

## ***Religious Domains of Infrastructure and its role among Armenians and Azerbaijanis in Georgia***

Georgia is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious state where various minority groups live. The Orthodox Church, which constitutes 83.4% of Georgia's population, is privileged, dominating the discourse on self-identifying the Georgian nation. The role of the Orthodox Church determines the state's attitude towards ethnic and religious minorities, whose interests are not given due attention or are disregarded.

**The project's main goal** is to study how the Azerbaijani and Armenian minorities in Georgia establish, use, and maintain their infrastructure related to religion. This issue shall be investigated on different levels: local relations, the relationship with the Georgian state, and transnational connections.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, religiosity in Georgia underwent a rapid transformation, including the construction of new infrastructure, renovation of old buildings, and reconstruction of sacred places. One of the critical research questions is how Armenians and Azerbaijanis use infrastructure in both religious and secular contexts to strengthen their position in Georgia. On the one hand, both groups must accept their minority status. On the other hand, their mutual relations are marked by distrust and sometimes even hostility resulting from the prolonged dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh.

Notwithstanding, infrastructure can support minorities regarding religious and social activities. The examples of Armenians, representatives of the Armenian Apostolic Church, and Azerbaijanis (Shiites and Sunnis) in Georgia show that infrastructure is an integral part of their cultural heritage, helps preserve their identity and faith, disseminates religious education, integrates community members, and supports their social and political claims. For example, both minorities used infrastructure as a resource during the Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020. Infrastructure is often built based on local activism, charitable organizations, and informal and formal transnational actors associated with Russia, Armenia (Armenians), Azerbaijan, Iran, and Turkey (Azerbaijanis).

Within the project, field research is planned in Georgia (300 days; 10 months, two stages: 2025, 2026), conducted by the Principal Investigator and a person employed as a post-doc. Additionally, visual documentation will be collected through photographs and short videos during rituals, meetings, celebrations, etc. The research will also cover cyberspace. Researchers will monitor social media and communication channels related to Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Islam, and the Armenian Apostolic Church in Georgia. In addition, an online meeting will be organized with experts to develop a theoretical framework on minority infrastructure in a religious context.

The result of the project will be a comprehensive analysis of the social and political role of Armenian and Azerbaijani infrastructure in Georgia, along with a discussion of the theoretical issues. The project results will be disseminated in 6 articles and a special issue submitted to international journals and at six international conferences. The project also includes a podcast, an exhibition of photos and videos from the field study, the publication of films on Vimeo, the "Civitas on Air" video channel, and four public lectures.