PROSPECTS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRANSFORMATIONAL CREATIVE TOURISM

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Abstract. *The study explores the potential of developing transformative creative tourism in Azerbaijan as a new and promising form of tourism that responds to the evolving needs of modern travelers. The research highlights that while Azerbaijan possesses diverse tourism resources, existing activities remain seasonally and geographically concentrated, creating socioeconomic imbalances. The article examines the concepts of transformation and transformative learning, explaining how tourism can serve as a medium for deep, long-lasting personal change. It then analyzes the relationship between creative and transformative tourism and introduces the concept of "transformative creative tourism," which integrates cultural participation with personal development. Practical examples, including the Chenot Palace Health Wellness Hotel in Gabala, demonstrate the applicability of this approach in Azerbaijan. The authors conclude that transformative creative tourism, based on the country's rich cultural heritage and creative potential, can promote individual well-being while generating economic, social, and cultural benefits for sustainable tourism development.*

Keywords: *transformative tourism, creative tourism, Chenot Palace Health Welness Hotel, transformative learning, transformative creative tourism.*

Azerbaijan possesses a wide range of tourism resources in areas such as coastal (sea), cultural, thermal, religious, and gastronomic tourism. However, an analysis of current tourism statistics reveals that tourism activity is largely concentrated in the summer months and in specific geographic regions. This concentration creates certain economic, social, and cultural challenges. Considering the evolving demands of consumers and the supply-demand dynamics of Azerbaijan's tourism market, it becomes evident that existing tourism types need to be developed in line with the expectations of modern tourists.

Creative tourism is a type of tourism that has gained increasing global prominence and continues to attract growing interest. This model emphasizes active participation and hands-on learning experiences in specific fields during travel, making it highly compatible with other types of tourism. Within this context, transformative tourism – focused on personal change and development—can be viewed as a complementary alternative that aligns well with creative tourism.

The first section of this article explores the concepts of transformation and transformative learning, followed by a detailed explanation of transformative tourism. The second section focuses on the relationship between creative tourism and transformative tourism. In the third section, the concept of "transformative creative tourism" is introduced, and relevant examples are provided.

1. The Concept of Change and Transformative Learning

In the Azerbaijani language, the term *change* refers to the process of shifting from one state to another, transformation, or alteration in form or condition. In the field of psychology, it is described as the emergence of a subconscious feeling or desire into consciousness, either in an opposite or altered form.

Reisinger (2015) associates transformation with changes in individuals' lifestyles and behavioral patterns, often linked to challenging unethical or unjust systems. *Learning*, on the other hand, refers to the process of acquiring knowledge, retaining information, developing skills, and gathering insights. Learning is a continuous process that spans an individual's entire life—from birth to death. The concepts of transformation and learning were brought together through the research of Mezirow (1978), leading to the development of the term *transformative learning* (cited in Şen & Şahin, 2017).

Morgan (2010) defines transformative learning as a process that brings about fundamental and structural changes in a person's thinking, emotions, and actions. He characterizes it as a shift in consciousness that is deep, radical, and irreversible. Similarly, Akpınar (2010) describes transformative learning as the process by which individuals critically reflect on their experiences, beliefs, and assumptions, thereby forming and applying new approaches to understanding the world. Based on these definitions, transformative learning is not about temporary behavioral adjustments; rather, it involves profound, long-lasting changes in a person's habits, worldview, or lifestyle. It is a process whereby negative behaviors or habits are replaced with positive and enduring alternatives.

Mezirow and Associates (2000) emphasize that transformative learning is composed of ten distinct phases. Upon completion of these phases, the individual internalizes the knowledge and experiences gained, ultimately bringing about significant and lasting change in their life.

According to Mezirow and his colleagues, the initial trigger for engaging in the transformative learning process is a personal and internal crisis. Mezirow characterizes this condition as a dilemma— a situation in which the individual is faced with conflicting choices (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). The theory proposes that transformative learning follows a sequential path. The individual, upon encountering such a dilemma, experiences emotional discomfort and begins a process of self-examination and internal reflection.

At this stage, the individual becomes aware of the confusion they are experiencing and recognizes that they are entering a period of change. They begin to identify goals, formulate a concrete action plan, and acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to implement that plan. As the person applies these new competencies, they begin to take on new roles within their social context, which in turn reinforces their self-confidence.

As a result, the individual undergoing transformation incorporates their newly acquired insights into lasting behavioral and cognitive change, leading to a more constructive and meaningful life trajectory. Thus, a previously negative or limiting condition is successfully transformed into a positive and empowering experience.

2. Transformative Tourism

In the modern era, tourism has become an essential and indispensable aspect of human life. Factors such as urban crowding, traffic congestion, noise pollution, and high-stress work environments are pushing individuals to seek rest and renewal. From this perspective, tourism is no longer perceived as a luxury; rather, it is increasingly recognized as a necessary means to support both psychological and physical well-being.

Following World War II and influenced by the Industrial Revolution, mass tourism became widespread across the globe. However, today's tourists are no longer content with merely relaxation and entertainment. As Reisinger (2015) emphasizes, the conceptualization of tourism has evolved: the primary objectives of tourists have shifted from pure leisure to include learning, self-development, cultural exploration, and personal transformation.

Transformative tourism refers to travel experiences that lead to lasting changes in individuals' lives by helping them abandon negative habits and adopt healthier, more beneficial behaviors. This type of tourism is primarily driven by the pursuit of personal goals and the intention to replace physically or psychologically harmful behaviors with safer and more constructive alternatives (Little, 2012: 257-271). Similarly, Christie and Mason (2003) define transformative tourism as a form of tourism that facilitates positive shifts in individuals' values, attitudes, and perspectives.

Many researchers working in this field propose similar approaches to transformative tourism. Tomljenovic et al. (2019) emphasize that for transformation to begin within an individual, the journey must be planned independently and should be realized through motivations such as learning, engaging with local culture, and participating in activities that provoke self-reflection. Akyurt (2019, p. 329) outlines the core components of transformative tourism as spiritual renewal, a desire for personal change, physical rejuvenation, visits to sacred places, cultural interactions, self-actualization, and various other tourism activities.

Reisinger (2015) categorizes types of transformation into physical, emotional, spiritual, existential, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions. He further defines individuals' expectations from transformation as improving physical health, reaching an ideal weight, adopting a

healthy diet, developing a positive outlook on life, living in the moment, becoming aware of one's desires and self, cultivating tolerance, and enhancing resilience in the face of life's challenges. To achieve such transformation, Reisinger recommends a range of activities including yoga, meditation, physical exercise, massage, dancing, singing, participating in charitable events, exploring different cultures, and engaging in cultural exchange – all of which are considered effective means of facilitating transformation.

Undoubtedly, every travel experience can bring about certain changes in individuals. During a vacation, travelers spend time in a different destination and interact—whether briefly or extensively—with locals and fellow tourists. As a result of these interactions, some degree of behavioral or cognitive change may naturally occur. A person from one cultural background spending time immersed in another culture and accumulating new experiences is likely to undergo some level of change. However, what is being discussed here is not merely superficial or temporary change, but *transformation*—a deep and lasting shift.

For a tourism experience to be considered transformative, there must be a clearly defined and meaningful intention for personal change set prior to the trip, along with a deliberate effort to realize this change during the journey. In short, although travel aimed at escaping daily stress, relaxing, or having fun may lead to minor shifts in an individual, such trips cannot be categorized under transformative tourism unless they are purposefully designed for deep personal transformation.

3. Creative Tourism and Transformative Tourism: Transformative Creative Tourism

Various definitions of creative tourism exist in the academic literature. Richards and Raymond (2000) define creative tourism as a form of tourism that provides visitors with opportunities to actively participate in local, specialized courses and learning experiences, thereby enhancing their creative potential. Another definition describes it as "interactive and reflective experiences rooted in creative activities based on local culture and active participation, emerging from cultural tourism" (Luka & Luka, 2014, p. 139). This form of tourism fosters a connection between visitors and local residents – the very individuals who shape and maintain the cultural identity of the destination. Through engagement in distinctive local courses, visitors are offered the opportunity to develop their creative skills while experiencing the region.

As can be inferred from these definitions, creative tourism involves visitors participating in educational programs that reflect the local culture of the destination they are visiting for vacation. These programs aim to equip participants with new skills while simultaneously offering relaxation and leisure. The educational activities are typically focused on topics that align with the interests of the visitors and embody the cultural characteristics of the region.

Several scholars have categorized the cultural resources that can be utilized in creative tourism. Table 1 presents a classification developed in relation to this topic.

Table 1. Cultural Resources Available for Creative Tourism

Traditional Culture, Historical and Cultural Heritage	Handicrafts, Antiques, and Restoration	Jewelry, Textiles, Ceramics, Woodworking, Antiques, Architecture Restoration, etc.
	Traditional Cuisine	Cooking, Local Cuisine, etc.
	Historical, Cultural and Natural Heritage	Museums, Archives, Libraries, Monuments, Natural Parks, etc.
Art	Visual Arts	Painting, Sculpture, Photography, Literature, etc.
	Performing Arts	Theatre, Dance, Opera, Circus, Puppetry, etc.
Creative Industries	Audio-Visual	Film, Television, Video, Radio, Documentary, etc.
	Music	Live music, Albums, Records, CDs, etc.
	Publishing	Books, Magazines, Newspapers, etc.
Creative Activities	Design	Fashion design, Graphic design, Interior architecture, etc.
	Creative Services	Architecture, advertising, etc.

Source: *urbact.eu.akt. Akshit Ashik, 2014: 790*

Transformative tourism refers to travel experiences undertaken by individuals with the intention of making positive changes in their physical, emotional, or lifestyle domains, often prompted by internal conflicts or personal dilemmas. In this context, it is feasible to integrate transformative tourism with creative tourism. Visitors who travel to a destination with the aim of achieving personal transformation can be directed toward creative tourism activities that facilitate this goal. The combined presentation of these two types of tourism can be referred to as "transformative creative tourism."

The desire for personal transformation typically stems from individual-specific needs. For instance, a person dissatisfied with their eating habits and experiencing related physical or emotional challenges may travel in search of adopting a healthier nutritional lifestyle and leaving behind unhealthy habits – this would fall within the scope of transformative tourism. Delivering this transformation through creative tourism activities – thus offering a "creative transformative tourism" experience – is entirely possible.

Examples of such integration include:

- Teaching tourists how to prepare meals from an ideal nutritional menu;
- Encouraging them to explore various types of physical activity to identify the sport most suitable for their needs;
- Instructing them on how to sustain a regular exercise routine;
- Helping them achieve mental and emotional relaxation through yoga;
- Offering hands-on activities like handicrafts that not only relieve mental fatigue but also introduce new, fulfilling hobbies.

To effectively implement transformative creative tourism activities at a destination, careful and strategic planning is essential. The process should begin with the formation of a skilled and experienced team, which will engage in regular meetings to exchange ideas and reach sound, well-informed decisions.

In the initial phase of planning, creative tourism activities can be identified based on a comprehensive assessment of the natural and cultural resources available at the destination. Potential offerings may include:

- region-specific culinary practices,
- traditional handicrafts,
- local music and dance traditions,
- agricultural practices,
- indigenous fruits and vegetables,
- raw material production or processing.

Following this analysis, the most suitable options for transformative creative tourism should be selected and adapted for implementation at the destination.

A key component of transformative creative tourism is that participating tourists approach these activities with the clear intent of achieving permanent, personal change. Therefore, when transformation is the goal, the duration, content, and organizational structure of the tourism experience become critically important. Ultimately, the success of the program hinges on whether participants return home having undergone a meaningful transformation and feeling genuinely satisfied with their experience.

Since the goal of transformative creative tourism is lasting change, short-term or single-day activities may not be sufficient. Instead, a longer-term process is generally required to enable authentic transformation. Furthermore, meticulous planning and the involvement of qualified professionals in delivering the training and activities are of vital importance.

Post-program feedback should be systematically collected from participants to inform and improve future initiatives. By incorporating this feedback, subsequent programs can be refined to better meet the expectations of tourists and more effectively facilitate transformation through creative engagement.

3.1. Examples of Transformative Creative Tourism

In the modern era, tourism consumers increasingly seek experiences that go beyond mere relaxation and entertainment, aspiring instead to achieve physical, emotional, and intellectual renewal through travel. In this context, the fusion of transformative tourism and creative tourism – referred to as *transformative creative tourism* – is emerging as a key pillar of new tourism strategies. In Azerbaijan, one of the most prominent examples of this potential is the Chenot Palace Health Wellness Hotel located in Gabala, which holds a leading position in the country's luxury health tourism sector.

Chenot Palace Health Wellness Hotel is situated in a serene natural environment surrounded by mountains and lakes in the city of Gabala. Since its opening in 2016, the hotel has wel-

comed high-profile guests from various countries, offering detoxification, wellness, and regeneration-oriented programs. The institution operates based on the Chenot Method, a globally recognized scientific approach to health and wellness.

The programs at Chenot Gabala begin with personalized medical diagnostics and typically last a minimum of 7 days, with standard programs ranging from 10 to 14 days. Each participant receives an individualized dietary plan, along with physician-supervised treatments such as massages, hydrotherapy, ozone therapy, lymphatic drainage, and more. Additionally, optional activities such as yoga, breathing techniques, guided walks, and stress management sessions are also offered.

Although the programs are medically grounded, many participants also pursue these experiences as opportunities for inner transformation and lifestyle change. Beyond physical treatments, activities promoting emotional and cultural well-being are also encouraged – such as reading, journaling, mindfulness sessions in nature, and informal reflective discussions.

The majority of participants (approximately 70-75%) come from high-stress professional backgrounds – including managers, entrepreneurs, lawyers, doctors, and bankers. The remaining 25-30% consist of individuals seeking to resolve specific health issues or improve their overall quality of life. Informal interviews conducted with hotel staff indicated that a portion of guests seek not only physical rejuvenation but also inner peace and balance. However, there is no formal documentation or categorization of guests who specifically aim for structured personal transformation.

Online research into examples of transformative creative tourism reveals that most programs focus on detoxification, wellness, weight loss, and stress reduction. For instance, 21-day wellness camps held in Turkey's Kaz Mountains aim to facilitate both physical detox and psychological renewal. Nevertheless, comprehensive information about these camps remains limited and typically requires direct contact via phone or email.

Despite the increasing use of terms like *transformation* and *change* in tourism marketing, it is evident that most offerings do not fully align with the framework of transformative creative tourism as defined in the academic context.

There are numerous websites and advertisements on the internet that include the terms "transformation" or "change." However, it can be asserted that the majority of these do not fall within the scope of *transformative creative tourism*.

Conclusion

Individuals may desire to make fundamental changes in certain areas of their lives. This desire for change often arises from physical or psychological discomfort associated with a particular problem. The primary goal is to replace something negative with something positive. Such a change is not temporary, but rather permanent, with the intention of sustaining it throughout life. Therefore, the term *transformation* is more appropriate than *change*. Especially in the context of demanding work life, personal challenges, and physical or mental needs, the demand for transformation may increase.

Transformative tourism has emerged as a form of tourism aimed at meeting the expectations of individuals seeking such life changes. It is possible to achieve this transformation through creative tourism activities, giving rise to what can be defined as transformative creative tourism.

Creative tourism is often rooted in cultural elements, and the rich cultural heritage of our country offers a wide range of components that can be utilized within the framework of transformative creative tourism. For instance, programs based on the teaching of local culinary traditions can be developed and integrated into transformative creative tourism activities. Similarly, activities designed to teach traditional handicrafts can also be implemented. Local music and folk dances may likewise be used as instruments within transformative creative tourism experiences.

Conducting research in this field and presenting *transformative creative tourism* as a modern form of tourism may provide significant economic, social, and cultural benefits.

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ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ РАЗВИТИЯ ТРАНСФОРМАЦИОННОГО КРЕАТИВНОГО ТУРИЗМА

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Аннотация. *В исследовании рассматривается потенциал развития трансформативного креативного туризма в Азербайджане как нового и перспективного направления, отвечающего современным потребностям туристов. Отмечается, что, несмотря на наличие разнообразных туристских ресурсов, туристская активность в стране носит сезонный и регионально ограниченный характер, что вызывает социально-экономические и культурные дисбалансы. В статье анализируются понятия трансформации и трансформативного обучения, раскрывается роль туризма как инструмента глубоких и устойчивых личностных изменений. Особое внимание уделяется взаимосвязи креативного и трансформативного туризма, а также вводится понятие «трансформативный креативный туризм», предполагающее сочетание культурного участия с личностным развитием. На примере деятельности Chenot Palace Health Wellness Hotel в Габале демонстрируются практические аспекты применения данного подхода. Авторы приходят к выводу, что развитие трансформативного креативного туризма, основанного на богатом культурном наследии и творческом потенциале Азербайджана, способствует личностному благополучию туристов и обеспечивает экономические, социальные и культурные выгоды для устойчивого развития туризма в стране.*

Ключевые слова: *трансформационный туризм, креативный туризм, оздоровительный велнес-отель Chenot Palace, трансформационное обучение, трансформационный креативный туризм.*