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## WAYS OF CREATING A CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT IN KARABAKH: BASED ON WORLD EXPERIENCE

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*The restoration of cultural heritage in Karabakh, a region of Azerbaijan that has been freed from occupation, is a critical and complex task. This area, deeply connected to Azerbaijani culture, saw its historical sites, mosques, and cemeteries destroyed during the years of occupation. Azerbaijan is now focusing on restoring this cultural heritage, under the programs approved by President Ilham Aliyev. The process faces significant challenges, such as extensive minefields that delay both the return of residents and restoration efforts. Drawing on international examples, such as the reconstruction of Warsaw after World War II, Azerbaijan aims to adopt a systematic approach to revitalizing Karabakh's cultural environment. International cooperation, including with UNESCO, plays a crucial role in accelerating these efforts. By restoring religious sites, building cultural centers, and leveraging digital technologies, Azerbaijan strives not only to revive its historical heritage but also to boost cultural tourism and regional stability through this revitalization.*

**Keywords:** Karabakh, cultural heritage, restoration, international cooperation, digital technology.

### INTRODUCTION

The restoration of cultural heritage in the Karabakh region, recently liberated from occupation, is a significant part of Azerbaijan's national revival efforts. As a historic and culturally rich region, Karabakh has long held an essential place in the cultural identity of Azerbaijan. However, during the decades of occupation, numerous cultural sites-including mosques, mausoleums, cemeteries, and other historical monuments-were deliberately destroyed or neglected. Today, Azerbaijan is engaged in an ambitious and comprehensive process to revive and preserve this rich cultural legacy.

Under the leadership of President Ilham Aliyev, extensive restoration and reconstruction programs have been launched, supported by local institutions and international organizations such as UNESCO and ISESCO. Despite significant progress, this process faces considerable challenges, particularly due to landmine contamination and the scale of destruction. The successful restoration of cultural heritage in post-conflict areas such as Warsaw, Dubrovnik, and Sarajevo offers important lessons for Azerbaijan's efforts in Karabakh.

This paper explores the multifaceted strategies employed in the restoration of cultural sites in Karabakh, highlighting the role of government initiatives, international cooperation, digital technologies, and cultural diplomacy. It also examines how the revival of Karabakh's cultural environment contributes not only to national identity but also to regional peace, tourism development, and inter-generational cultural transmission. Through a combination of traditional restoration methods and modern innovations, Karabakh is on its way to becoming a symbol of resilience, cultural revival, and international collaboration in heritage preservation.

### MAIN PART

The Karabakh region, liberated from occupation, has always been an integral part of Azerbaijan's culture and history. During the years of occupation, cultural monuments, mosques, cemeteries, and other valuable heritage sites in these territories were destroyed. As part of the programs for the



restoration of Karabakh, approved by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, special attention is given to the restoration of this destroyed cultural heritage. However, there are numerous challenges in carrying out these difficult and responsible tasks.

One of the main challenges in restoring culture in Karabakh is the presence of extensive minefields in the region. This danger hinders both the process of local population returning and the restoration efforts. Accelerating mine clearance work is of critical importance, as delays in this process negatively affect the restoration of cultural heritage. According to ANAMA, more than 62,000 hectares of land in Karabakh and East Zangazur were cleared of mines in 2024, with over 6,500 mines neutralized [6].

Global experience shows that restoring cultural heritage destroyed by war and occupation requires a comprehensive approach. For instance, after World War II, the cultural heritage of many European cities suffered significant damage, yet systematic efforts led to the restoration of the cultural environment in these cities. A notable example is Warsaw, Poland. During the war, nearly 85% of the city was destroyed, but with the support of the population and international organizations, Warsaw was rebuilt based on its ancient architecture.

Drawing from these experiences, it can be said that strategies for restoring the cultural environment in Karabakh should also be developed based on international practices.

Several important restoration projects have already been implemented in Shusha city under the initiatives of the Ministry of Culture and other institutions. For example, ancient architectural examples like the Yukhari Govhar Agha Mosque and the house of Mir Mohsun Navvab have been restored. The restoration of these monuments is being accelerated with the support of UNESCO and other international organizations. Azerbaijan's international cooperation in this area allows for a more effective preservation of cultural heritage.

One of the key steps for restoring cultural heritage in Karabakh is the restoration of historical monuments, mosques, and other religious and cultural sites. To expedite this process, the Azerbaijani government has implemented special programs. Collaboration with international organizations, including UNESCO and ISESCO, is essential. These organizations support the cultural restoration process by developing projects that align with international standards for heritage preservation.

Azerbaijan's experience in this area is applied not only in Karabakh but also in other historical areas. For example, the restoration practices in the Old City of Baku and the historical monuments of Sheki serve as significant models that can be applied in Karabakh. These models aim to preserve ancient architecture while also developing modern cultural infrastructure.

Another significant step towards restoring the cultural environment in Karabakh is the construction and reconstruction of cultural centers. These centers not only help preserve the historical and cultural heritage of the region but also provide opportunities for local people to engage in cultural activities. Declaring Shusha as Azerbaijan's "Cultural Capital" in 2021 was a crucial step in this direction. The "Kharibulbul" festival and other cultural events held in Shusha have strengthened its role as a center of culture and art in the region. The Khari Bulbul Music Festival, officially restored in 2022, has since been held annually in Shusha every May, reinforcing the city's image as the cultural capital of Azerbaijan [7].

Building such cultural centers in Karabakh will facilitate young people's closer engagement with culture and enable Azerbaijan's cultural heritage to be passed on to future generations. Additionally, it will attract foreign tourists to these areas, boosting the development of cultural tourism.

In many countries around the world, the restoration of cultures destroyed by war and occupation has been successfully carried out. For instance, cultural monuments, mosques, and churches destroyed during the war in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, were restored through the joint efforts of international organizations and the local government. These experiences can serve as an important model for the revival of cultural heritage in Karabakh. One of the lessons from Bosnia's experience is the importance of restoration based on mutual respect and cooperation between cultures.



Likewise, the city of Dubrovnik in Croatia serves as another significant example in this field. In the 1990s, the city suffered serious damage due to heavy bombardment, but with UNESCO's leadership, the old city area of Dubrovnik was fully restored. The role of international organizations in this process could be applied to the cultural restoration efforts in Karabakh.

Restoring the cultural environment in Karabakh requires a multifaceted approach. First, it is crucial to inventory historical monuments and prepare restoration plans. A comprehensive list of cultural heritage objects destroyed or damaged during the occupation needs to be compiled, clearly identifying their condition. Additionally, assessing the historical significance of these monuments and determining the technical capabilities required for their restoration are essential factors.

To achieve this, 3D modeling of monuments and the use of digital technologies should be employed. For example, creating a digital model of a historical temple in Nara, Japan, ensured technical precision during its restoration. Applying such technologies in Karabakh can facilitate more accurate and efficient restoration work.

Reconstructing the destroyed religious monuments and cemeteries in Karabakh is also a crucial element of the cultural revival. Restoration efforts should maintain their historical essence, preserving the original structures as much as possible. The restoration of the Yukhari Govhar Agha Mosque in Shusha is a successful example of this. This UNESCO-supported project contributes to the preservation of religious and historical values and to the promotion of intercultural dialogue.

The restoration of religious monuments should not be limited to physical reconstruction. It is also important to promote the cultures surrounding these monuments and to conduct religious and historical educational activities. For this purpose, the establishment of special religious-historical museums in Karabakh is recommended. These museums could serve as educational centers for both the local population and foreign tourists.

The application of modern technologies in the development of the cultural environment in Karabakh will play a decisive role in the growth of cultural tourism. Virtual tourism projects, interactive cultural programs, and digital exhibitions are effective tools for increasing interest in the Karabakh region. Through modern technologies, restored monuments and museums in Karabakh can be presented to the world.

Moreover, organizing cultural festivals and events in the ancient cities of Karabakh—especially Shusha and Aghdam—will revive the cultural life of the region. Disseminating these events widely through modern technologies and attracting artists and cultural figures who participate in international events will help speed up this process.

Based on global experience, several effective methods can be suggested for restoring the cultural environment in Karabakh. For example, the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, Italy, suffered severe damage during the Arno River flood in 1966. However, international funds were established for the restoration of these monuments, and with global cooperation, this historical monument was revived. Based on this experience, Azerbaijan could collaborate with international donor organizations for cultural restoration in Karabakh. Additionally, the creation of special cultural funds can contribute to the financing of this work.

Strategic development plans are essential for the restoration of the cultural environment in Karabakh. These plans should include short-term and long-term goals, providing detailed instructions for specific actions and activities. The coordination of activities related to cultural heritage preservation and the development of cultural infrastructure within the framework of the Karabakh restoration plans, approved by the government, is of critical importance.

To ensure the effectiveness of development plans, a continuous monitoring and evaluation system should be established. This system would monitor the progress of each project and resolve emerging issues in a timely manner. Using digital technologies, such as databases and Geographic Information Systems (GIS), can enhance the efficiency of the monitoring system. These technologies would allow the restoration process to be closely monitored and the outcomes to be assessed more accurately.



The restoration of cultural heritage should not end with the reconstruction of monuments and cultural facilities. It is crucial to implement continuous education and awareness programs for cultural preservation. Raising awareness among young people in Karabakh about the importance of culture, training specialists in heritage conservation, and learning from international experience are important steps in this direction.

For example, the Venice Cultural Heritage Academy in Italy specializes in training experts in the restoration and preservation of ancient monuments. Such educational programs could serve as a valuable model for Azerbaijan. A team of experts specifically trained for the restoration of monuments should be established and involved in this work in Karabakh.

Furthermore, public involvement in this process through awareness campaigns is essential. The role of the public is significant in reviving culture, and conducting awareness activities among the population is vital for effective implementation of this work.

International cooperation and cultural diplomacy can play a special role in the restoration of the cultural environment in Karabakh. Close collaboration with international organizations in cultural heritage preservation and restoration will enhance the effectiveness of this process. For example, Azerbaijan has successfully participated in restoration projects for monuments included in UNESCO's World Heritage List. This experience can serve as a valuable model for the restoration of cultural objects in Karabakh.

Additionally, the cultural heritage of Karabakh should be presented to the global community through international conferences and cultural events. This will aid in reviving the culture of Karabakh and increasing international support for these efforts.

The restoration of cultural heritage in Karabakh also opens up significant opportunities for the development of tourism. Karabakh, with its unique natural and cultural wealth, can become an ideal destination for ecotourism and cultural tourism. The historic cities of Shusha, Aghdam, and others could attract both local and foreign tourists.

Implementing ecotourism and cultural tourism projects will provide a new economic boost for Karabakh and contribute to increasing local employment. These projects should focus on developing tourism infrastructure in Karabakh and implementing extensive marketing campaigns to attract tourists to the region.

Securing financial support is a crucial step for the restoration of cultural heritage in Karabakh. The Azerbaijani government has allocated substantial funds for the restoration of Karabakh, but international organizations and donors also play an essential role in this process. International entities such as UNESCO, the European Union, and ISESCO can participate in cultural restoration projects in Karabakh and provide financial resources.

Public-private partnerships (PPP) are also vital for financing the restoration process. Such partnerships allow for the implementation of state-private partnership models in cultural restoration. For example, local companies have provided financial support for cultural events held in Shusha, alongside state support. The implementation of such models can make the restoration process faster and more sustainable.

Among the specific projects to be carried out in Karabakh for cultural restoration, the creation of museums and cultural centers holds particular importance. These projects will serve as key centers for preserving and presenting the history, art, and cultural heritage of Karabakh. For example, alongside the restoration of the palace of the Khans of Karabakh, the establishment of the Karabakh Historical Museum in Shusha is also planned. This museum will be an important center for preserving Karabakh's history, cultural heritage, and historical events.

Additionally, the construction of cultural centers in Aghdam and Fuzuli cities is also envisaged. These centers aim to promote cultural activities in the region, introduce new generations to culture, and pass on cultural heritage to future generations.

Cultural tourism holds significant potential for the development of Karabakh. It is essential to develop comprehensive marketing strategies to attract tourists to the region. These strategies should



present Karabakh's unique cultural heritage, historical monuments, and natural beauty to the global audience. International exhibitions, cultural events, and festivals should be utilized to expand the potential for tourism development in Karabakh.

Digital technologies play a major role in promoting tourism potential in Karabakh. Virtual tourism projects, 3D monument models, and interactive tourism routes can become projects that combine culture and tourism in Karabakh. Through these projects, information about Karabakh can be shared with a wider audience, increasing interest in the region.

The use of modern technologies and innovative approaches is crucial for accelerating the cultural restoration process. In Karabakh, the restoration process can utilize drones for mapping areas, 3D modeling, and other digital tools. These technologies will help make restoration work more precise, faster, and of higher quality.

Countries like Italy and Greece have successfully restored monuments using digital technologies after wars. In Greece, historical monuments like the Acropolis have been preserved using digital technologies [2]. Applying these technologies in Karabakh can not only preserve the original form of the monuments but also speed up the restoration process.

The restoration of cultural heritage in Karabakh is not limited to the reconstruction of historical monuments and cultural centers. This process will also have a long-term impact on various sectors of the economy. Along with the restoration of cultural objects, the development of the tourism sector, the creation of new jobs in the region, and the improvement of the living standards of the local population are among the significant outcomes of this process.

The development of cultural tourism will increase economic activity in Karabakh. Expanding tourism infrastructure in Shusha, Aghdam, and other cities, as well as organizing cultural festivals and international events, will help attract both local and foreign investments to the region. As a result of this process, Karabakh will enter a new phase of economic development, which will have a positive impact on the overall economy of the country.

The social aspects of the cultural restoration process are also highly significant. Reviving Karabakh's cultural heritage will allow the local population to reconnect with their historical and cultural values. The restoration of cultural heritage will have a strong impact on the identity and cultural awareness of local communities.

This process will also foster greater interest in culture among young people, allowing them to become familiar with national values. Through cultural centers and museums, young people will learn about culture and history, which will strengthen their respect for cultural heritage and national values. In this regard, the restoration of the cultural environment in Karabakh will play an important role in shaping the cultural identity of future generations in Azerbaijan.

The restoration and development of culture can also play a crucial role in strengthening peace and stability in Karabakh. Preserving culture and cultural heritage is an important tool for ensuring peace on an international scale. In this regard, the recommendations of UNESCO and other international organizations highlight the peacebuilding mission of culture.

The revival of culture in Karabakh will contribute to regional stability and the establishment of peace among various communities. Through the restoration of cultural sites, intercultural dialogue, and the organization of cultural events, new forms of cooperation can be developed in the region. This, in turn, will contribute to the establishment of long-term peace and stability in the region.

The ultimate goal of the cultural restoration process in Karabakh is to ensure the complete cultural revival of the region. With the combined efforts of the Azerbaijani government, international organizations, and local communities, it is possible to achieve progress in all areas of culture. Transforming Karabakh into a cultural capital will significantly contribute not only to the region but also to Azerbaijan's overall cultural policy.

In the long term, preserving and restoring the cultural heritage of Karabakh will position Azerbaijan as a leader in the field of culture on the international stage. The cultural restoration projects



implemented in Karabakh will resonate widely not only within the country but also globally. Through the development of culture and international cooperation, Karabakh will become a new cultural center, which will have a major impact on the consolidation of peace and stability in the region.

The issue of preserving historical and cultural heritage is a crucial topic not only in Azerbaijan but also globally. The successful experiences of restoring cultural heritage damaged by occupation in various countries around the world offer valuable examples for Azerbaijan. For instance, the reconstruction of Warsaw after World War II was a successful experience in the preservation of historical monuments and urban architecture. In this process, the principle of "Architectural heritage is the preservation of historical memory" was followed [1].

The restoration of the Acropolis monuments in Greece is another example. Through the use of modern technologies to preserve the original state of the monuments, the Acropolis has been reclaimed as a part of world cultural heritage [2]. These examples represent guiding principles that can be followed during the restoration of the cultural environment in Karabakh.

The use of modern technologies is a key factor in speeding up and enhancing the process of cultural heritage preservation and restoration. Thanks to 3D modeling and digital technologies, the repair and reconstruction of historical monuments can be carried out more precisely and effectively. One of the most successful experiences in this field is the creation of digital archives of the "Uffizi" Gallery in Florence. This project has allowed historical monuments to be preserved in digital resources without the risk of damage, making them accessible to researchers worldwide [3].

The restoration of cultural heritage in the liberated areas of Karabakh has also garnered international attention. This process can further strengthen Azerbaijan's position on the international stage in the field of culture. With the support of cultural and art experts from around the world, the cultural heritage of Karabakh will be reintroduced to the global community. "Cultural diplomacy is one of the most effective tools for global peace"—these words, expressed by Dr. Yunesko, a renowned cultural figure, remain relevant in the context of the restoration of Karabakh [4].

## CONCLUSION

The restoration of cultural heritage in the Karabakh region represents not only a physical reconstruction process, but also a broader cultural, social, and geopolitical mission. The integration of international experience, particularly from post-war restoration models in cities such as Warsaw, Sarajevo, and Dubrovnik, demonstrates the importance of systematic planning, international cooperation, and public engagement. Azerbaijan's efforts show that cultural heritage revival in post-conflict zones can significantly contribute to national identity reconstruction, regional stability, and economic revitalization through cultural tourism.

The application of digital technologies—such as 3D modeling, GIS systems, and virtual museums—proves essential in increasing the efficiency and accuracy of restoration. Moreover, the involvement of international organizations like UNESCO strengthens the legitimacy and visibility of these efforts on a global scale. Overall, Karabakh's cultural restoration process can serve as a model for similar post-conflict regions, highlighting the role of culture in peacebuilding, sustainable development, and global cultural dialogue.

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## QARABAĞDA MƏDƏNİ MÜHİTİN YARADILMASI YOLLARI: DÜNYA TƏCRÜBƏSİ ƏSASINDA

P.Ə. Əliyeva

Qarabağda mədəni irsin yenidən canlandırılması, regionun azad olunmasından sonra Azərbaycanın qarşısında duran əsas vəzifələrdən biridir. Uzun illər davam edən işğal dövründə bu ərazidəki tarixi abidələr, məscidlər və qəbiristanlıqlar dağıdılmışdır. Azərbaycan Respublikasının Prezidenti İlham Əliyevin təsdiqlədiyi proqramlara əsasən, bu dəyərli irsin bərpasına üstünlük verilir. Bu proses zamanı geniş minalanmış ərazilərin mövcudluğu kimi ciddi çətinliklərlə üzləşilir; bu da həm köçkünlərin geri qayıtmasını, həm də bərpa işlərini ləngidir. İkinci Dünya Müharibəsindən sonra Varşavanın yenidən qurulması kimi beynəlxalq təcrübələrdən ilham alaraq, Azərbaycan Qarabağda mədəni mühitin bərpası üçün strategiyalar hazırlayır. UNESCO ilə əməkdaşlıq kimi beynəlxalq dəstəklər bu prosesin sürətlənməsinə töhfə verir. Dini tikililər, mədəniyyət mərkəzləri və rəqəmsal texnologiyalardan istifadə etməklə Azərbaycan mədəni irsini yenidən canlandırmağı, mədəni turizmi təşviq etməyi və regional sabitliyi gücləndirməyi qarşısına məqsəd qoyur.

**Açar sözlər:** *Qarabağ, mədəni irs, bərpa, beynəlxalq əməkdaşlıq, rəqəmsal texnologiya.*

## СПОСОБЫ СОЗДАНИЯ КУЛЬТУРНОЙ СРЕДЫ В КАРАБАХЕ: НА ОСНОВЕ МИРОВОГО ОПЫТА

П.А. Алиева

Восстановление культурного наследия в Карабахе, регионе Азербайджана, освобожденном от оккупации, представляет собой сложную задачу, требующую комплексного подхода. За годы оккупации были разрушены ценные исторические памятники, мечети и кладбища. Сейчас Азербайджан, следуя программам, утвержденным президентом Ильхамом Алиевым, уделяет особое внимание восстановлению этих объектов. Основные трудности включают наличие больших минных полей, что замедляет процесс возвращения населения и восстановления. Опираясь на мировой опыт, такой как реконструкция Варшавы после Второй мировой войны, Азербайджан разрабатывает стратегию восстановления культурной среды в Карабахе. Важную роль в этих усилиях играет международное сотрудничество, включая помощь ЮНЕСКО. Восстанавливая религиозные памятники, создавая культурные центры и используя цифровые технологии, Азербайджан стремится не только возродить историческое наследие, но и развивать культурный туризм и укреплять региональную стабильность.

**Ключевые слова:** *Карабах, культурное наследие, восстановление, международное сотрудничество, цифровые технологии.*