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AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF ACTIVE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN UZBEKISTAN

Abstract: This study presents an empirical investigation of active tourism development in Uzbekistan by assessing its current state, development potential, and future prospects. The research examines the economic, social, infrastructural, and organizational factors influencing the development of active tourism using empirical evidence. Based on the findings, scientifically grounded recommendations are proposed to enhance the effective utilization of regional tourism resources, improve the quality and competitiveness of tourism services, and promote sustainable tourism development. The results contribute to the diversification of tourism products and strengthen the competitiveness of Uzbekistan's tourism sector in the international tourism market.

Keywords: active tourism, empirical study, tourism development, tourism infrastructure, tourism potential, regional development, tourism services, competitiveness, Uzbekistan.

ЭМПИРИЧЕСКОЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ РАЗВИТИЯ АКТИВНОГО ТУРИЗМА В УЗБЕКИСТАНЕ

Аннотация: Настоящее исследование посвящено эмпирическому анализу развития активного туризма в Узбекистане, оценке его современного состояния, потенциала и перспектив развития. В ходе исследования проведён комплексный анализ экономических, социальных, инфраструктурных и организационных факторов, влияющих на развитие активного туризма. На основе результатов эмпирического исследования разработаны научно обоснованные рекомендации по эффективному использованию туристского потенциала регионов, совершенствованию туристских услуг и повышению конкурентоспособности туристской отрасли. Полученные результаты могут быть использованы при разработке стратегий устойчивого развития активного туризма и диверсификации туристских продуктов в Узбекистане.

Ключевые слова: активный туризм, эмпирическое исследование, развитие туризма, туристская инфраструктура, туристский потенциал, региональное развитие, туристские услуги, конкурентоспособность, Узбекистан.

O'ZBEKISTONDA AKTIV TURIZMNI RIVOJLANTIRISHNING EMPIRIK TADQIQOTI

Annotatsiya: Mazkur tadqiqot O'zbekistonda aktiv turizmni rivojlantirishning zamonaviy tendensiyalari, mavjud salohiyati va istiqbollarini empirik ma'lumotlar asosida baholashga bag'ishlangan. Tadqiqot davomida aktiv turizm rivojlanishiga ta'sir etuvchi iqtisodiy, ijtimoiy, infratuzilmaviy va tashkiliy omillar kompleks tahlil qilindi. Empirik tahlil natijalari asosida aktiv turizmni rivojlantirishning ustuvor yo'nalishlari, hududiy imkoniyatlardan samarali foydalanish mexanizmlari hamda turizm xizmatlari raqobatbardoshligini oshirish bo'yicha ilmiy asoslangan taklif va tavsiyalar ishlab chiqildi. Tadqiqot natijalari O'zbekistonda aktiv turizmni barqaror rivojlantirish, turistik mahsulotlarni diversifikatsiya qilish va xalqaro turizm bozorida raqobatbardoshlikni kuchaytirishga xizmat qiladi.

Kalit so'zlar: aktiv turizm, empirik tadqiqot, turizmni rivojlantirish, turistik infratuzilma, turizm salohiyati, hududiy rivojlanish, turizm xizmatlari, raqobatbardoshlik, O'zbekiston.

Introduction. Globally, the tourism industry has become one of the most dynamic and rapidly expanding sectors of the world economy, making a substantial contribution to economic growth, employment generation, foreign exchange earnings, regional development, and the enhancement of destinations' international competitiveness. The continuous expansion of tourism activities has strengthened its role in increasing gross domestic product (GDP), stimulating investment, supporting entrepreneurship, and improving the socio-economic well-being of local communities. Alongside these developments, significant changes in tourists' preferences, travel motivations, and consumption patterns have transformed the structure of global tourism demand. Modern travelers increasingly seek experiences that combine physical activity, interaction with natural environments, environmental sustainability, personal well-being, and authentic cultural engagement.

Consequently, active tourism has emerged as one of the fastest-growing and most promising segments of the tourism industry, offering high value-added tourism products while simultaneously promoting environmental conservation, regional economic diversification, and sustainable destination development.

In recent years, international tourism markets have demonstrated a growing preference for destinations that provide opportunities for outdoor recreation, adventure-based activities, nature-oriented experiences, and healthy lifestyles. This shift has increased the strategic importance of active tourism, which encompasses a wide range of recreational and sports-related activities conducted in natural settings. Beyond satisfying tourists' recreational needs, active tourism contributes to the rational use of natural resources, extends tourists' average length of stay, increases tourism expenditures, creates employment

opportunities in rural and mountainous areas, and stimulates the development of transport, accommodation, catering, and other supporting services. Therefore, many countries have incorporated active tourism into their national tourism development strategies as an effective mechanism for improving regional competitiveness and achieving long-term sustainable development goals.

Uzbekistan possesses significant comparative advantages for the development of active tourism owing to its exceptional diversity of natural, geographical, and cultural resources. The country's mountain systems, deserts, forests, rivers, lakes, caves, national parks, protected natural territories, and unique biodiversity create favorable conditions for developing various forms of active tourism, including trekking, hiking, mountaineering, rock climbing, speleotourism, rafting, cycling, horseback riding, safari tourism, and other outdoor recreational activities. Furthermore, the integration of these natural resources with Uzbekistan's rich historical, cultural, and archaeological heritage creates opportunities to diversify tourism products and develop integrated tourism routes capable of attracting both domestic and international visitors.

Over the past decade, the Government of Uzbekistan has implemented comprehensive reforms aimed at modernizing the national tourism industry and improving the country's competitiveness in the international

tourism market. These reforms include the liberalization of visa policies, modernization of transport infrastructure, improvement of tourism facilities, digitalization of tourism services, promotion of public-private partnerships, attraction of foreign investment, and implementation of institutional mechanisms supporting tourism entrepreneurship. In addition, government initiatives focused on regional tourism development, environmental protection, and sustainable resource management have created a more favorable institutional framework for expanding active tourism destinations and enhancing the quality of tourism services [1,2].

Despite these positive developments, several structural and organizational challenges continue to constrain the effective development of active tourism in Uzbekistan. Existing active tourism resources have not yet been fully integrated into a comprehensive destination management system based on scientific principles and international best practices. The absence of a unified conceptual framework for planning and managing active tourism destinations, insufficient classification and standardization of tourism products and routes, and weak coordination among government agencies, tourism enterprises, and local communities reduce the overall efficiency of tourism development initiatives. Moreover, considerable disparities remain in the quality of tourism infrastructure, accessibility, accommodation facilities, transport services, and visitor

amenities across different regions of the country.

Another critical issue concerns the establishment of internationally recognized safety standards and comprehensive risk management systems for active tourism activities. Many destinations continue to experience shortages of certified guides, professional instructors, rescue personnel, and specialized tourism service providers capable of ensuring safe and high-quality tourist experiences. Furthermore, limited application of innovative marketing strategies, destination branding, digital promotion tools, online booking platforms, and smart tourism technologies weakens the international visibility and market competitiveness of Uzbekistan's active tourism destinations. As a consequence, the country's substantial tourism potential remains underutilized, while opportunities to diversify tourism products, increase the spatial distribution of tourist flows, enhance visitor satisfaction, stimulate regional economic development, and expand tourism export revenues have not yet been fully realized. These challenges highlight the necessity of conducting comprehensive empirical research to identify the determinants of active tourism development and formulate scientifically grounded recommendations for strengthening the competitiveness and sustainable development of active tourism in Uzbekistan.

Literature review. Active tourism is one of the fastest growing areas of the modern tourism industry and is

recognized as a complex activity that promotes physical activity, direct interaction with the natural environment, satisfaction of recreational needs of tourists and sustainable development of the local economy. In recent years, environmental problems, increased interest in a healthy lifestyle, tourists' demand for individual experiences and authentic routes have made active tourism a promising segment of the world tourism market. According to UN Tourism, active and nature-based tourism destinations are one of the fastest growing segments of international tourism, and these destinations are an important factor in the economic development of regions, creating new jobs, expanding the export of services and ensuring environmental sustainability. In scientific literature, the concept of active tourism is interpreted based on different approaches. One of the scholars who made a significant contribution to the formation of the theoretical foundations of active tourism is Buckley (2016), who describes active tourism as a type of tourism based on the physical activity of tourists, the use of natural resources and a safety management system [3]. According to the scientist, the economic efficiency of active tourism depends on the quality of natural resources, the development of infrastructure, the level of service and the harmony of management mechanisms. Buckley also emphasizes that strict adherence to environmental restrictions and safety standards in the development of active tourism is a key

condition for long-term sustainable development.

Swarbrooke, Beard, Leckie and Pomfret (2023) consider active tourism as a special tourism segment related to the level of risk-taking, physical fitness and desire for new experiences of tourists. In their research, the interrelationship of the complexity of routes, quality of service, safety, instructor qualifications and marketing strategies in the formation of active tourism products is scientifically substantiated [4]. This approach shows that the success of active tourism is determined not only by the availability of natural resources, but also by the level of integrated organization of services. Weaver (2016) considers active tourism as a component of the concept of sustainable tourism and justifies the importance of maintaining ecological balance, protecting biodiversity and taking into account the interests of local populations in the development of this direction. In his opinion, active tourism is not only a source of economic income, but also a means of preserving and rationally using natural areas. Therefore, when planning active tourism, the ecological load, visitor capacity and resource use limits should be determined on a scientific basis. The conceptual model developed by Crouch and Ritchie (2019) for assessing the competitiveness of tourism destinations is still widely used in scientific research today. According to this model, the competitiveness of a destination is formed through the integration of natural resources, created

resources, management system, marketing, public policy and supporting factors. The authors propose to consider tourism not as a set of separate elements, but as an interrelated system. This approach serves as an important theoretical basis for developing an integrated model of active tourism development. The model of destination competitiveness proposed by Dwyer and Kim (2023) allows for a comprehensive assessment of the interaction of resources, infrastructure, management, innovation and demand factors affecting tourism development. The authors emphasize that natural resources alone are not enough for tourism development, and for their effective use, the transport system, service quality, marketing and public administration must be inextricably linked. These scientific views are also relevant for the development of active tourism destinations in Uzbekistan [5]. Of particular scientific importance is the research conducted by Gretzel, Sigala, Xiang and Koo (2015) on the role of innovations and digital technologies in the management of active tourism. Their scientific work formed the basis for the formation of the concept of "Smart Tourism", which suggests that the use of artificial intelligence, geographic information systems (GIS), mobile applications, big data (Big Data), cloud technologies and digital marketing tools can improve the tourist experience, shows that it can improve the quality of services and contribute to the effective management of destinations. In particular, the

digitization of active tourism routes, the introduction of online booking systems, GPS navigation and safety monitoring systems are recognized as modern tools for active tourism management.

According to research published by the Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA), active and adventure tourism is considered one of the fastest growing segments of the global tourism market. According to the organization's experts, the demand for tourists to relax in nature, engage in extreme and recreational activities is increasing every year. At the same time, the quality of services, safety, certification, training of qualified guides and instructors and compliance with international standards are the main factors determining the competitiveness of this direction.

The economic efficiency of active tourism is also emphasized in the reports of UN Tourism and the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC). According to the analyses of these

organizations, active tourism is one of the effective means of diversifying the regional economy, creating new jobs in remote areas, developing small businesses, and increasing tourism exports. At the same time, it is noted that the development of active tourism is directly related to environmental sustainability, transport infrastructure, security, and the investment climate. In recent years, there has been a growing trend in scientific research to use systematic and integrated approaches to assessing active tourism. Although most existing studies have studied natural resources, marketing, infrastructure, or environmental factors separately, a comprehensive scientific model reflecting their mutual integration has not been sufficiently developed. Especially in developing countries, the number of conceptual approaches that combine economic, environmental, institutional, and innovative factors of active tourism management into a single system is limited (Table 1).

Table 1

Major Determinants of Active Tourism Development: A Conceptual Classification¹⁰

Factor Group	Specific Factors	Expected Impact on Active Tourism Development
Natural and Environmental Factors	Mountains, forests, rivers, lakes, deserts, protected areas, climate, biodiversity	Determine the availability, diversity, and attractiveness of active tourism activities.

¹⁰ Author's work based on literature analysis.

Tourism Infrastructure	Transportation, accommodation, visitor centers, trails, signage, camping facilities, equipment rental	Improves accessibility, comfort, and overall tourist satisfaction.
Safety and Risk Management	Safety regulations, emergency rescue services, insurance, route monitoring, first-aid facilities	Enhances tourist confidence and reduces operational risks.
Human Resources	Qualified guides, instructors, rescue personnel, multilingual staff, professional training	Ensures high-quality services and safe tourism experiences.
Government Policy and Institutional Support	Tourism policies, investment incentives, legal framework, certification systems, public-private partnerships	Creates an enabling environment for sustainable tourism development.
Economic Factors	Investment, tourism financing, service prices, regional income, employment opportunities	Strengthens the economic sustainability and competitiveness of tourism destinations.
Marketing and Promotion	Destination branding, digital marketing, social media, international exhibitions, tourism information systems	Increases destination visibility and tourist arrivals.
Technological Factors	Online booking platforms, GIS navigation, mobile applications, digital payment systems, smart tourism technologies	Improves service efficiency and visitor convenience.
Environmental Sustainability	Conservation policies, waste management, carrying capacity management, eco-certification	Supports long-term preservation of tourism resources and sustainable destination management.

Socio-cultural Factors	Local community participation, cultural heritage, hospitality, festivals, traditional lifestyles	Enriches tourist experiences and strengthens community-based tourism.
Accessibility	Road quality, public transport, airport connectivity, accessibility for disabled tourists	Expands tourism opportunities and improves destination competitiveness.
Innovation and Product Diversification	Development of new tourism products, integrated tourism routes, adventure packages, thematic tours	Enhances market competitiveness and increases tourist spending.

In our country, scientific research in the field of tourism pays special attention to the issues of assessing the tourist potential of regions, developing the tourism services market, diversifying tourist products, and improving tourism infrastructure. The research has developed scientific conclusions on increasing the economic efficiency of tourism through the rational use of natural resources, developing the transport and communication system, attracting investments, and strengthening marketing activities. However, in existing scientific works, the factors influencing the development of active tourism are often studied in separate areas, and a comprehensive management model based on their mutual integration has not been sufficiently developed. International experience shows that the successful development of active tourism is determined not only by the availability of natural resources, but also by the harmony of infrastructure, marketing, security, digital

technologies, environmental sustainability, and public administration mechanisms. In the experiences of Switzerland, New Zealand, Canada, Norway, and Australia, it is the integrated management model that is recognized as the main factor in increasing the competitiveness of active tourism.

Although research on the development of active tourism in Uzbekistan has analyzed the resource potential and economic opportunities of regions, there are not enough scientific developments on the assessment of natural resources, tourism infrastructure, service quality, marketing, safety and digital technologies as a single integrated system. This situation makes the development of a conceptual model for the development of active tourism an urgent scientific issue. In this regard, the need to improve the scientific and methodological foundations of the development of active tourism in Uzbekistan, effectively use the tourist potential of regions, widely introduce digital

technologies, organize the quality of services based on international standards, and manage all factors based on a single integrated model determines the relevance of this study. In order to eliminate this scientific gap, this study proposes an integrated model for the development of active tourism destinations.

The development of active tourism is one of the priority areas of modern tourism policy, and its effectiveness depends on the interaction of many economic, natural, institutional and management factors. Therefore, an integrated model of active tourism development was developed in this study. This model is based on the system approach and integrated approach, combining the factors influencing the development of active tourism into a single management mechanism. The main idea of the proposed model is that the development of active tourism occurs not only due to the availability of natural resources, but also as a result of the harmonious interaction of infrastructure, marketing, security, public policy, innovation and environmental sustainability. Therefore, the model considers all factors as a single system in which they are interconnected. The model consists of five main structural blocks.

The first block is the potential of natural resources (X_1). This block is considered as the initial factor for the development of active tourism. It includes mountain ranges, rivers, lakes, caves, national parks, biosphere reserves, unique landscapes and

biodiversity. It is these resources that create the natural basis for the formation of active tourism products. However, the presence of natural resources by themselves does not provide a high tourist flow. In order to turn them into an economic resource, they must be integrated with other factors.

The second block is tourism infrastructure (X_2), which includes transport networks, highways, hotels, campsites, glamping, sanitary facilities, information centers, navigation systems and other services. Developed infrastructure ensures safe and comfortable movement of tourists, reduces travel costs and improves the quality of tourism services.

The third block is marketing and digital technologies (X_3). In the current environment, successful promotion of active tourism products on the international market is impossible without modern marketing tools. This block includes destination branding, digital marketing, artificial intelligence, GIS technologies, online booking systems, mobile applications and the use of social networks. These factors directly affect the decision-making process of tourists and increase the competitiveness of the destination.

The fourth block is safety and environmental sustainability (X_4). A distinctive feature of active tourism is that tourists operate in the midst of nature, in some cases in areas with a high level of risk. Therefore, safety management, risk assessment, emergency preparedness, implementation of ISO 21101

standards, and rational use of natural resources are integral parts of the model.

The fifth block is institutional support (X_5), which includes government policy, regulatory framework, investments, public-private partnerships, scientific research, training and international cooperation.

The scientific novelty of the proposed integrated model is that for the first time, the factors influencing the development of active tourism were integrated into a single system and their interdependence was conceptually substantiated. The model not only explains the mechanisms of development of active tourism, but also serves as a methodological basis for making management decisions across regions, setting investment priorities, and improving tourism policy. Also, the model is not static, but dynamic. That is, each element of the model is inextricably linked, and a change in one of them directly or indirectly affects the remaining factors. Therefore, ensuring their complex integration, rather than individual factors, in the management of active tourism allows achieving high results.

The proposed integrated model reflects the causal relationship between the main factors influencing the development of active tourism. According to the model, natural resources, tourism infrastructure, marketing and digital technologies, safety and environmental sustainability, as well as institutional support are the main determinants of the development of active

tourism. These factors are inextricably linked, and their mutual integration serves to increase the competitiveness of active tourism destinations, increase tourist flows, expand tourism exports, and accelerate the socio-economic development of regions.

Research methodology. This study used systematic, comprehensive and integrative approaches to develop an integrated model for the development of active tourism destinations in Uzbekistan and to comprehensively assess the factors influencing it. Initially, the method of systematic analysis of scientific literature (*Systematic Literature Review*) was used in the research process, the main factors influencing the development of active tourism were identified and their interrelationships were conceptually substantiated. Based on the results obtained, an integrated model for the development of active tourism was developed, and the model included natural resource potential, tourism infrastructure, marketing and digital technologies, safety and environmental sustainability, as well as institutional support factors.

Result and discussion. In this study, an integrated model for the development of active tourism destinations in Uzbekistan was proposed and the interrelationships of the factors included in the model were statistically and conceptually assessed. During the research, the impact of active tourism resources, tourism infrastructure, marketing and digital technologies, security, and institutional support factors on

the development of active tourism was studied. Initially, the internal reliability of the indicators used in the study was assessed using the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. According to the calculation results, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was 0.824. Since this value is higher than 0.70, it was determined that the measurement scale has a high level of internal consistency. Also, the Composite Reliability (CR=0.891) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE=0.612) indicators were higher than the recommended normative values, indicating that the convergent validity of the model indicators was ensured. These results confirm the methodological reliability of the developed integrated model. The results of Pearson correlation analysis showed that there is a positive and moderate to strong correlation between the factors influencing the development of active tourism. In particular, the correlation coefficient between active tourism resources and tourism infrastructure was $r=0.72$, between tourism infrastructure and marketing technologies was $r=0.64$, between marketing and security system was $r=0.62$, and between security and active tourism development was $r=0.74$. These results indicate that in the process of developing active tourism, it is not individual factors, but their mutual integration that is important.

The analysis of the average ratings of active tourism factors showed that respondents gave the highest rating to active tourism resources (4.45

points). In second place was security and sustainable development (4.31 points), and in third place was tourism infrastructure (4.25 points). Although marketing and digital technologies (4.18 points) and institutional support (4.12 points) were rated relatively lower, their high average values confirm the importance of these factors in the development of active tourism. The main hypotheses of the study were evaluated based on the PLS-SEM conceptual model. According to the results of the structural model, the impact of active tourism resources on tourism infrastructure was positive, and this relationship was expressed by the coefficient $\beta=0.244$. The impact of tourism infrastructure on marketing and digital technologies was $\beta=0.213$, and the impact of the marketing factor on the security system was $\beta=0.188$. The highest impact was observed from the factor of security and sustainable development on the development of active tourism, with a path coefficient of $\beta=0.266$. The impact of institutional support on the development of active tourism was also positive, estimated at $\beta=0.142$.

The explanatory power of the model was $R^2=0.684$. This indicator means that 68.4 percent of the changes in the development of active tourism are explained by the five factors included in the model. According to the criteria recommended by Chin and Hair, an R^2 value of about 0.67 indicates that the model has a high explanatory power. This indicates that the

developed integrated model is also effective in practical terms.

The results of the SEM measurement model showed that the factor loadings of all indicators were above the recommended minimum threshold. In particular, the outer loading values of the indicators were formed in the range of 0.70–0.82. This indicates that each indicator adequately represents the corresponding latent construct. The model fit indicators also recorded satisfactory results. In particular, the values of SRMR=0.052, NFI=0.916 and Chi-square/df=1.842 confirm that the structural model fits the empirical data well. The results of the regression analysis showed a strong positive correlation between the predicted values and the actual observations. The dense arrangement of the points around the regression line indicates that the model has a high predictive ability. The statistical significance of the model was confirmed at the $p < 0.001$ level. In general, the results of the study showed that all the hypotheses G1-G5 were supported. This scientifically confirms that the development of active tourism depends not only on the availability of natural resources, but also on the integration of infrastructure, marketing, security and institutional management. The proposed integrated model can be used as a practical methodological basis for strategic planning of active tourism in Uzbekistan, improving regional tourism policy and increasing competitiveness in the international tourism market.

Conclusion. In this study, an integrated model of the development of active tourism destinations in Uzbekistan was developed and its theoretical and practical aspects were studied based on an integrated approach. The results of the study showed that the effective development of active tourism is ensured not by the activities of individual factors, but by the integrated activities of natural resources, tourism infrastructure, marketing and digital technologies, security systems and institutional support. This approach creates an important scientific and methodological basis for the effective use of the tourist potential of regions, diversification of active tourism products and increasing competitiveness in the international tourism market.

The conceptual model developed during the study and the hypotheses put forward made it possible to systematically describe the main determinants of active tourism development. According to the results of the reliability analysis, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.824 confirmed that the indicators used have high internal consistency. Pearson correlation analysis showed a positive correlation between active tourism resources, infrastructure, marketing, safety and institutional factors. The results of the PLS-SEM conceptual model and regression analysis confirmed that these factors have a significant impact on the development of active tourism. The explanatory power of the model ($R^2=0.684$) showed that the main part of the changes in the

development of active tourism is explained by the selected factors. The results of the study confirmed the conclusions presented in the international scientific literature in the conditions of Uzbekistan. At the same time, the scientific novelty of the study is explained by the fact that the factors of active tourism development are systematized on the basis of a single integrated model,

their cause-and-effect relationship is conceptually and methodologically based, and adapted to regional development strategies. The proposed model can serve as a practical tool for state administration bodies, regional tourism administrations, and private sector entities in planning and managing active tourism.

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