

The role of landscape in the formation of the Absheron reserves



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ABSTRACT

The characteristics of formation of the historical and cultural value of Absheron reserves under the effect of landscape changes in preserved areas were studied. The study used field and desktop research methods (analysis of library and archive historical, cartographical, and literary material on the history of formation of the historical and cultural heritage and landscape of the Absheron Peninsula). The Absheron Peninsula is characterized by peculiar physical and geographic conditions, which play a major role in the formation of the ecological situation. Recommendations were formulated to solve the discovered problems of development of Absheron reserves, based on existing advantages and characteristics of the landscape. In particular, practical recommendations are given to improve the conditions of development of Absheron Peninsular reserves; a system of generalized and structured directions for preserving and developing the historical, cultural, and natural heritage of the Absheron Peninsular reserve fund. The improvement of the situation with the preservation of the natural landscape will facilitate the development of tourism.

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1. Introduction

Natural components have always played an important role in the life and development of the human society. However, there is an obvious paradox in the relationship of humans and their natural habitat – the achievements of civilization virtually do not decrease human dependence on nature. Moreover, the wellbeing of certain countries and nations, and in certain periods – the wellbeing of humanity, can depend directly on natural resources (Watson et al., 2014).

Azerbaijan is a country with a rich history, material and cultural monuments, which show the centuries-long past of the people. The targeted measures of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Azerbaijan, aimed at developing specially protected natural territories and creating an ecological network, resulted in 6308 historical and cultural monuments' being taken under governmental protection. Twenty-seven historical, cultural, architectural, artistic and ethnographical state reserves are also operating under these measures.

In Azerbaijan, reserves are created as areas with special arrangements on the protection and

use of historically formed territories of cities and other settlements and landscapes, with a view to preserving and restoring their historical appearance. It should also be noted that historical-cultural reserves are important to the future development of tourism in Azerbaijan, since tourism is a means for expanding paid services, the income from which is a source of funds for preserving the historical and cultural environment.

The Absheron Peninsula includes the capital of Azerbaijan – Baku, and its surrounding settlements. Settlements in the area have a rich historical and architectural heritage. Five of them have been declared historical-architectural reserves for the richness of their tangible and cultural heritage. Geoclimatic and landscape features became a major factor in the formation and planning of the Absheron reserves. Water sources, especially the Caspian Sea, became a factor in the formation of reserves. Most reserves are located along the coastline (Baku Tower, Nardaran, and Gobustan) due to the population's demand for water, sea products, and due to the founding of seaports. The dry climate and the steppe-desert landscape of Absheron are reflected in the nature, architecture and the way of life of local settlements.

The establishment of the Absheron National Park is an example of the targeted measures for the efficient use of natural resources, awareness raising and care for the environment, and the formation of a new environmental thinking. The

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development of Absheron reserves will help preserve and restore unique natural complexes, objects, and species, especially the Caspian seal, goitered gazelle, and wetland birds.

Five historical-cultural reserves have been established in the Absheron Peninsula:

1. Gobustan National Historical-Artistic Reserve in 1966.
2. Icherisheher State Historical-Architectural Reserve in 1985.
3. Gala State Ethnographic Reserve in 1988.
4. Nardaran Historical-Cultural Reserve in 1992.
5. Ateshgah Historical-Architectural Reserve in 2007.

The issue of preserving the historical and cultural heritage and monuments is very relevant to Azerbaijan. A number of laws determine the governmental priority in regard to creating conditions for the preservation, restoration, and protection of the cultural and historical environment for the benefit of the current and future generations, and using objects of cultural heritage in public life. This issue is also prioritized by local authorities of regions that host the reserves. Reserve employees create new exhibits, restore monuments, add new findings, conduct research and educational work, open exhibitions, and publish research papers.

2. Literature survey

The characteristic of area reclamation processes and further use of these areas is presented in the field of geography and cultural sciences by the formation of the "cultural landscape" concept, which is reflected in studies (Isachenko, 2003). For example, many countries include various aspects of formation and development of cultural landscapes in their land-use planning (Pavlic and Raguž, 2013; Griffin et al., 2013).

In the 1920s, German geography formed its own school of cultural landscape. Its founder was Schlüter (1928), who managed to unite the chorological ideas of Hettner and the French anthropocentric human geography (Adenle et al., 2014; UNESCO, 1972). Since then, developed countries pay close attention to studying and designing cultural landscapes (Iwamura et al., 2014; Young, 1992).

At first, the concept of "cultural landscape" was attributed to any landscape that was modified by purposeful economic activity. The term "cultural landscape" was later replaced by the term "manmade landscape".

Nowadays, most scholars consider manmade landscape a complex, in which any of its landscape components, including vegetation, was radically changed by humans either in their entire area or in most of it. By their socioeconomic functions, manmade landscapes are divided into resource-producing (agricultural, industrial, forestry), environment-forming (residential, recreational),

nature-protecting, and others. The term "cultural landscape" later acquired an entirely different meaning.

Despite the fact that the idea of the cultural landscape was suggested in the early twentieth century, the modern vision thereof, which incorporated the body of knowledge of natural sciences and humanities, appeared only 10-15 years ago.

The cultural landscape concept was developed by a number of prominent natural scientists. Some of them emphasized the leading role of economic activity in the creation and functioning of the cultural landscape; other stressed that cultural landscapes depend on initial natural conditions that human activity has to reckon with (McCall and Gray, 2014). Due to the relevance of managing the effect of human activity on the formation of the cultural landscape, a number of countries (the United Kingdom, Ireland, Spain, the USA, and others) have passed special laws on the protection and use of natural heritage. In 1980, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland passed the National Heritage Act, which regulates in detail the protection and use of cultural heritage. To elaborate this piece of legislation, Scotland passed the Natural Heritage (Scotland) Act in 1991, which deals with the heritage of this part of the United Kingdom. The implementation of these laws is successful and efficient. In accordance with one of them, a "Scottish Natural Heritage" body with over 600 employees was established in Scotland.

At that, the cultural landscape is still natural in the sense that having been modified due to certain social needs in the manner, required by the industry, it still develops in accordance with natural laws.

The Absheron Peninsula is the windiest region of the entire Eastern Transcaucasia. In this respect, two areas of the peninsula are distinguished; where 15 m/sec winds blow for more than 50 days and where 15 m/s winds blow for more than 100 days. The dominant winds are "Khazri" (northern) and "Gilavar" (southern) that transport dust, dirt, and toxicants. Therefore, it is expedient to consider the wind speed and direction when constructing industrial objects. The reduction of environmental risks requires a detailed and comprehensive research of the environment, based on new methodology and technology. The diversity and multidimensionality of the issues related to the formation of reserves requires the use of universal and modern technologies.

3. Materials and methods

The following scientific approaches were used in this study:

1. The systems approach – studying the impact of landscape change on the formation of Absheron historical-cultural reserves.
2. The geosystem approach – combining local and regional studies to obtain a comprehensive result.

3. The space-and-time approach – characterizing the transformation of the Absheron Peninsula area in the course of time (during the period of formation of the historical-cultural heritage and landscape that characterize the reserve fund of Absheron).

4. Methodology

The study used general scientific methods (theoretical analysis and synthesis, generalization, structuring, systematization, and comparative analysis) and special methods that are typical for studies in the field of architecture, geography, geology, history, and production placement, in particular, field and desktop methods (analysis of library and archive historical, cartographical, and literary material on the history of formation of the historical and cultural heritage and landscape of the Absheron Peninsula).

5. Results

The purpose of this study is to analyze the peculiarities of the formation of Absheron historical-cultural reserves under the influence of changes in the reserve areas' landscape and to formulate recommendations regarding the development of Absheron reserves, based on existing advantages and characteristics of the landscape.

The landscape is a part of the earth's surface, within which all the natural complexes (rocks, terrain, water, soil, flora, and fauna) form an interrelated unity. Matter and energy circulates in each landscape.

Landscapes are usually divided into natural and manmade. However, the economic development of areas gradually changes the natural landscapes. The entire human life takes place in the conditions of this or that landscape. The human economic influence on nature includes the impact on landscapes. By affecting one or two landscape components, humans usually affect and change the entire landscape without realizing it. This results in the formation of qualitatively new constantly used landscapes, created by human industrial activity. Such landscapes are called manmade, since human economic activity played a significant role in their formation. Examples of such landscapes include cities and villages, agricultural lands, industrial enterprises, transport routes, and mining regions. In manmade landscapes, natural components were changed, partially or completely, by humans. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the effect of both natural and manmade landscapes on the development of the Azerbaijan reserve fund. It may be necessary to protect certain areas from human impact and preserve them. Many other areas, for example, waterbodies, forests, and parks within settlements, require scientifically substantiated and reasonable use.

The Absheron State Nature Reserve was established in July 1969 in order to protect gazelles, Caspian seals and water birds that inhabit

the territory. The dominant climate in this area is that of semi-deserts and dry steppes. The species composition and phytomass of the vegetation cover is limited; the plants vary with the level of salinity and water distribution in the areas. Coastal sand plants (42.6%), reed-swamp meadows (13.2%), and salt marshes (5.2%) are common. Ephemerae are well developed in early spring. The dry territory is inhabited by goitered gazelles, jackals, foxes, badger, and hares; the Caspian Sea is inhabited by seals and various fish; local birds include herring gulls, mute swans, coots, gadwalls, pochards, and black ducks, waders, marsh harriers, and other migrating birds. Animals and birds from the IUCN Red List that inhabit the Shirvan National Park can also be encountered in the Absheron National Park.

The decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan No. 132 dated August 2, 2011 entered into the register of governmentally protected objects of history and culture: 1067 cultural monuments of international importance in the Gobustan Reserve; three architectural monuments of international importance, 93 architectural monuments of national importance, and 2568 architectural monuments of regional importance in the Icherisheher Reserve; seven monuments of national importance and 234 monuments of regional importance in the Gala Reserve; one monument of international importance, five monuments of national importance and seven monuments of regional importance in the Nardaran Reserve; one architectural monument of international importance and eight monuments of regional importance in the Ateshgah Reserve (Neymat, 1991). The Absheron National Park was established on the base of the Absheron State Nature Reserve in the administrative territory of the Pirallahy district of Baku (783 hectares) by the decree of the President of Azerbaijan No. 622 dated February 8, 2005.

Historical-cultural reserves of Azerbaijan can be divided into 2 groups in terms of their territory and number of monuments.

(a) When the entire territory of a settlement is declared a reserve – “Icherisheher” State Historical-Architectural Reserve, “Lahij” and “Basqal” Historical-Cultural Reserve in the Ismaili district, Isilu State Historical-Cultural Reserve in the Qakh district, “Khinalug” State Historical-Architectural and Ethnographic Reserve in the Quba district, “Shusha” Historical-Architectural Reserve, “Yukhari Bash” Historical-Architectural Reserve in the Shaki district, “Ganja” State Historical-Architectural Reserve, “Qabala” State Historical-Cultural Reserve, “Shabran City” Historical Reserve in the Shabran district, “Yanar Dag” State Historical-Cultural and Natural Reserve in the Absheron district, “Arpaçay” Historical-Cultural Reserve in the Sharur district, Ordubad State Historical-Architectural Reserve, “Gülüstan” Historical-Cultural Reserve in the Julfa district, “Avey” State

Historical-Cultural Reserve in the Gazakh district.

- (b) When a certain monument or complex is declared a reserve – “Kish” Historical-Architectural Reserve in the Shaki district, Zagatala Historical-Cultural Reserve, “Chirag Gala” Historical-Architectural Reserve in the Shabran district, “Nizami Mausoleum”, “Pir Huseyn” Historical-Cultural Monument in the Hajigabul district, “Keshikchi Dag” State Historical-Cultural Reserve in the Aghstafa district, “Gamigaya” and “Ashab al-Kahf” in the Ordubad district.

In terms of the functioning of historical monuments, reserves are divided into historical-architectural, historical-cultural, historical-ethnographic, historical-artistic, and historical. The appearance of historical-architectural reserves is formed under the influence of climate, geographic location, and local building materials.

5.1. Gobustan

The State Historical-Artistic Reserve “Gobustan” is a protected complex of archaeological monuments in the Absheron Peninsula. The reserve is located in the Gobustan settlement of the Qaradağ district, 60 km from the capital city of Baku. The most common monuments in this reserve are those of the Mesolithic period. Two sub-layers of the three cultural layers that were discovered in the “Ana Zaga” (“Den Mother”) settlement in the Boyukdash Mountain date back to the Stone Age. The 20 settlements, 40 barrows, and over 6000 petroglyphs that were discovered in the area of the reserve are of great importance. The material and cultural richness of Gobustan is determined by the fact that people lived here from the tenth millennium BCE to the eighteenth century. Considering the exceptional importance of the complex of material and cultural heritage for history and culture, the Council of Ministers of the Azerbaijan SSR, by resolution No. 503, dated September 9, 1966 awarded Gobustan the status of a State Historical-Artistic Reserve. The reserve covers a large territory with three mountains – Boyukdash, Kichikdash, and Jingirdag.

Different scholars have different opinions regarding the meaning of the “Gobustan” toponym. The common opinion relates the toponym to the geographic and landscape conditions. The word “Gobustan” is interpreted as gorges, the land of ravines, or the land of hills. The word “Gobustan” is formed by combination of two words “Gobu” and “stan” (place, space). The conducted archaeological research showed that the Caspian Sea reached the area of the reserve. The discovered bones of tigers and bears show that this area was also covered by forests.

Norwegian scientist and explorer Thor Heyerdahl wrote in the notes from his travel to Azerbaijan, “Gobustan is a cultural gem, whose roots go back to ancient times, which is more ancient than Mesopotamia, and the history of

which is yet unstudied”. The area of the reserve is 4400 ha. It is currently under governmental protection, while research here continues to this day. The main purpose of the reserve is to study, protect and raise awareness of the local petroglyphs, mounds, and settlements, i.e. the living style, culture and art of ancestors of the Azerbaijani people. Since 2007, the “Gobustan State Historical-Artistic Reserve” is protected as part of the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage list (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2).



Fig. 1: Gobustan



Fig. 2: Gobustan

5.2. Icherisheher

The “Icherisheher” State Historical-Architectural Reserve spans the entire territory of the old Baku Fortress. The history of the seaport city Baku goes back to the times before the Common Era. Being cultural works of Azerbaijani architecture, the Shirvanshah’s Palace, the Maiden Tower, caravanserais, baths, residential houses, public and courtyard nodes, and the general urban planning incorporate a historical stage of the national architecture. The seemingly chaotic buildings of Icherisheher are harmonious inside. Thus, the terrain, landscape, and climate were the

main factors during the construction of squares, palaces, and streets, and the formation of the urban-planning structure.

The Icherisheher State Historical-Architectural Reserve includes the ancient inner fortress of Baku, surrounded by fortification walls. A small town with an area of 21.5 hectares is located in the south of the Absheron Peninsula, on the gulf coast of the Caspian Sea, well protected from wind and storms. Baku, a small seaport on the Caspian coast, was famous for fires that erupted from the ground, and combustible gases, which was key to the formation of its toponym (Badu Kube- Land of Life). Icherisheher is a precious monument of urbanism. Old Baku was the perfect Muslim city for the Icherisheher planning. It is located on the southeastern slope of the tallest hill, facing the gulf.

The structure of the gulf caused the transformation of Baku into the main port city of the Caspian Sea. At that time, the hilly landscape provided protection of the city's major buildings from very strong north winds. The fact that Baku was an important seaport is obvious from the formation of its trading center in the form of wide streets that ran parallel to the coastline. The planning structure of the city was developed in accordance with the structure of the natural landscape that was surrounded by two rows of walls. Icherisheher preserved its district system,

which was formed from the middle Ages up to end of the nineteenth century. Narrow and crooked streets, intended for pedestrians, created the complex and chaotic planning in accordance with the terrain and the life style of Muslims. Geographical, patronymic and professional 14 districts of the city were formed from the middle Ages to the nineteenth century. Since the district was located on hillslopes in the form of terraces, most ancient Baku homes commanded a view of the sun and the sea. The districts that formed from small and simple houses, based on the terrain, gave the city its general step-like structure. The Shirvanshah's Palace complex is located in the highest point of the fortified city. Despite there being no ancient castle walls around the complex, there is no doubt that the building was constructed in the territory of the inner city (Fig. 3 and Fig. 4). The complex includes the palace building, the courthouse, mosques, two tombs, baths, reservoirs, and the portal. These buildings form ensembles around three different courtyards, based on the difficult terrain. The minarets and domes of religious and public buildings significantly enrich the city's panorama. In recent years, a number of green spaces were established – Vahid, Azim Azimzade, the gardens near the Maiden's Tower, boulevards along the fortress walls, etc.

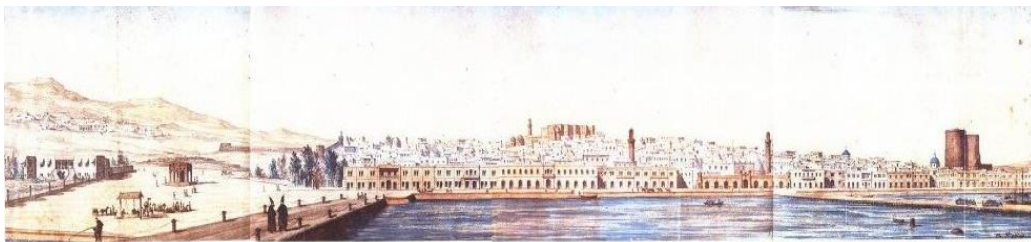


Fig. 3: Icherisheher

The rapid development of Baku, the second oil boom, and relative uncontrollability before the declaration of independence had a negative impact on Icherisheher; therefore, in 2002, UNESCO entered this city into the "List of World Heritage in Danger". In 2009, due to the conducted restoration and beautification, the reserve was removed from this list.

5.3. Gala

The "Gala" State Historical-Ethnographic Reserve is located in the Absheron Peninsula, at the foot of the Lesser Caucasus Mountains, which partly passes through the Caspian Sea. Archeological excavations that were conducted around the Gala village, and the discovered pottery and ceramic materials prove that the history of this village goes back to the times before the Common Era. The Gala village is the only Absheron settlement that stood the test of time and fully preserved its urban-planning structure and medieval architectural appearance. The unique historical and cultural complexes, individual village houses of various constructions indicate a high

level of building technique and allow comparing the Gala village to the Icherisheher of Baku. The existing historical and architectural heritage mostly dates back to the fourteenth – twentieth centuries. The Gala village, which reflects the centuries-long architectural and building art, displays a high level of building technique, and creates a unity of architectural monuments, is history engraved in stone. Preserving and protecting this historical heritage, familiarizing the future generation and the world with it is a key objective.

Established in 1988 in the village of Gala, the "Gala State Historical-Ethnographic Reserve" is located in the northeast of the Absheron Peninsula, on the shore of Lake Boyukshor. The lake's use for salt production resulted in the founding of settlements around it. The natural landscape determined the influence of Lake Boyukshor on the formation of the village's urban structure. The lake plays a major role in socioeconomic life of the local population. The area of main trading center of the village ran from the coast of Lake Boyukshor to the defense tower. In the middle Ages, merchants' shops and artisans' workshops were located in the

streets. In the middle Ages, the natural landscape caused the formation of a “High” and “Low” district systems in the village with their own geographic features. The construction of mosques in the village determined the formation of four districts. The defense tower and Juma Mosque were built on the tallest point of the reserve, which resulted in the development of the social center in this area. In accordance with the archive materials, even in the eighth century, after the Arabs’ invasion of this area, a small observation tower was built here, using a favorable geographic location. All the roads leading to the village were visible from the high spot.



Fig. 4: Maiden's Tower

Water shortage, clay soil unsuitable for agriculture, and the arid steppe climate of Absheron gave the village the appearance of a drab, gray landscape. The reservoirs in the historical area and the underground system of nearby Xashaxuna village provided the village with water. Fields was owned only by the private farms. Geographic and climatic characteristics allowed the local population to use the fertile land around the village for growing cotton and grain crops.

In recent years, with the support of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, a boulevard was built along the shore of Lake Boyukshor, and green spaces were established in the streets. The expansion of the manmade landscape by evergreen pine trees organizes the decorative green space system of the reserve (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5: Gala

In order to protect the national and cultural values, to restore and advertise the history of the Gala village, on April 18, 1988, the Cabinet of Ministers established the “Gala” State Historical-

Ethnographic Reserve by decree No. 457. This decree reads, “In the Gala village of Baku city, in the territory of the historical-ethnographic reserve, all scientific, historical, artistic, historical-cultural monuments shall be protected by the Government. Any destruction, modification of this area, deformation of historical and cultural monuments of the reserve shall be prohibited”. The area of the “Gala” State Historical-Ethnographic Reserve is more than 200 ha. The reserve management inventoried, documented, and took under protection over 243 monuments.

Since 2011, the “Gala” Historical-Ethnographic Reserve is part of the “Icherisheher” State Historical-Architectural Reserve. In 2008, a historical-ethnographic museum was established in the territory of the reserve, which is rare for Absheron. Restoration and beautification works were performed at the village. Studies that were conducted in the reserve discovered new monuments. The recommendation is to enter the following monuments into the Ministry of Culture and Tourism monument list: Qum bath – fourteenth – fifteenth centuries; remains of the Shor bath – eighteenth century; forge – eighteenth – nineteenth centuries; ancient residence – Bronze Age (Watson et al., 2014).

5.4. Nardaran

The Nardaran Historical-Cultural Reserve was established on January 17, 1992 by Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan No. 26. It was established as a special protected zone for preserving and restoring purposes. The reserve includes the historical territories of the Nardaran settlement.

The Nardaran State Historical-Cultural Reserve was established 2 km from the Caspian Sea in a sandy landscape. The formation of two separate parts of this village (the northeast part, settled from the early middle ages to the fourteenth century, and the western part, settled in later periods) was predetermined by the local environmental and landscape features. Strong north winds always covered this or that part of the village with layers of fine sand. In the Medieval period, the covering of single-story buildings by layers of sand caused the relocation of the village to the west. Residential, agricultural, livestock, and gardening areas were created in different geographic areas of the village, based on natural landscape features. The mild climate of the seacoast, rich in quartz fine sand, contributed to the development of the community garden and orchard. In the eastern part of the Nardaran village, near the seaside gardens area and the “Rock of Hope”, ancient human settlement was found, as well as the Gobustan stones with various petroglyphs. Famous historian Professor Sara Ashurbeyli called this area the most ancient finding in Gobustan. Settlement of the eastern part of the village began with the construction of a tower. The tower was located on the tallest point of the area, thus influencing the local urban planning. Hence,

the district system and community center, which are adapted to the terrain, are focused around it. The reserve was formed by 14 small districts squares with their own geographical and patronymic features. The seacoast mild climate was favorable for the growth of trees in the reserve. Figs, grapes, mulberry, pomegranate, pistachio trees, which are inherent to the Absheron climate, are the basis of the village's green spaces, which add variety to the Nardaran bare and sandy landscape.

There are various types of buildings in the Nardaran Historical-Cultural Reserve: military, religious, civil, and memorial. Their combination formed urban nodes, yard systems and street networks (Fig. 6). Civil buildings in the reserve were entered into the list of monuments and are under protection. By the decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan No. 132 dated August 2, 2011, the Nardaran Castle was entered into the list of internationally important monuments. Eight religious and 10 civil buildings have the status of monuments. Unfortunately, villages and residential buildings that incorporate the historical, individual, national, and architectural features were not entered into the list and were not inventoried. The research that was conducted in this territory marked two religious and 20 domestic buildings as newly discovered.



Fig. 6: Nardaran

5.5. Ateshgah temple

The "Ateshgah Temple" Historical-Architectural Reserve was established by the decree of the President of Azerbaijan No. 2564, dated December 19, 2007. In 2011, a number of civil and memorial buildings of historical and architectural importance were suggested to be included into the reserve by the Cabinet of Ministers with a view to expanding the territory of the reserve.

"Ateshgah" State Historical-Architectural Reserve is located in the Suraxanı village in the Absheron Peninsula. Rich gas fields and naturally erupting flames always attracted the attention of the people and facilitated the establishment of Zoroastrianism. The "Ateshgah" temple, which was built in the twelfth - thirteenth centuries by

merchants from Iran and India, where Zoroastrianism was widespread, was restored in the eighteenth century. Although the settlement in the Suraxanı village dates back to ancient times (which is evidenced by settlement in the rocky areas near the village, where the "muselle" ceremonies for rain took place), the construction of a place of worship created conditions for the establishment of settlements around it. The temple complex consists of several buildings– a vaulted temple, caravanserais, and cells. In 2007, the Cabinet of Ministers declared this unique architectural monument a reserve (Fig. 7).

Historical and cultural monuments indicate the cultural and moral level of the nation at different stages of its development. Monuments have a critical impact on science, education, culture, patriotic spirit, and the formation of moral and aesthetic education. At that, the landscape plays an important role in the formation of reserves.

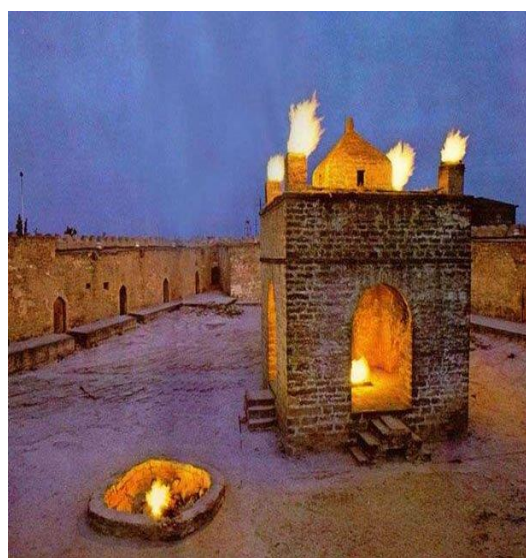


Fig. 7: Ateshgah

Absheron manmade landscapes have a rather complex spatial organization and, therefore, different spatial spans – from small tracts to separate groups of areas. The basic unit of a landscape is a topos, which has its own territorial, visual, semantic, and other properties that may be determined and interpreted only within the framework of cultural landscape studies.

For instance, the Absheron Peninsula is characterized by peculiar physical and geographic conditions that play an important role in the formation of the environmental situation. Arid and denuded terrain, badlands, and mud volcanos are common in this area. The dominant climate of this area is that of semi-deserts and dry steppes with a shortage of water resources.

Absheron is one of the oldest oil-producing regions in the world. The local oil-producing industry is more than 100 years old. The main oilfields of Azizbekovneft, Sabunçu Oil, Suraxanineft, Binagadi Oil, and Qaradağneft are based on these deposits.

The distinctness of the Absheron Peninsula geographic landscape is formed, in part, by the

local salt lakes (of which there are more than 100) with varying morphometric parameters, part of which dry up in summer. Some lakes became reservoirs for wastewater of big settlements (certain settlements lack a sewerage network). Parasites and bacteria are accumulated here. They reproduce rapidly, thus polluting the environment.

Quarries deal significant damage to the environment of the Absheron Peninsula, especially

the atmosphere. Quarries mostly use outdated equipment. The wind spreads dust, dirt, and engine waste.

The preservation of the historical-cultural and natural heritage of the Absheron Peninsula reserve fund is related to the following fields of endeavor (Fig. 8).

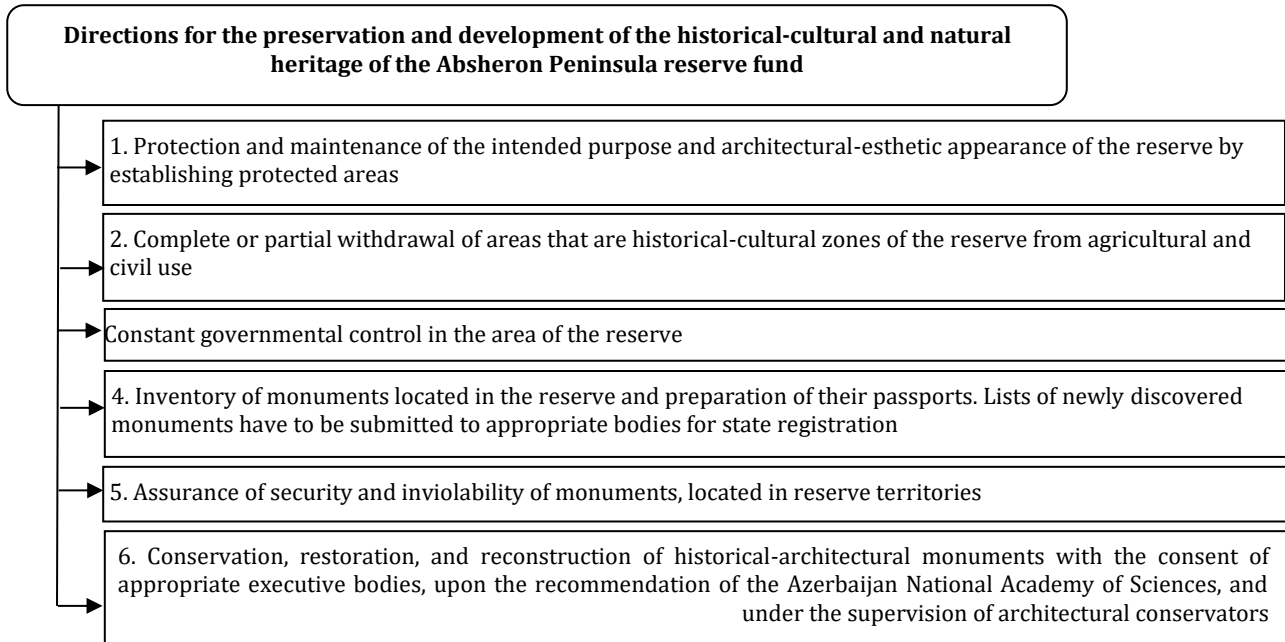


Fig. 8: Directions for the preservation and development of the historical-cultural and natural heritage of the Absheron Peninsula reserve fund (Magribi, 1998)

6. Discussion

This study found that the Absheron reserves have the potential that is required to develop tourism (Pavlic and Raguž, 2013; Gurova and Ratilainen, 2015). They include many unique and remarkable landscapes and ecosystems, undisturbed by human activities. They are a network of scientific and research institutions that span all natural areas. This predetermines their high potential for the organization of tourism, student internship, and volunteer programs. In most cases, the reserves are the only structures in their respective regions that can assume the function of planning, managing, and monitoring tourist activity, which is an invariable prerequisite for the development of ecotourism.

The development of innovative and traditional cultural landscapes of Absheron should take place under the effect of sociocultural and mental development of space by giving it specific properties that later manifest in its specific images. The combination of environmental, awareness rising, and ecotourism activities in Absheron reserves and national parks will help draw public attention to the issues of natural landscape protection. In this context, the results of this study should be interpreted in the light of sustainable social, ecological, and economic development of areas (Gooden, 2014).

After comparing the results of this research to those of other studies, (Soini and Birkeland, 2014; Twinamatsiko et al., 2014; Gydesen, 2015) in particular, it is worth noting that this paper not only describes the current situation in the development of the reserve fund and distinguishes the impact factors and problems of such development, but also formulates recommendations regarding the solution of the discovered problems of development of Absheron reserves, based on existing advantages and characteristics of the landscape. In particular:

1. Practical recommendations are given regarding the improvement of conditions for the development of Absheron Peninsula reserves.
2. A system of actions is offered in the form of generalized and structured directions for the preservation and development of the historical-cultural and natural heritage of the Absheron Peninsula reserve fund.

Overall, a lot of work has been done to preserve and develop the system of historical and cultural monuments of Absheron. The existing basis and potential for developing Absheron reserves is significant. However, modern work for protecting monuments, with a view to increasing its efficiency, should implement new ideas and technologies, new information support, and update its scientific instruments.

To conclude, it is worth noting that Azerbaijan's authority as a state significantly depends on how caring it is to its historical and cultural heritage, its monuments, how comfortable are the conditions for visitors from both Azerbaijan and other countries, how developed is the infrastructure of the reserve areas, and how quickly and efficiently can the country multiply its spiritual acquisitions.

The reasonableness and reliability of the obtained results is confirmed by the processing of a large number of scientific sources on the chosen field of research. The study used a wide range of general and special research methods, which also adds to the reasonableness and reliability of the obtained results.

The main theoretical and methodological considerations and recommendations of this study have scientific and practical value. Therefore, they can be used to improve the conditions of development of reserves and their potential as tourist destinations not only in Azerbaijan, but also in other countries, for instance, to compare the conditions of development and discover common problems and trends, which determine the contribution of this study to world science.

The issue of creating a system of institutions for protecting the cultural heritage of Absheron reserves is urgent. The distribution of powers of authority to numerous institutions causes an overlapping of certain functions and a conflict of interests between institutions regarding certain issues. One of the most complicated issues is that of funding works for the protection of monuments in the country overall, and in the Absheron Peninsula reserves, in particular.

7. Conclusion

The Absheron Peninsula is characterized by peculiar physical and geographic conditions that play an important role in the formation of the environmental situation. Arid and denuded terrain, badlands, and mud volcanos are common in this area. The dominant climate of this area is that of semi-deserts and dry steppes with insufficient water resources.

Manmade changes are always present in reserve areas. They improve the area, and ensure the creation of new green spaces for the population and tourists. The influence of the natural landscape on the creation of historical reserves and the development of the urban system in the Absheron Peninsula gives them a unique, distinctive architectural appearance with common features.

Traditional Absheron landscapes are of great interest for the development of tourism and recreation, given the local pristine nature, high level of preservation of the historical and cultural heritage, and elements of the living traditional culture of local communities (including traditional nature resource and economy management).

At that, analysis shows that the manmade landscape of the Absheron Peninsula is in a critical state, and requires improvement, which will facilitate the development of tourism,

intensification of historical, cultural, and ethnographic studies. The comprehensive and systems approach is offered to improve the conditions for the development of Absheron Peninsula reserves. It implies governmental monitoring, complete or partial withdrawal of areas that are historical-cultural zones of the reserve from agricultural and civil use, inventory of monuments, and assurance of their security and inviolability. In addition, it is necessary to use cutting-edge technologies at industrial enterprises, including non-waste technologies, relocating certain enterprises beyond the reserves, taking measures for ensuring the environmental friendliness of cities at the state and local authorities level, creating reserve areas, gardens, and parks for visitors, tourists, and residents of territories that surround reserves, etc.

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