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Zomin – Bakhmal Ecotourism Cluster

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Abstract: The Zomin–Bakhmal Ecotourism Cluster is located within the Turkestan Mountain Range, with its core comprising the Zomin State Reserve, Zomin National Nature Park, and the Zomin and Bakhmal State Forestry Enterprises. This cluster operates within the Bakhmal and Zomin districts of the Jizzakh region.

Keywords: Zomin, Bakhmal, ecotourism cluster, specialized tourism types, ecotourism, tourist routes.

1. Introduction

Since the 1990s, the term "cluster" has been applied with a new interpretation, considering the evolving competitive environment. This concept emerged largely due to Michael Porter's theoretical perspectives on strategic regional development. At present, various definitions of "cluster" have been developed, ranging from Michael Porter's studies to official government documents. While these definitions emphasize different elements (such as innovation systems, value chain creation, and others), they also share common characteristics.

A regional cluster, according to these shared features, is defined as an association of interrelated companies and organizations within a specific region. Although these entities operate in different areas, they are functionally interconnected and complementary. To characterize a cluster, three key features are typically highlighted:

- Geographical proximity
- Commonality of the products (services, resources, or technologies) produced
- Close interconnectivity among participants

Michael Porter initially proposed applying the cluster theory to industries, but today, the theory is actively evolving as a strategic framework for the development of new areas within regional tourism. A tourism cluster encompasses the organization and management of businesses centered around a core of tourism firms, creating tourism products and engaging in related activities. These firms purchase services such as accommodations, food and beverage, transportation, retail, entertainment, and similar offerings.

In clusters formed during the process of managing tourism and recreational services, enterprises offering recreational services based on available conditions are often considered the core of the cluster. At the same time, local administrations, enterprises providing ancillary and additional services, and the surrounding region or area where the cluster develops are considered integral elements associated with the cluster.

Regulations on the Procedure for Organizing Tourism Cluster Activities in the Republic of Uzbekistan

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A regulation on the approval of the "Procedure for Organizing Tourism Cluster Activities" has been announced. The draft government resolution approves the procedure for organizing tourism cluster activities. According to the provisions:

- Tourism clusters deliver services to local and foreign tourists under equal conditions using modern innovative technologies;
- Special attention is given to the establishment of thematic clusters, including ecotourism, agritourism, ethnotourism, extreme tourism, medical and wellness tourism, cultural and entertainment tourism, and others;
- The government creates the necessary conditions for establishing tourism clusters;
- Activities are organized within tourism cluster territories based on the principle of "service provider" – "service promoter" – "service user";

A procedure is established whereby:

- a) The Tourism Committee takes measures to promote and popularize new types of services and products from tourism clusters at international tourism fairs and exhibitions;
- b) Tourism clusters are equated with small industrial zones, and privileges and benefits under legislation concerning small industrial zones apply to tourism clusters;
- c) The Ministry of Ecology, Environmental Protection, and Climate Change and the Ministry of Economy and Finance, starting January 1, 2025, ensure that the territories where tourism clusters are organized are prioritized for the inclusion of engineering communication networks, communal and road infrastructure improvements, and the construction, reconstruction, expansion, and modernization of tourism and adjacent infrastructure in social and production infrastructure development programs;
- d) In 2025–2030, priority is given to entities that have received the status of a tourism cluster, integrating four services (tour operator–hotel–transport–service provision) from the Tourism Development Fund's resources, to promote new types of services and products at international tourism fairs and exhibitions;
- e) All business entities participating in tourism clusters are granted the right to operate 24/7, strictly adhering to public safety regulations.

The Ministry of Construction and Housing, the Ministry of Energy, and the Ministry of Ecology, Environmental Protection, and Climate Change, together with the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Karakalpakstan, regional governments, and the Tashkent City administration, are tasked with developing master plans for tourism clusters by March 1, 2025. These plans, created with the involvement of foreign project institutions and international experts, must include:

- Underground routing of electrical networks;
- Special pedestrian and bicycle lanes on roads connecting clusters with other regions;
- Designation of electric charging stations for electric vehicles and hybrid transportation;
- Designation of air navigation tools and small aircraft (helicopter) landing sites;
- Development of facilities for extreme sports, including zip lines, scenic photography zones, and selfie areas;
- Placement of road signs, model sanitary and hygiene facilities, and waste disposal points;
- Placement of facilities for the sale of souvenirs and food products at tourism sites.

On January 12, 2024, our esteemed President issued Resolution No. PQ-21 on "Measures for the Accelerated Development of Ecotourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan," which includes a targeted list of promising tourism cluster projects in the field of ecotourism.

Considering the high ecotourism potential of Zomin and Bakhmal districts, located in the embrace of the Turkestan Mountain Range in the Jizzakh region, we can assert that the development of the Zomin-Bakhmal ecotourism clusters in these districts could become one of the key principles for the region's economic and social development. Purpose of the Study

To provide information on the foundations for developing ecotourism clusters by assessing the tourism potential of the Jizzakh region;

To analyze the importance of ecotourism clusters in the socio-economic development of the regions;

To reveal the role of ecotourism clusters in nature conservation and to outline their principles for sustainable development;

To present information about the core and organizational components of the Zomin-Bakhmal ecotourism cluster located in the Turkestan Mountain Range;

To develop proposals regarding the prospects for the development of this cluster.

2. Materials and Methods

The research process involved the scientific substantiation of the cluster approach in the field of tourism, consideration of the goals, objectives, and directions of tourism cluster policy, and the transformation processes in the industry. Methodological aspects of cluster formation in tourism were studied, and expert opinions in the field were analyzed. A dialectical and systematic approach, comparative and comparative analysis, statistical methods, and grouping techniques were used.

Degree of Study

Global perspectives on tourism clusters have been interpreted by authors such as Sheraton, Best Western, Marriott, Intercontinental, and restaurant chains like McDonald's, Maxime, and Pizza Hut, as well as by scholars V.M. Kitsis, A.V. Eliseeva, and S.K. Volkov. In our region, the scientific articles of A.Q. Tokhtamishov, D.Kh. Aslanova, M.M. Khashimova, B.N. Navruz-Zoda, Kh.I. Turdibekov, A.R. Bozorov, and N.G. Badalova have addressed tourism clusters and their significance. However, the ecotourism potential of the Zomin and Bakhmal districts of the Jizzakh region has not been interpreted from the perspective of a cluster approach or compared to ecotourism clusters.

3. Results

The cluster method in tourism has been applied in several countries. The novelty of clusters in tourism requires numerous organizational and scientific studies in this area. In scientific literature on tourism, the ethnonym "cluster" has gone through several evolutionary stages:

- 1962: Cluster as a tourism center;
- 1968: Recreational zone;
- 1975: Recreational system;
- 1985: Resort;
- 1995: Tourist destination;
- 2005 and beyond: Tourist cluster.

This evolutionary trend highlights the continuous development of the concept in tourism studies.

Efficient organization of tourism-recreational activity management and expanding demand for their offered services, in our opinion, can be significantly enhanced by forming distinct clusters or optimizing partially formed clusters to their optimal capacity.

This approach allows such facilities to quickly convert latent demand into actual demand and fully mobilize their existing potential to satisfy it. Consequently, this leads to an increase in revenue levels for tourism-recreational service enterprises, specifically those considered as the core of the cluster.

Taking into account these factors, as well as advanced practices in recreational service clusters in developed countries, we propose forming a recreational service cluster with a specific structural composition within the country. Since the proposed cluster is associated with tourism-recreational services, recreational facilities constitute its core [3].

Similarly, the core of an ecotourism cluster is composed of specially protected natural areas. However, since any type of activity is legally prohibited in specially protected areas, including state reserves, in our country, revenue generated by ecotourism clusters not only supports the economy of these reserves but also contributes to the development of tourism in the buffer zones of protected areas. This, in turn, aids the socio-economic development of both the reserves and the local population residing around them.

The presence of Zomin National Park, Zomin State Reserve, and the lands of Zomin and Bakhmal forestry enterprises within the territory of the Zomin-Bakhmal tourism cluster attests to the high

ecotourism potential of the area. These protected natural areas constitute the core of the ecotourism cluster.

Zomin district has been transformed into a tourism zone [7], and significant efforts are currently being undertaken to establish tourism complexes and attract tourists. Considering the location of these two districts within the Turkestan Mountain Range and their ancient ethnographic and agro-industrial structures, we propose dividing the ecotourism cluster into ecotourism, ethnotourism, and agritourism zones.

- Ecotourism Zones cover specially protected natural areas and primarily include tourist routes, camping sites built with light structures, modern health resorts, recreational complexes, and ecotourism facilities. Any service type established in these areas will be based on the principles of causing no harm to nature and preserving it.
- Ethnotourism Zones encompass villages and settlements, hosting family guesthouses, hostels, tourism villages, or tourism neighborhoods. These areas also include rural medical and security points, workshops, craftsmen's libraries, and service providers catering to tourists.
- Agrotourism Zones involve tourism products such as orchards, vegetable fields, cotton and grain fields, livestock farms, and their pastures, as well as farms. These areas are equipped to provide services to travelers, and their integration into tourist routes is planned (Table 1).

4. Discussion

Table 1

Division and Composition of the Zomin-Bakhmal Ecotourism Cluster Territories

No	Ecotouristic area	Ethnotouristic area	Agrotouristic area
Zomin district	Zomin National Park, Zomin State Reserve,	Duoba, Usmanlisoy, Darkisoy, O'rikli soy, Reshaghor, Ettikechuv, Karimsoy, Beshkubi, Tolli, Uval, Karim.	1065 farmers
Bakhmal district	Zomin State Forestry	Moustache, deceive, Owl, Novqa, Jum - jumsoy, Oqtosh, Mongol, Vadigan, Dangara, Koyjar, Forester.	Average land area: 57.5 1110 farms

One of the unique aspects of the Zomin-Bakhmal ecotourism cluster is their close proximity and the minimal differences in climate and terrain. Additionally, the Zomin-Bakhmal ecotourism cluster is recognized as the districts with the highest tourism potential in the Jizzakh region, offering opportunities to develop various specialized tourism directions, such as ecotourism, pilgrimage tourism, scientific-archaeological tourism, rural tourism, agritourism, and other niche tourism types.

The term "tourism cluster" refers to an association of enterprises, organizations, and institutions providing services in the tourism sector. There are different interpretations of this term. Some scholars define a tourism cluster narrowly, as a "regional tourism-recreational system" [8], while others interpret it broadly, as encompassing the interests, independence, and development potential of a region.



Figure 1. Distribution of the Zomin-Bakhmal Ecotourism Cluster Territories

Tourism clusters are often viewed as a regional management mechanism aimed at enhancing competitiveness and sustainable development [11]. Two integral aspects of tourism clusters can be distinguished:

1. **Geographical Aspect** – Collaboration of enterprises and organizations operating within the same industry in a specific region.
2. **Economic Aspect** – Interconnection of companies and institutions within a region through a value-added creation chain.

The geographical aspect of a tourism cluster is closely tied to the tourism region. The territorial dimension of clusters plays a critical role in their creation and development. Before embarking on a journey, tourists first identify a travel destination or tourist destination, which then forms the basis for their travel. The travel destination, or the facility intended for fulfilling the travel objective, should, in our opinion, constitute the primary foundation for creating clusters.

If tourism firms develop routes without studying clients' needs and understanding the scope of the destinations, such tourism businesses are unlikely to succeed. Achieving success in tourism business requires utilizing marketing methods to shape tourist demand. Consequently, the creation of tourism clusters should focus on forming a comprehensive set of tourism services within the travel region from the perspective of potential tourists [9].

№		Zomin district	Bakhmal district
1	Ecotourism	Zomin National Nature Park, Zomin State Reserve,	Zomin State Reserve,
2	Ethno tourism	Recreation in recreation areas organized in Zomin State Forestry and traveling on routes along the ecosocoars	Rest in the resorts where the Velvet State forestry is established and trip on the routes along the resources
3	Agritourism	Duoba, Usmanlisoy, Darkisoy, Oriklisoy, Peshaghor, Ettikechuv, Karimsoy, Beshkubi, Tolli, Uval, Karim.	Muzbulaq, Aladman, Owl, Novqa, Jum-jumsoy, Oqtosh, Mughal, Vadigan, Dangara, Koyjar, Forester, Terakli, White Mullah, Soufi,

4	Scientific archaeological tourism	Livestock, gardening, landscaping.	Livestock, gardening, beekeeping, poultry farming.
5	Gastronomic tourism	73 archaeological monuments located in Zomin district	55 archaeological monuments located in the Bakhmal district
6	Speleo tourism	Zamin pot Patir, Zamin oven meat, Zamin honey	Velvet bark cure, Velvet patir bread, Velvet oven meat
7	Sports wellness tourism	Journey along the routes of Peshawar cave	
8	Phytotourism	Rest at the zombie sanctuary. Horseback riding along the ecosocles.	The resort of mountain sports tourism, located in the village of Jum-Jumsoy, Sports and wellness in the Velvet sihatgohi. Horseback riding along the ecosocles
9	Pilgrimage tourism	To see and participate in the processes of collection and processing of medicinal herbs in Zomin Forestry	To see and participate in the processes of collection and processing of medicinal herbs in velvet forestry, to see the processes of treatment with medicinal herbs in the household of the father physician.
10	Recreational tourism	Travel to the recreational areas of the Zomin district	See 8 shrines of the velvet tumnaia
11	Extramural tourism	A tour of the jumping, Window Bridge, suspension dor road resorts established in Zomin National Park.	Travel to the recreational areas of the Bazmal district
12	Hiking tourism	Zomin National Park, along the route of the Gai miq Fort in sayohat	Established in the recreation area of Danghara village
13	Mountain Tourism	Sayohat along the Zomin mountains	Walking around the eco path in the velvet Forestry
14	Ski tourism	Zomn National Nature Park: a trip to the ski area	A trip along the velvet mountains.

In the Zomin-Bakhmal ecotourism cluster, tourism infrastructure, including accommodation facilities, roads, and dining establishments, is gradually being developed to meet demand.

However, agritourism and ecotourism routes remain incomplete, resulting in unfulfilled expectations regarding visits from foreign tourists interested in these directions. For instance, tourist routes to apple orchards, strawberry fields, and horse and camel farms in the Bakhmal district have not been established. Similarly, agritourism routes lack facilities such as accommodation and tasting areas at farms.

5. Conclusion

As noted, while recreational and entertainment facilities are being developed in the Zomin district, the absence of entertainment establishments near recreational centers in the Bakhmal district limits the number of visitors. Consequently, travelers to the region are primarily drawn to gastronomy and wellness tourism (clean air relaxation). Although the Zomin-Bakhmal cluster is an emerging cluster, the following measures could ensure its comprehensive development:

1. Develop a tourism route connecting the Zomin-Bakhmal cluster.
2. Establish a national nature park in the Bakhmal zone of the Zomin State Reserve as part of the Zomin-Bakhmal cluster.
3. Create a sanctuary in the Zomin National Nature Park designed for breeding and conserving herbivorous animals.
4. Establish a historical-ethnographic museum in the Bakhmal district.
5. Assign ethnotourism status to the villages of Duoba, Usmonlisoy, Qorongisoy, Uriklisoy, Peshagor, Yettikechu, Karimsoy, Beshkubi, Tolli, Uvol, and Karim in the Zomin district, as well as Muzbuloq, Aldashman, Boyqungir, Novka, Jumjumsay, Oqtosh, Mogol, Vadigan,

Dangara, Kokjar, Ormonchi, Terakli, Oq Mulla, and Sofi in the Bakhmal district. Develop routes linking these villages.

6. Organize routes for active tourism such as rogaining, backpacking, jeep tourism, and other similar activities within the Zomin-Bakhmal ecotourism cluster.

7. Develop agritourism routes in the Zomin and Bakhmal districts.

8. Transform archaeological sites such as Tortkoltepa caravanserai, Kultepa city ruins, Qoratepa, Bosh Peshagartepa in the Zomin district, and Novka ota hill in the Bakhmal district into open-air museums.

9. Equip eco-trails within the Zomin-Bakhmal ecotourism cluster to meet modern standards.

These steps will contribute to the complete formation of the Zomin-Bakhmal tourism cluster and enhance its appeal for local and international tourists.

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