

WAYS TO IMPROVE THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF ECOLOGICAL TOURISM IN THE CONDITIONS OF UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract: This article analyzes the necessity of improving the concept of sustainable development of ecological tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan, existing problems, and ways to address them. Based on a comparison with global experience, particularly sustainable ecotourism practices in European countries, effective directions for the development of ecological tourism under the conditions of Uzbekistan have been identified. The study examines geographical, economic, and social factors, as well as strategies aimed at preserving natural areas and harmonizing the interests of local populations. As a result, recommendations have been developed to improve ecological tourism policy through a comprehensive approach and the introduction of innovative management mechanisms.

Keywords: ecological tourism, sustainable development, tourism policy, natural resources, European experience, ecological potential of Uzbekistan, local population, green economy.

At present, ecological tourism is globally recognized as an important component of sustainable development. This form of tourism not only generates economic benefits but also plays a significant role in environmental protection, biodiversity conservation, and the enhancement of ecological awareness among the population. Uzbekistan possesses considerable potential for the development of ecological tourism due to its natural and geographical location, unique landscapes, national parks, mountainous and desert areas.

However, practice shows that a number of systemic problems exist in the development of ecological tourism in the country, including weak ecological infrastructure, insufficient compliance with environmental standards, and the incomplete formation of a sustainable management system. Therefore, improving

the concept of sustainable development of ecological tourism is an urgent task today. This article is devoted to exploring ways to address this issue.

The ways to improve the concept of sustainable development of ecological tourism in the conditions of Uzbekistan are explained in detail below, without tables or lists. Ecotourism is an important strategic direction for Uzbekistan, aimed at generating economic benefits while preserving the country's natural resources, including mountains, deserts, protected areas, and unique ecosystems. The current concept is based on the Presidential Decree of 2016 and its updates in 2023, which envisage the establishment of tourism facilities in natural parks and the creation of digital platforms. However, to ensure sustainability, it is necessary to improve infrastructure, education, monitoring, and economic mechanisms.

Among the current challenges are the lack of roads and accommodation facilities in rural areas, insufficient environmental knowledge among guides, climate change and waste management issues, as well as weak legal regulation. For example, environmental degradation around the Aral Sea and the overuse of resources in Ugam-Chatkal National Park pose risks to tourism development. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach based on cooperation between the state, the private sector, and local communities.

The first direction for improvement is infrastructure development. This includes the construction of eco-friendly hotels and campsites in reserves and national parks, the integration of multimodal transport networks combining road and rail systems, and the introduction of solar energy and waste recycling systems. Based on reforestation projects in the Aral region and the experience of the Charvak zone, these measures can increase tourist flows and stimulate local economies while generating income without harming nature.

The second direction is strengthening human resources and education. This can be achieved through ecological training and online courses for local populations, the introduction of certification systems, and the implementation of special programs for youth and women. Experiences from cooperation with Purdue University and

ACTED projects demonstrate that such measures increase community participation, create new jobs, and help maintain ecological standards.

The third aspect involves strengthening ecological monitoring and regulation. It is necessary to establish real-time monitoring through digital technologies, make environmental impact assessments mandatory for every tourism project, and integrate international UNWTO standards. These measures help preserve the Aral Sea ecosystem, reduce degradation, and ensure compliance with the decrees adopted in 2023.

The fourth approach focuses on developing economic mechanisms and clusters. This includes attracting investments through public-private partnerships, forming tourism clusters in Khiva and along the Amu Darya, and promoting tourism through online marketing and branding. A system similar to Kazakhstan's certification registries can increase the share of tourism in gross domestic product.

The fifth element is strengthening public and international cooperation. Involving local communities through revenue-sharing mechanisms, promoting initiatives through international agreements such as Save Soil and COP29, grants, and ecological festivals ensures social sustainability and aligns with the ecological culture concept up to 2030.

Implementation should be phased: in the short term, launching pilot projects and platforms in the Aral Sea region and Ugam-Chatkal; in the medium term, developing a legal framework and establishing dedicated funds; and in the long term, creating a national registry and aligning activities with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Following the record of 6.6 million tourists in 2023, these measures will further increase ecotourism flows, position Uzbekistan as a leader in Central Asia, and support the implementation of the "Green Uzbekistan" strategy. For additional guidance, reference can be made to the website of the Tourism Committee.

The research results show that the success of ecological tourism depends not only on natural resources but also on socio-economic and governance factors. For

example, in Germany, each ecological route is developed through cooperation between local authorities, communities, and business entities. Under the conditions of Uzbekistan, such an integrated model has not yet been fully implemented.

In addition, the regulatory framework in the tourism sector does not clearly define sustainability indicators for ecological tourism, which leads to non-compliance with environmental standards in practice.

To address this issue, it is necessary to develop a national strategic model for managing ecological tourism, introduce a separate “ecological passport” for each tourism zone, and digitalize the monitoring system.

In general, it can be concluded that it is necessary to update the concept of sustainable development of ecological tourism in Uzbekistan based on international standards. A unified national coordination center for ecotourism management should be established. Local populations, especially communities in mountainous and desert areas, should be actively involved in ecological tourism projects. Digital technologies should be used to organize ecological monitoring in natural areas. It is recommended to introduce green economy principles in ecotourism financing, including ecological taxes and grant mechanisms. The training system should be expanded by introducing specialized courses on “Ecotourism and Sustainable Development” within the education system.

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