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The Role of Social and Cultural Relations in Azerbaijan–Türkiye Relations

Azerbaycan–Türkiye İlişkilerinde Sosyal ve Kültürel
İlişkilerin Rolü

Abstract

The relations between Azerbaijan and Türkiye are characterized not only by historical, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural proximity but also by extensive social and humanitarian cooperation developed in the modern period. Social and cultural relations form an important complementary dimension of bilateral political and economic cooperation. This article examines the main directions of contemporary social and cultural relations between Azerbaijan and Türkiye, the factors influencing their development, and the mechanisms of socio-cultural rapprochement between the two societies. The study applies historical-comparative, systemic, and source-analysis methods to monographs and scholarly works on bilateral relations. Education, science, literature, youth relations, tourism, media, diaspora activities, and cultural diplomacy are examined as separate areas of interaction. The findings suggest that social and cultural relations are not merely a consequence of interstate cooperation; they also function as a form of social capital that supports the sustainability of bilateral relations. Educational and scientific cooperation, shared cultural heritage, and people-to-people contacts appear to increase mutual recognition between the two societies. The article also discusses opportunities for expanding socio-cultural cooperation through joint scientific projects, digitalization of cultural heritage, and youth-oriented programs.

Keywords: cultural diplomacy, educational cooperation, science, youth, diaspora, social integration

Öz

Azerbaycan ile Türkiye arasındaki ilişkiler tarihî, etnik, dilsel ve kültürel yakınlığın yanı sıra modern dönemde gelişen geniş kapsamlı sosyal ve insani iş birliğiyle de belirginleşmektedir. Sosyal ve kültürel ilişkiler, ikili siyasi ve ekonomik iş birliğini tamamlayan önemli bir boyut oluşturmaktadır. Bu makale, Azerbaycan ile Türkiye arasındaki güncel sosyal ve kültürel ilişkilerin başlıca yönelimlerini, bu ilişkilerin gelişimini etkileyen etkenleri ve iki toplum arasındaki sosyokültürel yakınlaşma mekanizmalarını incelemektedir. Çalışmada tarihsel-karşılaştırmalı yöntem, sistem yaklaşımı ve kaynak analizi,

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ikili ilişkileri konu alan monografilere ve bilimsel çalışmalara uygulanmıştır. Eğitim, bilim, edebiyat, gençlik ilişkileri, turizm, medya, diaspora faaliyetleri ve kültürel diplomasi ayrı etkileşim alanları olarak ele alınmıştır. Bulgular, sosyal ve kültürel ilişkilerin yalnızca devletlerarası iş birliğinin bir sonucu olmadığını; ikili ilişkilerin sürdürülebilirliğini destekleyen bir tür sosyal sermaye işlevi de gördüğünü düşündürmektedir. Eğitim ve bilim alanındaki iş birliğinin, ortak kültürel mirasın ve halklar arası temasların iki toplumun birbirini daha yakından tanınmasına katkı sağladığı görülmektedir. Makalede ayrıca ortak bilimsel projeler, kültürel mirasın dijitalleştirilmesi ve gençlere yönelik programlar yoluyla sosyokültürel iş birliğinin genişletilmesine ilişkin imkânlar tartışılmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *kültürel diplomasi, eğitim iş birliği, bilim, gençlik, diaspora, sosyal bütünleşme*

Introduction

Relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Türkiye constitute one of the bilateral relationships of particular importance in the contemporary system of international relations. A distinctive feature of these relations is that they are not limited to the political and economic spheres but also encompass social, cultural, humanitarian, educational, and scientific dimensions. In general, the major trends in contemporary international relations include globalization, significant progress toward the democratization of the global political space, a new wave of the scientific and technological revolution, and changes in functions (Yusifzade, 2025). Relations between Azerbaijan and Türkiye are also of particular interest against this background.

The historical roots of social and cultural relations between the peoples of Azerbaijan and Türkiye are quite ancient. Common linguistic and cultural characteristics, folklore, literature, music, customs and traditions, and historical memory are among the main factors that have shaped the social proximity between the two peoples. In the contemporary period, this historical proximity has acquired new content through the activities of various state and non-state institutions. Following the restoration of Azerbaijan's independence, relations with Türkiye acquired a more systematic character. Türkiye's position as the first state to recognize Azerbaijan's independence and the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992 created the basis for cooperation in various fields at later stages. Alongside political relations, ties in culture, education, science, and people-to-people contacts then expanded.

The main purpose of the article is to examine the role of social and cultural relations in Azerbaijan–Türkiye relations, identify their main directions, and analyze the factors influencing socio-cultural rapprochement between the two societies. The article first reviews the relevant literature and explains the research design. It then examines education, science, culture, literature, youth relations, tourism, media, diaspora activities, and cultural diplomacy as separate areas of interaction, discusses the findings in relation to earlier studies, and closes with conclusions and recommendations.

Literature Review

The development of Azerbaijan–Türkiye relations should also be examined within the broader geopolitical context of the South Caucasus and the evolving regional cooperation framework involving Russia, Azerbaijan, and Türkiye. In his analysis of this trilateral relationship,

Talishinsky (2021) shows that the interaction among these countries is shaped by changing regional dynamics, geopolitical interests, and the pursuit of regional stability. This perspective is relevant to the present study because bilateral cooperation develops through historical ties, shared cultural values, and societal interactions as well as through formal diplomatic and economic mechanisms.

F. I. Huseynova's (2020) research examines the national and historical roots of Azerbaijan–Türkiye cultural relations, the formation of mutual relations in science and education, and the development of scientific cooperation. The author gives particular weight to the historical factor and treats scientific conferences as one of the channels of cultural rapprochement. Mammadov's (2021) monograph covers cultural cooperation between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Türkiye during 2003–2010 and analyzes cooperation in culture, art, education, and science on the basis of facts and documents.

Madatli (2023), examining the philosophical foundations of Azerbaijan–Türkiye unity, argues that relations between the two countries cannot be explained solely through political interests and that historical and spiritual proximity also carries considerable weight. M. Huseynova et al. (2025) offer a related perspective in their monograph on shared identity and philosophical heritage in Turkic culture. The authors trace the historical development of philosophical thought among Turkic peoples and highlight the significance of their intellectual and cultural heritage. Read together, these two works suggest that shared philosophical traditions, historical memory, and cultural values help form and preserve a sense of common identity between Azerbaijani and Turkish societies.

These studies approach the subject from different angles. F. I. Huseynova (2020) and Mammadov (2021) concentrate on the historical and institutional development of cultural cooperation, the latter within a defined period and largely through official documents. Madatli (2023) and M. Huseynova et al. (2025) emphasize the philosophical and spiritual foundations of unity, whereas Talishinsky (2021) places bilateral relations within a regional geopolitical framework. What the existing works share is a focus either on state-level cooperation or on the ideational basis of the relationship. Less attention has been paid to how different social and cultural fields, such as education, youth relations, tourism, media, and diaspora activities, operate together as channels of interaction between the two societies. This article addresses that gap by examining these fields as separate but connected areas and by treating social and cultural relations as a form of social capital that supports the sustainability of bilateral relations, rather than only as an outcome of political cooperation.

Methods

The methodological basis of the study consists of historical-comparative, systemic, and source-analysis approaches. The historical-comparative method is used to trace the development

of social and cultural relations between Azerbaijan and Türkiye from the restoration of Azerbaijan's independence and the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992 to the present. Within this span, the institutionalized cultural cooperation of 2003–2010 examined in Mammadov's (2021) monograph is compared with the contemporary period, in which cooperation extends to youth relations, tourism, media, and digital communication. The comparison rests on three criteria: the area of interaction, the main actors involved (state institutions, universities and scientific institutions, cultural organizations, and non-governmental and diaspora organizations), and the level at which relations develop, whether interstate or society-to-society.

The systemic approach is used to evaluate the social and cultural components of Azerbaijan–Türkiye relations in their interaction with political, economic, and humanitarian cooperation. Each area is examined on its own and in relation to the others, which makes it possible to identify the mechanisms through which socio-cultural rapprochement takes place.

Sources were selected according to three criteria: they had to address Azerbaijan–Türkiye relations or the wider regional and cultural context of these relations, they had to be monographs or scholarly works, and they had to be available through library catalogues or publicly accessible academic databases. On this basis, the study draws mainly on monographs and scholarly works published in Azerbaijan between 2020 and 2025, together with an article on trilateral cooperation in the South Caucasus and a collective monograph on Turkic philosophical heritage. F. I. Huseynova's (2020) work on Azerbaijan–Türkiye cultural relations in the contemporary period, Mammadov's (2021) monograph on the cultural cooperation of the two republics in 2003–2010, and Madatli's (2023) work on the philosophy of Azerbaijanism and Azerbaijan–Türkiye unity constitute the theoretical basis of the study. Source analysis was carried out by reading each work thematically and recording its assessments under the areas of interaction listed above. These assessments were then compared to identify points of agreement and difference among the authors and related to the stages of development identified through the historical-comparative method.

The study has several limitations. It relies on secondary sources, most of which were published in Azerbaijan, and therefore reflects the Azerbaijani scholarly perspective more strongly than the Turkish one. It does not use statistical data on student mobility, tourist flows, or diaspora membership, and it does not include interviews or fieldwork. The assessments of how particular fields affect mutual trust should therefore be read as interpretations based on the literature rather than as measured effects.

Findings: Social and Cultural Dimensions of Azerbaijan–Türkiye Relations

Historical and Cultural Foundations of Social Relations

The social relations between Azerbaijan and Türkiye are based primarily on common historical and cultural characteristics. This proximity extends beyond linguistic similarities to

literature, folklore, music, national holidays, customs and traditions, and family and everyday culture. In the contemporary period, historical and cultural proximity has been complemented by institutional cooperation. State institutions, universities, scientific institutions, cultural organizations, non-governmental organizations, and diaspora organizations create conditions for relations between the two societies at various levels. F. I. Huseynova (2020) emphasizes the importance of the historical factor in the formation of Azerbaijan–Türkiye cultural relations and links their development to science, education, and cultural exchange as well as to political processes.

Social relations should therefore be considered not only as interstate relations but also as everyday interactions among individuals. Mutual visits and cooperation among students, scholars, artists, journalists, tourists, and other social groups help form direct ties between the two societies.

Educational Cooperation

Education occupies a particularly important place in the development of social relations within Azerbaijan–Türkiye relations, since educational exchange enables people to establish long-term relationships. Azerbaijani students studying in Türkiye and Turkish citizens studying in Azerbaijan acquire academic knowledge and also become closely acquainted with the society, culture, and everyday life of the other country. This direct communication can help reduce mutual stereotypes and support more balanced perceptions of the other society.

Educational relations also form a social bridge between future generations. Inter-university cooperation, exchanges of teachers and students, and joint academic events create opportunities for expanding relations among young people from the two countries. In Mammadov's (2021) study, education and science appear as one of the main directions of Azerbaijan–Türkiye cultural cooperation in the period under review.

Scientific Cooperation

Scientific cooperation is another important direction in the social and cultural relations between Azerbaijan and Türkiye. Scientific conferences, joint research, academic publications, and mutual visits among scholars bring the intellectual environments of the two countries closer to each other. F. I. Huseynova (2020) examines the characteristics of this cooperation and the effect of scientific conferences on cultural rapprochement, an approach that treats science as a social institution as well as a field of knowledge production. The long-term nature of academic relations matters in this respect, because professional networks formed through cooperation among universities and scientific institutions later create opportunities for new joint projects.

Culture and Shared Heritage

Culture is a central element of the social foundations of Azerbaijan–Türkiye relations. Common cultural heritage creates socio-cultural codes that make it easier for the two societies to understand each other. Relations in literature, music, folklore, theater, cinema, and visual arts

contribute to the mutual enrichment of the cultural environments of the two countries, and exhibitions, festivals, concerts, and book presentations are practical forms of this exchange.

According to F. I. Huseynova (2020), cultural events, together with scientific and educational relations, influence mutual understanding between the two countries. The preservation of common cultural heritage is therefore important both for maintaining the memory of the past and for shaping the social and cultural identity of future generations. The shared philosophical heritage discussed by M. Huseynova et al. (2025) points in the same direction, as it connects present-day cultural relations to historically accumulated intellectual ties.

Language and Literature

Relations in language and literature are among the most natural forms of social interaction between Azerbaijan and Türkiye. The proximity between the Azerbaijani and Turkish languages facilitates the translation and circulation of literary works, through which one society becomes familiar with the history, social problems, worldview, and cultural values of the other. Literary relations thus serve as an instrument of cultural diplomacy.

The mutual publication of works by Azerbaijani and Turkish writers and poets, literary events, and book fairs create opportunities for expanding socio-cultural dialogue. Literature also has a more direct influence on individuals than official texts: while political and diplomatic documents mainly express interstate relations, literary works reflect people's everyday feelings, values, and worldview.

Youth Relations

Young people are of particular importance for the future development of social relations between Azerbaijan and Türkiye, as relations among them help form the human capital that will sustain cooperation between the two countries. Student programs, youth forums, volunteer projects, sporting events, and cultural programs increase opportunities for communication and interaction among young people.

Relations established through social media have also gained importance in the contemporary period. Unlike traditional cultural diplomacy events, digital platforms allow daily and continuous communication. Expanding digital projects, joint scientific initiatives, and social initiatives among Azerbaijani and Turkish youth can therefore be considered a promising direction for the future.

Tourism

Tourism creates opportunities for direct social contact between the two countries. During visits, people can observe the everyday life, culture, cuisine, historical monuments, and social behavior of the other country at first hand. Developing tourism relations between Azerbaijan and Türkiye can increase people-to-people contacts, so that social relations develop at the individual level as well as at the state level.

The social function of tourism lies in the fact that people form their perceptions of another society through direct experience and not only through the media and books. In this sense, tourism serves as an informal instrument of cultural diplomacy in Azerbaijan–Türkiye relations.

Media and Digital Communication

The media plays an important role in the development of social and cultural relations between Azerbaijan and Türkiye. Television, online news resources, social media, and video platforms accelerate the exchange of information between the two societies and raise awareness of Türkiye in Azerbaijan and of Azerbaijan in Türkiye. In this process, the diversity of information sources and the accurate presentation of information are of great importance.

Digital communication has a notable impact on relations among young people in particular. Although they live in different cities and countries, they can communicate daily through social networks. Digitalization thus extends the geographical boundaries of social relations within Azerbaijan–Türkiye relations.

Diaspora Relations

Diaspora activities are also significant for Azerbaijan–Türkiye social relations. Azerbaijanis living in Türkiye and Azerbaijani and Turkish diaspora organizations operating in various countries contribute to the preservation of social and cultural ties between the two societies. A main function of these organizations is to preserve and maintain national culture; at the same time, they can act as socio-cultural bridges between their host societies and Azerbaijan and Türkiye. Diaspora activities should therefore be assessed from social and cultural perspectives as well as from political and public ones.

Cultural Diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy is one of the institutional mechanisms for the development of social relations within Azerbaijan–Türkiye relations. Through cultural diplomacy, states establish relations with the societies of other countries in culture, science, education, and the arts. Its importance in Azerbaijan–Türkiye relations becomes particularly clear against the background of the common cultural heritage of the two countries. Mammadov's (2021) research shows that cultural cooperation between Azerbaijan and Türkiye developed through state documents, agreements, and institutional relations.

Madatli (2023), meanwhile, emphasizes the historical and spiritual dimensions of Azerbaijan–Türkiye unity. Taken together, these studies indicate that cultural diplomacy is a means of social dialogue between societies as well as an instrument of state foreign policy.

Discussion

The findings indicate that the social and cultural relations between Azerbaijan and Türkiye operate at two levels. At the institutional level, cooperation in education, science, and culture

develops through state documents, agreements, and the activities of universities and cultural organizations, which is consistent with the institutional development described by Mammadov (2021) and the role of scientific cooperation emphasized by F. I. Huseynova (2020). At the societal level, youth relations, tourism, media, digital communication, and diaspora activities create direct contacts among individuals that depend less on state initiative. These fields receive comparatively little attention in the reviewed literature, yet they appear to be the channels through which shared cultural heritage is turned into everyday social ties.

The historical and spiritual proximity emphasized by Madatli (2023) and M. Huseynova et al. (2025) provides the background against which these channels operate, but proximity alone does not guarantee sustained interaction. The analysis suggests that the durability of social and cultural relations depends on the continuity of programs, the participation of young people, and the presence of institutions that connect the two societies over time. The regional context examined by Talishinsky (2021) also indicates that socio-cultural relations develop within a wider geopolitical environment and cannot be fully separated from it. Because the study is based on secondary sources, these observations remain interpretive and would benefit from testing with data on student mobility, tourism, and diaspora activities.

Directions for Future Cooperation

Building on these findings, the future development of social and cultural relations between Azerbaijan and Türkiye may focus on digitalization, youth policy, education, science, and the preservation of cultural heritage. Since academic networks tend to generate new projects over time, increasing joint scientific projects and inter-university cooperation could widen the network of relations between the academic environments of the two countries.

The digitalization of common cultural heritage is another direction. Collecting examples of the shared folklore, music, literature, and historical heritage of Azerbaijan and Türkiye in electronic databases could serve both scientific research and the education of young people.

Given the role of youth relations identified above, joint summer schools, student forums, scientific competitions, and social projects could help young people from the two countries become more familiar with one another. Long-term programs, developed alongside individual events, could also give social and cultural cooperation a more systematic character.

Conclusion

This study examined the role of social and cultural relations in Azerbaijan–Türkiye relations across education, science, culture, literature, youth relations, tourism, media, diaspora activities, and cultural diplomacy. Its main conclusion is that these relations, while rooted in historical, linguistic, and cultural proximity, have expanded in the contemporary period into a set of interconnected channels that link the two societies directly as well as through state institutions.

The analysis also suggests that institutional cooperation and direct contacts among individuals reinforce each other. Agreements and academic networks create the conditions for exchanges, while exchanges among students, scholars, young people, and tourists give these agreements social content. Shared cultural heritage, in turn, functions less as a fixed legacy than as a resource that has to be maintained through continuous programs and the participation of new generations.

These results are consistent with the emphasis on historical factors and scientific cooperation in F. I. Huseynova (2020), the institutional development described by Mammadov (2021), and the importance of spiritual proximity underlined by Madatli (2023). The study adds to this literature by bringing societal channels such as youth relations, tourism, media, and diaspora activities into a single analytical frame and by treating social and cultural relations as a form of social capital that supports the sustainability of bilateral relations, rather than only as a result of political cooperation.

In line with these findings, expanding joint scientific projects, student and youth programs, the digitalization of common heritage, and long-term cultural programs could strengthen socio-cultural cooperation between the two countries. Future research could test the assessments made here with data on student mobility, tourism flows, and diaspora activities and by including sources published in Türkiye.

Author Contributions

Aida Yusifzada and Shahismayil Ismayilov jointly conceived and designed the study, conducted the literature review, collected and analyzed the data, interpreted the findings, and drafted and revised the manuscript. Both authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no financial, institutional, professional, or personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the research, analysis, or publication of this study.

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