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STRATEGIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF INCLUSIVE TOURISM IN UZBEKISTAN: A CASE STUDY OF SOUTH KOREA

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Annotation: *This article explores the development of inclusive and accessible tourism in Uzbekistan, using South Korea as a successful model. It highlights the global importance of accessible tourism, which ensures equitable travel experiences for people with disabilities, the elderly, families with young children, and others with limited mobility. The concept of "Tourism for All" is emphasized as both a moral imperative and an economic opportunity, given the growing population of people with disabilities and elderly travelers. The article outlines Uzbekistan's recent efforts—particularly the Presidential Resolution of January 12, 2024—to promote barrier-free tourism infrastructure. It then examines South Korea's comprehensive approach, including legislative measures, inclusive public transport, barrier-free tourist sites, and technological solutions. Drawing on this model, the article proposes practical steps for Uzbekistan, such as establishing a national center for accessible tourism, offering financial incentives for inclusive infrastructure, and modernizing transportation systems. The paper concludes that by adopting these measures, Uzbekistan can become a leader in accessible tourism in Central Asia, enhancing both social inclusion and economic competitiveness.*

Keywords: *Inclusive tourism, accessible tourism, tourism for all, disability-friendly infrastructure Uzbekistan tourism development, South Korea tourism model, smart tourism technology*

Introduction

The future growth of high-quality tourism can be modeled by accessible tourism, which promotes sustainable companies, locations, and communities while providing everyone with high-quality experiences.

The concept known as "tourism for all," or accessible tourism, promotes fair access to travel experiences for those with disabilities, those with limited mobility, and other groups that might encounter obstacles.

The idea behind "Tourism for All" is to cater to an increasing number of tourists with a wide range of demands. For instance, something that one tourist in a wheelchair finds "accessible" can be entirely inaccessible or extremely difficult for another person with a different kind of disability, mobility limitation, or other impairments.

Through the provision of universally designed tourism products, services, and environments, accessible tourism entails cooperative processes amongst stakeholders that allow individuals with access requirements—such as mobility, vision, hearing, and cognitive dimensions of access—to function independently, fairly, and with dignity. This definition takes a whole-of-life approach, meaning that accessible tourism benefits individuals at every stage of their lives. These include elderly persons, obese people, people with short-term or long-term disabilities, families with small children, and those who work in safer and more socially responsible settings¹.

Analysis of the literature on the topic. Biddulph and Scheyvens define "inclusive tourism" as "transformative tourism in which marginalized groups are engaged in ethical production or consumption of tourism and the sharing of its benefits." This definition has been used more widely in recent years. Although there are benefits to this definition's broader scope, which encompasses all types of marginality and intersectionality (such as gender, sexual orientation, Indigeneity, etc.), we think that the conceptualization of "accessibility" and "marginalization" is more divergent than convergent².

The latest research highlights a compelling and often overlooked truth: accessibility is not just a moral imperative but a growing economic opportunity. With 1.3 billion people worldwide already living with significant disabilities and 1 in 6 people expected to be aged 60 or older within the next five years, the demand for accessible travel options is set to rise dramatically. This demographic shift means that travel providers who fail to prioritize accessibility risk alienating a substantial and increasingly influential customer base.

Furthermore, travellers with disabilities often do not travel alone — they are typically accompanied by two to three additional companions. This multiplier effect significantly amplifies the potential market value of accessible tourism³.

Materials and methods. This study employs a qualitative research approach based on comparative analysis, policy review, and secondary data examination. The materials used include national legislation, government resolutions, institutional reports, and international guidelines related to accessible tourism in both Uzbekistan and South Korea.

Analysis and results Zurab Pololikashvili, the UN secretary-general for tourism, states: "Travel should be accessible to all. The advantages of accessibility have never been more evident, and we at UN Tourism have long promoted it. UN Tourism and our partners have developed new guidelines on accessible tourism that outline how enterprises and destinations can use innovation and investment to increase accessibility in all aspects.

Developing procedural guidelines that enable the tourism sector to better assist people with all degrees of disabilities and enabling the establishment of good tourism experiences depend on an understanding of the general issues that still exist with accessibility in tourist surroundings⁴.

On January 12, 2024, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan adopted the Resolution "On Measures to Develop and Promote Barrier-Free Tourism Infrastructure in the Republic of Uzbekistan. This resolution proposes the installation of ramps, elevators, and plinths at cultural heritage sites for persons with disabilities, as well as the placement of miniature models and informational materials in Braille for the visually impaired. Additionally, it envisages the introduction of tactile maps and audio guides in museums, theaters, and other cultural venues. Special boarding ramps, convenient stair railings, and wheelchairs are to be installed in public transportation, airports, and railway stations. Entrepreneurial entities that create specially equipped rooms in hotels for persons with disabilities will be provided with subsidies. It also addresses the reimbursement of 50 percent of the costs for training courses for sign language interpreters. Starting

¹ Darcy, S. and Dickson, T. (2009), "A whole-of-Life approach to tourism: the case for accessible tourism experiences", *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, Vol. 16 No. 1, pp. 32-44.

² Biddulph, R. and Scheyvens, R. (2018), "Inclusive tourism development", *Tourism Geographies*, Vol. 20 No. 4, pp. 589-609

³ <https://www.unwto.org/news/un-tourism-accessible-travel-a-game-changer-for-destinations-and-businesses>

⁴ Darcy, S. (2008). Accessible tourism: challenges and opportunities. Accessible tourism understanding and evolving aspect of Australian tourism, Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre, Australia

from March 1, 2024, it is planned to ensure access for persons with disabilities to the unified national tourism information portal Uzbekistan.travel, as well as to introduce tactile and voice-function display systems adapted to the needs of hearing and visually impaired persons on online platforms for the purchase of air, railway, and bus tickets.

The South Korean government has institutionalized accessibility through several key policies. The **"Act on Guarantee of Convenience Promotion for Persons with Disabilities, the Elderly, and Pregnant Women"**, first enacted in 1998 and amended regularly, serves as the cornerstone of inclusive infrastructure policy. This act mandates the incorporation of accessibility features such as ramps, elevators, tactile paving, and accessible restrooms in public spaces, including tourist attractions.

The **Korea Tourism Organization (KTO)** has played a central role by establishing the **Barrier-Free Tourism Information Center**, which provides resources, training, and accessibility assessments for tourism businesses and travelers. In addition, local governments often implement city-specific programs to promote inclusive tourism.

South Korea has made significant investments in accessible public transportation. In cities like **Seoul, Busan, and Daejeon**, subway systems are equipped with elevators, Braille signboards, voice-guided announcements, and tactile paving for the visually impaired. **Low-floor buses**, which are wheelchair accessible, are increasingly common in metropolitan areas.

High-speed trains (KTX) provide accessible boarding areas, designated wheelchair spaces, and barrier-free restrooms. **Incheon International Airport**, one of Asia's largest transit hubs, offers a fully accessible experience with rental wheelchairs, guidance systems for the visually impaired, and multilingual assistance services.

Efforts have been made to improve the accessibility of South Korea's most popular tourist destinations. Major historical and cultural sites such as **Gyeongbokgung Palace, Changdeokgung Palace**, and the **National Museum of Korea** have introduced barrier-free paths, Braille maps, and tactile models. Natural sites, including the **Jeju Olle Trails**, have certain routes adapted for wheelchair users and elderly visitors.

Theme parks such as **Everland** and **Lotte World** provide wheelchairs, priority entry for persons with disabilities, and designated resting areas.

Many hotels, especially international chains and newer domestic properties, include **barrier-free rooms** equipped with wide doors, roll-in showers, grab bars, and emergency call systems. The KTO has launched campaigns encouraging more hospitality businesses to obtain **barrier-free certifications** and improve staff training. Entrepreneurial initiatives are also growing, such as tour agencies offering **specialized packages** for travelers with disabilities, including transportation, interpretation, and health services. South Korea integrates technology into accessible tourism through mobile applications and smart devices. Apps such as **"Tourmate"**, **"Wheelmap"**, and **"Accessible Korea"** provide real-time information on barrier-free locations, accessible routes, and service availability. Museums and cultural centers often offer **audio guides, subtitled videos**, and **sign language interpretation**. Moreover, tactile exhibits and Braille materials cater to visually impaired visitors. Efforts are ongoing to introduce **AI-based support** for real-time navigation and information access.

Conclusions and proposals. Accessible tourism is an essential component of an inclusive society. While Uzbekistan has begun taking steps toward inclusive tourism—particularly with the Presidential Decree of January 12, 2024 there is still a significant opportunity to learn from countries like South Korea, which has developed a well-structured and inclusive tourism ecosystem. Based on South Korea's model, the following proposals are recommended for Uzbekistan:

- Establish a **National Center for Accessible Tourism** under the Committee for Tourism Development to oversee implementation, monitoring, and capacity building.
- Mandate the installation of **ramps, tactile paths, elevators, Braille signage, and accessible toilets** in airports, train stations, museums, theatres, and cultural heritage sites.
- Provide **government subsidies or tax incentives** to hotels and hospitality businesses that equip rooms and facilities for people with disabilities.

- Introduce **low-floor buses** and accessible metro stations in major cities like Tashkent, Samarkand, and Bukhara.
- Upgrade **train stations and carriages** to accommodate passengers using wheelchairs, with reserved seating and accessible restrooms.

In Central Asia, Uzbekistan has the ability to lead the way in accessible travel. Uzbekistan can guarantee that tourism is genuinely accessible to all by adopting and implementing South Korea's model, which emphasizes robust legislation, inclusive infrastructure, digital innovation, and capacity building. Putting these suggestions into practice would not only make life better for people with disabilities, but it will also establish Uzbekistan as a friendly and progressive travel destination.

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TURIZM INDUSTRIYASIDA NOGIRONLAR UCHUN INKLYUZIV TABIAT TURIZMI YO'LLARI

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Annotatsiya: so'nggi yillarda turizm sanoati yanada inklyuziv va barqaror variantlarni taqdim etish orqali o'z takliflarini kengaytirmoqda. Biroq, bo'sh vaqt va sayohat hali ham