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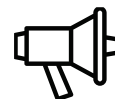


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SPECIFIC FEATURES OF THE FORMATION AND OPERATION OF A REGIONAL TOURISM CLUSTER

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Abstract: The article provides a scientific analysis of the specific features of the formation and functioning of regional tourism clusters. It substantiates the effective organization of the multidisciplinary and integrated nature of the tourism services sector through a cluster-based approach. The study highlights the importance of regional concentration, the coordination of cooperation and competition, synergistic effects, and public-private partnership mechanisms within a tourism cluster. It also emphasizes the need to coordinate stakeholders' activities in the process of creating and delivering a tourism product. Based on an analysis of international experience, regional tourism clusters are identified as an important institutional mechanism that ensures regional economic efficiency, employment growth, and sustainable development.

Key words: regional tourism cluster, cluster approach, tourism services, territorial agglomeration, cooperation and competition, synergistic effect, public-private partnership, regional economy, sustainable development.

Annotatsiya: Mazkur maqolada mintaqaviy turizm klasterlarining shakllanishi va faoliyat yuritishining o'ziga xos xususiyatlari ilmiy jihatdan tahlil qilingan. Turizm xizmatlari sohasining ko'p tarmoqli va integratsiyalashgan xususiyatini klaster yondashuvi asosida samarali tashkil etish zarurati asoslab berilgan. Tadqiqotda hududiy konsentratsiya, hamkorlik va raqobatni muvofiqlashtirish, sinergetik samaralar hamda davlat-xususiy sheriklik mexanizmlarining turizm klasteridagi o'zni yoritilgan. Shuningdek, turistik mahsulotni yaratish va iste'mol qilish jarayonida manfaatdor tomonlar faoliyatini muvofiqlashtirish zarurligi ta'kidlangan. Xorijiy tajriba tahliliga asoslanib, mintaqaviy turizm klasterlari hududiy iqtisodiyot samaradorligi, bandlik va barqaror rivojlanishni ta'minlovchi muhim institutsional mexanizm sifatida e'tirof etilgan.

Kalit so'zlar: mintaqaviy turizm klasteri, klaster yondashuvi, turizm xizmatlari, hududiy aglomeratsiya, hamkorlik va raqobat, sinergetik samara, davlat-xususiy sheriklik, hududiy iqtisodiyot, barqaror rivojlanish.

Аннотация: В статье научно проанализированы особенности формирования и функционирования региональных туристских кластеров. Обоснована необходимость эффективной организации многопрофильного и интегрированного характера сферы туристских услуг на основе кластерного подхода. Освещена роль территориальной концентрации, координации сотрудничества и конкуренции, синергетического эффекта, а также механизмов государственно-частного партнёрства в рамках туристского кластера. Подчёркнута необходимость согласования деятельности заинтересованных сторон в процессе создания и потребления туристского продукта. На основе анализа зарубежного опыта региональные туристские кластеры рассматриваются как важный институциональный механизм обеспечения эффективности региональной экономики, занятости и устойчивого развития.

Ключевые слова: региональный туристский кластер, кластерный подход, туристские услуги, территориальная агломерация, сотрудничество и конкуренция, синергетический эффект, государственно-частное партнёрство, региональная экономика, устойчивое развитие.

INTRODUCTION

The formation and effective functioning of regional tourism clusters constitute an important component of modern territorial development concepts. Their specific features are determined, on the one hand, by the internal principles of cluster systems—namely territorial concentration, cooperation, and competition—and, on the other hand, by the multi-component and integrated nature of the tourism services sector and the tourism product itself. The cluster approach ensures economic efficiency through the coordinated interaction of tourism resources, cultural and historical sites, infrastructure, service providers, suppliers, auxiliary sectors, and

governance structures located within a specific territory. In this regard, regional tourism clusters represent an organizational model that corresponds most closely to tourism as a complex and multidisciplinary system.

The specificity of the tourism services sector—particularly the fact that a tourism product consists of multiple services and goods, that its creation and consumption occur simultaneously, and that service quality and customer satisfaction directly depend on the territorial environment and human factors—further reinforces the need for a cluster-based approach. A tourism product is typically formed not by a single producer but through the cooperation of various stakeholders. Therefore, the integrated use of resources, service chain integration, and coordination of stakeholders' activities can be more effectively implemented within a cluster framework.

The application of the cluster approach in tourism services generates significant positive effects that stimulate regional development. The primary outcomes of clustering include increased regional economic activity, job creation, the development of small businesses and entrepreneurship, enhanced regional competitiveness, and growth in local budget revenues. In addition, tourism clusters play an important role in building a regional brand, coordinating marketing and promotional activities, and introducing innovative and digital solutions.

These issues are aligned with the long-term strategic reforms being implemented in the Republic of Uzbekistan. In particular, the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. PF-158 "On the Strategy 'Uzbekistan – 2030'" identifies the realization of regional economic potential, development of the services sector—including tourism—reduction of regional disparities, and ensuring sustainable economic growth as priority objectives [1]. This strategic document emphasizes the development of tourism as one of the key drivers of economic growth, the efficient use of regional resources, and the formation of new growth poles.

At the same time, the implementation of cluster projects in tourism may face challenges such as conflicts of interest, fragmentation of resources and ownership, and insufficient development of governance and institutional mechanisms. These factors necessitate the careful design of cluster policies, the expansion of public–private partnership mechanisms, and the improvement of territorial governance systems. Therefore, the scientific analysis of the specific features of the formation and functioning of regional tourism clusters, as well as the identification of their impact mechanisms on regional economic development, determines the relevance of this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In scientific research, regional tourism clusters are widely recognized as an effective institutional model that accelerates regional economic development. Michael Porter evaluates clusters as a key factor ensuring regional competitiveness and innovative growth, substantiating their role in enhancing economic efficiency [2].

D.D. Fundeanu interprets tourism clusters as a model of innovative regional development, demonstrating that clustering increases resource concentration and stimulates investment activity [3]. The multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder nature of the tourism services sector makes the cluster approach a necessary coordination mechanism.

L.K. Gurieva and T.G. Kurskiev define a tourism cluster as a coordinated system of resources, infrastructure, service providers, and governance structures located within a specific territory. They emphasize that the cluster environment enables the effective formation and delivery of a tourism product. At the same time, they note that the dispersion of resources and conflicting interests among stakeholders may hinder cluster development [4].

T. Yalçinkaya and T. Güzel argue that the cluster approach contributes to improving the quality of tourism services, strengthening regional branding, and increasing the effectiveness of marketing strategies [5].

In the studies of O.V. Ryzhkova, A.I. Mikhaylichenko, and D.O. Eneev and R.M. Cherkosov, tourism clusters are considered an important mechanism for expanding employment, fostering small business development, and ensuring regional economic stability [6–8].

Regional research, including the work of Z.S. Abriyev, recognizes tourism clusters as an effective instrument for enhancing investment attractiveness and reducing regional disparities in the context of Uzbekistan's economic development [9].

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed both general scientific and specialized economic research methods to assess the impact of the formation and functioning of regional tourism clusters on regional economic efficiency. In particular, the research applied systemic and institutional approaches, as well as methods of analysis and synthesis, comparison, and logical generalization.

The empirical basis of the study consisted of official statistical data, regulatory and legal documents, regional development programs, and relevant foreign and domestic academic sources. The findings were synthesized through an evaluation of the economic, social, and institutional effectiveness of the cluster approach.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In the contemporary tourism market, demand for tailor-made and integrated tourism packages that reflect tourists' individual preferences and interests has significantly increased. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) play a pivotal role in this process, as they constitute the backbone of the global tourism market. Their activities substantially influence regional economic growth and the development of tourism infrastructure [4].

This trend highlights two key aspects that determine the need for coordination within a tourism cluster. First, tourism clusters comprise numerous participants, which makes spontaneous cooperation difficult. Second, a tourism product must be developed as a holistic and integrated offering that corresponds to tourists' expectations. Achieving this requires continuous interaction among producers and service providers within a unified value chain.

Changing consumer preferences have intensified competition in the tourism market and have led to deeper segmentation and specialization [10]. Tourism enterprises must now design their services based on clearly defined strategies in order to remain competitive not only locally but also globally. This process requires the integration of different companies into a coordinated value chain and a high level of collaborative activity.

The territorial specificity of tourism products is also of fundamental importance. Unlike many other goods and services, tourism products require consumers to travel to the region where they are produced. Value creation occurs only when tourists physically visit the destination. Without tourist participation, tourism infrastructure and services remain underutilized. Therefore, effective tourist attraction can be achieved primarily through collective efforts within the cluster framework, as individual initiatives tend to produce limited results.

A tourism product is essentially a service, and in its creation and consumption process, the tourist acts as an active participant and co-creator. The core value emerges through an experiential and interactive process between the tourist and the service provider. Tourists independently select products that best meet their preferences from a range of services offered by various organizations within the destination.

This situation indicates that a significant portion of growth opportunities for firms operating in the tourism services sector lies beyond their direct control. Such characteristics necessitate the coordination of activities among all stakeholders within cluster initiatives [4]. Since the creation and consumption of tourism services require direct tourist involvement, effective coordination among service providers, suppliers, and administrative institutions is essential for delivering a high-quality and competitive tourism product.

Based on an analysis of cluster theory and the specific features of tourism and tourism products, several key characteristics of a regional tourism cluster can be identified.

The main characteristics of a regional tourism cluster are as follows [4]:

1. Territorial concentration and compact location of entities providing tourist services. Tourist clusters are typically characterized by a high concentration of tourism service providers within a specific territory. The availability and diversity of natural and cultural-historical resources are of decisive importance. The quantity, quality, and spatial distribution of these resources determine the potential for tourism development in the area. At the same time, an excessively dense concentration of tourism facilities may disrupt ecological and aesthetic balance, leading to a decline in the area's tourist attractiveness and competitiveness.

2. Multi-sectoral and systemic cooperation. The tourism industry is closely interconnected with several sectors, including agriculture, industry, construction, transport, and trade. Therefore, the effective functioning of tourism clusters is based on multi-level cooperation, coordination, and interdependence among related industries.

3. Synergistic effect. Hotels, catering establishments, transport services, excursion agencies, and entertainment centers operating within the cluster interact to create a collective synergistic effect. As noted by Michael Porter, a cluster represents a system of interconnected enterprises and institutions whose combined value exceeds the simple sum of their individual contributions.

4. Open and complex system. A regional tourism cluster possesses both internal and external linkages and operates through continuous flows of information, technology, innovation, and services. Within the cluster, cooperation and competition coexist, which enhances overall efficiency in a market economy.

5. A controlled but self-organizing system. Clusters may emerge either through local initiatives (bottom-up) or within the framework of state policy (top-down). In both cases, the primary role of the state is to create a favorable institutional, regulatory, and investment environment for cluster development.

6. A network with a horizontal structure, not a hierarchical one. Participants in tourism clusters operate on the basis of partnership, equality, and mutual cooperation rather than strict hierarchical subordination. In this process, smaller local tourism networks are interconnected, forming an integrated regional tourism space.

7. Dynamic and flexible system. Small and medium-sized tourism entities are characterized by their ability to adapt quickly to market changes. While maintaining their independence, they cooperate within the cluster framework, thereby strengthening the competitiveness and sustainability of the region.

Taking into account the specific characteristics of regional tourism clusters, the following basic principles can be distinguished to ensure their effective functioning:

The main principles of the operation of regional tourism clusters:

1. Tourist attractions concentrated within a specific territory. The spatial concentration of enterprises within a defined area reduces transportation and logistics costs and facilitates the exchange of information, knowledge, and experience among participants.

2. Deep cooperation based on the value chain. Cluster participants form an integrated service system grounded in technological and functional interconnections, enabling them to participate effectively in the value-added chain.

3. Combination of cooperation and competition. Alongside collaboration, competition exists among cluster members, motivating them to pursue innovation, enhance service quality, and improve overall performance.

4. Innovative environment. Within the cluster, intensive exchange of information, technologies, and ideas occurs, ensuring the rapid dissemination and implementation of innovations.

5. Public-private partnership. While the state plays a crucial role in the initial formation of clusters, sustainable development requires a strategic partnership with the private sector.

The main aspects to be considered when forming a regional tourism cluster are as follows:

1. Geographic proximity and territorial positioning. The close location of tourism entities facilitates efficient cooperation, strengthens social capital, and enhances skill development. Tourism clusters may operate at local, regional, or even trans-regional levels.

2. Cross-sectoral and multi-component structure. A cluster includes core tourism enterprises, service organizations, educational institutions, and research centers. Through joint participation in the value chain, they achieve sustainable competitiveness.

3. Parallel existence of cooperation and competition. Enterprises producing similar services may simultaneously act as competitors and strategic partners, thereby stimulating growth and innovation.

4. Concentration of competitiveness and innovation. The geographic concentration of firms operating within the same sector generates an accumulation of resources, knowledge, and expertise, fostering innovation. For example, Napa Valley in United States has developed a wine tourism cluster in which tourism significantly reinforces the wine industry [4].

5. Development based on public-private partnerships. The state may participate in cluster formation as a project initiator, manager, and investor. A notable example is the Cancún tourism cluster in Mexico, where the government played a key role in planning, financing, and marketing the cluster initiative.

The experience of South Africa is particularly noteworthy in this regard. In this country, national and local authorities implemented a tourism cluster policy in three main directions [11]:

1. Support for institutional development. Specialized management groups were established with the involvement of an international consulting company. These groups organized seminars, consultations, and working meetings to define strategic priorities, develop practical action plans, and ensure effective information exchange among cluster participants.

2. Development of mechanisms to support cluster projects. The government provided assistance for tourism product modernization, large-scale marketing and promotion, and investment attraction processes.

3. Creation of a supportive environment. By promoting vocational education and ensuring safety standards, favorable conditions were established for the sustainable development of tourism clusters.

The South African approach represents a successful example of public-private partnership in the effective governance and development of regional tourism clusters. This experience demonstrates how institutional governance, targeted economic support mechanisms, and a conducive social learning environment can collectively enhance cluster initiatives. Such a model may serve as a practical and adaptable framework for other countries, including Uzbekistan.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the study confirm that regional tourism clusters represent an effective organizational and economic mechanism for coordinating the multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder nature of the tourism services sector. The cluster approach enhances regional economic efficiency through the integrated utilization of tourism resources, value chain integration, and a balanced interaction between cooperation and competition. Regional tourism clusters contribute to employment growth, the development of small businesses and entrepreneurship, improved regional competitiveness, and the achievement of sustainable socio-economic development.

At the same time, the study reveals that the sustainable functioning of tourism clusters may be constrained by conflicts of interest among stakeholders, fragmentation of resources and ownership structures, and the insufficient development of governance and institutional frameworks. To address these challenges, it is

necessary to strengthen regional cluster governance systems, expand public–private partnership mechanisms, and establish effective coordination platforms that facilitate collaboration among cluster participants.

Furthermore, the development of tourism clusters requires the enhancement of regional branding and marketing strategies, modernization of tourism infrastructure, systematic human capital development, and the active introduction of digital technologies. The consistent implementation of these recommendations will improve the efficiency and resilience of regional tourism clusters, ensure sustainable growth in the tourism services sector, and contribute to the long-term development of regional economies.

LIST OF LITERATURE

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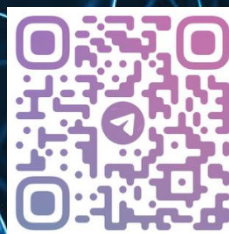
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