



Article

“SMLT” Strategy for Clustering the Tourism Sector of Uzbekistan

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Abstract: This article seeks to explain the development of a strategy for clustering the tourism sector of Uzbekistan, in which a “Short → Medium → Long Term” (abbreviated as “SMLT”) strategy is proposed to implement for the development of tourist clusters according to short-term (S), medium-term (M), long-term (L) stages following time-management approach. Priorities have been developed for “Short Term”, “Medium Term” and “Long Term” to implement the strategy in an appropriate way. The research identifies priorities for each stage to ensure an effective and phased implementation of tourism cluster development programs. Emphasis is placed on the integration of local natural, cultural, and historical resources, as well as the strategic promotion of Uzbekistan’s tourism brands in global markets. The study also proposes mechanisms for organizing and managing tourist clusters, taking into account the type and specialization of services offered. By providing both theoretical and practical recommendations, this research contributes to enhancing the efficiency, competitiveness, and sustainability of Uzbekistan’s tourism sector.

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1. Introduction

In Uzbekistan the dynamic development trends have been being observed in the national tourism sector in the context of new reforms, including annual growth rate in the volume of domestic and foreign tourist flows in the country’s tourism services market [1]. It allows us to achieve record results in the history of the country’s tourism industry, which have been even higher than before, along with a complete restoration of the results achieved in the period before the global sanitary crisis in 2019.

This condition, in the national economy of the country, increases the economic and social significance of the tourism industry in the country’s economy, ensuring the population welfare, and confirms that the national Uzbek tourism sector is among the newly developing tourist destinations at the global level [2]. It is recommended to continually maintain the positive development trends attained in recent years in the country’s tourism sector in upcoming years, including the development of strategic development programs based on comprehensive approaches to further strengthening the position of local tourism brands in the global tourism services markets, and their implementation into practice. In order to achieve this goal, it is necessary to develop the priorities of a comprehensive strategic program to develop the tourism clusters according to a systematic analysis of the conclusions of domestic economists in recent years formed through the scientific research to develop local tourism [3].

The activities of tourist clusters and strategic programs aimed at their development are of paramount importance, because they focus on the comprehensive development of the practice of providing tourist services. In this article, taking this situation into consideration, we set ourselves the goal of developing scientific proposals and practical recommendations on the structural composition of tourist cluster development strategies and the mechanisms for their implementation [4].

It should be noted that the author developed a proposal to implement a “tourist cluster development strategy” in the country through short-term (S), medium-term (M), and long-term (L) stages, as “Short → Medium → Long Term” formula (abbreviated as “SMLT”). The “SMLT” strategy for clustering tourism of Uzbekistan, based on the type and specialization of services provided by tourist clusters, creates the possibility of adaptation for the relevant tourist service sector and sphere [5].

Literature Review

Uzbek economist Usmanova, Z. developed research proposals and practical recommendations for the development of the practice of using tourist and recreational services to increase the efficiency of the usage of the country’s natural tourist resources. Another scientist Ruziyev takes into account the location of historical and architectural monuments in the country, especially monuments of global significance included in the UNESCO list and believes that the effectiveness of the country’s tourism sector can be increased through the development of the historical and cultural tourism sector, including through the improvement of the organizational and economic mechanism of reforms and state programs in Uzbekistan. Similar scientific views and opinions are also reflected in the scientific research conducted by Abiyev, J. and his findings are important, because there are scientific conclusions on improving the organizational and economic mechanism of the tourism industry by studying the general features of its functioning.

Alimov, A [6]. researched the priorities of developing ecotourism services in the territory of the Republic of Karakalpakstan, which is the most problematic region of the country in terms of natural and climatic conditions and Hamidov conducted scientific research on improving the mechanism for managing ecotourism services at the national level. Eshtayev, A[7]. using marketing programs to develop the country’s tourism sector, developed scientific proposals and practical recommendations which aimed at expanding local tourism brands’ participation in tourism services market globally[8]. Navruz-Zoda developed a cluster model to organize a tourist business proposing its internal structure which consists of three components: a tourist destination, the core of the tourist cluster, and tourist entrepreneurship partners.

2. Materials and Methods

The methods used in this research are system analysis, historical and logic, induction and deduction, analysis and synthesis, comparative and selective research, monographic analysis and grouping. This research adopts an integrated methodological approach to investigate and develop a strategy for tourism cluster development in Uzbekistan. The study employs system analysis to examine the interactions between various components of the tourism sector, including service providers, local communities, and regulatory frameworks. Historical and logical methods are applied to trace the evolution of national tourism policies and identify key trends that influence cluster development. Inductive and deductive reasoning is utilized to derive general principles from specific case studies, ensuring that the proposed strategy is both evidence-based and practically applicable. Analysis and synthesis of existing domestic and international research allows for the identification of best practices and innovative approaches in tourism management. Comparative and selective research methods enable a focused evaluation of priority regions and tourism segments, such as ecological, historical, and cultural tourism.

3. Results and Discussion

In our opinion, the “Tourist Cluster Development Strategy” in the country should be implemented in the established sequence based on the development of short-term, medium-term, and long-term stages, abbreviated as “Short → Medium → Long Term” based on the priorities of the implementation of structural strategic measures in upcoming years [9].

Thus, the first stage is short-term strategic development programs, see Table 1, which consist of the following priorities implemented within the first two years of the “Short Term” stage of tourism cluster development:

Table 1. Priorities of the “Short Term” stage of the Tourism Cluster Development Strategy planned for 1-2 years.

No	Strategic priorities	Implementation mechanism
1	Improvement of the legislative framework	Creating a separate legal framework regulating the activities of the cluster
2	Marketing and branding	Creating regional brands (for example, “Samarkand - Silk Road Center”)
3	Personnel training	Cooperation agreements between tourism colleges and universities and clusters on personnel training
4	Pilot projects	Creating tourist clusters as an experiment in 2-3 regions (for example, Bukhara and Termez)

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in this case, improvement of the legislative framework means that, it is necessary to form a united regulatory framework to develop and regulate the activities of tourist clusters in the country, and in order to achieve this goal, it is necessary to develop the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On Tourist Clusters”[10]. In particular, it is recommended to form a convenient and transparent system to license the activities of tourist clusters, apply tax and customs benefits to them, and using land resources for business entities;

ensuring the implementation of marketing and branding programs in a mutually integrated manner is another goal and to achieve this, it is necessary to develop brand development strategies for each tourist cluster in the country, based on their specialization and the direction of offered services. For example, it will be possible to promote the brand “Bukhara - a center of culture and Sufism” for regional tourist clusters created in Bukhara region[11]. At the same time, it is necessary to conduct digital marketing programs on top social networks such as Google, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Telegram, TikTok, Pinterest, as well as expand the participation of local brands in tourist exhibitions organized at the national and international levels, including expanding the practice of hosting them;

improving the quality of personnel training - training the personnel who meet the requirements of professional competence set by employers in the field of tourism and other types of services by fully transitioning to the mechanism of a tripartite contract for personnel provision between vocational schools, colleges, universities and tourist clusters[12]. In particular, improving the quality of services provided by organizing short-

term (for example, up to 1-6 months) practical courses and trainings that provide opportunities for advanced training for employees of tourist clusters;

Implementation of pilot projects - by piloting tourism clusters in regions with high tourism potential, such as Bukhara, Samarkand, and Termez, it will be possible to create exemplary development models based on them. When implementing such projects, it is advisable to rely on the PPP mechanism and expand public participation.

The second stage, called "Medium Term", consists of priorities for 3-5 years of the implementation of the tourism cluster development strategy, see Table 2, which are interpreted in the following order: development of tourist infrastructure will be necessary to develop in this case, including improvement of hotels, sanitary facilities, transport, information centers, free Wi-Fi zones, and other types of infrastructure that are necessary for tourists[13]. It will also be necessary to develop new types of tourist routes and ensure their convenience for tourists, in particular, to digitize the processes of purchasing these types of routes and delivering information about them;

Table 2. Priorities of the "Medium Term" stage of the Tourism Cluster Development Strategy based on 3-5 years.

No	Strategic priorities	Implementation mechanism
1	Infrastructure Development	Construction and modernization of roads, hotels, and information centers
2	Strengthening public-private partnerships (PPPs)	Offering incentives, subsidies, and tax breaks to investors
3	Digitalization and innovative activity	Tourist site maps, online booking, AR/VR excursions
4	Local population participation	The concept of "people's tourism": involving local population groups in the provision of tourist services.

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"Development of PPP" means that it is necessary to expand private sector participation in attracting investments in the activities of tourist clusters and strengthen the system of guarantees provided to them[14]. At the same time, it is advisable to allocate subsidies from the state for tourism entities, which participate in the activities of tourism clusters, including tax benefits for investments directed by private investors in the activities of tourism clusters, as well as to expand the offer of loan guarantees.

When we digitalize the activities of tourist clusters and increase their innovative activity, it is necessary to introduce AR/VR technologies into service delivery practice, guide services based on QR code technology, the development of specialized platforms for online booking, as well as the development and improvement of tourist databases, maps and mobile applications (for example, "Digital Guide" programs for incoming tourist flows);

In the wide involvement of the local population in the activities of tourist clusters, through the concept of "people's tourism", it is necessary to involve the population in the spheres of home hotels, handicrafts, guiding and preparation of national dishes[15]. This creates a basis for the development of authentic tourist experiences among the population, along with an increase in the volume of income of the population from tourism activities.

At the third stage, it is necessary to implement the “Long Term”, for example strategic priorities for the development of tourist clusters, designed for a period of more than five years, see Table 3, in the following areas:

Table 3. Priorities of the “Long Term” stage of the Tourism Cluster Development Strategy for a period of more than 5 years.

No	Strategic priorities	Implementation mechanism
1	International cooperation and integration	Cooperation with tourist clusters in other countries (tours within Central Asia)
2	Development of ecological and cultural tourism	Preservation of biodiversity and expansion of ecological travel.
3	Sustainability of tourism	Implementation of sustainable tourism standards (ISO standards, “Green Tourism” models)
4	Scientific and educational clusters	Organization of scientific research and centers in the field of tourism and services.

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International cooperation and integration - including historical sites located on the territory of the country in the World Heritage List through the development of regional tourist clusters (for example, the regional tourist cluster “Great Silk Road”) in cooperation with the countries of Central Asia, as well as the development of cooperation with the international organization UNESCO;

organization of the activities of ecotourism clusters based on natural parks, mountainous areas and various ecosystems in the territory of the country in the development of ecotourism and cultural tourism, including the development of types of tourist services in areas related to rural tourism, various cultural festivals and national traditions;

It is necessary to develop and implement the concepts of environmental protection and reduce the volume of environmental damage, save resources, including “Green”, “Slow” and “Zero Waste” tourism, when organizing the activities of tourist clusters based on the concept of sustainable development in ensuring the sustainability of tourism;

development of scientific and educational clusters in tourism - in this case, it is advisable to create scientific centers related to the tourism sector, research laboratories, and develop centers engaged in providing in-depth specialized knowledge in the fields of tourism, history, archaeology, and environmental analysis.

4. Conclusion

Clustering the industry is an important direction in the development of tourism. In this process, it is possible to create clusters of various forms in the tourism sector of Uzbekistan through short, medium, and long-term stages according to the time management approach. It is recommended to develop the following specific priorities for each stage in the process of implementing the “SHORT → MEDIUM → LONG TERM” (SMLT) strategy for the development of tourist clusters:

- Improvement of the legislative framework, marketing and branding, training of personnel, development of pilot projects at the “Short Term” stage;

- Development of such priorities at the “Medium Term” stage as infrastructure development, strengthening public-private partnerships (PPPs), digitalization and innovative activity, participation of the local population;
- Development of such priorities as international cooperation and integration, development of ecotourism and cultural tourism, tourism sustainability, scientific and educational clusters at the “Long Term” stage.

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