

### A Clash of Cultures: How Rural Out-Migrants Adapt to Urban Life in Baku

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## Conclusion

For Baku it will be very difficult to maintain the same pace of investments as before. Without private funds, Baku will not be able to become a major city like its model, Dubai. Moreover, a possible population growth in Baku and housing problems accompanying urbanization (which are absent in Dubai's case) will prevent Baku from completing massive reconstruction and rede-

velopment. Therefore, this is a critical time for Baku to attempt to emulate other models of the city. Eastern and Central European cities, with their similar development paths, could be a better model for Baku. Baku's years of development have shown the city and its administration that the Dubai model is unique and cannot be replicated elsewhere without taking into consideration local peculiarities, history and geographical constraints.

### About the Author

Dr. Anar Valiyev is an independent scholar based in Baku.

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## A Clash of Cultures: How Rural Out-Migrants Adapt to Urban Life in Baku

By Turkhan Sadigov, Baku

### Abstract

As in other developing countries, rural-urban migration in Azerbaijan has led to over-crowding of the metropolitan Baku area, affecting the livelihood of a considerable number of communities and residents. This article provides an overview of socio-economic repercussions of rural migration to Baku. More specifically, it focuses on the adaptation of rural mechanisms (such as social networks of mutual assistance, community solidarity, and operation of social safety nets) among rural migrants after they have resettled to the new urban space. While Baku's closed nepotistic economy of favors forces rural migrants to rely on their bonding social capital (immediate kin, relatives, neighbors), the meeting of city and village in Azerbaijan brings out the worst of the two worlds.

### Introduction

Right before our eyes, traditional structures, holding villages together, crumble. Global developments wipe out villages throughout the world. From the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, rising access to medical services and improving levels of hygiene led to an unprecedented population growth in developing world countries. This in turn

created massive demographic pressure on villages and subsequent rural migration to cities. Simultaneously, an unprecedented rise of communications, transportation, and media made the production of Western commercialized agriculture accessible anywhere in the remote corners of the globe. Due to accelerating trade and the WTO regulations, markets infiltrated every

country, and with them, third world peasants are being ruined. The demise of agriculture in the countries in the periphery of the world economy does not automatically lead to the emergence of specific niches in the world market for these third world countries. Failed states, as well as failed generations of billions of people, create low wage labor bases for capitalist growth. Desolated global villages reappear as global slums / favelas, stretching from suburban São Paulo, Kinshasa, and Cairo, to Dushanbe, Tashkent, and Tehran.

As in other developing countries, rural–urban migration<sup>1</sup> in Azerbaijan has led to over-crowding of metropolitan Baku and its suburban areas (villages and towns in Absheron in close proximity to the capital). Over-crowding affects the livelihood of a considerable number of communities and residents. It is impossible to even roughly estimate (let alone exactly pinpoint) the approximate number of rural-provincial migrants and their share in Baku's overall population today. The reason for this is that the Azerbaijani registration system is administered according to the formal principle of the place of origin, but not by the actual place of residence (Allahveranov et al 2012).

This article provides an overview of socio-economic repercussions of rural migration to Baku. The massive inflow of peasants to cities creates new generations with new social backgrounds of proletarianization<sup>2</sup> away from village communities (Yalçın-Heckmann 2010). How are these rural mechanisms re-interpreted among rural out-migrants to Baku, if at all? What are the coping mechanisms of vulnerable groups left behind in villages as a result of a bread-winner migration to the city? What is Baku's potential to socialize and co-opt rural migrants? The article looks at the adaptation of patriarchy and broader rural mechanisms (such as social networks of mutual assistance, community solidarity, and the operation of social safety nets) among Azerbaijani rural migrants after they migrated to Baku. I argue that community solidarity and mutual self-help based on ascriptive<sup>3</sup> qualities dominate the experience of rural migrants to Baku. In this context, the introduction and enforcement of standardized rules, norms of urban socialization (like traffic rules, queue norms, and pedes-

trian regulations) in Baku are either unlikely or are destined to fail.

### Migration: Rural Solidarity Beyond Villages

Mechanisms of rural socialization are closely tied to and regulate economic relations in Azerbaijani villages. Azerbaijani agriculture today is not fully commercialized and is dominated by economically ineffective subsistence production (Allahveranov et al 2012, Sadigov 2018). As a result, the rural areas have a higher level of poverty than the urban areas. While average monthly per capita income in rural areas in 2016 equaled AZN 245.5 (SSCAR 2017), average salaries in Baku are 3 to 5 times higher than this figure. More than half of the poor people in Azerbaijan now live in villages (World Bank 2010, 14). Lower levels of welfare and the inability to earn enough to live in the villages make rural people more dependent on remittances. Calculations show that 60% of remittances in Azerbaijan are sent to rural recipients (ADB 2008).

Lower standards of living lead to rural out-migration to urban centers. According to a recent UNFPA report, “since 1990 the rural population of Azerbaijan has increased by 1.06 million, (32%) and the urban population by 1.04 million (27%)” (Avdeev 2015, 36). Migration flows are mainly directed from villages to cities. In recent years, only Baku and Absheron experienced positive net migration, while other (primarily rural) regions have a negative migration track record (Allahveranov et al. 2012, 19–21). The highest migration outflow is registered in Lankaran and Aran, where the share of rural residents is 75% and 60%, respectively. These two regions also have higher birth rates compared to the national average (Allahveranov et al. 2012, 19), which creates additional surplus in the workforce. A depressed economy and lower standards of living force villagers to Baku (the center of the oil industry) or Absheron (with a comparatively lower cost of living, but geographic proximity to Baku).

Once settled in Baku, rural migrants face a highly competitive labor market, in which they do not have much to offer (due to their poor education and the lack of skills). Since Baku attracts villagers from the entire country, the city is increasingly overcrowded. With growing competition for lower skilled jobs in the capital's labor market, rural migrants usually get part-time, seasonal, short-term jobs in low-skill occupations, such as retail sellers, loaders, taxi drivers, waiters, and dishwashers.

The situation is exacerbated by the domination of nepotism in Azerbaijan's and, specifically, Baku's economy itself (Guliyev 2015, Sadigov 2017), which further diminishes employment prospects for outsider entrants. An extremely fragmented, patrimonial, and rent-seek-

1 In this article, the category of ‘rural migrants’ includes internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees from Karabakh only if they have initially settled in the provinces of Azerbaijan and migrated to Baku long after the Karabakh conflict. Those IDPs and refugees who migrated to Baku fleeing violence from the start of the conflict and settled in Baku are not considered ‘rural migrants’ in this text.

2 Proletarianization is defined here as the reduction to a status or level of lower income laborers.

3 Ascriptive is defined here as a quality (of a person, or organizational principle) derived from birth such as membership in a specific family or clan; belonging to a specific race, religion, place of origin, etc.

ing economy breeds alienation instead of integration. Overall, this highly fragmented social landscape does not bode well for the enforcement of standardized urban norms of behavior and socialization. Rules and laws are broken (be it pedestrians' following of streetlights, or norms of driving (Sadigov 2016)) by nepotistic localized interests in every 'corner' of the city.

Since the socialization mechanisms of urban centers are virtually non-existent, and since cities do not have vast employment opportunities (especially in industries that provide certain training and socialization), low-skilled labor from villages is usually forced to rely on its own informal nepotistic circles to find jobs and procure services. Easily disposable, low-skill labor is more vulnerable to market shifts and employer discretion. Thus, to find a stable job, low skill labor needs to use connections more actively. Rural migrants turn for assistance to their immediate kin, relatives, or former rural neighbors living in cities. As a result, these villagers become affirmed in their belief of the positive role of nepotistic bonding (rather than bridging) social capital. In the final count, the meeting of city and village in Azerbaijan brings to life the worst of these two worlds—nepotism, corruption, trespassing standards and norms of communal life.

### Vulnerable Groups: Rural Solidarity within Villages

Another major issue resulting from the difference between rural and urban life standards in Azerbaijan is care for socially vulnerable groups. Villagers in Azerbaijan have limited access to public services, from stable access to electricity, water and other amenities, to basic education and medical assistance. Therefore, vulnerable population groups “have to rely on... relatives or on their neighbors in case they need support and care” (Allahveranov et al. 2012, 26). The elderly, widows, orphans, and son/daughters who are left behind by migrant parents have to rely on community networks of mutual assistance.

There are two types of informal mutual assistance mechanisms—ad hoc and periodic. Ad hoc mechanisms are event or needs-based; neighbors and relatives pool together their assets, money, and physical labor to help each other for funerals, weddings, celebrations, and festivities. Close neighbors and relatives assist vulnerable elderly people or families without male heads in a household with provision of services (such as repairing the house and fence, hoeing plots, finding jobs, taking vulnerable people to hospitals, etc.). Therefore, Azerbaijan is no different from other countries of the region in having such forms of community solidarity as “monetary and labor exchanges, rotating savings and credit initiatives,

mutual assistance and non-compensated labor, housing construction and contributions to charity” (Urinboev 2017).

CRRC Caucasus Barometer 2013 survey data for Azerbaijan shows that rural residents more than residents of Baku count on close people for house/apartment construction. The respondents were asked to respond to the following *survey question*: “Please tell me, how likely or how unlikely is it for you to receive some help from your close relatives, friends, and neighbors in the following matters: Repair[ing] your house / apartment.” They had to choose an answer between 1 (denoting the least likelihood of support from their community and kin) and 10 (the greatest likelihood of support), or a number in between—the higher is the number, the higher a respondent's expectation of support. The survey results show that the greatest share of rural respondents expect either reserved (18% of rural respondents) or complete (17% of rural respondents) readiness from close relatives, friends, and neighbors to help (Figure 1 on p. 15). In contrast, the majority (23%) of the Baku-based respondents do not expect any support from the close circle, while those who count on the complete support of their immediate social network account for only 2% of the capital city respondents. These data testify to a relatively higher level of community solidarity among rural residents compared to informal mutual assistance among Baku residents.

Although the Azerbaijani government invests in rural infrastructure and welfare through the AzRIP program,<sup>4</sup> bypassing the state to access required services in these cases is often born out of a necessity. For instance, the state is either unwilling to solve a high unemployment problem in rural areas (Sadigov 2018) or unable to provide required social services (drainage and irrigation works, asphaltting small roads and alleys, arranging transportation for kids who travel to another village for school). As a result, community solidarity has a positive contribution to safety nets for the disadvantaged people. However, there are also negative aspects of community assistance. Often destitute relatives rely heavily on more competitive and well-off villagers for help. This in turn often breeds parasitism and the lack of incentives to step out of one's comfort zone among households with lower welfare.

In some places, local people with influence or in positions of power (community elders, the municipality heads, wealthy heads of patrimonial families) hold informal periodic meetings. During these meetings, they discuss large-

<sup>4</sup> AzRIP works with local communities by “contribut[ing] up to 90% of the funds for projects. Communities must contribute at least 10%. At least 2% of this must be in cash. The remaining 8% can be in their own labor or materials” <<http://www.azrip.org/content.php?page=main>>.

scale community needs, and seek out business and personal opportunities. These meetings are also ways to address long-standing problems, such as building mosques, asphaltting certain bigger roads, procuring licenses, or solving disputes.

Thus, while ad hoc small-scale community solidarity is a mechanism of survival, periodic meetings are vehicles of amassing surplus wealth and influence. However, since both mechanisms are based on bonding social capital (where in-group belonging hinges on ascriptive qualities, such as kinship and place of origin), they are likely to contribute further to the closed nature of Azerbaijani society, its ad hoc localistic orientation (Sadigov 2017), and the rejection of standardization of rules and norms. This situation echoes developments in other (primarily Central Asian) post-Soviet states, where the ineffectiveness of public social safety nets leads ordinary people to embrace corruption.

## Conclusion

Socio-economic transformations of Azerbaijani village resemble similar processes in many other regions of the developing world. Thousands of rural dwellers migrate to Baku and its suburbs for employment and better public services. However, new rural migrants with low skills who lack education and training find few opportunities

in the overcrowded city dominated by closed nepotistic networks of the patrimonial petro-economy.

New rural migrants are forced to turn to part-time, seasonal, and short-term jobs in low-skill occupations. However, in many cases, procuring even these basic jobs requires connections. Therefore, rural migrants to Baku have to rely increasingly on their own bonding networks of kin and neighbors for secure and stable opportunities. Vulnerable rural groups left behind are also taken care of by close relatives and neighbors. Villagers rely on ad hoc and periodic meetings to address important socio-economic problems.

All this raises the importance of associational solidarity based on ascriptive qualities. Society gets increasingly fragmented into narrow networks, closed and semi-closed isolated exclusivist circles of in-group belonging, with contradistinction between favored members of the group and the outsiders. All this makes the standardized laws, norms, and rules unappealing to rural migrants; the reality is that these norms interfere with, rather than assist in, securing jobs and public services. As a result, in this social context, both urbanites and rural migrants are unlikely to embrace formal standards, rules, and norms of urban socialization in Baku. Socio-economic structure of society favors informality over formal standardization.

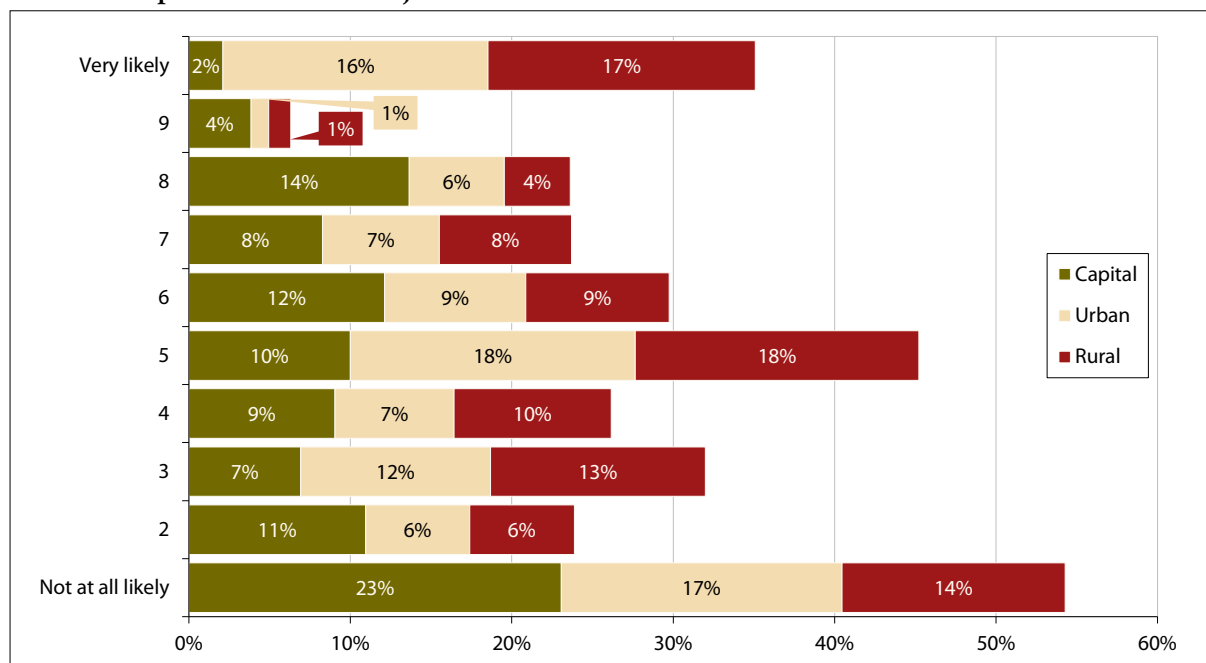
### About the Author

Turkhan Sadigov is a PhD in Political Science (SUNY 2016). He is interested in the impact of political culture, informality, and collectively shared ideas on citizen pro-activism and the development of political institutions in post-Soviet societies. He has published articles in journals such as the *Journal of Civil Society*, *East European Politics*, and *Problems of Post-Communism*.

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Figure 1: Expectation That Close Relatives, Friends, and Neighbors Will Help Repair a House/ Apartment in Azerbaijan



Source: CRRC Caucasus Barometer 2013

## Modernization of Baku's Transport System: Infrastructure Development Issues

By Fuad Jafarli, Baku

### Abstract

Recent changes in transportation planning and management in Azerbaijan in the context of an economic downturn indicate the need for sustainable urban transportation planning in Baku. This paper looks at existing situations in transportation planning and some of the policies implemented in recent years. It also analyzes transportation-related investments and transportation management as well as their implications for sustainable transportation planning in the future.

### Introduction

In the time before the Soviet collapse, Azerbaijan was ranked at the bottom of the republics of the former Soviet Union for car ownership. The USSR, which used to protect collective ownership principles, was reluctant to open a market mechanism for obtaining cars for individual use. Instead, the Soviet public transportation system was one of the best in the world. Since the Soviet

collapse, transportation planning and policies in Azerbaijan have changed considerably, as have the approach to transportation infrastructure improvement. In this article, I examine how the changes over the last few decades have affected transportation policies in Azerbaijan and how government investments have changed Azerbaijan from a nation of public transportation riders to one of car owners.