

TOURIST VS LOCAL PERCEPTIONS OF HERITAGE SITE PROTECTION: A CASE STUDY IN LANKARAN DISTRICT

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Abstract: Cultural heritage sites serve as crucial anchors of community identity while simultaneously functioning as tourism attractions, yet tourists and local residents often hold divergent perceptions regarding their protection and management. This study examines differences between tourists and residents in perceptions of heritage site protection in Azerbaijan's Lankaran district, aiming to identify key demographic and attitudinal factors influencing heritage protection perspectives. A cross-sectional survey was administered to 300 respondents (160 local residents and 140 tourists) at major heritage sites during peak tourism season. The structured questionnaire comprised 20 items measuring attitudes toward heritage protection, perceived tourism benefits, conservation behavioral intentions, and willingness to pay for preservation efforts. Data analysis employed descriptive statistics, independent samples t-tests, one-way ANOVA, and ordinary least squares regression modeling. The instrument demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.812). Statistically significant differences emerged between tourists and residents across multiple dimensions. Tourists emphasized aesthetic appeal, site accessibility, and service quality, while local residents prioritized cultural identity, traditional practices, and community pride. Females reported stronger heritage protection attitudes than males ($p < 0.01$). Middle-aged respondents (40-59 years) demonstrated the highest conservation commitment ($p < 0.001$), and educational attainment positively correlated with heritage protection sensitivity ($p < 0.01$). Regression analysis ($R^2 = 0.516$) identified tourist status as the strongest predictor of willingness to pay, with tourists willing to contribute 4.1 AZN more than locals. The findings suggest that sustainable heritage tourism in Lankaran requires dual-focused management: enhancing visitor infrastructure while safeguarding intangible cultural traditions, ensuring equitable revenue distribution, and facilitating meaningful community participation in decision-making processes.

Keywords: Lankaran, heritage protection, tourist perceptions, cultural identity, tourism, collective memory

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INTRODUCTION

Heritage is the base of community identity and a major factor for developing tourism, however, very few times do visitors and local citizens have the same perception of what heritage represents and how it should be protected. Most tourists view heritage sites as visual and aesthetic attractions; and when visiting, they want to experience new things and enjoy unique, memorable experiences. In contrast, most local citizens are heavily invested in the same sites as being a part of their collective memories, traditions and cultural identities, therefore they see heritage as alive and not merely an artifact. The differing views may cause conflict but will also provide opportunities for more inclusive and collaborative approaches to managing heritage. One example of this is the city of Lankaran in Azerbaijan.

Lankaran is situated between the Caspian Sea and the Talysh Mountains, which makes it a great example of the potential for creating tension due to conflicting views on heritage, yet also creates the potential for creating new approaches to inclusive and collaborative heritage management. The area is well known for its tea culture, historic caravanserais, variety of landscapes, and monumental architecture, all of which continue to attract increasing numbers of tourists, while at the same time remain culturally significant to the residents. As the number of tourists increases so does the amount of money generated by heritage tourism and the level of conservation interest; however, it also raises questions about whether the tourist industry can preserve authentic cultural practices and if the benefits derived from tourism are distributed equitably. Many tourists focus on aspects such as cleanliness of sites, access to sites, and overall service quality, while many local citizens focus on preserving the cultural significance of the heritage in order to sustain their traditional values and community. However, there is little empirical research that examines the convergence and divergence of tourist and citizen perceptions regarding the protection of heritage. Therefore, this study addresses that void by conducting surveys of both tourists and local citizens in order to identify areas of similarity and difference, and provide policy makers with data to develop tourism development and cultural preservation policies.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourist and Local Perceptions of Heritage Sites

Growing disparities between what tourists and people who live in the areas they visit experience when they visit historic places have been receiving more and more attention lately. The theoretical foundations of heritage tourism have been influenced by seminal studies such as Nunkoo & So (2016), who showed that residents' support for tourism is influenced by a broad range of factors, including perceived benefits, associated costs, and trust in institutional stakeholders, as well as Timothy (2021), who developed an extensive framework connecting heritage conservation and tourism development within an international context. However, there are very few studies about how this works in post-Soviet countries like Azerbaijan. This paper will identify and analyze the gaps in perception and attitudes towards protecting historic places among tourists and residents in the Lankaran district in Azerbaijan. It will explore how differing perspectives impact views about preservation, willingness to contribute financially to preserve a historic place, and support for developing and sustaining a viable sustainable tourism industry. Tourists typically view historic sites from an experiential standpoint.

Therefore, they tend to evaluate the attractiveness of a site based on its appearance, accessibility, and the level of service provided during the time spent at the site. By contrast, residents of the same area as the site consider the site as part of their identity and view it as a repository of collective memory and cultural continuity. This pattern is consistent with broader findings in the tourism impacts literature; Rasoolimanesh et al. (2017) demonstrated through a survey of residents near the George Town World Heritage Site that community attachment, cultural attitudes, and perceived community gains positively influenced residents' perceptions toward heritage site conservation and tourism development. Gannon et al. (2022) found that locals reported greater levels of emotional connection and more memorable experiences than did non-locals, because their memories were linked to personal histories. Non-locals, on the other hand, tended to focus on novelty and visual appeal.

However, Gannon et al. (2022) relied on self-reported memory scales to measure emotional and memorable connections, which may be influenced by biases related to remembering past events. Their study was also limited to a sample of non-local visitors to cultural attractions located in the United Kingdom, which means their results cannot be generalized to areas outside of the UK, such as areas in the world with different cultural and economic environments. In a similar vein, Li et al. (2024) examined tourist perceptions of architectural heritage at Gulangyu Island, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in China, and discovered that tourists were primarily interested in the aesthetic and historical aspects of the island, but had little appreciation for the spiritual and social aspects of the site to the local community. Li et al.'s (2024) study utilized a structured questionnaire, but did not include longitudinal data to assess if tourists' perceptions of the site would change over multiple visits or after increased exposure to local culture. A major limitation of both studies is that they do not examine the economic perspective of tourists and how willingness to pay for preserving historic places may vary between travelers and local residents.

Economic Incentives and Community Support

While economic advantages have been cited as important reasons why people at the local level will favor heritage tourism, there is considerable debate regarding how these economic advantages are distributed. Nunkoo & Gursoy (2017) developed a structural model demonstrating that political trust is a key determinant of residents' support for both alternative and mass tourism, with perceived benefits and costs mediating the relationship between trust and support. Chiengkul et al. (2025) identified three key factors for supporting Community-Based Tourism in Thailand; they were economic opportunities, high levels of environmental quality, and social cohesion among other things. Economic opportunity was the most significant factor, however, since those residents who had tangible evidence of an economic gain were much more likely to endorse tourism projects in their area. A major limitation of the Chiengkul et al. (2025) study is that it relied upon perceptions from respondents rather than using actual income data, therefore it is unclear if the financial advantages reported by residents actually existed or were simply optimistic expectations.

Jurado-Rivas & Sánchez-Rivero (2019) examined willingness to pay for sustainable tourism in Cáceres, Spain, a World Heritage Site. Both residents and tourists demonstrated a moderate degree of willingness to pay a fee; however, the tourists were more willing to pay entrance fees, while the residents preferred indirect payments such as tax revenue. Although they used a contingent valuation methodology, which has utility, this methodology is susceptible to hypothetical bias, i.e., the amount of money individuals say they would be willing to pay may exceed the amount they would actually pay. While there has been some research into how individuals perceive the costs and benefits associated with sustainable tourism and how these perceptions influence their attitudes toward conservation, the relationship between perceptions of fairness in distributing the benefits of sustainable tourism and attitudes toward conservation has been largely unexplored. Thus, the purpose of this study was to address this void by investigating the link between economic perceptions and willingness to pay for sustainable tourism in Lankaran.

Fernández Gallardo & Hernández Rojas (2024) studied the effects of sustainability on tourist satisfaction with service quality in a single tourist attraction, specifically an equestrian show in Córdoba, Spain, as a cultural heritage attraction. The authors demonstrated that the implementation of sustainability practices increased both tourist satisfaction and the perceived quality of service of the attraction. However, because the study focused on a single attraction, the results of the study are limited in terms of being generalizable to the management of all heritage sites. Additionally, researchers did not distinguish between tourist and resident perceptions. Therefore, they assumed that all members of the audience would have similar perceptions about the sustainability of the attraction. However, this assumption does not take into account that there may be conflicting opinions regarding what constitutes a "sustainable" tourism experience when sustainability measures are designed to enhance tourist experiences while ignoring local concerns, such as, but not limited to, controlling excessive noise, managing traffic, or preserving local intangible cultural traditions.

Place Attachment and Emotional Connections

The concept of place attachment offers a deeper understanding of why locals and tourists relate differently to heritage sites. Ge et al. (2022) examined how place attachment and emotional solidarity influenced residents' attitudes toward glacier tourism in China, finding that a stronger attachment correlated with greater support for conservation but also heightened concerns about overtourism. Similarly, Dey et al. (2021) examined the moderating role of residents' perceptions in shaping support for geoheritage conservation and tourism development around the Mehrangarh Fort in Jodhpur, India, finding that community awareness and perceived economic gains significantly strengthened conservation support. The study's focus on natural rather than cultural heritage limits its direct applicability to sites like Lankaran's scenic nature or its tea culture.

Qiu et al. (2025) investigated the relationship between perceived authenticity, place attachment, and environmental behavior at industrial heritage sites in China, revealing that attachment mediated the link between authenticity and pro-environmental actions. Tourists with higher attachment were more likely to engage in conservation behaviors, though the study did not explore whether this translated into financial contributions. The research also focused exclusively on industrial heritage, which differs in symbolic meaning from traditional cultural sites, and its convenience sampling may have skewed results towards more engaged visitors. Nian et al. (2025) applied the stimulus-organism-response model to examine how tourist experiences affect conservation attitudes at Mount Sanqingshan National Park in China.

They found that positive experiences fostered conservation intentions, but the effect weakened when visitors perceived the site as over-commercialized. The study's limitation is its single-site focus and reliance on post-visit surveys, which may not capture long-term behavioural change. Guo & Kim (2025) assessed how intangible cultural heritage cognition influenced sense of place among urban residents in Dalian, China, finding that awareness of intangible heritage strengthened place identity and community pride. However, the study did not include tourists, missing an opportunity to compare how outsiders perceive the same intangible elements.

Balancing Conservation Priorities and Community Involvement

There are differences in how people perceive their "heritage" when it comes to tourism. For example, Routh et al. (2025) examined participative governance in India regarding cultural heritage. Their findings indicated that residents were being excluded from decision-making processes, although there are policies that encourage community engagement in the decision-making process. Residents' perception of governance was based on education level and whether they lived near the site; those with higher levels of education wanted greater participation. Although the methodology used a qualitative approach to gather data, it did not include any quantitative data to measure the effect of participation on heritage conservation.

Karimi & Boley (2022) utilized Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) to compare service quality assessments for cultural heritage sites among residents and visitors. IPA assesses both how important an attribute is to consumers as well as how well providers deliver on each of these attributes. According to their results, visitors rated accessibility and amenities as the most important attributes of a cultural heritage site, whereas residents rated authenticity and respect for culture as the most important. A significant strength of this study was the use of two analytical techniques to analyze the data, although the sampling frame was U.S.-based, which will limit the applicability of the findings to non-Western contexts.

At the European level, Adie & Falk (2021) used Eurobarometer data to demonstrate that highly educated residents living near cultural heritage sites were more likely to simultaneously view tourism as both a threat to heritage and a benefit to the local economy, suggesting that heritage tourism perceptions are characterized by nuanced ambivalence. Earlier, Adie et al. (2020) found that approximately two in five European residents perceived the number of tourists as a threat to cultural heritage, with the probability of this perception increasing among individuals with higher education and stronger cultural engagement. Tuyen et al. (2025) completed a bibliometric review of community-based tourism literature from 1995 to 2025. They identified a trend from top-down conservation models to participatory approaches that emphasize local agency.

The authors also identified a number of gaps in the current literature, including, but not limited to, understanding how locals and tourists negotiate conflicting interests, especially in areas that are experiencing rapid tourism development. Therefore, this study fills one of the gaps in the literature by directly comparing perceptions of both tourists and locals in Lankaran, an area where heritage tourism is increasing but community engagement remains low.

In a related vein, Oka et al. (2021) studied community-based tourism from the local population's perspective in Bali, Indonesia, and found that meaningful participation in tourism planning and equitable benefit-sharing were the primary factors in sustaining local support for tourism initiatives. Sokka et al. (2021) discussed resource allocation in international cultural cooperation, pointing out that many knowledge-sharing frameworks place an emphasis on economic sustainability rather than cultural sustainability, a dichotomy that is evident in heritage tourism where the construction of new infrastructure can be given priority over preserving intangible heritage. The literature shows that tourists and locals view heritage through two different frameworks: experience-based vs. identity-based. Recent studies have expanded our understanding of the concepts of authenticity, place attachment, and the role of economics in motivating tourist behavior. However, several limitations remain. Most of the research has been conducted in established tourist destinations in East Asia and Europe, and very little attention has been paid to emerging heritage tourism destinations such as Lankaran. Much of the research has focused solely on either tourists or locals and rarely compares them directly at the same site.

From a methodological perspective, relying on cross-sectional surveys makes it difficult to determine how perceptions change, and few studies relate attitude measures to the actual amount of money spent on conservation efforts or actual behavior related to conservation. Gursoy et al. (2017) highlighted the importance of trust in both government and organizing committees as determinants of residents' impact perceptions and support for tourism, while Hadinejad et al. (2019), in their systematic review of 90 resident attitude studies published between 2011 and 2017, confirmed that

while social exchange theory remains dominant, comparative approaches and methodological diversity remain underrepresented in the field. This study addresses these issues by comparing tourist and local perceptions in Lankaran, relating attitudes to willingness to pay, and determining how demographic characteristics influence the relationship between attitudes and willingness to pay in a post-Soviet, Muslim-majority context where heritage tourism is still evolving.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research utilizes a transversal and predominantly quantitative design, firmly set on examining and interpreting the viewpoints of both tourists and local residents concerning heritage site conservation within the Lankaran district. By combining systematically collected survey data with rigorous econometric analysis, the study maintains both analytical precision and methodological rigor throughout its investigative process. The survey instrument itself is organized along three core thematic strands:

- Respondents' attitudes toward heritage preservation
- Their perceived advantages associated with tourism
- Their stated intentions or predispositions regarding conservation-related actions

Each theme was measured via multiple Likert scale items. Overmore, the instrument encompassed a contingent valuation section to elicit respondents' stated willingness to pay for heritage conservation. The survey instrument was structured around three primary thematic axes: attitudes toward heritage protection, perceived benefits of tourism, and intentions regarding conservation behaviors. A total of 300 participants - including 160 residents and 140 tourists were surveyed through selective sampling at famous cultural and natural sites. Specifically Hirkan National Park, the Lankaran Khan Palace complex, and central community areas frequently visited by tourists. The instrument comprised twenty structured items: eight gauged attitudes toward heritage protection, four examined perceptions regarding tourism-related benefits, three assessed behavioral intentions in relation to conservation practices. One section of the survey directly captured respondents' professed willingness to pay for heritage preservation measures, with specified amounts in Azerbaijani manats. Key demographic variables age, gender, and education level were procedurally collected to enable segmented analyses across polymorphic social strata. The administration of the survey occurred in person, implemented by extensively trained enumerators over a concentrated six-week interval aligning with the top period of tourism. This methodological approach not only maximized respondent diversity but also ensured the situational correctness and recency of the data acquired. Participant responses were coded and input into python for analysis.

Scale reliability was assessed via Cronbach's alpha, which indicated satisfactory internal consistency across the primary constructs under investigation. Initial analyses involved calculating descriptive statistics to outline overall perception trends. In due course, independent samples t-tests were employed to assess whether mean differences existed between local residents and tourists across the three indices. To intensify the analysis intra group variations, one-way ANOVA analyses were performed on both age and education categories, unraveling the generational and educational factors shaping attitudes leading up to heritage perception and conservation. Beyond these descriptive and inferential tests, an econometric modeling stage was implemented, where willingness to pay served as the dependent variable in an ordinary least squares regression framework. Independent variables included group affiliation (tourist versus local), mean scores of the heritage protection, tourism benefits, and conservation intention indices, as well as demographic controls. This design facilitated examination of both attitudinal and socio-demographic factors influencing economic valuation of heritage preservation. Diagnostics like variance inflation factors, residual analysis, and heteroscedasticity tests were conducted to safeguard statistical exactitude. For sensitivity checks, we also explored alternative model specifications, notably employing logit estimations for binary willingness-to-pay thresholds. To ensure the findings actually held up, data were normalized during entry, and coding was cross-validated at that stage.

The questionnaire itself went through a pilot test before the main rollout, letting us fine tune the language and prune any ambiguous bits. Over the study's timeframe, we adhered strictly to ethical standards. Participants gave informed consent, and their anonymity remained fully protected. This avenue maintained the integrity of the research and ensured respondent trust at every stage. In fact, purposive sampling isn't without its drawbacks, especially when it comes to generalizability. You're not exactly maximizing the coverage. Still, by zeroing in on respondents with direct, solid involvement in heritage sites, the method yielded data that's not just context-aware but also practically relevant. So, sure, you lose some breadth, but the depth and applicability of the findings are tough to beat.

The methodological framework facilitated a nuanced and empirically substantiated examination of the ways in which both tourists and local residents perceive, assign value to, and financially contribute to heritage site preservation in Lankaran. By confloating subjective attitudinal data with quantifiable policy dividends, this design effectively integrates individual perspectives with actionable insights for sustainable tourism management.

The methodology used in this study is shown in Figure 1 below as a sequential flow chart to demonstrate the logical sequence from the research design stage through data analysis and interpretation. This flow chart visually illustrates how the cross-sectional survey design, primary data collection from 300 respondents (160 locals, 140 tourists), systematic data processing using Python, and statistically rigorous data analysis (descriptive statistics, independent samples t-tests, one-way ANOVA, ordinary least squares regression) were strategically integrated to examine perceptual differences between tourists and local residents with regard to heritage site protection in Lankaran District.

The stages in the methodology build sequentially upon each other to ensure analytical coherence and empirical rigor across the entire research process. The methodology concludes with an examination of findings and their direct policy implications for sustainable heritage tourism management in the region.

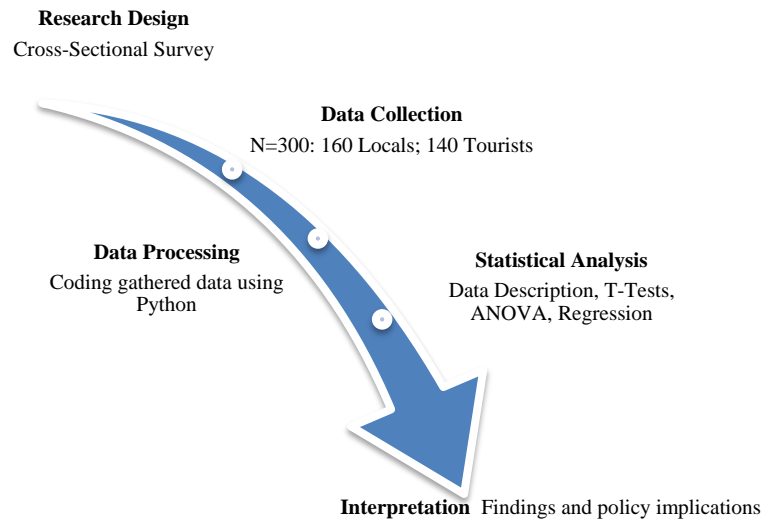


Figure 1. Methodological Framework of the Study

Results of the study

Table 1 presents the distribution of subjects by gender. In total, there are 300 subjects in this study, of which 160 are local residents and 140 are tourists. Regarding gender, 55.0% of the respondents are female, representing 165 subjects, while 45.0% are male, representing 135 subjects. These results highlight a relatively balanced distribution of genders in the sample, although the female share remains slightly dominant. Figure 2 indicates that there were 165 female and 135 male respondents, showing that women constitute a slight majority among both tourists and locals.

Table 2 outlines the age distribution of participants in the study. Altogether, 300 subjects were included. The youngest participant is 18 years old, while the oldest is 65 years old. The mean age comes in at 36.4 years, with a standard deviation of 11.8 years. This range highlights a diverse cohort composed of young adults, those in middle age, and older individuals.

Table 1. Subjects' gender

	N	%
Female	165	55.0
Male	135	45.0
Total	300	100.0

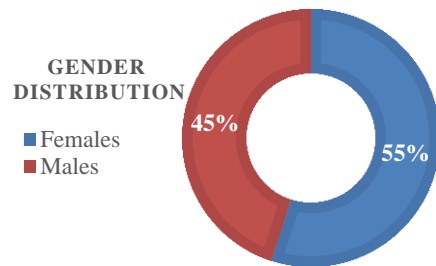


Figure 2. Gender of respondents

Table 2. Age of subjects

	N	Max	Avg	Std.Dev
Age	300	65	36.40	11.82
N	300			

Table 3. Education level of subjects

	N	%
High School	72	24.0
Bachelor	123	41.0
Master of Arts	75	25.0
Ph.D	30	10.0
Total	300	100.0

Table 3 presents a summary of the education levels among the 300 participants in the study. Specifically, 24% of respondents (72 individuals) reported having completed high school. A higher proportion 41%, or 123 participants held bachelor's degrees. Additionally, 25% of the sample (75 individuals) indicated that they had completed master's degrees, while 10% (30 participants) reported attainment of a Ph.D. Overall, these figures demonstrate that the majority of subjects possess higher education qualifications, indicating a notably well-educated sample with substantial academic backgrounds.

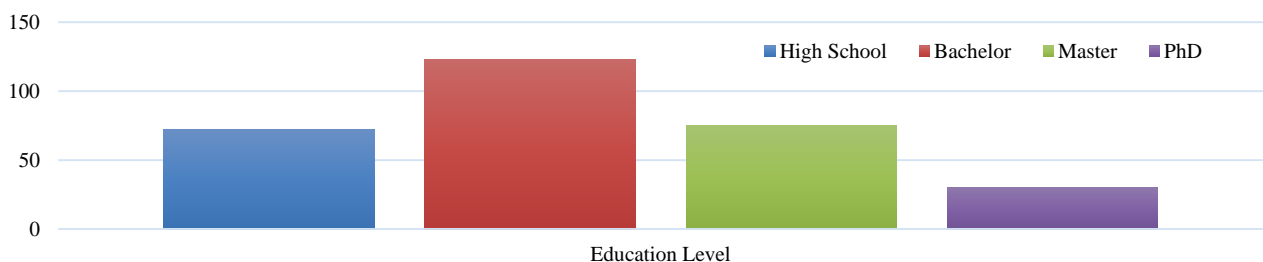


Figure 3. Level of education of respondents

The results show that 24% of the respondents have completed high school, 41% bachelor studies, 25% master studies, and 10% Ph.D. studies, underlining the prevalence of tertiary education among both tourists and locals.

Table 4 provides an assessment of the questionnaire's reliability through the Cronbach's Alpha index. The level of reliability for the entire questionnaire is 0.812, a value that indicates a good degree of internal consistency across the responses of the subjects. This result demonstrates that the scales used in the questionnaire, which covered heritage protection attitudes, perceived tourism benefits, and conservation behavior intentions, were sufficiently coherent and consistent, ensuring the credibility of the findings. Table 4 provides an assessment of the questionnaire's reliability through Cronbach's Alpha index. The level of reliability is 0.812, a value that indicates a high degree of consistency in the responses of the subjects regarding the questionnaires. This result can be interpreted as a good sign of the quality of the questionnaire. This reliability index determines how well a subject's responses correspond to their responses overall. In this case, the number of items for which Cronbach's Alpha was calculated is 20.

Table 4. Credibility of the questionnaire

Statistic	Estimate	N items
Cronbach's alpha	0.812	20

Table 5. Questions

Question	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std.Dev
Do you think protecting heritage sites in Lankaran is essential for preserving cultural identity?	300	2.00	5.00	4.28	0.6527
Should tea culture, crafts, and caravanserai be safeguarded as part of community pride?	300	2.00	5.00	4.12	0.6945
Does preserving monuments in Lankaran ensure continuity of local traditions?	300	2.00	5.00	4.06	0.7219
Should heritage protection focus on cultural inheritance for future generations?	300	2.00	5.00	4.18	0.6641
Do you personally feel responsible for the protection of heritage sites in your community?	300	1.00	5.00	3.94	0.7813
Does the cultural landscape of Lankaran strengthen your sense of belonging?	300	2.00	5.00	4.02	0.7024
Would neglect of heritage sites damage the collective memory of society?	300	2.00	5.00	4.10	0.6786
Does protecting heritage contribute to the international image of Lankaran?	300	2.00	5.00	3.96	0.7432
Do you think tourism development in Lankaran creates economic opportunities for locals?	300	1.00	5.00	3.82	0.8579
Does cultural heritage attract more visitors and support the regional economy?	300	2.00	5.00	3.88	0.8135
Does tourism related to heritage sites improve local infrastructure?	300	1.00	5.00	3.74	0.8921
Does visitors' spending on heritage contribute to community well-being?	300	1.00	5.00	3.68	0.9058
Do you intend to participate in activities that promote the protection of heritage?	300	2.00	5.00	3.98	0.7156
Are you willing to volunteer your time for heritage conservation projects?	300	1.00	5.00	3.84	0.7912
Would you encourage others to respect and protect heritage sites?	300	2.00	5.00	4.01	0.6897
Are you willing to pay money to support preservation of heritage sites (AZN)?	300	1.00	20.0	11.95	6.3021
Do you think authorities in Lankaran effectively safeguard cultural heritage?	300	1.00	5.00	3.70	0.8324
Do current policies for heritage management meet the expectations of residents and visitors?	300	1.00	5.00	3.62	0.8796
Does cooperation between government, community, and tourists strengthen heritage protection?	300	2.00	5.00	3.92	0.7318
Should investments in cultural tourism be increased for better site management?	300	1.00	5.00	3.86	0.7742

Table 5 displays the measures of central tendency for the primary variables examined in this study. Notably, the perceived importance of safeguarding heritage monuments in Lankaran received the highest score, with a mean of 4.32, suggesting a strong agreement among both local residents and tourists. In terms of willingness to pay, the responses, measured in Azerbaijani manats, varied from 1 to 20 AZN. The average value settled at nearly 12 AZN, pointing to a moderate yet meaningful level of financial support for conservation efforts.

Table 6 shows that female respondents reported a slightly higher mean score ($M = 4.08$) than male respondents ($M = 3.92$). While the standard deviations are similar, this minor difference indicates that female respondents may exhibit a somewhat stronger agreement with statements related to heritage protection and conservation behavior.

Table 6. Gender-wise Variation in Perceptions

Gender	N	Mean	Std.Dev	Std.Err.Mean
Female	165	4.08	0.74	0.06
Male	135	3.92	0.71	0.06

Table 7. Independent Samples t-Test for Gender Differences

Test / Metric	t	DoF	p-value	Mean diff.	Std. error	95% CI for diff.
Welch's t-test (<i>equal_var=False</i>)	2.872	294	0.005	0.16	0.06	0.05 to 0.28
Pooled t-test (<i>equal_var=True</i>)	2.845	298	0.005	0.16	0.06	0.05 to 0.28
Variance homogeneity (Levene's test)	2.310	298	0.131	—	—	—

Table 7 demonstrates statistically significant gender differences in the evaluation of heritage protection and related aspects ($t = 2.845$, $p < .01$). Female respondents consistently provided higher ratings, which suggests a stronger commitment to heritage-related attitudes compared to their male counterparts.

Table 8. Perceptual Variations According to Age

Age Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
18–24 years	60	3.90	0.19
25–39 years	110	4.02	0.21
40–59 years	85	4.10	0.18
60+ years	45	3.86	0.17
Total	300	3.96	0.20

Table 8 presents how responses are distributed among the different age groups. Respondents aged 40–59 reported the highest average ($M = 4.10$), while those in the 60+ category had the lowest mean ($M = 3.86$). So, it seems middle-aged participants tend to value heritage conservation the most. Younger and older respondents, while a bit less enthusiastic, still hold generally positive perspectives.

Table 9. ANOVA Test for Age Differences

Source	DoF	F	p-value
Age group	3	6.982	0.000
Residual	296		
Total	299		

The results of ANOVA presented in Table 9 indicate that the differences among age groups are statistically significant ($F = 6.982$, $p < .001$). This confirms that age is a relevant factor influencing how respondents perceive heritage protection and associated tourism benefits in Lankaran.

Table 10. Education Level and Responses on Heritage Protection and Related Items

Education Level	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
High school	72	3.86	0.7123
Bachelor studies	123	3.97	0.6845
Master studies	75	4.08	0.6559
Ph.D. studies	30	4.15	0.6284
Total	300	3.99	0.6835

Table 10 presents the relationship between education level and heritage protection responses. The data indicates a noticeable progression: individuals with advanced degrees, such as PhDs, display heightened concern for heritage preservation compared to those whose education stopped at high school. Mean scores range from 3.86 for high school graduates to 4.15 for those with doctoral degrees. This pattern suggests that increased educational attainment is associated with greater sensitivity toward issues of cultural heritage and conservation.

Table 11. ANOVA Test for Education Differences

Source	df	F	p-value
Education	3	4.867	0.002
Residual	296		
Total	299		

As presented in Table 11, the ANOVA results clearly indicate that the differences among education groups are statistically significant ($F = 4.867$, $p < .01$). These findings suggest that education level plays a key role in shaping perception intensity, with individuals who have attained higher education reporting a stronger sense of attachment to cultural heritage protection and an increased awareness of its significance.

Table 12. Regression Analysis: Predictors of Willingness to Pay (AZN)

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	p-value
Constant	1.986	1.047		1.898	0.059
Group (Tourist = 1, Local = 0)	4.125	0.548	0.423	7.523	0.000
Heritage Protection Score	1.754	0.492	0.198	3.566	0.000
Tourism Benefits Score	1.489	0.466	0.167	3.194	0.002
Gender (Female = 1, Male = 0)	0.336	0.429	0.037	0.783	0.435
Education Level (ordinal)	0.278	0.246	0.038	1.132	0.259
Age Group (ordinal)	0.204	0.225	0.031	0.906	0.366

Model Summary: $R^2 = 0.516$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.506$, $F(6,293) = 43.79$, $p < .001$

The results of the regression analysis are presented in Table 12. The regression model demonstrates an R^2 value of 0.516, indicating that nearly half of the variance in willingness to pay is accounted for by the predictors included. The most substantial effect arises from group membership - specifically, tourists exhibit a willingness to pay that exceeds that of locals by more than 4.1 AZN, reinforcing prior observations that tourists tend to display greater economic commitment to preservation initiatives. Additionally, heritage protection and tourism benefit scores emerge as significant, suggesting that both attitudinal attachment and recognition of tourism's benefits are directly linked to financial contributions. In contrast, demographic variables such as gender, education, and age do not yield significant effects, implying that their roles diminish when attitudinal factors are considered.

The model's relatively high explanatory power ultimately underscores the substantial influence of attitudinal constructs on willingness to pay for heritage preservation in Lankaran.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Social constructions of heritage sites in Lankaran really do depend on whether you're a local or just passing through the two groups don't exactly see eye to eye. Visitors tend to zero in on the surface details: how tidy things are, whether it's easy to get around, the look and feel of the place as both a natural landscape and a built environment. Locals, though? They're on a different wavelength. For them, these sites are Entrenched in community memory, cultural roots, and the ongoing thread of tradition they see protecting heritage as keeping the spirit of the place alive for future generations.

By no means is this unique to Lankaran. You'll spot the same pattern in tourism studies. Outsiders focus on what captivates the senses instantly, while people who live there trace meaning and continuity more profoundly. The survey data had to be sorted into themes just to make sense of it all, which goes to show how palimpsestic and complicated the whole process of valuing heritage actually is. Table 13 below summarizes these interrelated dimensions, organized by the emphases of tourists and locals across economic, socio-cultural, educational, and environmental aspects.

Table 13. Interrelated dimensions of heritage perception in Lankaran (based on results from the survey)

Dimension	Tourists' Emphasis	Locals' Emphasis
Economic Aspect	Heritage protection linked to tourism services, willingness to pay entrance fees.	Expectation of equitable distribution of tourism income, job creation, and local benefit-sharing.
Socio-Cultural Aspect	Sites seen as exotic and novel cultural showcases.	Sites embedded in daily life, reflecting continuity of traditions, rituals, and community pride.
Educational Aspect	Heritage as information source, mainly through signage and guided tours.	Heritage as lived knowledge transferred through families, elders, and schools.
Environmental Aspect	Preference for well-maintained landscapes and clean facilities.	Stronger concern with long-term environmental protection, forest and coastal ecosystem conservation.

CONCLUSION

The study shows divergence in how tourists and residents think about Lankaran's historic sites. For locals, however, they represent much more than just an attractive place to visit - they are deeply rooted in their cultural identity and are a source of pride in their family lineages and communities. They are also living repositories of the history and traditions of those communities. The disconnect between these two ways of thinking indicates that there needs to be a dual approach to managing heritage sites: improving infrastructure and services for tourists (e.g., better signs, cleaner facilities, higher-quality interpretative displays), and at the same time, preserving intangible cultural traditions and providing fair economic opportunities for local communities (through protecting tea culture, preserving craft skills, implementing transparent systems of sharing benefits). The statistical data in this study confirm this conclusion - middle-aged people were found to have the greatest commitment to conservation, education was shown to be positively correlated with sensitivity to the protection of heritage, and women had greater protectionist attitudes, which underscores the importance of education and using gender-sensitive approaches. A regression analysis showed that being a tourist was the best predictor of willingness to pay, with tourists being willing to pay 4.1 AZN more than locals, which offers a potential funding vehicle for conservation efforts, but also warns against relying too heavily on tourist money for conservation without having local funding commitments. Heritage protection attitudes and the perceived benefits from tourism were both strong predictors of financial commitment, therefore increasing both the emotional connection and the tangible economic benefits can also help to promote support for conservation.

These results highlight the need for co-management, including governments, local communities, tourism operators, and conservation organizations, and for participatory governance, where local communities have meaningful input into decisions regarding their own heritage sites. Local communities should receive fair shares of tourism revenue through community-based tourism, and there should be educational programs aimed at reducing the gap between what tourists see as valuable and what locals see as important. Managing tourism and heritage in a way that balances growth with preservation will be increasingly important if done well, as heritage can provide a long-term, sustainable basis for tourism, and preserve cultural values for future generations by creating a common ground for both tourist and local perspectives.

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