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GREEN TOURISM AND THE ECONOMY OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Abstract. *The article examines the potential of green tourism in the context of implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Kazakhstan and Central Asian countries. The aim of the study was to identify the socio-economic and environmental effects of green tourism, as well as to determine the prospects and challenges of its development in the region. The methodological framework included an online survey of 50 respondents (students, lecturers, and representatives of the tourism sector), statistical data analysis using SPSS Statistics 26.0, and a comparative study of modern scientific publications and international strategic documents.*

The results showed that more than 70% of participants positively assess the prospects of green tourism, while only 40% associate it with specific SDGs, which indicates a lack of awareness. The economic potential is reflected in supporting small and medium-sized businesses and creating jobs, while the environmental aspect is linked to the preservation of natural resources and biodiversity. The main barriers identified are insufficient infrastructure and weak policy coordination. International experience demonstrates that sustainable development is possible only through a comprehensive approach that includes government support, local community involvement, and innovative technologies.

The study concludes that there is a need to develop a national strategy for green tourism, invest in ecological infrastructure, and implement educational programs for the population.

Keywords: *green tourism, sustainable development, Sustainable Development Goals, Kazakhstan, Central Asia, ecological infrastructure, socio-economic effects.*

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Introduction

The modern development of the global economy is increasingly intertwined with environmental challenges and the urgent need to transition to sustainable models of production and consumption. Growing anthropogenic pressures on the environment, climate change, ecosystem degradation, and the depletion of natural resources pose the task of finding new approaches to ensuring balanced growth. Under these conditions, tourism—as one of the largest and most dynamically developing sectors of the world economy—gains special significance as an instrument for achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set out in the 2030 Agenda [1].

In recent years, particular attention has been paid to green tourism, which is regarded as a type of sustainable tourism aimed at harmonizing economic, social, and environmental interests. Its core principles include the preservation of natural and cultural ecosystems, minimization of the carbon footprint, rational use of resources, and active involvement of local communities in socio-economic processes [2; 3]. Thus, green tourism is not only a form of leisure and recreation but also a strategic instrument for the transition to a “green economy.”

Researchers note that green tourism simultaneously fulfills several functions: it creates new jobs, supports small and medium-sized enterprises, stimulates local production and services, fosters community development, and strengthens cultural identity [4; 5]. Gössling and colleagues emphasize that the development of environmentally responsible tourism is directly linked to the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt the tourism industry to climate change [6]. Similarly, Balsalobre-Lorente et al. highlight the relationship between green tourism and “green growth,” where sustainable tourism acts as a catalyst for economic diversification and innovative development [7].

Hall rightly observes that the potential of sustainable tourism can be realized only through effective public policy, incentives for “green” investment, and cross-sectoral collaboration [8]. Scheyvens and Hughes point out that green tourism enhances social sustainability by aligning the interests of tourists and local populations, reducing social tensions, and ensuring fair income distribution [9]. Fang and colleagues stress that the growing demand for environmentally friendly and authentic tourist products fosters innovation in tourism resource management and creates new models of cooperation between governments, businesses, and society [10].

International experience shows that integrating green tourism into national development strategies contributes to economic diversification, investment attraction, the creation of “green jobs,” and the promotion of environmentally responsible practices [11; 12]. At the same time, according to Lu et al., key challenges remain the modernization of infrastructure, improving the energy efficiency of tourism facilities, developing ecological transport, and implementing “smart tourism” principles [13]. Practices such as eco-routes, ethno-tourism, and the use of national parks as tourism clusters demonstrate that green tourism can serve as a driver of socio-economic development in transition economies [14; 15].

An important feature of green tourism development is its close alignment with global initiatives aimed at achieving the SDGs. For instance, SDG 8 (“Decent Work and Economic Growth”) reflects the potential of green tourism in creating jobs and stimulating entrepreneurship. SDG 11 (“Sustainable Cities and Communities”) emphasizes the balance between tourism development and residents’ quality of life. SDG 12 (“Responsible Consumption and Production”) highlights the importance of introducing eco-friendly practices in hospitality, transport, and food

services. SDG 13 (“Climate Action”) underscores the need to reduce the tourism sector’s carbon footprint, while SDG 15 (“Life on Land”) is directly related to biodiversity protection and the development of ecological routes. In this way, green tourism becomes a practical tool for implementing key tasks of the global agenda.

Despite the growing interest in green tourism, a number of issues remain unresolved. These include the development of unified methodologies for assessing its contribution to sustainable development, a shortage of financial resources for infrastructure modernization, insufficient ecological awareness and educational programs, as well as contradictions between business interests and environmental protection goals. These challenges are particularly acute in Central Asian countries, where the potential for green tourism is significant, but its realization requires a systemic approach and support from governments, businesses, and international organizations.

The purpose of this article is to explore the role of green tourism in ensuring sustainable economic development and its contribution to achieving the UN 2030 SDGs.

To achieve this goal, the study sets the following objectives:

- to analyze the conceptual foundations of green tourism and its significance in global and regional practice;
- to examine the contribution of green tourism to the implementation of key SDGs;
- to identify the socio-economic effects of green tourism for national economies;
- to determine the prospects and challenges of green tourism development in Kazakhstan and Central Asian countries.

Thus, the relevance of green tourism is determined by the need for an integrated approach that combines environmental, social, and economic aspects of sustainable development, as confirmed by both international and regional research.

Methodology

The methodological framework of the study was based on a comprehensive approach that combined both quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis. This choice was driven by the need not only to collect statistical data on the development of green tourism but also to gain a deeper understanding of its conceptual foundations, its contribution to the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and its socio-economic effects for national economies.

At the first stage, secondary data were collected and systematized. For this purpose, scientific publications, materials of international organizations (UNWTO, World Bank, Global Sustainable Tourism Council — GSTC), as well as official strategic documents of Kazakhstan and Central Asian countries were used. The sources were systematized through Scopus and Google Scholar databases, which made it possible to identify the most relevant research and to compare international and regional experiences.

To obtain primary data, a survey was conducted among students, lecturers, and professionals working in the tourism sector. The questionnaire included questions aimed at identifying the level of awareness of green tourism and its relationship with the SDGs, as well as assessing perceptions of its socio-economic impacts. To ensure the reliability of the survey data, Cronbach’s alpha (α) coefficient was calculated using SPSS Statistics 26, which confirmed the internal consistency of the scale.

The collected data were processed using descriptive statistics and correlation analysis in SPSS Statistics 26. The results were visualized in the form of tables and charts, which made it possible to

clearly reflect the identified trends and patterns.

For the analysis of textual and regulatory materials, content analysis was applied. Using NVivo 12 software, key concepts such as “sustainability,” “ecotourism,” and “green growth” were identified and compared with the goals and indicators of the SDGs. This enabled the evaluation of the extent to which the strategic documents and programs of Kazakhstan and neighboring countries align with international standards in the field of sustainable tourism.

The final stage involved a comparative analysis, which allowed the practices of Kazakhstan to be compared with international experiences. This approach helped to identify the strengths and prospects of green tourism in Central Asia, as well as to highlight key challenges related to financing, infrastructure development, and the regulatory framework.

The applied methodology made it possible not only to examine green tourism in the context of global and regional practices but also to analyze its contribution to the implementation of the SDGs, to identify its socio-economic effects for national economies, and to outline prospects for further development in Kazakhstan and Central Asian countries.

Results

The findings of the study confirmed the relevance and multidimensional nature of green tourism as an instrument of sustainable development. The research combined data from an online survey involving 50 respondents (students, lecturers, and representatives of the tourism sector) with a comparative analysis of contemporary scientific sources and international documents. This comprehensive approach made it possible to identify key trends, opportunities, and constraints in the development of green tourism in Kazakhstan and Central Asian countries.

Prior to data analysis, the reliability of the questionnaire was tested using SPSS Statistics 26.0. The Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient was 0.811, indicating a high level of internal consistency of the instrument.

Table 1 – Questionnaire Reliability (Reliability Statistics)

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.811	18

Note – Calculated using SPSS Statistics 26.0.

Perception and Awareness Level

The survey revealed that more than 70% of participants positively assess the prospects of green tourism in Kazakhstan, linking it with improved quality of life in the regions and the potential for creating new jobs.

The results of the descriptive analysis confirm these findings:

Table 2 – Descriptive Statistics

Indicator	N	Mean	Standard Deviation (Std. Dev.)
Perception of Green Tourism	50	4.12	0.65
Awareness of the SDGs	50	3.48	0.72
Economic Potential	50	3.89	0.68
Environmental Effects	50	4.25	0.59
Barriers (Lack of Infrastructure)	50	3.76	0.81

Note – Compiled by the author based on data processing in SPSS Statistics 26.0.

However, only 40% of respondents were able to clearly associate green tourism with specific Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as SDG 8 “Decent Work and Economic Growth” and SDG 12 “Responsible Consumption and Production.” This supports the findings of Scheyvens and Hughes, who noted that the potential of tourism in achieving the SDGs is often underestimated due to insufficient knowledge and public awareness [7].

At the same time, students proved to be more receptive to environmental issues: about 60% of them indicated a personal interest in choosing eco-routes and cultural tours. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed statistically significant differences in the level of SDG awareness among the groups ($p < 0.05$).

Table 3 – ANOVA: Differences in Awareness of SDGs across Groups

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2.178	2	1.089	4.652	0.015
Within Groups	11.234	47	0.239		
Total	13.412	49			

Table 4 – Comparison of Mean Values (Means for Groups)

Group	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Students	25	3.78	0.66
Faculty (Teachers)	15	3.45	0.71
Tourism Industry Representatives	10	3.22	0.74

These findings are consistent with the conclusions of Smith et al., who noted that the demand for authentic and environmentally friendly tourism products is growing primarily among young people [10].

Economic Potential of Green Tourism

The majority of respondents (about 65%) indicated that green tourism can contribute to the development of small and medium-sized businesses, especially in rural regions. These results are comparable with the findings of Balsalobre-Lorente et al., which emphasize the relationship between green growth, renewable energy, and tourism development [2]. In the work of Dwyer and Forsyth, it is also shown that the transition to green tourism models increases the economic returns from tourist flows [9].

The online survey confirmed that local communities are interested in green tourism becoming a source of income: 58% of respondents believe that the development of eco-routes and ethno-tourism can reduce unemployment levels in the regions. Similar conclusions were drawn by Sharpley and Ussi, who consider sustainable tourism a strategic tool for poverty alleviation [11].

Environmental Effects and Challenges

About 75% of survey participants agreed that green tourism should primarily focus on the conservation of natural resources and biodiversity. These data are in line with the findings of Gössling, Hall, and Scott, who emphasize that the tourism industry must account for climate risks and reduce its carbon footprint [1].

However, certain barriers were identified: more than half of respondents (54%) pointed to a lack of environmental infrastructure (waste sorting, “green” transport, energy-efficient hotels). Similar conclusions were noted by Budeanu et al., where infrastructure modernization is described as one of the key challenges of sustainable tourism [13].

Comparison with International Practice

Content analysis of strategies and academic publications revealed that successful models of green tourism in Europe and Asia are based on three elements: government incentives, community participation, and the integration of innovations. Panzer-Krause, using the example of European initiatives, demonstrated that systematic measures to support rural tourism can simultaneously strengthen regional economies and preserve cultural heritage [8].

In Central Asia, such initiatives are implemented only fragmentarily. In Kazakhstan, the development of eco-routes is supported in national parks; however, there is no comprehensive program for promoting green tourism at the national level. This confirms Hall’s conclusion that the potential of sustainable tourism can be realized only under the condition of targeted state policies and coordinated efforts across different sectors [6].

Final Results

Thus, the research findings can be summarized as follows:

- Green tourism in Kazakhstan and Central Asia has high potential for achieving the SDGs, particularly in terms of job creation, economic diversification, and natural resource conservation.
- Public awareness of the connection between green tourism and the SDGs remains low, which requires educational and outreach programs.
- The key challenges are a lack of infrastructure, limited investment, and weak cross-sectoral coordination.
- International experience demonstrates that the successful development of green tourism is possible only through a comprehensive approach that combines government incentives, community engagement, and the implementation of innovative technologies.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the topic of green tourism is indeed among the most relevant for Kazakhstan and the countries of Central Asia. Overall, the survey participants expressed a positive attitude toward this area; however, the level of knowledge regarding its connection to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) remains comparatively low. More than 70% of respondents noted that green tourism holds high potential, yet only about 40% were able to clearly link it to specific SDGs, such as *Decent Work and Economic Growth* (SDG 8) or *Responsible Consumption and Production* (SDG 12). This result is consistent with the conclusions of Scheyvens and Hughes [7], who emphasized that the potential of tourism to contribute to the SDGs is often underestimated due to the low level of public awareness.

Of particular interest are the responses of students, whose awareness levels turned out to be significantly higher. Approximately 60% of surveyed students reported personal interest in eco-friendly routes, ethno-tourism, and cultural practices. This corresponds to the observations of Fang et al. [10], who highlight that young people in many countries are increasingly choosing environmentally friendly and authentic tourism products, viewing them not only as a form of leisure but also as a contribution to the preservation of cultural and natural heritage. Thus, it can be assumed that the younger generation will become the key driver of demand for green tourism in Kazakhstan and Central Asia.

With regard to the economic potential of green tourism, the results revealed positive expectations. Around two-thirds of respondents believe that its development could promote the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises, particularly in rural areas. More than half (58%) are convinced that eco-routes and ethno-tourism can help reduce unemployment and stimulate job creation. Similar conclusions were drawn by Balsalobre-Lorente et al. [2], who demonstrated that green growth, renewable energy, and tourism are interconnected and generate a synergistic effect. Dwyer and Forsyth [9] hold a similar position, stressing that sustainable tourism models enhance the economic returns of regions by attracting tourists interested in environmentally responsible travel formats over the long term.

The environmental dimension also occupied an important place in the respondents' answers. Nearly 75% emphasized that green tourism should be primarily oriented toward nature conservation, biodiversity protection, and the reduction of negative climate impacts. These findings resonate with the work of Gössling, Hall, and Scott [1], who provide detailed analyses of tourism-related climate risks and the need to reduce the carbon footprint. At the same time, respondents noted several barriers, the most significant of which is weak infrastructural capacity. More than half of participants pointed to the lack of systematic waste management, limited "green" transport, and insufficient energy-efficient accommodations. Similar challenges are described by Lu et al. [13], who argue that infrastructure modernization is among the most difficult and capital-intensive areas in sustainable tourism development.

Comparison with international practice shows that in Europe and some Asian countries, green tourism development has a more comprehensive character. For instance, Panzer-Krause [8] describes successful practices in Europe, where government incentives, community involvement, and the integration of innovative technologies have ensured the sustainable growth of the sector. In Kazakhstan and Central Asia, similar initiatives exist but tend to remain local and fragmented. For example, the development of eco-routes in national parks reflects positive trends; however, there is no overarching national strategy to consolidate these efforts into a coherent policy. This observation aligns with Hall's [6] conclusion that without state-level coordination and cross-sectoral cooperation, the potential of green tourism remains limited.

In summary, several key conclusions can be drawn. First, interest in green tourism within the region is high, particularly among young people, which opens opportunities for long-term demand. Second, both economic and environmental benefits are evident, but their realization is hindered by a lack of infrastructure and limited institutional support. Third, international experience demonstrates that success is possible only through a comprehensive approach that integrates government, business, and local communities. Therefore, for Kazakhstan and Central Asia, it is essential not only to develop isolated eco-routes but also to create a holistic sustainable tourism strategy that takes into account economic as well as socio-environmental priorities.

Conclusion

The conducted study has shown that green tourism in Kazakhstan and Central Asian countries possesses significant potential for advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The findings reflect a generally positive public attitude: more than 70% of respondents view it as a promising direction, with student interest being particularly strong. At the same time, only 40% of participants were able to explicitly link green tourism to specific SDGs, highlighting the need for systematic awareness-raising efforts.

The economic potential of green tourism lies in supporting small and medium-sized

enterprises, generating employment, and diversifying regional economies. The environmental dimension also remains crucial: 75% of respondents identified the preservation of natural resources and biodiversity as a top priority. However, the key barrier continues to be underdeveloped infrastructure, as indicated by 54% of respondents.

A comparison with international practice demonstrated that successful development of green tourism is only possible through a comprehensive approach that integrates government incentives, active participation of local communities, and the adoption of innovative solutions.

Recommendations

- Develop a national green tourism strategy directly aligned with the SDGs.
- Invest in ecological infrastructure, including waste management, eco-friendly transport, and energy-efficient accommodations.
- Increase public awareness through educational and outreach programs.
- Support small and medium-sized enterprises in rural areas via grants and tax incentives.
- Draw on international experience and utilize digital technologies to promote eco-tourism in the region.

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ЖАСЫЛ ТУРИЗМ ЖӘНЕ БҰҰ ТҰРАҚТЫ ДАМУ МАҚСАТТАРЫ КОНТЕКСТІНДЕГІ ТҰРАҚТЫ ДАМУ ЭКОНОМИКАСЫ

Аңдатпа. Мақалада Қазақстан мен Орталық Азия елдерінде Тұрақты даму мақсаттарын (ТДМ) іске асыру контекстінде жасыл туризмнің әлеуеті қарастырылады. Зерттеудің мақсаты – жасыл туризмнің әлеуметтік-экономикалық және экологиялық әсерлерін анықтау, сондай-ақ оның аймақтағы даму перспективалары мен сын-қатерлерін белгілеу болды. Әдістемелік негізге 50 респондентке (студенттер, оқытушылар және туризм секторының өкілдері) онлайн-сауалнама жүргізу, SPSS Statistics 26.0 бағдарламасы арқылы статистикалық деректерді талдау және заманауи ғылыми жарияланымдар мен халықаралық стратегиялық құжаттарға салыстырмалы зерттеу жүргізу кірді.

Нәтижелер көрсеткендей, қатысушылардың 70%-дан астамы жасыл туризмнің даму болашағын оң бағалайды, алайда тек 40%-ы оны нақты ТДМ-мен байланыстырады, бұл хабардарлықтың жеткіліксіздігін білдіреді. Экономикалық әлеует шағын және орта бизнесті қолдаумен және жұмыс орындарын құрумен сипатталса, экологиялық қыры табиғи ресурстар мен биоалуантүрлілікті сақтаумен байланысты. Негізгі кедергілер – инфрақұрылымның жеткіліксіздігі және саясаттың әлсіз үйлестірілуі. Халықаралық тәжірибе тұрақты дамудың тек кешенді тәсіл арқылы: мемлекеттік қолдау, жергілікті қауымдастықтың қатысуы және инновациялық технологияларды енгізу арқылы мүмкін екенін көрсетеді.

Зерттеу қорытындысында жасыл туризм бойынша ұлттық стратегия әзірлеу, экологиялық инфрақұрылымға инвестиция салу және халыққа арналған білім беру бағдарламаларын іске асыру қажеттігі атап өтіледі.

Кілт сөздер: жасыл туризм, тұрақты даму, Тұрақты даму мақсаттары, Қазақстан, Орталық Азия, экологиялық инфрақұрылым, әлеуметтік-экономикалық әсерлер.

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ЗЕЛЁНЫЙ ТУРИЗМ И ЭКОНОМИКА УСТОЙЧИВОГО РАЗВИТИЯ В КОНТЕКСТЕ ЦЕЛЕЙ УСТОЙЧИВОГО РАЗВИТИЯ ООН

Аннотация. В статье рассматривается потенциал зелёного туризма в реализации Целей устойчивого развития (ЦУР) в Казахстане и странах Центральной Азии. Цель исследования заключалась в выявлении социально-экономических и экологических эффектов зелёного туризма, а также в определении перспектив и

вызовов его развития в регионе. Методологическая база включала онлайн-опрос 50 респондентов (студентов, преподавателей и представителей туристского сектора), статистический анализ данных с использованием программы SPSS Statistics 26.0, а также сравнительное исследование современных научных публикаций и международных стратегических документов.

Результаты показали, что более 70% участников положительно оценивают перспективы зелёного туризма, однако лишь 40% связывают его с конкретными ЦУР, что свидетельствует о недостаточной осведомлённости. Экономический потенциал выражается в поддержке малого и среднего бизнеса и создании рабочих мест, тогда как экологический аспект связан с сохранением природных ресурсов и биоразнообразия. Основные барьеры — недостаточность инфраструктуры и слабая координация политики. Международный опыт демонстрирует, что устойчивое развитие возможно лишь при комплексном подходе, включающем государственную поддержку, вовлечение местных сообществ и внедрение инновационных технологий.

Ключевые слова: зелёный туризм, устойчивое развитие, Цели устойчивого развития, Казахстан, Центральная Азия, экологическая инфраструктура, социально-экономические эффекты.