American citizens because they need a visa to enter in Iran. Obviously nobody can cross the border with Armenia.

All guidebooks and many websites say that because of these problems of accessibility, the number of foreigners that visit Nakhchivan is still reduced and local police forces can be very suspicious

⁴⁷¹ A. Ferrari, *Breve Storia del Caucaso*, Carocci Editore, Roma, 2007, pp. 49, 101.

⁴⁷² C. King, *The Ghost of Freedom, a history of the Caucasus*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2008, p. 188.

⁴⁷³ Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, *Ruling Structure*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.nakhchivan.az/portal-en/idar-qurul.htm>. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

⁴⁷⁴ *Azal, Home*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.azal.az/>. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

⁴⁷⁵ *Sky Scanner, Home*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.skyscanner.it/>. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

⁴⁷⁶ *eDreams, Home*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: http://www.edreams.it/travel/?mktportal=google-brand&mobileDomainIgnore=0&ipLookupIgnore=0&awsearchcpc=1&gclid=CjwKEAjwoZ-oBRCAjZqs96qCmzgSJADnWCv8UuZXS5FTpA9ghoPvejgCkPBnna6d2lCpM3kLP1osRoCeOjw_wcB. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

⁴⁷⁷ *Turkish Airlines, Home*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.turkishairlines.com/>. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

and ask questions to tourists about their reasons to travel in Nakhchivan. It is reported that tourists must register in every city in which they arrive and if they use a taxi, the driver must also register which way he takes and which stops he makes⁴⁷⁸. On the official website *Visit Azerbaijan* there is some information about the region, its main attractions and also a list of hotels but there is no information about how to reach Nakhchivan⁴⁷⁹, same story in the official website of the Autonomous Republic, where there are even more information dedicated to museums, culture, nature, hotels and restaurants⁴⁸⁰, but not information about transportations.

Nakhchivan City in itself has some interesting attractions, a big number of museums, some pleasant gardens and a photogenic bazaar but the highlight is for sure the *Momime Khatum* mausoleum, a tower twenty five meters tall that dates back to 1186⁴⁸¹ and that is definitely worth a visit. The city also offers some accommodation possibilities⁴⁸² but the most celebrated is the *Hotel Duzdag*, built close to a very old underground salt deposit that since the Soviet period was used as a sanatorium for people with lungs problems. Still today some people come here to cure their health problems spending the night inside the old salt mine⁴⁸³.

Nakhchivan City is a pleasant location to see but according to the information available the main attraction of the region lays in the impressive landscape outside of the city in particular in the South: all the main guidebooks suggest to rent a taxi and go in the Southern part⁴⁸⁴, towards the city of Ordubad, and stop on the way to see the old ruins of the *Alinca Castle* where there is also a beautiful view of *Ilan Dağ*, a dramatic peak that can be seen also from Nakhchivan City. The rest of the landscape on the way to Ordubad is said to be almost a rocky desert, with some oasis here and there. This city itself can represent a good idea for a day trip from Nakhchivan City because it has some historical sites to see and because of the particularly peaceful atmosphere, however to stop

⁴⁷⁸ Time Out, *Baku & the best of Azerbaijan*, Time Out, 1st edition, London, 2012, p. 180.

⁴⁷⁹ Visit Azerbaijan, *Nakhchivan*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.turkishairlines.com/>. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

⁴⁸⁰ Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, *Tourism*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.nakhchivan.az/portal-en/turizm.htm>. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

⁴⁸¹ Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, *Historical Monuments*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.nakhchivan.az/portal-en/tarx-abideler.htm>. (Accessed 18/03/2015).

⁴⁸² Visit Azerbaijan, *Hotels*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.nakhchivan.az/portal-en/tarx-abideler.htm>. (Accessed 18/03/2015).

⁴⁸³ Visit Azerbaijan, *Nature*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://azerbaijan.travel/en/experience/161/63?regionA=70>. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

⁴⁸⁴ M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010, p. 311.

here for the night might be difficult because, according to the information available, there are no hotels or other accommodation options⁴⁸⁵, the closest possibilities are back in the city of Julfa, halfway between Ordubad and Nakhchivan City, but all guidebooks say that this city has nothing worth to visit if one does not have a visa for Iran. Police forces are quite paranoid and a foreigner might risk long and annoying inquisitions, some guides even suggest crossing the border and find a hotel on the Iranian side where policemen are by far less paranoid instead of spending the night in Julfa⁴⁸⁶. About the Northern part of Nakhchivan, basically all guidebooks and websites say that is good to visit if one is heading to the border with Turkey, but if one has to choose between going South or going North, the best choice is for sure South. Apparently there are also some interesting attractions close to the border with Armenia like the Batabat Lake⁴⁸⁷, but getting there might be difficult if not impossible for tourists without a special permission from the local Ministry of Tourism.

All in all we can say that Nakhchivan has some potential for attracting tourists, it has many historical sites, impressive landscapes, people are hospitable and there are some tourism structures, even if almost just in the capital. However the evident difficulties of getting there and also the potential risk of having to deal with hassles from the local police forces are a very big deterrent for every kind of potential visitor. A person might be interested to come here with an organized trip by a local agency that has some contacts with local authorities, but this might be quite expensive. Another group of potential tourists are the foreign people working in Azerbaijan, who usually have more time to visit also the rest of the country and also have a temporary permission of stay in Azerbaijan that might be more effective than just a thirty days visa in the passport when it comes to convince the policemen that you are not a spy. For independent travelers that just come to Azerbaijan for a relative short holiday, Nakhchivan still represents a choice for the most adventurous and the general impression is that the national government is not even interested in promoting tourism there, the position of this region is very delicate and to have many foreigners walking around it is probably considered a risk for the national security, a risk that the government is still not willing to take.

⁴⁸⁵ Time Out, *Baku & the best of Azerbaijan*, Time Out, 1st edition, London, 2012, p. 184.

⁴⁸⁶ M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010, p. 312.

⁴⁸⁷ Visit Azerbaijan, *Nature*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://azerbaijan.travel/en/experience/161/63?regionA=70>. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

CHAPTER EIGHT

OTHER POTENTIAL SOURCES OF TOURISM INTEREST

8.1: About the other potential sources of tourism interest

In this chapter we want to analyze in a more detailed way some indirect sources of tourism interest. In the last two chapters we mainly described potential tourism locations, their attractions and potentialities, but there are also some other issues for which Azerbaijan is known around the world. We are speaking about the *Mugham* for example, the national music of Azerbaijan, or about the traditional food that has an interesting mixture of different influences from the other countries of the region. Azerbaijan is also known worldwide for its carpets and for the production of caviar, but it has also some interesting pieces of theater and literature. In this chapter we will discuss about some of these aspects and we will try to understand how much they can represent a tourist attraction factor.

8.2: *Mugham, the national music*

Mugham is unanimously considered the national traditional music of Azerbaijan. Its importance for the whole country is also testified by the presence on the one qəpik coin and on the one manat note, of the three main traditional instruments used to play it. These instruments are the *daf*, a sort of frame drums played with the hands, the *kermancha*, a bowed string instrument similar to a banjo but played with a bow and the *tar*, a sort of long lute⁴⁸⁸ but there are also other instruments that can be used. *Mugham* can be seen as a good reflection of the complicated history of Azerbaijan because it shares some features with Iraqi and also Persian traditional music and also because it has always been part of Azerbaijani history⁴⁸⁹. Still today a big part of *mugham* is based on improvisation and it is basically a sort of fusion between the narration of traditional stories and music, this kind of music cannot be transcribed and this is why it is transmitted orally from teachers to students⁴⁹⁰.

⁴⁸⁸ UNESCO, *Azerbaijani Mugham*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at:

<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00011&RL=00039>. (Accessed 31/03/2015).

⁴⁸⁹ Ibidem.

⁴⁹⁰ C. Frappi, *Azerbaijani, Crocevia del Caucaso*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012, pp. 30-31.

In 2003 *mugham* was inscribed in the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity of UNESCO⁴⁹¹ and as a result, some years later, in 2008 thanks to the initiative of Azerbaijan's First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva and the funding of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation⁴⁹², it was built the *International Mugham Center of Azerbaijan*. This fascinating building is situated on the Boulevard and it contains a concert hall, a recording studio and a precious collection of old traditional instruments. It is dedicated to the organization of events, conferences and concerts about the preservation and the promotion of *mugham* but also about music in general. Every year in March, in the center is organized the *International Mugham Festival*⁴⁹³, that arrived in 2015 to its 4th edition and who saw the participation of many important international artists.

Today *mugham* is still appreciated among the population, especially for occasions like weddings or festivities, like *Novruz*. In the last decades there has also been an interesting experiment that was meant to fuse *mugham* with jazz, an idea attributed to Vagif Mustafazadeh whose success inspired his daughter, Aziza in continuing to develop that genre⁴⁹⁴ that is still very popular, considering that also jazz is very appreciated in Azerbaijan. As a matter of fact it can be considered the second most popular music in the country as is testified also by the existence of the *Baku Jazz Center*⁴⁹⁵.

Unfortunately for foreigners, not understanding the lyrics of the songs does not allow them to totally appreciate the beauties of this kind of music, nonetheless it is still something peculiar of the country and its particular atmospheres and sounds totally different from all European traditions give a sort of exoticism that can be very appealing if placed in the right situations. It is hard to say that *mugham* alone can attract tourists however it can represent a secondary attraction, a curiosity that could work really well as a frame for a traditional dinner or for a traditional music and dancing show organized for tourists.

⁴⁹¹ UNESCO, *Azerbaijani Mugham*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at:

<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00011&RL=00039>. (Accessed 31/03/2015).

⁴⁹² S. Agayeva, *Mugham, a national heritage of Azerbaijan, is a pearl of the world music art: Mehriban Aliyeva*, Trend.az, November 2009, Baku. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/1578294.html>. (Accessed 31/03/2015).

⁴⁹³ Mugam.az, *Home*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.mugam.az/>. (Accessed 31/03/2015).

⁴⁹⁴ A. Mustafa Zadeh, *Biography*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.azizamustafazadeh.de/>. (Accessed 31/03/2015).

⁴⁹⁵ Baku Jazz Center, *Home*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://jazzcenter.jazz.az/>. (Accessed 31/03/2015).

8.3: The Azerbaijani cuisine

For being a relatively little country, the national cuisine of Azerbaijan offers a bigger variety of products and dishes that one would expect. This big variety has been given mainly by two factors, the first one is the presence of many different climatic zones that obviously have developed several traditions with many regional products and the second one is the influence of the neighboring cultures that arrived in Azerbaijan during the last centuries, especially Russian, Iranian and Turkish.

Being a Muslim country, pork meat is not part of the traditional cuisine, even if in Baku is quite easy to find restaurants that serve it, however the traditional cuisine is mainly based on mutton, and poultry, with also some dishes made with beef⁴⁹⁶. These are often served with rice that is one of the other most traditional foods and that exists in many varieties, especially famous is the type produced in the city of Länkärän⁴⁹⁷. Also very common is the *plov*, pilaf rice usually served with meat, dried fruit and nuts but that exists in many different versions. *Dolmas* are also considered part of the traditional cuisine and they are basically little dumplings of lamb meat with some vegetables and spices usually wrapped in vine leaves⁴⁹⁸.

Soups are also very common and tasty, very common is the lentil soup and also the Russian *borshch*. Basic soups made with mutton, onions, potatoes and other spices are very common in the villages of the mountains of the Greater Caucasus and are likely to be served to guests that stay in local houses for the night. A very particular soup-like dish is *piti*: a sort of soup based on mutton and cooked in a close clay pot. The proper way to eat it is to soak the soup in the dish with some bread and eat the result as a first course, after that, eat the meat and the vegetables as a second course. It is very common in the Southern Region, especially in the Talysh Mountains and also in Shäki⁴⁹⁹.

Another very common food is *döner*. In its sandwich version it is one of the most common street foods among the local population but in reality there is plenty of versions of it, the most common are *shish kebab* and *lüle kebab*. In general, barbecue is an all country passion and is generally known with the name of *shashlyk*, that generally means every kind of meat, grilled with some spices

⁴⁹⁶ Visit Azerbaijan, *10 reasons to visit Azerbaijan*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://azerbaijan.travel/en/facts/148/>. (Accessed 01/04/2015).

⁴⁹⁷ C. Castagna, *Lankaran, La Patria Azerbaijaniana del tè*, Magazine Vie della Seta, Associazione Italia-Azerbaijan, Baku, n. 2, 2014, pp. 92-93-94.

⁴⁹⁸ M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010, p. 22.

⁴⁹⁹ J. Noble, M. Kohn, D. Systemans, *Georgia, Armenia & Azerbaijan*, Lonely Planet, 4th edition, 2012, p. 242.

and served with some fresh vegetables, in particular tomatoes, cucumbers and a big amount of herbs like parsley, coriander, dill and spring onions that are supposed to be eaten without any special condiments⁵⁰⁰ and that usually give an incredibly good aspect to every Azerbaijani table. A really good meat dish is *sadj*, usually served in an iron dish with some hot embers under it to keep the meat warm.

In general fruits and vegetables have really a high quality in Azerbaijan, they do not look perfect and most of them present some imperfections and might not be so appealing for a Western visitor used to perfectly shaped industrial products, however the taste is usually really good, especially the one of the products that is possible to find in the local bazaars. The variety of fruits and vegetables that is possible to buy seasonally does not have anything to envy to any other country; pomegranates, apples, walnuts and watermelons are just the best examples and in the right season they are really simply delicious⁵⁰¹. There are also many spices that are usually really appreciated, like saffron, or the most traditional *sumakh*, used especially for *qutabs* and that has a sort of lemony taste⁵⁰². *Qutabs*, half-moon pan-cakes filled with meat or spinaches, together with *pirozhi*, sort of fried doughnuts stuffed with potatoes, are also very common snacks or street foods.

In the Muslim culture, bread is considered holy and Azerbaijan in this is not an exception. There are some basic types of bread that one can find almost everywhere in the country and traditionally bread cannot be thrown away like all the other rubbish. This is why is not rare to see some plastic bags full of bread hanging from the trees and not only in the countryside but even in Baku⁵⁰³.

Speaking about sweets, the most common one is for sure *paxlava*, very similar to the many versions that are possible to find in many of the territories that were once under the control of the Ottoman Empire. Very famous throughout Azerbaijan is the version typical of Shäki, that is called *halva* and that has some peculiarities that make it a unique type of *paxlava* that is possible to find just in Azerbaijan⁵⁰⁴.

Another food for which Azerbaijan is known worldwide is caviar. There are mainly five species of sturgeons from which one can obtain caviar, that in the end are just the eggs of this fish. The most expensive and rare is the one from the *beluga* that is characterized for living as long as humans and

⁵⁰⁰ Time Out, *Baku & the best of Azerbaijan*, Time Out, 1st edition, London, 2012, p. 36.

⁵⁰¹ M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010, p. 25.

⁵⁰² Time Out, *Baku & the best of Azerbaijan*, Time Out, 1st edition, London, 2012, p. 35.

⁵⁰³ M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010, pp. 24-25.

⁵⁰⁴ Ivi, p. 25.

for not being able to reproduce before the age of twenty, this is why today the population of these animals is in danger of extinction and the government is in control of the production and of the exportations of caviar. Exportations in particular are really strict and they cannot be more than 125g per person. This increasing difficulty in finding this particular type of caviar is reflected in its price that increased of more than ten times in the last twenty years⁵⁰⁵.

About drinks, tea still remains the most common one and the main symbol of hospitality. Travelling around Azerbaijan usually means to be offered a ridiculous amount of tea almost by everyone. When entering in a local house or even when going to a restaurant in the rural parts of Azerbaijan, tea is often served without even asking to the guest. Traditionally people put a slice of lemon and some sugar in their teas, and especially in the mountains, the sugar is served in cubes and people just dip them briefly in their glasses before putting them in their mouths and drinking a sip of tea. As an alternative to sugar, usually one can have some sort of jams, called *murabbasi*⁵⁰⁶.

Despite of being a Muslim country, in Azerbaijan alcohol is widely consumed without any particular restrictions, particularly wine and vodka. Some decent wines and beers are even produced inside the country and noticeable is the locally produced pomegranate wine⁵⁰⁷. A good way to exploit this local wine production would be to organize some *wine tasting tours*, something that is already very common among tourists in Georgia, where some agencies organize these trips to a wine production place where tourist can taste different types of wines and also buy them.

About other international cuisines, in Baku there is a surprising variety of different restaurants: Italian, Georgian, Chinese, Japanese, German, Mexican, Ukrainian and Turkish are some of them but outside Baku it is very unlikely to find other restaurants with international dishes.

As we saw, Azerbaijan managed to maintain its own particular cuisine traditions and we can say without any doubts that this can become a really interesting tourism attraction. There are many European countries where the national cuisine cannot compete with the one of Azerbaijan, for example in the UK, or in Ireland and also in all the countries of the Baltic Region the variety, and also the quality, of the products is not so extended like in Azerbaijan and this factor can really become an important one for the development of tourism. To this we have to add the fact that eating has always been considered an act of hospitality, and as we saw the host is very well considered and

⁵⁰⁵ Time Out, *Baku & the best of Azerbaijan*, Time Out, 1st edition, London, 2012, p. 39.

⁵⁰⁶ M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010, p. 27.

⁵⁰⁷ Time Out, *Baku & the best of Azerbaijan*, Time Out, 1st edition, London, 2012, pp. 38-39.

well treated in Azerbaijan⁵⁰⁸. Food can become a way through which this hospitality is shown to tourists that at the same time can taste some delicacies that it could be really hard to find outside Azerbaijan.

8.4: The art of carpet making

Carpet making is probably the most traditional and famous Azerbaijani applied art. Still today carpets are widely used to decorate the floors and the walls of the houses and they have a particular importance in the local culture, they are considered more than everyday objects and every type of carpet is used for a different purpose. Carpets are also considered as some of the best souvenirs that one can bring from Azerbaijan.

According to some historical researches the first signs of carpet making in these territories date back between the end of the 2nd and the beginning of the 1st millennium BC⁵⁰⁹. Throughout the history of Azerbaijan it is possible to find references to carpets and to the high development of the carpet making techniques that here was reached. Obviously there are different techniques, styles and schools and these last ones usually bring the names of the regions from where they come from⁵¹⁰. For example geometric patterns are typical of Quba and Shirvan, the paisley-shaped motif related to Zoroastrianism can usually be found in the carpets from Baku and a large motif that is similar to the number two is typical of the Karabakh Region⁵¹¹.

This particular art of carpet weaving is considered so precious and valuable that in 2010 it has been inscribed in the List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity⁵¹², exactly like the *mugham* music. Probably also because of this achievement, in 2014 the already existing *Azerbaijan State Museum of Carpet and Folk Applied Arts* has been moved to a new futuristic building that has the shape of a rolled carpet and that is situated on the Baku Boulevard⁵¹³. The museum in itself is very

⁵⁰⁸ C. Frappi, *Azerbaijani, Crocevia del Caucaso*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012, p. 32.

⁵⁰⁹ Azerbaijan Carpet Museum, *The Development of Carpet Weaving in Azerbaijan*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.azcarpetmuseum.az/001.html>. (Accessed 01/04/2015).

⁵¹⁰ Azerbaijan.com, *About Carpet*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: http://www.azerbaijans.com/content_184_en.html. (Accessed 02/04/2015).

⁵¹¹ Time Out, *Baku & the best of Azerbaijan*, Time Out, 1st edition, London, 2012, pp. 138-139.

⁵¹² UNESCO, *Traditional art of Azerbaijani carpet weaving in the Republic of Azerbaijan*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/RL/00389>. (Accessed 02/04/2015).

⁵¹³ Visit Azerbaijan, *Museums*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://azerbaijan.travel/en/culture-life/15/40?regionA=47>. (Accessed 02/04/2015).

interesting and it gives to the visitor the opportunity to learn more about this complicated art and to admire some good examples of antique and precious carpets.

As we said carpets are probably some of the most popular souvenirs that one can bring from Azerbaijan. In Baku, especially in the Old City, there are many shops that are specialized in carpets, while outside Baku one would probably need to go directly to a local carpet laboratory⁵¹⁴ to buy a carpet. However the rules for the exportation of carpets require a specific certificate for all the carpets bigger than one square meter. This certificate can usually be done by the seller as an extra cost⁵¹⁵. To export carpets that are considered “antique” seems for the moment to be forbidden by the local authorities^{516 517}.

As is testified by the new museum and by the big number of sellers in Baku, the promotion of carpets as a tourism resource is already on its way, however more could be done; for example it would be a good idea to organize trips to the carpet laboratories where tourists could see all the procedure of the carpet making and at the same time see the artisans in the process of making them. This at the moment can be done in some places around the country where there are carpet laboratories but these are not organized trips promoted as tourism attractions by some tourism agencies, if one wants to visit these laboratories it must be a personal initiative. As in many other cases in Azerbaijan, some things have been done for the promotion of carpets, it would be necessary just to make something more in order to create the possibilities for a bigger development of the tourism appeal related to this ancient form of applied art, that in itself has some good potential even for people who are not passionate or specialized in carpets. It is an art that owns some exoticism and some fascination especially for people from the Western countries and this is exactly the reason why a good promotion of it would be for sure a good investment.

8.5: The modern architecture

As one can imagine, this particular potential attraction regards just the city of Baku. We already spoke about the city and its main attractions for tourists however we did not really focus on the importance that the new buildings are having for the promotion of the city. As we said the logic that is seemed to have been adopted by the government is to create a sort of “Dubai of the Caucasus”, a

⁵¹⁴ Time Out, *Baku & the best of Azerbaijan*, Time Out, 1st edition, London, 2012, pp. 138-139.

⁵¹⁵ Ibidem.

⁵¹⁶ Viaggiare Sicuri, *Azerbaijan*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.viaggiaresicuri.it/?azerbaijan>. (Accessed 02/04/2015).

⁵¹⁷ M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010, p. 60.

city full of brand new buildings that usually have innovative design and memorable shapes that can become real tourism destinations.

Some results of this strategy have already been completed, one example for all are the *Flame Towers*, with their unique shape and their strategic position that dominates the bay of Baku. Other good examples can be the new *Socar Tower*, that is now about to be finished, the fascinating *Heydar Aliyev Center*⁵¹⁸, the *Baku National Stadium* and some of the buildings built all along the boulevard like the shopping mall *Park Bulvar*⁵¹⁹, the *National Flag Square*⁵²⁰ where there is one of the tallest flagpoles in the world and also the *Baku Crystal Hall*⁵²¹ that hosted the contest *Eurovision 2012*, the *Baku Ferris Wheel*, the *International Mugham Center of Azerbaijan* and the already mentioned building of the *Azerbaijan State Museum of Carpet and Folk Applied Arts*. The last impressive building that have been concluded is the *Heydar Mosque* that opened in the last days of 2014 in Baku and that with its 4 tall minarets and its spectacular façade is for sure an interesting building to see⁵²².

In the future more of these spectacular new buildings will come, projects like the *Baku White City*⁵²³ and the *Khazar Islands*⁵²⁴ are already in the making and some more will probably follow in the next years. All this buildings are responding to one of the main problems that Baku used to have: the lack of an internationally known and famous landmark. Something as the *Tour Eiffel*, the *Big Ben*, the *Empire State Building* or the brand new *Burj Khalifa* in Dubai. Today the *Flame Towers* are probably the closest thing that Baku has to a widely famous landmark and they represent one of the main things to see for a tourist, but they are not the only ones.

⁵¹⁸ Heydar Aliyev Center, *Heydar Aliyev Center*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://heydaraliyevcenter.az/#main>. (Accessed 02/04/2015).

⁵¹⁹ Park Bulvar, *Park Bulvar Baku*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.parkbulvar.az/index.php?language=en>. (Accessed 02/04/2015).

⁵²⁰ Azerbaijan.com, *One of the highest flag of the world*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: http://www.azerbaijans.com/content_432_en.html. (Accessed 02/04/2015).

⁵²¹ Traxon Technologies, *Crystal Hall-Baku, Azerbaijan*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: http://www3.traxontechnologies.com/showcase/showcase_details/14085. (Accessed 02/04/2015).

⁵²² News.az, *Azerbaijani President attends opening of Heydar Mosque*, News.az, 2014. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://news.az/articles/official/94612>. (Accessed 02/04/2015).

⁵²³ Baku White City, *Baku White City*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.bakuwhitecity.com/en/project/12>. (Accessed 02/04/2015).

⁵²⁴ Khazar Islands, *Home*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://khazarislands.com/>. (Accessed 02/04/2015).

It is clear that on one hand the government is actually following the logic of creating new attractions and on the other hand it is promoting the already existing ones, however the creation of new fascinating buildings in the future will be very much dependant on the investments that comes from the national government, whose financial allowances mostly depends on the oil revenues.

That the modern buildings of Baku have a good tourism potential is something clear and not debatable, how this can affect the potential of the rest of the country is yet to see. On one side, if the investments are concentrated just on Baku there is the risk that the rest of the country would not develop enough to be able to respond properly to the improved tourism arrivals generated by a continuous development of the capital. On the other side, as we saw from the statistics, a big part of the tourists arrive directly in Baku and so it is a wise choice to keep on developing the city. Modern architecture can be the key to make Baku an important tourist destination at an international level, but it can also become source of problems for the rest of the country.

8.6: Literature, theatre and other arts

Baku in itself is a city with a vibrant art and cultural scene, conferences, events, galleries and concerts are very common and can represent an interesting look inside the worldly life of the city. However the tourism potential of the cultural inheritance of Azerbaijan is limited, mostly because it is not really well known outside the country.

About literature, the best way to get a general idea of the national one is to visit the interesting *Museum of Azerbaijani Literature*⁵²⁵, situated in the very centre of Baku and where a guide, that is included in the price of the ticket, will explain all the main facts about the history of local literature. The main author that is celebrated as one of the biggest contributor to the national cultural heritage, even if he wrote in Persian, is for sure Nizami Gänjävî (1141-1209)⁵²⁶, author of *Khamza*, a collection of five different narrative poems whose more famous are *The Seven Beauties* and *Leyli and Majnun*⁵²⁷. A tourism attraction related to Nizami is the already mentioned *Nizami Mausoleum*, in the city of Gänjä.

Other authors that are worth mentioning are Mehmet ibn Suleyman Füzüli (1480-1556), who was one of the first that used the local language, together with Imadaddin Nasimi (1369-1417)⁵²⁸.

⁵²⁵ Visit Azerbaijan, *Museums*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://azerbaijan.travel/en/culture-life/15/40?regionA=47>. (Accessed 03/04/2015).

⁵²⁶ A. Ferrari, *Breve Storia del Caucaso*, Carocci Editore, Roma, 2007, p. 40.

⁵²⁷ C. Frappi, *Azerbaijan, Crocevia del Caucaso*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012, p. 25.

⁵²⁸ *Ibidem*.

Particularly interesting, even if not fully part of the national literature tradition, is the novel *Ali and Nino*, by the mysterious author Kurban Said (1905-1942): this book narrates a love story between a Georgian girl and an Azerbaijani boy and is settled in the Caucasus in the years of WWI and of the first independence of Azerbaijan. This book is very interesting and precious because it offers many good observations on the society and on the situation of the Caucasus in those important years full of social and political changes⁵²⁹.

Related to literature and narration is the art of the *Ashiqs*: also this art has been inscribed in the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2009⁵³⁰ and it is basically a combination of poetry, dancing, music and narration. There is a specific repertoire that is used and it counts two hundred songs, one hundred and fifty compositions known as *dastans* and two thousand poems all written in Azerbaijani⁵³¹. This kind of art is considered one of the main symbols of the Azerbaijani culture and also the “guardian” of the Azerbaijani language⁵³², usually is possible to attend this kind of shows during weddings and other important celebrations, it is also possible to see them in one of the theaters of Baku. Their tourism potential might be limited but it could become bigger with some adjustments, a good idea for example would be to place screens in the theaters with subtitles in English where a foreigner could read the subtitles of what the performers are singing, this idea has already been put into practice in many opera theaters around Europe and it could really make this kind of traditional and unique performing art a true tourism attraction.

Azerbaijan has a good theatre tradition that reached its peak during the 19th century⁵³³. Today in the theaters of Baku is possible to see operas and ballets that are usually more successful among the local population, however these are usually performed in Azerbaijani or Russian and they represent a limited tourism attraction, as well as the Azerbaijani cinema, not really famous abroad.

Figurative arts have seen a more impressive development in the last years and there are some Azerbaijani artists that are known abroad and from which is possible to buy some pieces of art

⁵²⁹ F. Orlandi, *L'anima del Caucaso: "Ali e Nino" di Kurban Said*, East Journal, Società politica e cultura dell'Europa orientale, 2014. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.eastjournal.net/lanima-del-caucaso-ali-e-nino-di-kurban-said/43844>. (Accessed 03/04/2015).

⁵³⁰ UNESCO, *Art of Azerbaijani Ashiq*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/RL/00253>. (Accessed 03/04/2015).

⁵³¹ C. Frappi, *Azerbaijani, Crocevia del Caucaso*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012, p. 31.

⁵³² UNESCO, *Art of Azerbaijani Ashiq*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/RL/00253>. (Accessed 03/04/2015).

⁵³³ C. Frappi, *Azerbaijani, Crocevia del Caucaso*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012, p. 27.

directly in Baku⁵³⁴. Moreover in the capital there are some modern art galleries and it is not rare to find official events dedicated to the presentations of new artists or new collections of art. Both theater and figurative art have a limited tourism potential, but their presence and their vivacity give a precious contribution in the process of making Azerbaijan a modern country able not to be known as just one of the numerous post-Soviet republics.

⁵³⁴ M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010, p. 59.

CONCLUSION

After having analyzed the main aspects of tourism in Azerbaijan is now time to arrive to some general conclusions. First of all we understood that Azerbaijan is today a very interesting country from many points of views: its fast development created some very good conditions for foreign investments, its increasing wealth is causing the need for goods that are typical of the developed countries and so import possibilities for foreign companies will probably keep on growing, its particular geopolitical situation and in general the overall situation of the region makes it a good object for researchers and academicians and its unique culture and history still have to be fully analyzed and studied.

Secondly, we can now give an answer to one of the basic questions of this research: does Azerbaijan have some tourism potential? The answer is surely yes, but there are some things to keep in mind about this topic; we already analyzed case by case the single potentialities of the different locations and attractions and we saw that there are many places with a lot of tourism potential. However, as we just said, this potential is limited to some specific regions or locations and the ones that have more of it are Baku and the mountains of the Northern areas; Baku has the fascinations of a boom town with its brand new buildings and its cosmopolite life moreover it is close to many interesting sites like the mud volcanoes and the petroglyph of Qobustan or also the numerous interesting sites of the Absheron Peninsula. The Northern Regions instead, have timeless villages surrounded by amazing landscapes that often look totally untouched and still virgins. The Southern and Central regions for some aspects have some potential, but it is still not at the same level of the other two and especially in the Central one, the amount of potential attractions is quite low.

Another basic question to which we can now answer is how this potential is actually exploited. The correct answer to this question is that even if many progresses have been made in the last years, there is still a lot to do in order to reach significant levels. The creation of a tourism culture and of a “tourism friendly” environment is still on the making in Azerbaijan. There are some places, that are usually considered the main tourism destinations, where now is possible to find tourism offices, a good number of hotels, restaurants and some other structures that are necessary for the development of tourism, we just have to think about locations like Lahic and Shäki, that in the last year have seen a big extension of their tourism structures. However, the best example is probably the *Shahdag Ski Resort*⁵³⁵ that represents one of the biggest projects and investments that have been made in the last

⁵³⁵ Shahdag Ski Resort, *Home*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://shahdag.az/eng/welcome/>. (Accessed 16/04/2015).

years. As we already said, it is also interesting to observe that in Azerbaijan there is a general tendency of concentrating a lot of efforts and investments in creating impressive and gigantic structures in specific locations, without really caring about what there is around them. It happened with the resorts in Naftalan⁵³⁶, it is happening now with the *Shahdag Ski Resort*⁵³⁷ and the same will probably happen again with the *Khazar Islands*⁵³⁸ when they are completed. There is an unpleasant contrast between these developed and new clusters and the rest of the country where in some places life conditions are still not easy.

A good demonstration about how this tourism potential could be exploited is represented by the interesting case of *Camping Azerbaijan*: this is basically a Facebook page where regularly are organized trips around Azerbaijan. The creator and for the moment only manager of this page is Cavid Qara, who I personally interviewed in May 2015. Cavid is twenty three years old and he has a big passion for camping, trekking and exploring. He graduated in economics in the Baku State University two years ago, after that he went one year to the military service that in Azerbaijan is compulsory, in October 2014 he created the Facebook page and in November he organized the first trip. At first he started by organizing day trips around Baku in places like Qobustan or Yanar Dağ, after he started to think about organizing longer trips and so in January 2015 he managed to bring fifteen people to Qrix, a little and almost unknown mountain village halfway between Quba and Xınalıq, in the Northern part of Azerbaijan. He organized the transportation from Baku and also the accommodation in the houses of local families, all this for a price that we can consider more than reasonable. I met some of the people that participated to this trip and they all told me it was incredibly good and well organized. I also personally participated in one of this trips and I also joined Cavid in one of his explorations in the some of the remotest villages in the Northern Region. After this first trip Cavid organized other trips in Qrix, Laza, Qabala and also in Lahıc. He told me that he will continue to focus on the Northern Region because there is more potential and it is closer to Baku, he also would like to start organizing some camping and climbing trips but he is waiting to have money enough to buy the needed equipment. He already received many offers from local tourism agencies to collaborate with them but for the moment he refused because he said he wants to be able to keep the prices of its trips affordable, in June 2015 he will also collaborate with Mark Elliott who contacted him and proposed him to explore some parts of Azerbaijan together. He also

⁵³⁶ Visit Azerbaijan, *Hotels*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at:

<http://azerbaijan.travel/en/accomreg/?regionA=58&typeA=4>. (16/04/2015).

⁵³⁷ Shahdag Ski Resort, *Home*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://shahdag.az/eng/welcome/>. (Accessed 16/04/2015).

⁵³⁸ Khazar Islands, *Home*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://khazarislands.com/>. (Accessed 16/04/2015).

said that he has been contacted by some tourists who will arrive in Azerbaijan during summer and who were looking for some help for exploring the mountains. According to him the potential for this kind of trips is really big, in Baku there are a lot of expats that would like to explore the country but that cannot do it because it is too difficult. According to Cavid the visa policies of Azerbaijan are at the moment influencing the arrival of tourists, he also said that the government is more interested in developing a high level of tourism because it is easy to control and it brings more money directly to the state. For the moment Cavid is not paying taxes because he said that to do that he needs an official certificate that cost 5000 manat. At the time of the interview he was not so sure about the future of this business but he said he does not consider it a job but more like a hobby. Anyways this little business, managed by a twenty three years old person, is the demonstration that the effort that is needed to exploit Azerbaijan's potential is really minimum. Cavid understood that what is needed at the moment someone between the tourists and the local people and who can organize everything with a minimum effort. The future for low budget tourists in Azerbaijan for the moment still depends of people and ideas like Cavid's ones, however, as we said, for the moment the government seems more interested in creating the environment for a more high tourism, a fact creates many inequalities among different parts of the country.

These inequalities take us directly to another important question to which we can now answer, what is the role of the government in the promotion of tourism? And more in general, how the geopolitical situation of the country is affecting tourism? This phenomenon of developed clusters ready to host tourists versus underdeveloped areas of the country is clearly not a case. The main reason for this might be that the government still prefers to have a sort of control of the flow of foreign visitors in the country; we do not have to forget that Azerbaijan is officially still at war with Armenia and in some regions local authorities can be really sensible about foreign visitors.

As we saw a very good example can be Nakhchivan: a foreigner visitor to go there must book the plane tickets at least one month before in the offices of *Azal*, the national company of Azerbaijan, this choice can be interpreted as a specific will of the local authorities of not having too many foreigners travelling around this delicate zone, even if this cannot be officially and explicitly said. Another good example that we analyzed is the *Goygol National Park*⁵³⁹, a place with a huge tourism potential but that cannot be exploited because it is too close to the frontline. It is clear that a big national concern like a war cannot be ignored and that it influences a lot of aspects inside the country. A specific study of the influences that geopolitics can have on the tourism sector would be

⁵³⁹ Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Goygol National Park*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.eco.gov.az/en/goy-gol/>. (Accessed 29/03/2015).

very interesting and it would allow us to understand how much a situation like this is slowing the development of Azerbaijan. As one might expect, in this difficult situation the access of foreign citizens to the country is one of the main concerns for the national government and it is obviously related to the visa policies of Azerbaijan, one of the critical points that we mentioned when speaking about the main difficulties of tourism in this country. It is true that the government is involved and engaged in trying to promote the country on a tourism level and the temporary facilitations of the visa policies during the period of the *European Games*⁵⁴⁰ clearly testify this; but it is also clear that it wants to promote the country and develop tourism on its own conditions and it does not forget that its first priority is to end the war and have back the Nagorno-Karabakh territory as soon as possible⁵⁴¹.

From the geopolitical point of view we have to mention also a couple of other important issues: we already said that Azerbaijan's geographical position, between two important countries (Iran and Russia) that at the moment are not very popular among the Western world, might be a problem for its promotion. This together with the war with Armenia and also the relatively recent war of 2008 between Russia and Georgia frankly make the Caucasus not the easiest region to promote, even if the situation in reality is absolutely safe and without any particular danger for foreigners.

By taking a look at the numbers⁵⁴² we can say that tourism is a sector that is actually becoming more important in the Southern Caucasus. As we already said, also Georgia and Armenia in the last years saw an increasing of their tourist arrivals. Georgia in particular in 2013 was the leading country in the region for the number of tourist arrivals that according to the World Bank have been more than 5 million⁵⁴³. If we look at the numbers given by UNWTO and that arrive until 2012⁵⁴⁴, we can see that the trend in the last five years has been positive. For these reasons it is clear that the

⁵⁴⁰ Baku 2015, 1st European Games, *Visa for Azerbaijan*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at:

<http://www.baku2015.com/tickets/article/visa-for-azerbaijan-29100.html>. (Accessed 16/04/2015).

⁵⁴¹ A. Petersen, *Azerbaijan in Global Politics: Crafting Foreign Policy*, Chashioglu Publishing House (for the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy, 2009, pp. 11-21.

⁵⁴² In doing that we always have to remember that the numbers about tourism in Azerbaijan that we analyzed might not reflect exactly the situation as it really is, like in the case of the foreign citizens that cross the national borders more times not just for tourism reasons that are always counted in the statistics and that give a wrong idea of the extension of the tourism phenomenon in the country.

⁵⁴³ The World Bank, *International Tourism, number of arrivals*, 2015. (ONLINE) Available at:

<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/ST.INT.ARVL>. (Accessed 18/03/2015).

⁵⁴⁴ UNWTO, *Tourism Highlights 2014 Edition*, UN, Madrid, 2014, p. 8. (ONLINE) Available at:

<http://www2.unwto.org/content/why-tourism>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

development of tourism in Azerbaijan in the next years will also have to deal with the concurrence of Georgia and Armenia.

So to answer to our question, politics and geopolitics are clearly influencing the tourism sector in Azerbaijan and its development. However, we can say without any doubt that a stabilization of the political situation in the region will for sure increase the appeal of the country as a tourism destination.

Related to this aspect is also the topic of the role of tourism in the processes of self-representation, nation branding and nation building of Azerbaijan. The individuation of an Azerbaijani identity is today one of the unsaid purposes of the government. It is not a mystery that Azerbaijan has clearly less national self-consciousness if compared to its neighbors: Armenians, Georgians, Persians and Russians are all populations with a defined national identity and that have been there for centuries. The complex history of Azerbaijan is probably the main cause why the term Azerbaijani is relatively new and still not 100% clear⁵⁴⁵. This process of nation building that now is on the making seems to have a double direction: the first one is the self-recognition that is made through the promotion of the same ideals and of the same traditions for the whole nation. The celebration of Heydar Aliyev as the father of the country, the title of national poet given to Nizami Gänjavi all are examples of the attempt to find common figures that could create a sense of unity. In this direction we can also see the massive propaganda about the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as a tool for the creation of a national unity, however this topic is quite controversial and it goes out from our analysis about tourism.

Other tools of nation building can be considered the big events that Azerbaijan organized in the last years and will organize in the future. These are used as common events in which all the population can feel proud of being Azerbaijani, this is why the government gives so much importance to them. These events are also related to the second direction of the process of nation building, that is the external recognition. The promotion of the country abroad, a process that we can define as nation branding⁵⁴⁶, has the purpose of spreading the knowledge about Azerbaijan in the world. More consciousness and more tourism will work as a tool of recognition from abroad and they will strengthen the national feelings. So the promotion of tourism can be interpreted also as a mean to enforce the country, the national identity is still not completely formed and one of the ideas behind

⁵⁴⁵ Tokluoglu, C., *Definitions of national identity, nationalism and ethnicity in post-Soviet Azerbaijan in the 1990s*, Ethnic and Racial Studies, Routledge, 2005, Vol. 28, No. 4, pp. 722-758.

⁵⁴⁶ Jordan, P., *The Modern Fairy Tale: Nation Branding, National Identity and the Eurovision Song Contest in Estonia*, University of Tartu Press, Tartu, 2014, pp. 9-10-11.

its promotion is to make possible a circular process of self-recognition achieved through external recognition.

Another good question is which is the actual level of structures and infrastructures that are fundamental for a proper development of tourism? Azerbaijan already saw a big process of modernization and this is clearly visible throughout the country however it is also clear that there is a big disequilibrium between Baku and the other regions. Still in Baku there are some problems that should be resolved before considering the city totally fit for hosting a big number of tourists, like a better system of public transports to and from the airport or a more extended underground system. The incoming first edition of the *European Games* in June 2015 will probably give some interesting indications about how much Baku is ready to host a big amount of tourists, but for the moment we can say that the machine of the organization is big and is working hard to make this games memorable and a good advertisement for the country. The future continuation of this development is obviously linked with the economic situation of the country that in itself is clearly dependant on the oil sector. How much Azerbaijan will invest in the development of the country and also in the development of tourism will depend on the energy market. As we saw the latest forecasts say that in the next future the growth of Azerbaijan will slow down because of the lowering price of oil⁵⁴⁷ however this situation can change and in the long-term the forecasts still say that tourism in Azerbaijan is likely to improve, even if not on a spectacular rate.

Related to this is also the issue that we mentioned in chapter three about the direct and indirect contribution of the tourism sector to the national GDP, where the direct contributions are the ones generated by enterprises directly involved in the tourism sector and the indirect ones are generated by investments, promotion and administration⁵⁴⁸. In Azerbaijan for the moment the indirect contributions are more extended than the indirect ones⁵⁴⁹. However we can consider this as a normal situation in a country that is developing its tourism sector. As we said tourism is a sector that needs structures and infrastructures and these need investments to be made so it is normal that on a first stage the indirect contributions are bigger than the direct ones. The real effects of the actual

⁵⁴⁷ Caspian Barrel, *S&P downgrades outlook of Azerbaijan's sovereign rating to negative due to global oil prices*, 02/02/2015. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://caspianbarrel.org/?p=26562>. (Accessed 10/04/2015).

⁵⁴⁸ WTTC, *Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2014, Azerbaijan*, The Authority on World Travel & Tourism, London, 2014, p. 2. (ONLINE) Available at: <http://www.wttc.org/-/media/files/reports/economic%20impact%20research/country%20reports/azerbaijan2014.pdf>. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

⁵⁴⁹ Ibidem.

investments for the national promotion will come in the next years and it will be interesting to see how they will be.

The last question to which we need to answer is: can Azerbaijan become a popular tourism destination? All in all we can say that yes, it can, but this will not happen soon and it will need a lot of work and investments by the local authorities. As we saw, the country has some potential but this is not equally distributed throughout the country and sometimes is sad to notice how the amazingly interesting history of these territories did not leave a lot of remaining that could be considered tourism attractions. Speaking about which tourism sector Azerbaijan should develop, for the moment we can say that until now the logic that has been followed has been to try to develop many sectors at the same time, mainly business tourism, summer tourism, winter tourism and health tourism, also trying to keep the level of the structures quite high in order to have a higher budget tourism. This policy can be good because it allows having more potential visitors and it provides the country with more attractions during all the year and not just in some specific seasons. This logic also fits perfectly with the need of having a controlled amount of visitors all concentrated in the same complexes and that usually do not want to travel independently throughout the country. However something that at the moment is missing in Azerbaijan is the lack of a specific sector in which it can be widely recognized as one of the best in the world. This might be hard to achieve in the short term but for example the construction of the *Shahdag Ski Resort* could be a good start for a future exploit of the very big potential of the mountains of the Greater Caucasus. Another good direction that seems the Government has taken is the promotion of sport tourism, tourism based on sport events, together also with the well-known business tourism.

In this sense it has been very useful my interview with Orkhan Musa, Head Specialist in the International Office of the *Azerbaijan Tourism and Management University*. During my interview he repeatedly stated that the main tourism sectors in which Azerbaijan should invest now are sport and business tourism, and for some things also health tourism. Sport tourism in particular has seen a lot of investments and this is can be easily seen because there are many towns and cities around Azerbaijan that now have a brand new Olympic Center. These two sectors would work as a sort of promotion for the country because they will create an international reputation, a spread knowledge that will allow one day moving to a second level where Azerbaijan will be able to promote itself as a destination for other tourism sectors. Together with this Mr. Orkhan also stated the importance of training the local people about why do they need tourism. As a matter of fact tourism is something that impacts the local population that must be prepared to this. A big concern for Azerbaijan could be also the competition with Georgia and Armenia. Georgia in particular is doing a great job in

promoting itself and this is a reason more for Azerbaijan to develop those sectors of tourism that one cannot find in Georgia, like business, sport and health tourism. Finally Mr. Orkhan confirmed that the visa policy of Azerbaijan is a problem related to the national concern for national security, as he told me, tourism promotion is a priority for the government, but also national security so the two things need to cooperate and to find an equilibrium.

Azerbaijan is a relatively young country that is now very willing to show itself to world and have an important role on the international arena. Tourism is a good way to increase the knowledge of the country among other people, this together with the need of an economic diversification they are probably the main reasons why Azerbaijan is now trying to present itself as a tourism destination. For the future we can just repeat what we already said, that tourism will grow in the country, it will probably do it slowly and this will allow the tourism structures to gain more experience and to develop themselves in order to be more efficient and competitive with other more experienced countries. As a matter of fact experience is another thing that at the moment is missing in the tourism sector in Azerbaijan but that is also fundamental to succeed in its competitive market, however there are no reasons why this could not be achieved in the next years. The growth of the overall sector will still be dependent on the geopolitical situation in the region and on the country's economic situation, but this is something that we can find in many developing countries and is part of the development process. Azerbaijan can be defined now as a "work in progress", it still needs time to be completed, many are the issues that need to be resolved before Azerbaijan could present itself as a truly developed country able to be considered a common tourism destination, but for the moment all signs indicate that there are many possibilities that in the future tourism will have an important role in the national economy of Azerbaijan.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- T. Bagiyev, T. Heyradov, J. Novruzov, *Azerbaijan: 100 Questions Answered*, Azerbaijan Boyuk Britaniya Ganjlari Jamiyyati, 3rd Edition, 2008.
- G. Bensi, *Le Religioni dell'Azerbaigian*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012.
- G. Bifulchi, *Oltre 20 anni di relazioni tra Italia e Azerbaijan*, Magazine Via della Seta, Associazione Italia-Azerbaigian, Baku, n. 2, 2014, p. 12.
- C. Castagna, *Lankaran, La Patria Azerbaigiana del tè*, Magazine Vie della Seta, Associazione Italia-Azerbaigian, Baku, n. 2, 2014, pp. 92-93-94.
- M. Elliott, *Azerbaijan, with an Excursion to Georgia*, Trailblazer Publications, Surrey, 2010.
- Explorer, *Azerbaijan, Live Work, Explore*, Explorer Publications, 1st edition, 2011.
- Explorer, *Baku, Mini Visitor's Guide*, Explorer Publications, 1st edition, 2011.
- A. Ferrari, *Breve Storia del Caucaso*, Carocci Editore, Roma, 2007.
- G. Ferroni, *Profilo Storico della Letteratura Italiana*. Einaudi Scuola, Milano, 2000, Vol. 1, pp. 87-88.
- R. A. Fletcher, *Saint James's Catapult, The Life and Times of Diego Gelmirez of Santiago de Compostela*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984, pp. 53-55.
- A. Franklin, *Tourism an Introduction*, SAGE Publications Ltd, London, 2003, p. 27.
- C. Frappi, *Azerbaigian, Crocevia del Caucaso*, Sandro Teti Editore, Roma, 2012.
- C. Frappi, *Nagorno-Karabakh, il congelamento di un conflitto*, ISPI Policy Brief, Milano, n. 2, 2006.
- D. C. Gilbert in *Tourism, Critical Concepts in the Social Sciences*, Edited by S. Williams, Routledge, London, 2003, Vol. 1, pp. 49, 51.
- J. W. Goethe, *Italian Journey*, Translated by A. W. Morrison, The Perfect Library, 2015.
- W. Hunziker, K. Krapf, *Grundriß Der Allgemeinen Fremdenverkehrslehre*, Polygraph Verl. Zurich, 1942.
- N. Jayapalan, *Introduction to Tourism*, Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, New Dehli, 2001, pp. 181-182-183-184, 189-190.
- A. Kanan, I. Zonrab, A. Rovshan, M. Azer, *Assessment of Economic Export and Diversification*, AFA Translation LLS, Baku, 2013.
- C. King, *The Ghost of Freedom, a history of the Caucasus*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2008.
- Jordan, P., *The Modern Fairy Tale: Nation Branding, National Identity and the Eurovision Song Contest in Estonia*, University of Tartu Press, Tartu, 2014, pp. 9-10-11.

- B. Illis, *A Hedonist's Guide to Baku*, Hg2, London, 2010.
- L. J. Linckorish, C. L. Jenkins, *An Introduction to Tourism*, Butterworth-Enieman, Oxford, 1997, pp. 11-12, 17-18, 29-30-31.
- M. Longano, *L'altra Faccia del Petrolio: Naftalan*, Magazine Vie della Seta, Associazione Italia-Azerbaijan, Baku, n. 2, 2014, pp. 96-97.
- B. Mayhew, M. Elliott, T. Masters, J. Noble, *Central Asia*, Lonely Planet, Footscray, 2014.
- M. Melotti, *Il Mediterraneo tra Mito e Turismo*, Cuem – Università di Milano, Milano, 2007, pp. 21-25, 27-29.
- J. Noble, M. Kohn, D. Systemans, *Georgia, Armenia & Azerbaijan*, Lonely Planet, 4th edition, 2012.
- A. Petersen, *Azerbaijan in Global Politics: Crafting Foreign Policy*, Chashioglu Publishing House (for the) Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy, 2009.
- M. Polo, *Il Milione*, a cura di V. Bertolucci Pizzorusso, Adelphi, Milano, 1975, pp. 12-13.
- S. Richmond, A. Bush, D. Eimer, M. Elliott, N. Ray, *Myanmar (Burma)*, Lonely Planet, Footscray, 2014.
- L. K. Singh, *Fundamental of Tourism and Travel*, Gyan Publishing House, Dehli, 2008, pp. 189-190.
- S. Singh, M. Benanav, M. Elliott and others, *India*, Lonely Planet, Footscray, 2013.
- Time Out, *Baku & the best of Azerbaijan*, Time Out, 1st edition, London, 2012.
- Tokluoglu, C., *Definitions of national identity, nationalism and ethnicity in post-Soviet Azerbaijan in the 1990s*, Ethnic and Racial Studies, Routledge, 2005, Vol. 28, No. 4, pp. 722-758.
- P. Von Oppeln, *Aserbaidshan*, Trescher Verlar, 2nd Edition, 2012.
- T. Wheeler, M. Wheeler, *Across Asia, on the cheap*, Lonely Planet, Footscray, 2013.
- D. Yergin, *The Prize, the epic quest for oil, money and power*, Simon & Shuster, New York, 1991.

SITOGRAPHY

- F. Abdullayev, *Qala – History in Action*, Visions of Azerbaijan, September-October 2010, pp. 64-68. Available at: http://www.visions.az/travel_tourism,216/. (14/03/2015).
- Accra Declaration on the WTO-UNESCO cultural tourism programme "The Slave Route"*, WTO-UNESCO, Accra, 1995. Available at: <http://www.e-unwto.org/content/w04028mxu37527r0>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

Adam Matthews Digital, *The Grand Tour*. Available at: <http://www.amdigital.co.uk/m-collections/collection/the-grand-tour/>. (Accessed 05/02/2015).

S. Agayeva, *Mugam, a national heritage of Azerbaijan, is a pearl of the world music art: Mehriban Aliyeva*, Trend.az, November 2009, Baku. Available at: <http://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/1578294.html>. (Accessed 31/03/2015).

AITF, *Azerbaijan International Travel & Tourism Festival, 2015*. Available at: <http://www.aitf.az/2015/>. (Accessed 03/03/2015).

Associazione Italia-Azerbaijiana, *Associazione Italia-Azerbaijiana, 2015*. Available at: <http://www.italiaazerbaigian.org/index.html>. (Accessed 25/02/2015).

Associazione Italia-Azerbaijiana, *Vie della Seta Magazine, 2015*. Available at: <http://www.italiaazerbaigian.org/viadellaseta.html>. (Accessed 25/02/2015).

Atlético de Madrid, *Much More Than a Sponsorship, 2015*. Available at: <http://en.clubatleticodemadrid.com/noticias/much-more-than-a-sponsorship>. (Accessed: 27/02/2015).

Autosport.com, *Baku street track for 2016 F1 European Grand Prix unveiled, 2014*. Available at: <http://www.autosport.com/news/report.php/id/116213>. (Accessed 01/03/2015).

Azal, *Home, 2015*. Available at: <http://www.azal.az/>. (Accessed 21/03/2015).

Azernews, *Baku Boulevard to be the Largest in Europe, 2015*. Available at: <http://www.azernews.az/azerbaijan/61643.html>. (Accessed 02/03/2015).

“Azerbaijan”, *www.etymonline.com, 2015*. Available at: <http://www.etymonline.com/>. (Accessed 11/02/2015).

Azerbaijan.com, *Azerbaijan.com, 2015*. Available at: <http://www.azerbaijan.com/about/>. (Accessed 25/02/2015).

Azerbaijan24, *Home, 2015*. Available at: <http://azerbaijan24.com/>. (Accessed 11/04/2015).

Azerbaijan.az, *Home, 2015*. Available at: http://azerbaijan.az/portal/index_a.html?lang=az. (Accessed 11/04/2015).

Azerbaijan Carpet Museum, *The Development of Carpet Weaving in Azerbaijan, 2015*. Available at: <http://www.azcarpetmuseum.az/001.html>. (Accessed 01/04/2015).

Azerbaijan Institute of Tourism, *Azerbaijan Institute of Tourism, 2015*. Available at: http://www.tourism.edu.az/index.php?option=com_content&id=6&lang=en. (Accessed 20/03/2015).

Azerbaijan Olympic Committee, *From Candidate to Host City, 2015*. Available at: <http://www.olympic.org/host-city-election>. (Accessed 01/03/2015).

Azerbaijan Railways LTD, *Home*, 2015. Available at: <http://railway.gov.az/index/en/>. (Accessed 21/03/2015).

Bahar 2005, as cited by Ş. Esen, H. Uyar in *Competitiveness of Tourism and the Evaluation of Turkey According to the International Tourism Criteria*, Bartın University, 2010. Available from the abstract at: http://www.researchgate.net/profile/Hande_Uyar. (Accessed 07/02/2015).

Bakı Metropoliteni, *Bakı Metropoliteni*, 2015. Available at: <http://metro.gov.az/en/index.html>. (Accessed 02/03/2015).

Baku 2015, 1st European Games, *Home*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.baku2015.com/>. (Accessed 19/03/2015).

Baku Airport, *About the Airport*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.airport.az/about.php?id=1>. (Accessed 02/03/2015).

Baku Jazz Center, *Home*, 2015. Available at: <http://jazzcenter.jazz.az/>. (Accessed 31/03/2015).

Baku Nobel Heritage Fund, *Baku Nobel Heritage Fund*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.bakunobel.org/home.html>. (Accessed 02/03/2015).

Baku White City, *Baku White City*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.bakuwhitecity.com/>. (Accessed 19/03/2015).

Batinić, *The Role and Importance of the Internet in Contemporary Tourism Travel Agencies Business*, International Journal of Cognitive Research in Science, Engineering and education, Vol. 1, N. 2, 2013. Available at: <http://www.ijcrsee.com/index.php/ijcrsee/index>. (Accessed 06/02/2015).

J. Bayramova, *Skiing on Shahdag, King of the Mountains*, Visions of Azerbaijan, January- April 2013. Available at: http://www.visions.az/travel_tourism,477/. (Accessed 04/03/2015).

K. Beckan, *Everything you always wanted to know about Russian gas supplies to Europe*, Energy Post, 2014. Available at: <http://www.energypost.eu/everything-always-wanted-know-russian-gas-supplies-europe/>. (Accessed 13/02/2015).

Booking.com, *Booking.com*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.booking.com/index.en-gb.html?aid=376372;label=it-flMupqHx6plmBCXSi4jzcAS33962441313%3Apl%3Aata%3Ap1%3Ap2603.000%3Aac%3Aap1t1%3Aneg;sid=55972e9e4ad816d923ab4b6bff354798;dcid=4>. (Accessed 25/02/2015).

Caspian Barrel, *S&P downgrades outlook of Azerbaijan's sovereign rating to negative due to global oil prices*, 02//02/2015. Available at: <http://caspiabarrel.org/?p=26562>. (Accessed 13/02/2015).

Caspian Oil & Gas Exhibition, *Caspian Oil & Gas Exhibition*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.caspianoilgas.az/2015/>. (Accessed 03/03/2015).

Center for Economic and Social Development (CESD), *CESD Policy Report on Tourism Sector in Azerbaijan*, CESD, Baku, 2011, p.3. Available at: <http://cesd.az/new/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/CESD-Tourism-Paper.pdf>. (Accessed 19/03/2015).

CIA, *The World Factbook*, 2015. Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/aj.html>. (Accessed 12/02/2015).

Cox & Kings Ltd, 2015. *Introduction*. Available at: <http://www.coxandkings.com/about-us/index.shtml>. (Accessed 06/02/2015).

R. Dewsbury, *Azerbaijan reveals plans for world's tallest building at 3500ft high*, Daily Mail Online, 12/04/2012. Available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2128870/Azerbaijan-reveals-plans-worlds-tallest-building-3-500ft-high.html>. (Accessed 19/03/2015).

eDreams, *Home*, 2015. Available at: http://www.edreams.it/travel/?mktportal=google-brand&mobileDomainIgnore=0&ipLookupIgnore=0&awsearchcpc=1&gclid=CjwKEAjwoZ-oBRCAjZqs96qCmzgSJADnWCv8UuZXSsn5FTpA9ghoPvejgCkPBnna6d2lCpM3kLP1osRoCeOjw_wcB. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the United States of America, *Visa-waiver countries*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.azembassy.us/visa-service/visa-free-countries.html>. (Accessed 20/03/2015).

European Union External Action, *Azerbaijan*, 2014. Available at: http://eeas.europa.eu/azerbaijan/index_en.htm. (Accessed 13/02/2015).

Eurovision Song Contest, *Eurovision Song Contest 2012 Grand Final*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.eurovision.tv/page/baku-2012/about/shows/final%20>. (Accessed 19/03/2015).

Fairmont Baku Flame Towers, *Fairmont Baku, Flame Towers*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.fairmont.com/baku/>. (Accessed 02/03/2015).

Four Seasons, *Four Seasons Hotel Baku*, 2015. Available at: http://www.fourseasons.com/baku/landing_3/?source=gaw12bakuS03&creative=26631220128&KW_ID=s83ZEJ6iF_dc|pclid|26631220128&gclid=CjwKEAjwiq-oBRC9gvHCsvDdn2cSJACV3DFRtBAcYtIZGVN4EXP0L48LJcbOqat05v1WE4qJNQB-yBoCYSbw_wcB. (Accessed 20/03/2015).

G20, *G20 Leaders Declaration*, G20, Los Cabos, 2012, p. 4. Available at: https://g20.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/G20_Leaders_Declaration_Final_Los_Cabos.pdf. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

A. Geybullayeva, *2014: Azerbaijan, un anno di repressione*, Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso, 2nd of February 2015. Available at: <http://www.balcanicaucaso.org/Media/Multimedia/infografiche/2014-Azerbaijan-un-anno-di-repressione>. (Accessed 08/04/2015).

M. A. Gischler, *Beautifying the Bay*, Azerbaijan International, summer 2000, pp. 40-42. Available at:
http://www.azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/82_folder/82_articles/82_boulevard_project.html. (Accessed 02/03/2015).

Heydar Aliyev Center, *Heydar Aliyev Center*, 2015. Available at:
<http://heydaraliyevcenter.az/#main>. (Accessed 02/03/2015).

Heydar Aliyev Foundation, *Home*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.heydar-aliyev-foundation.org/en>. (Accessed 11/04/2015).

Heydar Aliyev International Airport, *Home*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.airport.az/>. (Accessed 21/03/2015).

Hg2, *Hg2 A Hedonist's guide to ...*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.hg2.com/>. (Accessed 25/02/2015).

Hg2, *Hg2 Baku*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.hg2baku.com/>. (Accessed 25/06/2015).

Hilton Hotel & Resorts, *Hilton Baku*, 2015. Available at:
http://www.hilton.com/en/hi/promotions/hi_baku/index.jhtml. (Accessed 20/03/2015).

“Holiday”, *www.oed.com*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.oed.com/>. (Accessed 04/02/2015).

Hostelworld, *Hostelworld.com*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.hostelworld.com/>. (Accessed 25/02/2015).

B. Illis, *Baku, Azerbaijan: Dubai of the Caucasus*, the Telegraph, 2012. Available at:
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/middleeast/azerbaijan/9287045/Baku-Azerbaijan-Dubai-of-the-Caucasus.html>. (Accessed 01/03/2015).

B. Illis, *Biography*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.benillis.com/biography.html>. (Accessed 25/02/2015).

IRS-Heritage, *IRS-Heritage*, 2015. Available at: <http://irs-az.com/new/>. (Accessed 25/02/2015).

Kempinsky Hotel, *Kempinsky Hotel Badamdar Baku*, 2015. Available at:
[http://www.kempinski.com/en/baku/hotel-badamdar/special-offers/early-booker/?campaign=Google-Baku+\(english\)-Baku+Hotel&source=S46992213&s_kwid=TC|21680|%2Bbaku%20%2Bhotel||S|b|52826189914&gclid=CjwKEAjwiq-oBRC9gvHCsvDdn2cSJACV3DFRdeAcnDn_pTCRqjJLhOGtkfgWOfol6SJzVVnYfE3KBoCFRzw_wcB](http://www.kempinski.com/en/baku/hotel-badamdar/special-offers/early-booker/?campaign=Google-Baku+(english)-Baku+Hotel&source=S46992213&s_kwid=TC|21680|%2Bbaku%20%2Bhotel||S|b|52826189914&gclid=CjwKEAjwiq-oBRC9gvHCsvDdn2cSJACV3DFRdeAcnDn_pTCRqjJLhOGtkfgWOfol6SJzVVnYfE3KBoCFRzw_wcB). (Accessed 20/03/2015).

Khazar Islands, *Home*, 2015. Available at: <http://khazarislands.com/>. (Accessed 19/03/2015).

M. Korstanje, *The Origin and Meaning of Tourism: Etymological Study*, e-Review of Tourism Research, Vol. 5, No.2, 2007, pp 101-102-103-104. Available at: http://www.academia.edu/353007/The_Origin_and_Meaning_of_Tourism_Etymological_Study. (Accessed 06/02/2015).

Lonely Planet, *Georgia, Armenia & Azerbaijan travel guide*, 2015. Available at: <http://shop.lonelyplanet.com/europe/georgia-armenia-and-azerbaijan-travel-guide-4/>. (Accessed 24/02/2015).

Lonely Planet, *Lonely Planet*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/>. (Accessed 24/02/2015).

Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Azerbaijan Republic, *Home*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.eco.gov.az/en/>. (Accessed 11/04/2015).

F. Morar, *The Myth of “Frozen Conflicts”, transcending illusive dilemmas*, Per Concordiam, Journal of European Security and Defense Issues, vol. 1, n. 2, 2010, pp. 10-17. George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies. Available at: http://www.marshallcenter.org/mcpublicweb/MCDocs/files/College/F_Publications/perConcordiam/pC_V1N2_en.pdf. (Accessed 12/02/2015).

J. Metcalfe, *Visit a Crumbling, Soviet-Era Floating “Oil City”*, Citylab, 2014. Available at: <http://www.citylab.com/design/2014/02/visit-soviet-era-oil-city-floating-caspian-sea/8512/>. (Accessed 04/05/2015).

Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Home*, 2015. Available at: <http://mct.gov.az/index.php>. (Accessed 11/04/2015).

A. Mustafa Zadeh, *Biography*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.azizamustafazadeh.de/>. (Accessed 31/03/2015).

MTrans, *Mtrans*, 2015. Available at: <http://mtrans.az/index.php/eng/>. (Accessed 02/03/2015).

Mugam.az, *Home*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.mugam.az/>. (Accessed 31/03/2015).

A. Mustafa Zadeh, *Biography*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.azizamustafazadeh.de/>. (Accessed 31/03/2015).

Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, *Home Page*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.nakhchivan.az/portal-en/index-22.htm>. (Accessed 16/03/2015).

National Geographic, *Top 10 Nightlife Cities*, 2015. Available at: <http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel/top-10/nightlife-cities/>. (Accessed 02/03/2015).

NATO, *NATO's relations with Azerbaijan*, 2012. Available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49111.htm?selectedLocale=en#. (Accessed 13/02/2015).

News.az, *Azerbaijani President attends opening of Heydar Mosque*, News.az, 2014. Available at: <http://news.az/articles/official/94612>. (Accessed 02/04/2015).

News.az, *Azerbaijan sees increase in the number of tourists*, News.az, 25/12/2015. Available at: <http://news.az/articles/economy/94576>. (Accessed 19/03/2015).

OCSE, *Election in Azerbaijan undermined by limitations on fundamental freedoms, lack of level playing field and significant problems on election day, international observers say*, OCSE, 2013. Available at: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/106908>. (Accessed 08/04/2015).

F. Orlandi, *L'anima del Caucaso: "Ali e Nino" di Kurban Said*, East Journal, Società politica e cultura dell'Europa orientale, 2014. Available at: <http://www.eastjournal.net/lanima-del-caucaso-ali-e-nino-di-kurban-said/43844>. (Accessed 03/04/2015).

N. Orujova, *Good News for Baku's Metro Users*, Azernews, 2015. Available at: <http://www.azernews.az/azerbaijan/69559.html>. (Accessed 11/03/2015).

Park Bulvar, *Park Bulvar Baku*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.parkbulvar.az/index.php?language=en>. (Accessed 02/04/2015).

Radio Free Europe, *Baku's Building Boom*, 2012. Available at: http://www.rferl.org/media/photogallery/azerbaijan_building_projects/24476817.html. (Accessed 02/03/2015).

Samarkand Declaration on Silk Road Tourism, Samarkand, 1994. Available at: <http://silkroad.unwto.org/en/content/declarations>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

Shahdag Ski Resort, *Home*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.shahdagmountainresort.com/eng/welcome/>. (Accessed 12/04/2015).

Sky Scanner, *Home*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.skyscanner.it/>. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

Smithsonian Institution, *A Survey of the Rock Substrates of Petroglyphs at Gobustan, Azerbaijan*, 2012, p.20. Available at: http://agt.si.edu/uncover_more/GobustanPetroglyphSurveyOnlineD1.pdf. (Accessed 03/03/2015).

Society for Industrial Archeology, *About*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.sia-web.org/about/>. (Accessed 04/05/2015).

SOFAZ, *Home*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.oilfund.az/>. (Accessed 11/04/2015).

State Migration Service of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *e-service*, 2015. Available at: <http://en.e.migration.gov.az/>. (Accessed 20/03/2015).

State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Azerbaijan in Figures 2014*, State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Baku, 2014. Available at: http://www.stat.gov.az/menu/6/statistical_yearbooks/indexen.php. (Accessed 10/02/2015).

State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Home, 2015. Available at: <http://www.stat.gov.az/indexen.php>. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Tourism and Services in Azerbaijan*, State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Baku, 2014. Available at: <http://www.stat.gov.az/source/tourism/indexen.php>. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, *Transport in Azerbaijan*, State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Baku, 2014, p.55. Available at: <http://www.stat.gov.az/source/transport/indexen.php>. (Accessed 21/03/2015).

The Economist, *Don't call me Stan*, 2014. Available at: <http://www.economist.com/news/asia/21597006-president-wants-change-what-country-called-dont-call-me-stan>. (Accessed 03/04/2015).

The European Azerbaijan Society, *The European Azerbaijan Society*, 2015. Available at: <http://teas.eu/>. (15/02/2015).

The World Bank, *International Tourism, number of arrivals*, 2015. Available at: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/ST.INT.ARVL>. (Accessed 18/03/2015).

Thomas Cook Group, 2014, *Thomas Cook History*. Available at: <http://www.thomascokk.com/thomas-cook-history/>. (Accessed 06/02/2015).

Time Out: Time Out, About Time Out, 2015. Available at: <http://www.timeout.com/about/time-out-group/about-time-out>. (Accessed 25/02/2015).

“Tourism”, www.etymonline.com, 2015. Available at: http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=tourism&searchmode=none. (Accessed 07/02/2015).

“Tourism”, www.oed.com, 2015. Available at: <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/203936?redirectedFrom=tourism#eid>. (Accessed 07/02/2015).

Tourist”, www.etymonline.com, 2015. Available at: http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=tourist&searchmode=none. (Accessed 07/08/2015).

“Tourist”, www.oed.com, 2015. Available at: <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/203937?rskey=Vdo6Dj&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>. (Accessed 07/02/2015).

Trailblazer, *Mark Elliott*, 2015. Available at: <http://trailblazer-guides.com/author/mark-elliott>. (Accessed 24/02/2015).

Travelagents.com, *Travelagents.com*, 2015. Available at: <http://travelagents.com/>. (Accessed 25/02/2015).

Traxon Technologies, *Crystal Hall-Baku, Azerbaijan*, 2015. Available at: http://www3.traxontechnologies.com/showcase/showcase_details/14085. (Accessed 03/03/2015)

Tripadvisor, *Tripadvisor*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.tripadvisor.it/>. (Accessed 25/02/2015).

Turkish Airlines, *Home*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.turkishairlines.com/>. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

UK Government Web archive, *Historical Note*, 2009. Available at: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20090609003228/http://www.berr.gov.uk/whatwedo/employment/bank-public-holidays/bank-public-holidays/page18882.html>. (Accessed 06/02/2015).

UN Security Council, *Countries elected members of the Security Council*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.un.org/en/sc/members/elected.asp>. (Accessed 13/02/2015).

UN Security Council, Resolutions Number 822, 853, 874, 884, UN, New York, 1993. Available at: <http://www.un.org/en/sc/documents/resolutions/1993.shtml>. (Accessed 13/02/2015).

UNDP, *About Azerbaijan*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.az.undp.org/content/azerbaijan/en/home/countryinfo/>. (Accessed 13/02/2015).

UNESCO, *Art of Azerbaijani Ashiq*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/RL/00253>. (Accessed 03/04/2015).

UNESCO, *Azerbaijani Mugham*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00011&RL=00039>. (Accessed 31/03/2015).

UNESCO, *Traditional art of Azerbaijani carpet weaving in the Republic of Azerbaijan*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/RL/00389>. (Accessed 02/04/2015).

UNWTO, *Annual Report*, UN, Madrid, 2014. Available at: <http://www2.unwto.org/annual-reports>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

UNWTO, *Collection of Tourism Expenditure Statistics, Technical Manual*, UN, New York, 1995. Available at: <https://pub.unwto.org/WebRoot/Store/Shops/Infoshop/Products/1034/1034-1.pdf>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

UNWTO, *Global Code of Ethics for Tourism*, UN, New York, 1999. Available at: <http://dtxqt4w60xqpw.cloudfront.net/sites/all/files/docpdf/gcetpassportglobalcodeen.pdf>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

UNWTO, *Home*, UNWTO, 2015. Available at: <http://www2.unwto.org/>. (Accessed 11/04/2015).

UNWTO, *Manila Declaration on World Tourism*, UN, Manila, 1980. Available at: <http://www.univeur.org/cuebc/downloads/PDF%20carte/65.%20Manila.PDF>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

UNWTO, *Press Release, G20 recognizes Travel & Tourism as a driver of economic growth for the first time and commits to work on travel facilitation*, UNWTO, Madrid, 2012. Available at: <http://media.unwto.org/en/press-release/2012-06-20/g20-recognizes-travel-tourism-driver-economic-growth-first-time-and-commits>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

UNWTO, *Press Release, Tourism identified as key sector for high impact in Aid for Trade*, UNWTO, Genève, 2013. Available at: <http://media.unwto.org/press-release/2013-07-16/tourism-identified-key-sector-high-impact-aid-trade>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

UNWTO, *Press Release, UNWTO Statistics and TSA Issue Papers Series highlights relevance of tourism measurement and analysis*, UNWTO, Madrid, 2013. Available at: <http://media.unwto.org/press-release/2013-10-14/unwto-statistics-and-tsa-issue-papers-series-highlights-relevance-tourism-m>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

UNWTO, *Recommendations on Tourism Statistics*, UN, New York, 1994. Available at: http://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/Seriesm/SeriesM_83e.pdf. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

UNWTO, *Resolutions of the International Conference on travel and tourism statistics*, UN, Ottawa, 1991. Available at: <http://repository.uneca.org/bitstream/handle/10855/3921/Bib-29976.pdf?sequence=1>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

UNWTO, *Sustainable Tourism for Development Guidebook*, UNWTO, Madrid, 2013. Available at: <http://icr.unwto.org/content/guidebook-sustainable-tourism-development>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

UNWTO, *Tourism Highlights 2014 Edition*, UN, Madrid, 2014. Available at: <http://www2.unwto.org/content/why-tourism>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

UNWTO, *Tourism Towards 2030, Global Overview*, UN, Republic of Korea, 2011. Available at: http://dtxtq4w60xqpw.cloudfront.net/sites/all/files/pdf/unwto_2030_ga_2011_korea_1.pdf. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

US Energy Information Administration, *Azerbaijan*, 2014. Available at: <http://www.eia.gov/countries/cab.cfm?fips=aj>. (Accessed 13/02/2015).

Viaggiare Sicuri, *Azerbaijan*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.viaggiariesicuri.it/?azerbaijan>. (Accessed 02/04/2015).

Visions of Azerbaijan, *Visions of Azerbaijan*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.visions.az/>. (Accessed 26/02/2015).

Visit Azerbaijan, *Home*, 2015. Available at: <http://azerbaijan.travel/en/>. (Accessed 11/04/2015).

WTO, *Fourth Global Review of Aid for Trade: "Connecting to value chains"*, WTO, 2015. Available at: http://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/devel_e/a4t_e/global_review13_e.htm. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

WTTC, *Home*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.wttc.org/>. (Accessed 17/03/2015).

WTTC, *World Travel & Tourism Council*, 2015. Available at: <http://www.wttc.org/>. (Accessed 08/02/2015).

WTTC, *Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2014, Azerbaijan*, The Authority on World Travel & Tourism, London, 2014. Available at: <http://www.wttc.org/-/media/files/reports/economic%20impact%20research/country%20reports/azerbaijan2014.pdf>. (Accessed 17/03/2015).