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## MODERN METHODS OF ECOTOURISM MANAGEMENT: THE EXPERIENCE OF KAZAKHSTAN AND OTHER COUNTRIES

*Métodos modernos de gestión del ecoturismo:  
La experiencia de Kazajistán y otros países*



*Métodos modernos de gestão do ecoturismo:  
A experiência de Cazaquistão e outros países*

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## ABSTRACT

Ecotourism in Kazakhstan has huge potential but remains underdeveloped. This research aims to study the use of modern management techniques to promote and develop ecotourism in Kazakhstan. The methods used include a literature review of research on ecotourism management, a comparative analysis of Kazakhstan's ecotourism industry versus other countries, and a SWOT analysis of Kazakhstan's ecotourism. Key findings show Kazakhstan has abundant natural resources for ecotourism but lacks infrastructure, government support, and effective policies. Recommendations include designating ecotourism development areas, simplifying visa policies, building transportation networks, and launching marketing campaigns. A proposed management model incorporates public-private partnerships, sustainable practices, community involvement, and monitoring systems. More research on specific regions and target groups would further aid development of this promising industry.

## KEYWORDS

Ecological tourism management, field of tourism, development, ecological resources, tourism enterprises.

## RESUMEN

El ecoturismo en Kazajistán tiene un enorme potencial, pero sigue estando subdesarrollado. Esta investigación pretende estudiar el uso de técnicas modernas de gestión para promover y desarrollar el ecoturismo en Kazajistán. Los métodos utilizados incluyen una revisión bibliográfica de la investigación sobre la gestión del ecoturismo, un análisis comparativo de la industria ecoturística de Kazajistán frente a otros países y un análisis DAFO del ecoturismo de Kazajistán. Las principales conclusiones muestran que Kazajistán cuenta con abundantes recursos naturales para el ecoturismo, pero carece de infraestructuras, apoyo gubernamental y políticas eficaces. Las recomendaciones incluyen la designación de zonas de desarrollo ecoturístico, la simplificación de las políticas de visados, la construcción de redes de transporte y el lanzamiento de campañas de marketing. Un modelo de gestión propuesto incorpora asociaciones público-privadas, prácticas sostenibles, participación de la comunidad y sistemas de supervisión. Una mayor investigación sobre regiones y grupos destinatarios específicos contribuiría aún más al desarrollo de esta prometedora industria.

## PALABRAS CLAVE

Gestión del turismo ecológico, ámbito del turismo, desarrollo, recursos ecológicos, empresas turísticas.

## RESUMO

O ecoturismo no Cazaquistão tem um enorme potencial, mas continua subdesenvolvido. Esta pesquisa tem como objetivo estudar o uso de técnicas modernas de gestão para promover e desenvolver o ecoturismo no Cazaquistão. Os métodos utilizados incluem uma revisão da literatura de pesquisas sobre gestão do ecoturismo, uma análise comparativa da indústria do ecoturismo do Cazaquistão em relação a outros países, e uma análise SWOT do ecoturismo do Cazaquistão. As principais conclusões mostram que o Cazaquistão possui recursos naturais abundantes para o ecoturismo, mas carece de infraestruturas, apoio governamental e políticas eficazes. As recomendações incluem a designação de zonas de desenvolvimento do ecoturismo, a simplificação das políticas de vistos, a construção de redes de transporte e o lançamento de campanhas de marketing. Um modelo de gestão proposto incorpora parcerias público-privadas, práticas sustentáveis, participação comunitária e sistemas de supervisão. Mais investigação sobre regiões e grupos-alvo específicos contribuiria ainda mais para o desenvolvimento desta indústria promissora.

## PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Gestão do turismo ecológico, área do turismo, desenvolvimento, recursos ecológicos, empresas turísticas.

## Introduction

Ecotourism is definitely a promising development sector, playing a significant role in the development of the global tourism industry. Ecotourism helps to raise the level of public awareness of the values of the country's natural and cultural environment and helps improve the economic performance of the region. According to the definition of The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), ecotourism should be considered responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, supports the well-being of the local population, promotes cultural development and learning, and involves both staff and visitors to the region (Chehabeddine et al., 2022). Researchers Abrdkazakova et al. (2022) emphasize in their scientific work the unique opportunities of ecotourism in the Republic of Kazakhstan, which provide effective economic incentives to preserve and increase biodiversity and protect the natural and cultural heritage of the planet. An important point in the study of ecotourism is the designation of the industry's orientation towards local cultures. Ecotourism is often possible only in regions where fauna and flora, as well as the cultural environment, are the main attractions.

Quite common is the opinion of many researchers that ecotourism is part of sustainable tourism. The same opinion is shared by the researchers, Kairova et al. (2019). Sustainable tourism, in turn, is aimed at meeting three basic requirements: quality, balance, and optimality. The quality of sustainable tourism refers to the level of impact of tourism on the quality of life of all people involved in it. Under optimality, it is customary to consider the level of use of natural resources; the operation should be in optimal volumes; and the resources should be able to be restored. The balance also determines the fairness of the distribution of the benefits received by all participants in the tourism process. In their scientific work, researchers Tisca et al. (2016) note that the development of the tourism industry is aimed at developing certain strategies, both in the medium and long term. The researchers believe the development of these strategies should be focused on two separate criteria: the level of annual growth in the number of tourists visiting the region and the provision of new tourist attractions for visitors. The Republic of Kazakhstan has a fairly extensive list of natural attractions, covering different geographical and climatic zones.

Thus, one of the most promising and attractive objects for the development of ecological tourism is the national natural parks of Kazakhstan. Also, the popularization and development of the sacred places of Kazakhstan, in particular the East Kazakhstan region, now called the Abai region, can be considered promising. On the territory of the region, there are many unexplored, sacred places that are of particular interest to the population: Historical and cultural complex of Abai Zhidebai-Borili; cave Konyr Aulie; tract Bayanbay Ata; tract Yrgyzbay Ata; tract Tañbalı Tastar; historical and archaeological complex Berel; natural and historical complex Ak-Bauyr; complex of Shilikta mound; Lake Alakol.

Researchers Ostapenko and Bryantsev (2023) indicate the need for the development of nature reserves and museums in Kazakhstan, created along the Great Silk Road, as they make an invaluable contribution to the preservation, research, and use of heritage. Moreover, the authors believe that increasing the popularity of visiting historical sites will create a positive image of the region and contribute to the development of its economy. Moldazhanov et al. (2019) note that the general demand for recreation has led to the growth of various areas of recreation and entertainment, which have begun to play a significant role in the social and

economic development of territorial entities. Unfortunately, despite the huge potential, Kazakhstan has a rather low competitive performance in terms of world tourism. With the large territory of the country, the tourism infrastructure is absolutely not developed and requires more global investment in the development of the tourism industry. Researchers note that one of the effective development options, along with the improvement of the legislative regulation of the industry and the development of infrastructure, is international investment.

An important factor in the process of developing ecotourism is also the possibility of multi-lateral development of the industry, not limited solely to the social, environmental, or economic aspects of the issue. This opinion is supported by American scientists, Stronza et al. (2019). Speaking about the specifics and possible difficulties in the process of managing the ecotourism industry, the following aspects should be highlighted: Places for tourists to visit are often located in hard-to-reach areas, which limits the possibility of establishing tourist flows. Within the framework of ecotourism management, special attention should be paid to the general level of unemployment, as it directly affects the increase in the level of poaching and illegal logging. Finding the best management practices can be hampered by the ambiguity of public policy on ecotourism.

The novelty of the research work is the formation of an optimal management mechanism to achieve the development of the environmental industry of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the context of the compliance of the country's ecotourism management with global trends. Thus, the purpose of this research work is a detailed study of the use of various methods in the process of managing the ecotourism industry, as well as the study of modern methods of ecotourism management.

## Materials and methods

As a theoretical basis for the study, the scientific works of Kazakhstani scientists and theoretical scientists from the countries of New Zealand, Japan, Indonesia, Australia, the United States of America, Vietnam, and others involved in the study of methods of managing the ecotourism industry are taken (Abrdkazakova et al., 2022; Gryshchenko and Lytvynenko, 2007; Tisca et al., 2016). The theoretical base served as the basis for determining the degree of development of the tourism region of the Republic of Kazakhstan, allowing determining, among other things, the level of development of ecological tourism. Thanks to the data that were obtained as part of this study, the level of development of the tourism industry was determined, ways to improve management efficiency were found, and additional management methods were found for the development of ecological tourism in the Republic of Kazakhstan. As part of the scientific study, both primary and secondary information that is in the public domain was used. Data was collected from both primary sources, including statistical reports from Kazakhstan's Tourism Committee, and secondary sources such as prior academic studies on ecotourism management approaches globally. Qualitative and descriptive analysis was used to compare Kazakhstan's ecotourism industry maturity level versus other nations and identify areas for governance improvements.

The basis of methodological base of the research work was the method of system analysis, which became a generalizing method in the process of determining the problems of the issue under study, as well as in the course of finding ways to solve current problems in the subject area of research. Specifically, the systems analysis method holistically examines the

ecotourism system's components and interrelations in order to optimize the whole system. This involved reviewing statistical data and policies related to Kazakhstan's tourism sector as well as examining factors driving global ecotourism growth. As a method of strategic planning, a SWOT-analysis was chosen (based on identifying factors of the internal and external environment of the industry in question and dividing these factors into four categories: S – strengths, W – weaknesses, O – opportunities, T – threats). The SWOT analysis enables strategic planning by mapping out favorable and unfavorable factors. The method of scientific comparison, thanks to which it became possible to determine both common and distinctive features in the management and management methods of the tourism industry, focused on ensuring the functioning and development of the ecotourism industry in Kazakhstan and other countries. Also, the method of isolating indicators for qualitative analysis, the modeling method for a qualitative assessment of the development of the ecotourism industry.

Research work on the study of modern methods of ecotourism management in the context of the experiences of the Republic of Kazakhstan and other countries includes three stages. The first stage of the study included the collection and processing of information, which is the theoretical basis of the study. As part of the first stage, statistical data were collected, and the study of legal documents and state programs of the Republic of Kazakhstan for the development of the tourism industry was carried out. This stage made it possible to identify the purpose of the research work as well as determine the scope of the study, choosing the appropriate methodological base necessary to solve the tasks. Thanks to the data obtained during the first stage of the work, it was possible to form conclusions that determined the best methods for managing the ecotourism industry. As part of the second stage of work, an assessment was made of the level of development of the tourism industry in Kazakhstan, including the ecotourism segment. In the course of this stage of the study, data directly related to the current study was obtained and systematized. In the second stage, the method of scientific comparison was applied to determine the common and distinctive features of the management of the tourism industry in other countries and Kazakhstan. The comparison was carried out in order to find additional ways to ensure the efficiency and development of the ecotourism industry in Kazakhstan. This stage included the coverage of expert opinions on the issue of ecotourism management methods, both in the Kazakhstani market and abroad. The third stage of the work is the final. This stage made it possible to form conclusions and recommendations on the application of modern methods of managing the ecotourism industry.

## Results

Despite the fact that ecotourism is a fairly young phenomenon in the tourism industry, it is ecotourism that acts as one of the most promising industries in the development of any country. However, one should not forget that, at its core, ecological tourism has the goal of preserving natural resources and, secondly, promoting economic interests in the development of the country. Thus, TIES highlights the following features of ecotourism: Ecotourism contributes to the creation of a respectful attitude towards the environment while, at the same time, minimizing the physical, behavioral, social, and psychological aspects of the impact on tourists. This specificity makes it possible to achieve the formation of the values of ecological tourism, having achieved the maximum level of involvement of tourists in the life of the visited region, affecting both political and socio-environmental issues (Allaberdiev et

al., 2021).

Despite the insignificant interest in Kazakhstani ecotourism, it should be noted that, according to world experience, sufficient attention should be paid to the development of this industry. Thus, the countries of South and Central Africa are famous for numerous natural monuments and developed flora and fauna. However, with probably the most numerous and extensive number of natural areas, they do not occupy a leading position in the True Travel (2022), which determines the most interesting and attractive countries for ecotourism. In many ways, this situation depends on the insufficient efficiency of industry management. The leader of the rating is the United States of America, which has in its arsenal a huge number of national parks and museums of nature. In many ways, it maintains a leading position due to the competent management of the ecotourism industry and the efforts made in the process of preserving the country's natural resources.

At the time before the emergence and spread of coronavirus infection and related restrictions (True Travel Index, 2022), Kazakhstan ranked only 87th in the ranking of the most attractive countries for tourism, having about 79 natural monuments, twelve biosphere reserves, which are part of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as well as five objects with the status of UNESCO World Heritage (Abrdkazakova et al., 2022). At the time of 2021, the country occupies only 112th place in the ranking. Unfortunately, the emergence of coronavirus infection has had a sharply negative effect on the development of the industry. According to many experts, tourism is one of the most affected industries by the restrictions caused by the coronavirus infection. However, despite the current situation, the industry requires constant attention and development, moreover, with a general vulnerability, the industry requires even greater concentration of efforts to restore lost efficiency and achieve new stages of development.

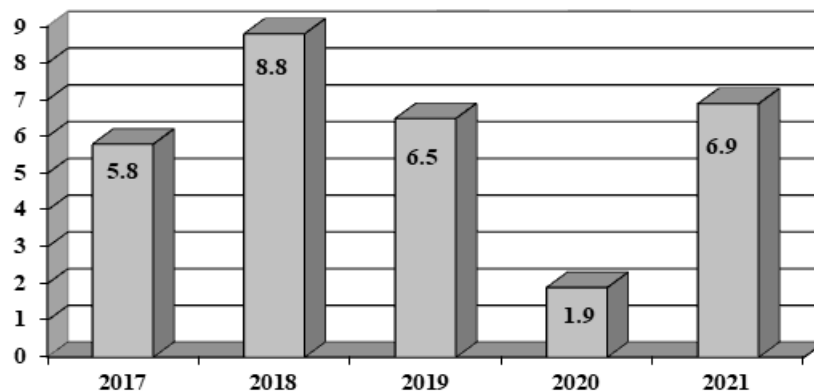
The development of ecological tourism allows increasing the country's competitiveness on the world stage of the tourism industry and will increase the overall development indicators. Thus, the successful development and maintenance of the tourism industry in Australia and New Zealand, and Asian countries (including Nepal, Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, the Philippines, China, and Japan), leads to a significant increase in economic indicators, and also allows saving and popularizing their cultural heritage everywhere. Moreover, ecological tourism acts as one of the leading directions of the entire tourism industry in some countries, which, in turn, has a direct impact on the development of national tourism in these countries. The Arab countries are characterized by comprehensive development with significant financial investments and serious state support. For example, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has many environmental problems, but despite the harsh fate of a desert country, the UAE government funds and strongly supports programs aimed at eliminating the problems caused by human activities. The development of the country's ecotourism provides new economic opportunities to improve the ecology of the UAE. The leading positions in the ranking of the attractiveness of countries for ecotourism in 2021 were occupied by the USA, Venezuela, Brazil, Thailand, and Tanzania (True Travel, 2022).

Sufficient competitive capacities of the industry provide countries with a developed tourism environment with additional mechanisms for development. After all, significant in modern world tourism is the constant acceleration of globalization and increased competition on a global scale. To achieve the development of the ecotourism industry, it is essential to ensure

a stable tourist flow by stimulating the interest of both tourists from other countries and Kazakhstani ones. In 2017, more than 5.8 million people visited the Republic of Kazakhstan (Kairova et al., 2019), the increase in the number of tourists in the next 2018 was already 14% and equalled a value of more than 8.8 million people. In 2019, the indicators of inbound tourism decreased, stopping at 6.5 million people. 2020, due to the global pandemic of coronavirus infection and the total restriction of tourist flows, showed even lower rates of inbound tourism. Thus, according to the indicators of 2020, the volume of the tourist flow decreased by more than 3.5 times. The situation changed in 2021, due to the lifting of general travel restrictions, about 6.9 million people visited the country, which is a significantly higher figure compared to the previous "Covid" year and also has an increase compared to 2019, which reflects the overall positive dynamics of the recovery of the tourism industry (Figure 1) (Kazakh Tourism, 2023). It is important to note that the data showing the situation with outbound tourism in 2022 cannot be used in full as part of determining the dynamics of changes, since these data are incomplete and reflect the situation only for the first two quarters of the year.

**Figure 1.** Dynamics of changes in outbound tourism of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2017-2021, in millions of people

*Figura 1. Dinámica de los cambios en el turismo emisor de la República de Kazajistán para 2017-2021, en millones de personas*



Source: own elaboration based on Kazakh Tourism, 2023. Fuente: elaboración propia en base a Kazakh Tourism, 2023.

Thus, after the lifting of restrictions caused by the worldwide pandemic of coronavirus infection, the influx of tourists to the Republic of Kazakhstan is significant, which fully necessitates the provision of effective management for the development of the tourism industry. It is important to note that the attraction of tourists from other countries to the Republic of Kazakhstan has a positive impact on increasing the demand for domestic tourism among the citizens of Kazakhstan. Thus, the implementation of competent management of the tourism industry will have a positive impact on many aspects of the country's development.

The general trend in the development of ecotourism is quite positive, according to experts, about 7% of the total volume of world tourism falls on ecotourism, and its percentage increases annually by an average of 3% (Borysova et al., 2021). However, many researchers give rather negative forecasts for the development of the tourism industry, noting that the

coronavirus infection will have a negative impact on the restoration of the tourist flow for quite a long time, not to mention its. Despite this, ecological tourism has a development perspective, which is caused by the desire of potential consumers to visit remote corners of the planet untouched by civilization. Many experts are pushing for a general rise in the role of meaningful tourism in the industry. Moreover, despite its essence, ecological tourism cannot be considered without reference to the economic effect. Interestingly, there is the fact that the emergence of ecological tourism as such is caused by the formation of demand for it, which is an organic economic phenomenon (Periokaitė and Dobrovolskienė, 2021).

World practice in the implementation of processes for the regulation and management of the tourism industry in “pre-covid” times demonstrated the need to change the growth model of the industry. World researchers note an overabundance of tourist flows and an excessive tourist load. In order to reduce the negative impact of tourism on natural resources, infrastructure, and socio-cultural factors, the World Tourism Organization, with the support of the United Nations Statistics Division, proposed the creation of a statistical base for measuring the sustainability of tourism (MST). The introduction of such a mechanism will create additional reliability and have a beneficial effect on the development of the tourism industry. The purpose of this base should be to determine the role of tourism in sustainable development (affecting economic, social, and environmental aspects) (Afanasieva, 2020). Also, it is important that the MST base establishes and creates a strong network that connects various sectors with each other, helping to establish a dialogue and make optimal decisions. In terms of governance, many countries, including world leaders in ecotourism and tourism in general, are pursuing a strategy of prioritizing sustainable tourism. An additional management tool in the international tourism community is the EUROPARC Federation.

This organization aims to improve the management of natural protected areas through international cooperation and the exchange of experience. The organization extends to European countries and has sufficient influence on the policies of countries that fall under its patronage. The creation of such an organization gave European countries certain privileges. Thus, the EUROPARC federation, being the governing body, creates stable relations between partners and tour operators within the zone of visiting (rest) of tourists, which allows for the organic, efficient, and safe development of tourism in the countries that are part of the federation. An additional management mechanism within the framework of ecological tourism is accounting and monitoring. These activities contribute to the sustainable development of the industry. One of the well-known projects that takes into account natural areas is the Protected Planet project. The project covers about 15% of land areas and 7.6% of sea areas, carrying out continuous monitoring and accounting. The above projects are non-state mechanisms for managing the sphere of ecological tourism.

However, it is important to understand that, in the process of developing the industry, one cannot be limited to international management projects, which means that it is necessary to create effective management mechanisms within each country. Unfortunately, often, public administration is at a rather low level. Public administration should be carried out taking into account all the characteristics of the country and region, whose natural resources act as the main object of ecological tourism. For example, countries such as Canada, Australia, and the United States of America are characterized by a high level of urbanization and weak natural recreational potential. With this option, the main activity of ecotourism is concentrated on the main natural areas (often large in the area); as a rule, such areas are national parks.



This characteristic feature is similar to the priority direction of development in Kazakhstan, since one of the most promising areas for the development of ecotourism in the Republic of Kazakhstan is precisely national parks. Such a model and management structure make it possible to effectively distribute tourist flows throughout the territory, organizing convenient and diverse logistics. An additional method of management within the framework of ecological tourism is the involvement of private individuals through the conclusion of agreements with them for the implementation of economic activities aimed at the conservation of natural resources and the development of the tourism industry.

An important point is the development of a management model that will exclude the possibility of third parties using natural resources for their own benefit and illegal enrichment. Thus, management should be carried out in terms of reducing the process of degradation of the natural resources of the regions, benefiting other ecotourism stakeholders (Denissova et al., 2021). Speaking about the management model characteristic of the Nordic countries, it is worth noting the following aspects: active use of “green” technologies; emphasis on the quality and uniqueness of nature; development of convenient infrastructure for easy access to places not affected by urbanization. The development of the industry, based on the introduction of innovations, occurs through the introduction of public initiatives associated with the constant support of the state. For the countries of Eastern Europe, which include Montenegro, Ukraine, the Czech Republic, Poland, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and others, the development of ecological tourism is a characteristic feature based on the natural resources of the region.

However, for the countries of Eastern Europe, the development of industry (light industry, ferrous metallurgy, coal and chemical industries, mechanical engineering) is more characteristic than ecotourism. Despite this, the governments of Eastern European countries are aware of the prospects for the development of the ecotourism industry. In recent years, the countries of Eastern Europe included in the Transcaucasus (Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia) have been actively developing ecotourism. So, in Georgia, ecotourism is a rather “young” direction of tourism. But, due to the diversity of the country’s nature, ranging from subtropical forests to mountain steppes, as well as due to the rich cultural heritage, the nature of Georgia represents a huge potential for the development of various forms of tourism, including ecotourism. The countries of Western Europe are characterized by a model of management of the ecotourism industry that develops in combination with other forms of tourism (for example, rural or gastronomic forms of tourism). The most characteristic feature of the development of ecological tourism in Western European countries is their close cooperation with each other.

A similar feature is associated with the location of countries, their relatively small size, and the presence of natural monuments within several independent states (for example, the mountain range of the Alps). For example, some programs for the development of ecological tourism in Switzerland are being developed in the context of cooperation since the country is located in the very center of Europe and borders such countries as Austria, France, Germany, the Principality of Liechtenstein, and Italy. Asian countries are characterized by the definition of ecotourism potential as the main potential for the development of the tourism industry in general. However, the state management of tourism in these countries needs to be adjusted. So, despite having one of the most powerful natural potentials on the planet, China is not at the top of the list of countries due to its insufficiently effective level of public

administration. However, there are also positive examples of the insufficient level of public administration in the field of ecotourism; such examples include Japan. Ecotourism is managed by the Japan Tourism Society, which includes a number of organizations involved in the management of ecotourism. State influence is expressed only by supporting the industry through financial incentives (Komilova et al., 2021). With a sufficient level of management, the Republic of Kazakhstan has a huge potential for building a high-quality and competitive ecotourism industry. A SWOT analysis was carried out as part of this research work (Figure 2) to map the potential paths for the development of the ecotourism industry in Kazakhstan.

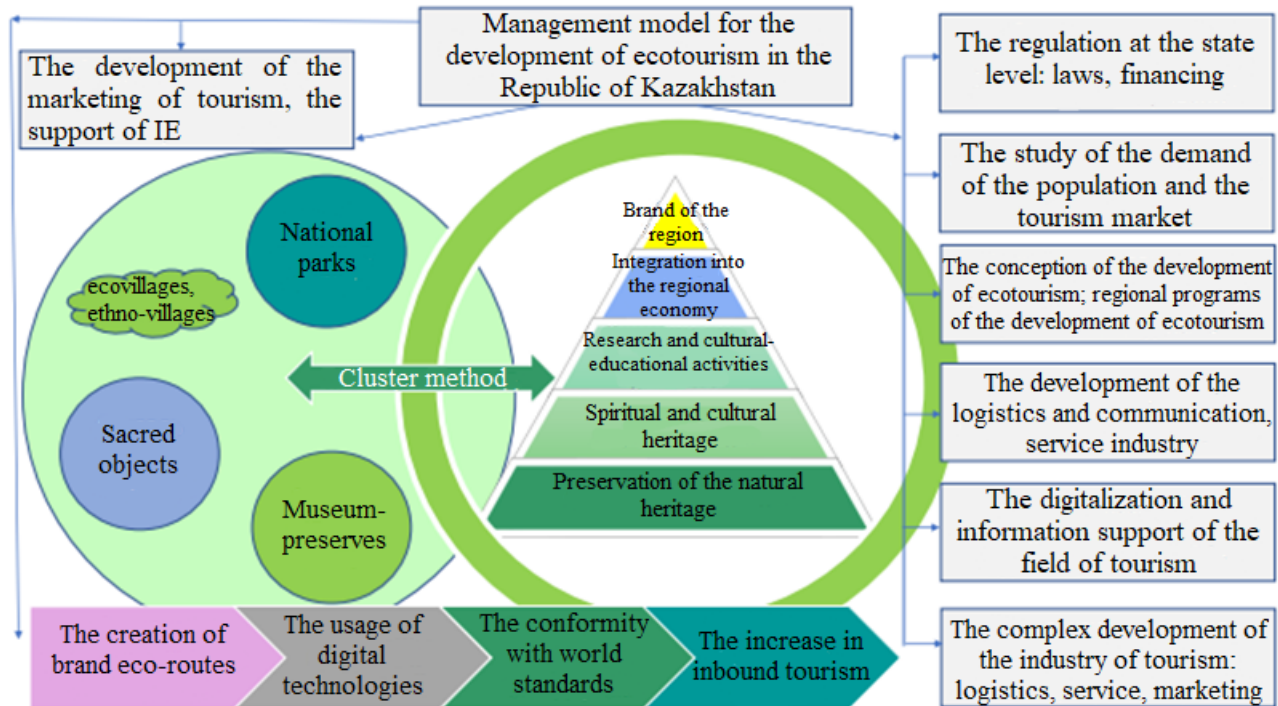
**Figure 2.** SWOT-analysis of prospects for the development of ecotourism in Kazakhstan  
*Figura 2. Análisis DAFO de las perspectivas de desarrollo del ecoturismo en Kazajistán*

<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Weaknesses</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enormous natural potential;</li> <li>- High consumer demand for ecotourism;</li> <li>- Existence and operation of the Environmental Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Low government regulation;</li> <li>- Inefficient advertising campaign (low awareness of foreign tourists about the country);</li> <li>- Lack of clear criteria and mechanisms for managing the industry.</li> </ul>
<i>Opportunities</i>	<i>Threats</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Building a convenient logistics network;</li> <li>- State support;</li> <li>- Creation of clear criteria and mechanisms for managing the industry;</li> <li>- Popularization of the theme of “green” tourism and environmental initiatives.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Possibility of spreading poaching and illegal logging.</li> <li>- Pandemics, crises and unforeseen global changes.</li> </ul>

Source: own elaboration. Fuente: elaboración propia.

Thus, the main features in the process of managing the ecotourism industry of the Republic of Kazakhstan are the colossal potential of the country for the development of the industry and the insufficiency of its regulation by the state. The most necessary and important is the final introduction of the concept of ecotourism at the legal level, as well as a clear definition of the direction of development, including the selection of methods and regulatory mechanisms. For a better understanding of the ecotourism development process in the Republic of Kazakhstan, the authors compiled a management model that includes the potential for the comprehensive development of the industry (Figure 3). At the same time, authorized institutions and organizations in the field of tourism and ecology should develop appropriate action plans and review existing methods of tourism management in natural areas. An additional management tool can be called the introduction of international cooperation to achieve an improvement in the quality of tourism products and an increase in education in the field of ecotourism.

**Figure 3.** Management model for the development of ecotourism in the Republic of Kazakhstan  
*Figura 3. Modelo de gestión para el desarrollo del ecoturismo en la República de Kazajstán*



Where IE means individual entrepreneur. Source: own elaboration. Donde IE significa emprendedor individual. Fuente: elaboración propia.

In particular, Kazakhstan’s emerging ecotourism firms should follow certain leading practices already deployed successfully in top-ranked countries. For example, participating in sustainable travel certification programs like Slovenia’s national “Green Scheme” which designates hotels and tour operators meeting environmental standards (Shahini et al., 2023). Adopting rigorous site visitor quotas and wildlife habitat protections akin to Rwanda and Zambia’s low-impact gorilla trekking policies. Launching proactive reforestation partnerships on the model of Costa Rica’s Biodiversity Conservation contracts between the environment ministry, forest communities and eco-lodges. Implementing site management training for guides as seen across Ecuador’s community-owned tourism cooperatives (Ostapenko et al., 2023). And creating digital tools for education and visitor engagement like the mobile apps employed in China’s protected reserves. These proven initiatives offer adaptable blueprints for shared value creation going forward in Kazakhstan.

## Discussion

In the current conditions, the ecotourism industry of the Republic of Kazakhstan is underdeveloped, and also, the industry needs to revise the management methods and increase the level of state support. Taking into account the situation caused by the global pandemic of coronavirus infection and the restrictions caused by it, it is worth noting that, in many ways, this situation could have caused a slowdown, and in some cases a strong rollback of the industry back, in the process of developing the ecotourism sector in Kazakhstan. The study of the state and prospects for the development of management methods for the ecotourism

industry, as well as the degree of its development, was considered by both Kazakhstani and researchers from other countries. L should be included among them (Abrdkazakova et al., 2022; Kairova et al., 2019; Harahab et al., 2021; Tisca et al., 2016; Moldazhanov et al., 2019; Borysova et al., 2021).

In the process of modernization, caused by inevitable changes in the development of society, the tourism industry is also developing. Borysova et al. (2021) indicate the need for the introduction of Internet technologies in the process of managing the tourism industry. This opinion of the researchers is justified by the crisis caused by the global pandemic of coronavirus infection at the end of 2019. At the same time, the researchers note that the coronavirus pandemic will have a negative effect on the development of the industry for a long time to come. It should be noted that with the development of the technological process, the introduction of the latest technologies in the tourism industry is inevitable. Like any other branch of human management, the tourism industry is forced to develop within the framework of universal progress. Unfortunately, researchers Borysova et al. (2021) do not give practical recommendations and do not provide options for introducing the latest technologies in the process of managing the tourism industry, in particular the environmental one.

Indonesian researchers Harahab et al. (2021) define ecotourism as a mechanism for the conservation of natural resources. Researchers believe that ecotourism will become more and more popular and will be able to fully compete with mass tourism in the future. A similar opinion is shared by Vietnamese scientists Thao and Mi (2021). Thus, researchers highlight the urgent need to develop management practices with a focus on ecotourism and the conservation of natural resources and ecosystems. To determine the level of sustainability of management activities, they propose to be guided by nine parameters based on empirical and theoretical studies. These parameters include preservation of the environment, participation in the industry, recreation and education, economic indicators, the level of control in the industry, government initiatives, the degree of development of ecotourism, the availability of a sufficient base for research work in this area, as well as the development of social networks. One cannot but agree that the sphere of ecological tourism is becoming more and more popular. Maintaining "green" trends is becoming one of the leading directions of state policy. Increasing demand for ecotourism necessitates the development of ecotourism in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

It should be noted that the state support for the ecotourism industry in Kazakhstan is at an insignificant level and requires rethinking. Tisca et al. (2016) highlight the need for management activities aimed at developing strategies in the medium and long term. The development of these strategies, the researchers believe, should be focused on two separate criteria: the level of annual growth in the number of tourists visiting the region and the provision of new tourist attractions for visiting. In turn, Trusheva et al. (2022) also note that regions with constantly growing tourist flows require special attention in the development of the tourism industry.

Speaking about the prospects for the development of tourism in the Republic, it is worth mentioning the sacred territories of Kazakhstan. The list of sacred territories includes 13 shrines, some of which are located within the Abay region. These territories include the historical and cultural complex of Abai, Zhidebai-Borili, the cave Konyr Aulie, and others. Providing these territories for tourists in the future opens up new opportunities for the development

of the entire ecotourism industry in Kazakhstan by increasing the total number of tourist flows. It should also be noted that in the Abay region there is a growing interest in health ecotourism, which is directly related to the sacred places of this region: tract Yrgyzbay Ata, tract Bayanbay Ata, cave Konyr Aulie, holy beak near Semey, and others. In addition, these sacred objects are little studied, and the development of ecotourism in this area will have a positive impact on the economy of the region, given the interest of the population in the medical plan, and on the health of the population. Researcher Afanasieva (2020) proposes the division of the main methods and control systems into eight groups. To classify the country under examination into one of these groups, the researcher proposes using seven parameters: the extent of state involvement in ecotourism development, the identification and proportion of natural territories within the country's total area, the degree of urbanization and development of natural landscapes, the role of ecological tourism in the national tourism industry program, the global appeal of natural areas to ecotourists, the level of control over tourist activity in natural environments, and the integration of specially protected natural areas into the broader tourism industry framework within the country.

The researcher believes that by evaluating these parameters, it is possible to most accurately determine the methods necessary for the organic and effective management of the ecotourism industry. However, none of the management models proposed by the authors can be fully applied to the current realities of the level of development of the tourism industry in the Republic of Kazakhstan. To foster the growth of the ecotourism industry in Kazakhstan, a comprehensive model for ecotourism cluster management should be built. Key components of this model include state-level regulation to define management mechanisms and drive tourism sector development, active state involvement on the international stage, improved accessibility to natural areas and simplified visa procedures, adherence to global green trends to meet demand, support for environmental initiatives and promotion of a healthy lifestyle, financial incentives for ecotourism enterprises, enhanced digitalization, increased population literacy, and promotion efforts at local and global levels.

Thus, it becomes obvious that, at the moment, with the existing natural resources of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the level of development of the ecotourism industry remains at an insignificant level, which is caused by inefficient methods of managing the tourism sector. The ecotourism industry is definitely worth developing, as it has prospects for expansion due to the growing need of the world's population for recreation in natural areas that are practically not affected by the environmental problems of urbanized areas and industrial centers, and also provide tourists with an excellent opportunity to spend time in comfort and the purity of nature after such a long period of self-isolation.

## Conclusions

According to the goals set and the results obtained in the course of this scientific study, the degree of development of the tourism industry of the Republic of Kazakhstan was determined; in particular, the current level and prospects for the development of the country's ecotourism industry were determined. The results obtained during the writing of the research work allowed us to form the following conclusions: The tourism industry of the Republic of Kazakhstan is at an insufficient level of development. The entire natural potential of the country is not fully used, and in crisis situations, it is subjected to illegal actions by local residents, including theft of natural resources and poaching. It should be assumed that the

situation is caused by various political, economic, social, and environmental problems. A significant aspect of the insufficient level of development in the sphere of ecological tourism can be considered inefficient methods of managing the industry and the lack of state support. The sphere of ecological tourism in the Republic of Kazakhstan requires reform. Thus, thanks to the data obtained as a result of the SWOT analysis, the strengths of the industry should be called the colossal natural potential of Kazakhstan, the ever-increasing consumer demand for ecotourism around the world, and the existence of the Environmental Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan, which allows regulating initiatives in the development of the country's ecotourism industry.

This study contributes to the academic literature on ecotourism governance by applying a systems analysis perspective to evaluate Kazakhstan's ecotourism policies against global best practices. The theoretical framework can inform other developing countries in conducting holistic audits of their ecotourism management processes. On a practical level, the SWOT analysis provides Kazakh tourism authorities specific strategic insights like designating ecotourism zones, streamlining visa access, bolstering transport links to nature preserves, and launching ecotourism promotion campaigns domestically and internationally. Implementing these recommendations can accelerate responsible tourism growth. Limitations of the research include a lack of primary data on tourist motivations and preferences within Kazakhstan. Guest surveys and focus groups could strengthen the demand analysis. Additionally, quantitative data on ecotourism's current and projected future economic impacts would make the business case clearer. Follow-on research should address these gaps through field studies on visitors to Kazakhstan as well as modeling the investment returns from increased infrastructure and marketing for nature tourism. Comparative case studies of policies applied in regions with similar natural assets could reveal additional best practices for Kazakhstan's nascent ecotourism industry.

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