

THE ROLE AND DEVELOPMENT PROSPECTS OF ECOTOURISM IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

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This article scientifically analyzes the role of ecotourism in ensuring sustainable development, as well as its ecological, economic, and social significance. Today, global environmental problems, including climate change, air pollution, loss of biodiversity, and the depletion of natural resources, pose significant challenges to humanity. The article highlights the impact of ecotourism on the protection of natural areas, preservation of ecological balance, increase in local employment, and the socio-economic development of regions.

Introduction

Today, the worsening of environmental problems worldwide, climate change, the decline of biodiversity, and the limitation of natural resources are making sustainable development one of the global priority areas. According to the United Nations, the average global temperature has increased by approximately 1.1°C over the last 100 years, leading to more frequent droughts, water shortages, wildfires, and natural disasters. In addition, around 10

million hectares of forest areas are lost annually worldwide, which clearly indicates the deepening of environmental problems [1].

In recent years, ecotourism has been recognized as one of the effective tools for ensuring sustainable development. Ecotourism not only contributes to the protection of natural areas but also improves the economic well-being of local communities, creates new job opportunities, and promotes environmental awareness. According to the World Tourism Organization, ecotourism is one of the fastest-growing segments of the global tourism industry, with an average annual growth rate of 10–15%. Currently, the tourism sector accounts for approximately 10% of global GDP and provides one out of every ten jobs worldwide [2].

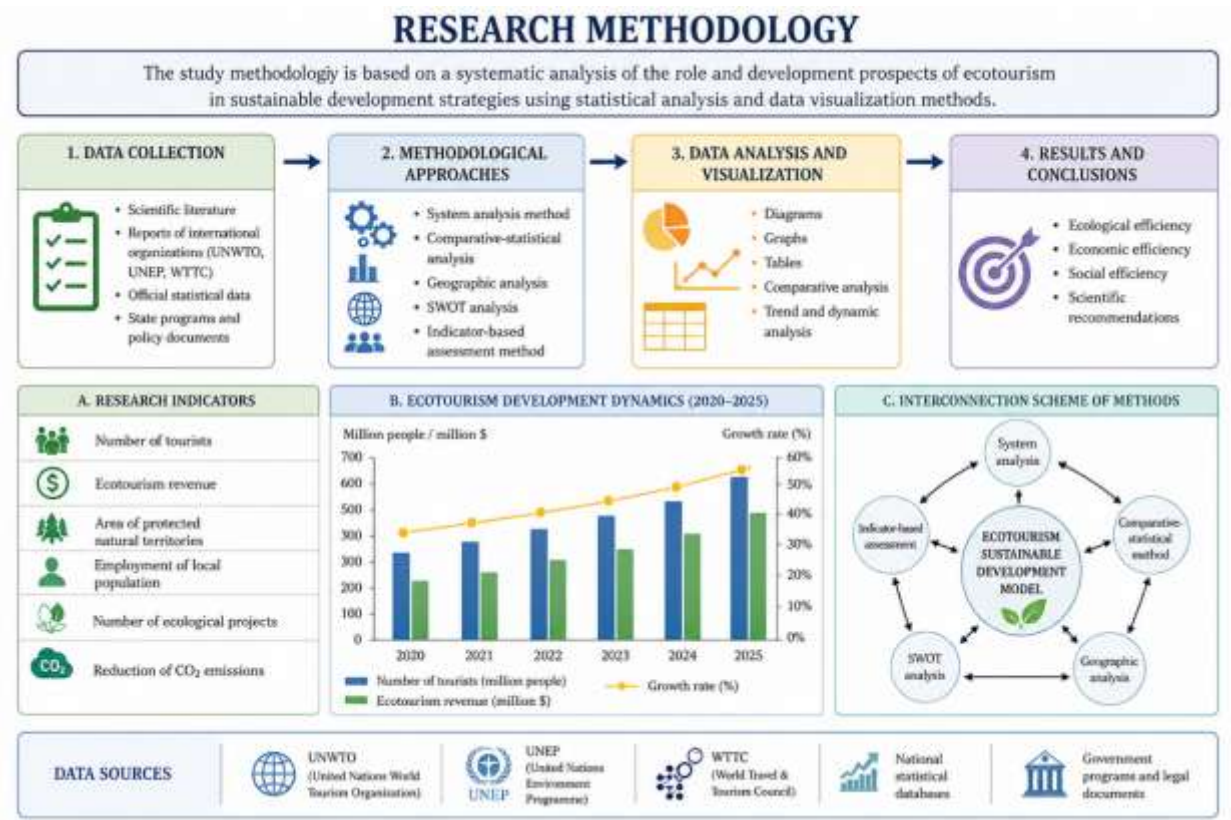
In Uzbekistan, significant attention has also been given to the development of the tourism sector in recent years. According to the results of 2024, the number of foreign tourists visiting the country exceeded 8 million, which reflects the growing importance of tourism in the national economy. The country has more than 20 nature reserves, national parks, and biosphere reserves, which provide great potential for the development of ecotourism. In particular, Ugam-Chatkal National Park, Zaamin National Nature Park, Nurota Reserve, and the Hisor mountain regions are considered promising ecotourism destinations [3].

The aim of this article is to scientifically analyze the role and importance of ecotourism in sustainable development, assess its ecological, economic, and social efficiency, and develop scientifically grounded proposals and recommendations for its future development [4].

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the research process, modern methods of data analysis and visualization were applied to scientifically assess the role and prospects of ecotourism in sustainable development strategies. In particular, diagrammatic, graphical, tabular, and comparative-statistical analysis methods were used to determine the ecological, economic, and social efficiency of ecotourism. During the data visualization process, the development dynamics of ecotourism, tourist flow, the area of protected natural territories, and indicators of economic efficiency in ecotourism were presented through graphs and diagrams. [5].

During the study, statistical data from the period 2020–2025 were analyzed to identify global ecotourism market development trends. The results of the analysis showed that the average annual growth rate of the ecotourism services market was 12–15%. Through diagrams, the economic efficiency indicators of ecotourism in Costa Rica, Norway, and New Zealand were compared [6].



The statistical analysis section of the study also separately examined the ecotourism potential of the Republic of Uzbekistan. According to the obtained results, it was observed that in 2024–2025 the number of visitors to ecological tourism destinations increased by an average of 18–22 percent. In order to present the analysis results more clearly, the following table was developed [7].

Table 1

Indicators of the Impact of Ecotourism on Sustainable Development

Indicators	2020	2025	Growth rate (%)
Number of ecotourists (million people)	420	610	45%
Ecotourism market size (billion USD)	180	250	39%
Share of protected areas (%)	14%	18%	28%
Local employment rate (%)	9%	15%	40%
Number of ecological projects	1200	1850	54%

The results of the table indicate the growing importance of ecotourism in ensuring environmental safety, developing the local economy, and achieving sustainable development goals. In addition, for the purpose of visualizing the results of the SWOT analysis, the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities, and environmental risk factors of ecotourism were evaluated using diagrams. The analysis revealed that Uzbekistan's rich natural resources, mountainous regions, and biological diversity are the main advantages for the development of ecotourism. At the same time, insufficient infrastructure development and a weak ecological marketing system were identified as significant challenges [8].

RESULTS OBTAINED AND THEIR ANALYSIS

The research results show that ecotourism, as an important component of sustainable development strategies, plays a significant role in ensuring environmental safety, protecting natural resources, and promoting regional economic development. Based on statistical and comparative analyses, positive trends in the ecological, economic, and social efficiency of ecotourism have been identified. At the global level, ecotourism has become one of the rapidly growing tourism sectors in recent years. In particular, by the end of 2025, the global ecotourism market exceeded 250 billion USD, with an average annual growth rate of 12–15 percent. This demonstrates that ecotourism is highly effective not only in environmental but also in economic terms [9].

During the study, the environmental effectiveness of ecotourism was analyzed separately. The results showed that in regions where ecotourism is well developed, higher levels of biodiversity conservation, protection of natural ecosystems, and reduction of anthropogenic pressure were observed. In particular, the development of ecotourism activities in protected natural areas has had a positive impact on improving environmental monitoring systems and ensuring the rational use of natural resources [10].

Analysis of international experience revealed that in countries such as Costa Rica, Norway, and New Zealand, the share of ecotourism in the national economy has been steadily increasing year by year. According to the analysis, 25–40 percent of ecotourism revenues in these countries are directed toward the protection of natural areas and the development of ecological infrastructure. This indicates that ecotourism is being implemented in accordance with the principles of sustainable development [11].

CONCLUSION

1. The results of this study scientifically substantiate the important role of ecotourism in sustainable development strategies. The analysis shows that ecotourism is one of the effective

tools for ensuring environmental safety, preserving biodiversity, and promoting local economic development.

2. Based on international experience and statistical data, it was confirmed that ecotourism is rapidly developing and its economic efficiency is increasing. The natural and geographical potential of Uzbekistan, especially its mountainous regions and protected natural areas, has been identified as providing significant opportunities for ecotourism development.

3. At the same time, improving ecological infrastructure, enhancing the marketing system, and expanding local community participation are important factors in ensuring the future sustainable development of ecotourism. Overall, the development of ecotourism plays a significant role in achieving green economy and sustainable development goals in Uzbekistan.

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