

CONDITIONS AND FEATURES OF DEVELOPMENT OF SUSTAINABLE ECOTOURISM

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Annotation. This article written underscores the imperative of developing ecotourism within protected areas as a cohesive and integrated system. The narrative explores the multifaceted challenges and opportunities associated with ecotourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan, emphasizing the need for a specialized organizational framework. Key objectives of the proposed ecotourism development model include enhancing ecological literacy, promoting sustainable practices, improving socio-economic conditions, and fostering international collaboration. The discourse also delineates strategies for marketing, training, standardization, and expansion of tourism areas, aiming at a holistic approach to environmental preservation and socio-economic development.

Keywords: Ecotourism, Protected Areas, Sustainable Development, Socio-economic Impact, Environmental Education, Marketing, International Collaboration, Standardization, Uzbekistan, Nature Reserves.

Introduction

In contemporary developed economies, a noteworthy focus is directed towards advancing tourism services, a constituent of the service sector. Presently, as per the World Tourism Organization (WTO), ecotourism is identified as the most rapidly expanding sector within the tourism industry, experiencing an annual growth rate of 30%, contributing 10–15% to global tourism revenues [1]. The heightened trajectory of ecotourism finds its rationale in the escalating societal demand for outdoor recreation, attributed to the adverse repercussions of industrial progress on the environment.

Ecotourism is "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, supports the well-being of local people, and includes interpretation and education." Ecotourism is the integration of nature, communities and sustainable travel. At this time, natural and recreational resources and objects of protected natural areas (from now on referred to as protected areas) attract tourists. They are, in essence, a market tourism product. Therefore, the new paradigm of protected areas is characterized by the active implementation of social and economic practices in the territory of special protection, the most large-scale of which is the practice of eco-tourism.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) emphasizes that ecotourism involves environmentally responsible travel in relatively undisturbed natural areas to explore and enjoy nature and cultural attractions. The World Wildlife Fund also focuses on the environmental orientation of ecotourism: "Ecotourism is nature tourism that promotes nature conservation."

Ecotourism stands as a prevalent pursuit across diverse nations, representing a form of active recreation wherein individuals seek to rejuvenate their well-being and derive aesthetic gratification through the contemplation of the surrounding flora and fauna.

The contemporary objective of ecotourism is the judicious utilization of natural resources at tourist destinations to ensure environmental sustainability for future generations. Prescribed criteria for the recognition of ecotourism encompass an environmentally oriented service provision, eco-friendly transport for tourists, the utilization of environmentally friendly and healthful food and beverage products sourced locally, and the engagement of qualified guides to accompany tourists to points of interest [2].

Recently, the promotion of ecotourism within protected natural areas (PAs) has been a subject of ongoing debate across many nations. While a minority of states assert that ecotourism is incompatible with such territories, the majority actively embrace and implement ecotourism in protected areas worldwide. The case of Uzbekistan is particularly pertinent, as the potential of its protected areas not only rivals that of international natural reserves but also offers distinctive advantages such as unique natural landscapes, pristine ecosystems, and habitats untouched by human presence, housing diverse fauna including goitered Jeyrans, saigas, and rare birds of prey.

The protected areas in Uzbekistan exhibit distinct characteristics and advantages conducive to the theoretical and practical application of sustainable ecotourism, including:

1. Ecotourism development transcends mere commercial interests, emphasizing a primary objective beyond profit maximization. Conventional travel agencies are often ill-equipped to implement the intricate theories and practices inherent in ecotourism.
2. Within the reserves of Uzbekistan, dedicated scientific departments continuously monitor natural ecosystems. In a broad sense, the natural zones of the Republic of

- Uzbekistan offer favorable conditions for implementing various forms of educational tourism, student practicum, scientific tourism, and volunteer programs.
3. The cohesive integration of environmental education and awareness significantly enhances the efficacy of ecotourism education and activities within nature reserves. This integration engages the general public in nature conservation issues, garnering public support for protected natural areas.
 4. The presence of structures proficient in planning, managing, and monitoring tourism activities within protected areas is a fundamental prerequisite for ecotourism. The global socio-economic efficiency of ecotourism at local and regional levels is relatively high.

Consequently, protected areas have the potential to evolve into substantive sources of new employment opportunities and supplementary income for the local economy. The development of ecotourism in protected areas can catalyze international investment and attention, thereby reinforcing the significance of protected areas in the local population's perception and fostering a transformative attitude towards environmental concerns.

The diverse and abundant nature of our region is well-documented. Notable examples include the Lower Amudarya State Bioserve and Jeyran Ecocenter, encompassing nature reserves, national parks, and sanctuaries, housing diverse fauna such as goitered gazelles, kulans, Przewalski's horses, Bukhara mountain goats, and thousands of unique plant species.

Initiatives have been undertaken on the Ustyurt plateau to protect and create favorable conditions for saigas. The resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan focused on streamlining issues related to the creation and organization of activities in complex (landscape) reserves has led to the allocation of five areas totaling 628.3 thousand hectares based on the Saigachiy State Nature Reserve. These areas facilitate the existence of saigas and other rare animals, with abundant herb-rich pastures and water sources. Simultaneously, measures are planned to establish a protective zone covering 219.8 thousand hectares within the landscape reserves to mitigate potential negative consequences and contribute to the conservation of saigas, rare animals, and plants.

Our research reveals several challenges within protected areas in the Republic of Uzbekistan, including:

- *Pervasive development of traditional forms of tourism in most regions.*
- *Imperfections in legislation governing ecotourism development, especially concerning tax policy, the visa system, and land use regulations.*
- *The absence of specific plans and strategies for ecotourism development based on protected areas that align with global standards.*
- *Most protected areas lack established mechanisms to determine ecotourism's recreational impact and consequences, leading to implementation challenges.*
- *Absence or inadequacy of living conditions, transportation, organized tourist routes, equipment for ecological trails, observation points, and other essential infrastructure within protected areas.*

- *Limited experience in organizing environmental education in protected areas, lacking specificity in target audiences, and falling short of meeting the minimum requirements for average visitors.*
- *Insufficient availability of specialized and detailed information regarding plants and animals, particularly those categorized as endangered species, poses a challenge to the efficacy of ecotourism, particularly on the international stage. The extent of success in ecotourism is heavily contingent on the informational capacities of visitors to the designated areas.*
- *Inadequate knowledge and qualifications in marketing among personnel within protected areas hinder the effective organization of international tours. This includes challenges in setting appropriate pricing structures and organizing programs tailored to diverse categories of visitors.*
- *The absence of standardized guidelines for establishing uniform pricing structures for tourist services within protected areas and incongruities between the offered services and their associated prices complicate the operational landscape.*

Notwithstanding these challenges, within the contemporary socio-economic milieu of the Republic of Uzbekistan, there exists the potential to organize and cultivate promising ecotourism relatively effectively. This facet of tourism holds considerable resource potential and, with reasonable mitigation strategies, can address adverse repercussions, contribute to environmental preservation, and augment socio-economic benefits. Achieving these objectives necessitates meticulous planning, adept management of ecotourism, and vigilant monitoring of associated activities.

The advancement of ecotourism can transform protected areas from secluded entities with limited involvement in resolving economic and social issues within the region into reliable partners. This evolution involves augmenting visitor influx, generating employment opportunities, establishing new activities, revitalizing local culture, and fostering increased regional investment activities.

Simultaneously, two ecotourism models in natural settings are discernible: the Australian model, originating in the USA and Canada and fully realized in Australia, and the Western European model, implemented within cultural landscapes.

Drawing insights from analyzing these models, legislative mandates, and contemporary research, a proposed development model for ecotourism within protected areas of the Republic of Uzbekistan is presented (refer to Figure 1) [3].

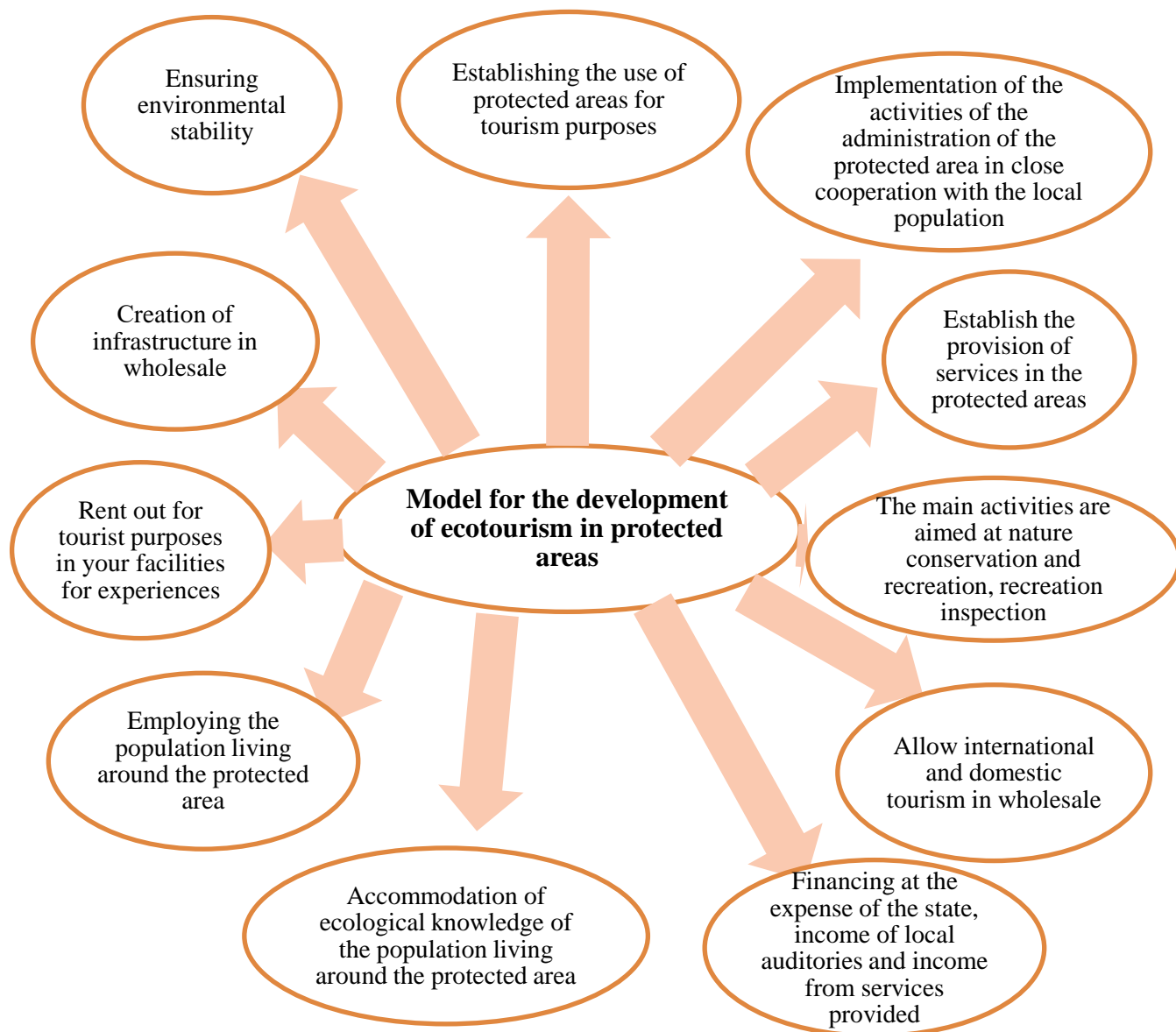


Figure 1. Model of ecotourism development in protected areas

Ecotourism within protected areas necessitates establishing a cohesive and integrated system where delineated objectives operate at regional and protected area levels. Establishing a specialized organizational framework responsible for the strategic development of ecotourism within protected areas is essential to address this imperative.

The objectives inherent in the proposed model for the development of ecotourism based on protected areas encompass the following facets:

- Advancement of ecological literacy within the population.
- Exploration of alternative modalities instead of non-renewable practices in natural resource utilization.
- Enhancement of socio-economic conditions for residents through the creation of employment opportunities.
- Generation of supplementary financial resources to sustain protected areas.
- Establishment of linkages with national and international nature reserve systems, coupled with active integration into the global ecotourism market.

- Formulation of criteria for the sustainable development of ecotourism, entailing an evaluation of the alignment of ecotourism routes and services with the principles underpinning sustainable international tourism.
- Facilitation of the incorporation of protected areas into international ecotourism's unified Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure.
- We are implementing marketing and advertising strategies to promote tourism products within Uzbekistan and abroad.
- Establishment of a centralized professional center dedicated to retraining personnel in ecotourism, complemented by regular seminars.
- We are adopting a policy to standardize pricing structures for ecotourism products and services.
- Development of uniform standards for advertising, informational boards, and promotional materials along tourist trails within protected areas.
- Compilation of standardized informational materials for designing and outfitting visitor centers, nature museums, exhibitions, advertising brochures, and presentations.

The gradual expansion of land areas allocated for tourism and recreational purposes within protected areas in the region is imperative to foster ecotourism development. The proposed model's overarching goals encompass the utilization of protected areas for tourism endeavors, employment generation for local communities, augmentation of environmental literacy and awareness, and preservation of ecological stability.

Conclusion

The establishment of a comprehensive model for ecotourism development within protected areas in Uzbekistan emerges as a strategic imperative. By addressing challenges such as information gaps, marketing limitations, and pricing inconsistencies, the proposed model aims to not only mitigate negative consequences but also leverage the rich resource potential for socio-economic advancement. The integration of ecological education, international collaboration, and standardized practices is envisioned to transform protected areas into dynamic contributors to regional development, fostering environmental stability, and cultural restoration. As a result, the proposed model serves as a blueprint for the effective and sustainable integration of ecotourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan.

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