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SYSTEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING ROLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ECOTOURISM

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Systematic analysis of the education and training role in the development of ecotourism

Abstract. The rapid growth of the tourism industry worldwide has opened up various opportunities for economic and social development. Among the various forms of tourism, ecotourism has been widely recognized for its respect for the environment and contribution to the well-being of local communities. The purpose of this article is to identify the key role of education and training in promoting the sustainable development of ecotourism. The results of the study confirmed that a well-structured educational system, including a curriculum that complies with the principles of sustainable tourism, practical experience and community involvement, plays an important role in the training of competent personnel for the ecotourism sector. In addition, the analysis highlights the need for joint efforts between academia, industry and government agencies to continuously improve educational programs that meet the changing requirements of ecotourism. This comprehensive study provides a framework for understanding the importance of a robust education and training infrastructure in advancing the goals of sustainable ecotourism, thereby contributing to a broader understanding of the sustainable development of the tourist landscape.

Key words: sustainable development, ecotourism, universities, education, training, educational programs.

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Экотуризмнің дамуындағы білім беру мен кәсіптік даярлықтың рөлін жүйелі талдау

Аңдатпа. Бүкіл әлемде туризм индустриясының қарқынды өсуі экономикалық және әлеуметтік даму үшін әртүрлі мүмкіндіктер ашты. Туризмнің әртүрлі формаларының ішінде экотуризм қоршаған ортаны қорғауы және жергілікті қауымдастықтардың әл-ауқатына қосқан үлесі үшін кеңінен танылды. Мақаланың мақсаты - экотуризмнің тұрақты дамуына ықпал етудегі білім беру мен кәсіптік даярлықтың негізгі рөлін анықтау. Зерттеу нәтижелері тұрақты туризм принциптеріне сәйкес келетін оқу бағдарламасын, практикалық тәжірибені және қауымдастықты тартуды қамтитын жақсы құрылымдалған білім беру жүйесі экотуризм секторы үшін құзыретті кадрларды дайындауда маңызды рөл атқаратынын растады. Сонымен қатар, талдау экотуризмнің барлық талаптарына жауап беретін білім беру бағдарламаларын үнемі жетілдіру үшін академиялар, өнеркәсіп және мемлекеттік органдар арасында бірлескен күш-жігерді жолға қою қажеттілігін көрсетеді. Бұл жан-жақты зерттеу тұрақты экотуризм мақсаттарын ілгерілетуде білім беру инфрақұрылымы мен кәсіби дайындықтың маңыздылығын түсінуге негіз береді, осылайша туристік ландшафтың тұрақты дамуы туралы кеңірек түсінікке үлес қосады.

Түйін сөздер: тұрақты даму, экотуризм, университеттер, білім беру, кадрларды даярлау, білім беру бағдарламалары.

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Систематический анализ роли образования и профессиональной подготовки в развитии экотуризма

Аннотация. Стремительный рост индустрии туризма во всем мире открыл различные возможности для экономического и социального развития. Среди разнообразных форм туризма экотуризм получил широкое признание за бережное отношение к окружающей среде и вклад в благосостояние местных сообществ. Цель данной статьи – выявить ключевую роль образования и профессиональной подготовки в содействии устойчивому развитию экотуризма. Полученные результаты исследования подтвердили, что хорошо структурированная образовательная система, включающая учебную программу, соответствующую принципам устойчивого туризма, практический опыт и вовлечение сообщества, играет важную роль в подготовке компетентных кадров для сектора экотуризма.

Кроме того, анализ подчеркивает необходимость налаживания совместных усилий между академическими кругами, промышленностью и государственными органами для постоянного совершенствования образовательных программ, отвечающих меняющимся требованиям экотуризма. Данное всестороннее исследование обеспечивает основу для понимания важности надежной инфраструктуры образования и профессиональной подготовки в продвижении целей устойчивого экотуризма, тем самым внося свой вклад в более широкое представление об устойчивом развитии туристского ландшафта.

Ключевые слова: устойчивое развитие, экотуризм, университеты, образование, подготовка кадров, образовательные программы.

Basic provisions:

– A brief overview of the global transition to sustainable tourism practices.

– Analysis of the current state of ecotourism education in Kazakhstan, identification of the main problems, including the lack of programs, insufficient practical training and the gap between academia and industry.

– «Recreational, sports and wellness tourism» program implementation by the Kazakh Academy of Sports and Tourism with an emphasis on the inclusion of the module «Ecotourism».

– Study of real initiatives, assessment of the role of practical experience and community participation in the education of comprehensively trained personnel for ecotourism.

Introduction. Tourism stands as one of the most expansive and rapidly expanding segments of the global economy, exerting a substantial influence over various spheres including the environment, culture, society, and economic domains. Recently, the pivotal role and the pressing need for the advancement of tourism ventures were highlighted in a directive from the head of state, K.K. Tokayev. This has necessitated the cultivation of skilled individuals well-versed in tourism dynamics. Gaining insight into the workings of tourism is instrumental in deciphering the interrelations between tourism and other sectors, reinforcing the notion that it operates as a multidisciplinary and interconnected industry. Furthermore, the sector continually garners attention from governmental agencies, urged by international bodies to integrate tourism into their economic agendas, attesting to its substantial role in economic strategization [1].

Currently, ecotourism is emerging as a foremost preference in the tourism landscape, propelled by heightened awareness and concern regarding the environmental repercussions of tourism activities. Ecotourism stands as a sustainable counterpart, mitigating adverse environmental effects while promoting conscientious travel habits. This branch not only facilitates a closer encounter with natural habitats but also fosters the initiatives aimed at environmental preservation.

Remarkably, there is a burgeoning trend in the number of ecotourists annually, a testament to the escalating consciousness about the imperative of safeguarding both natural and cultural heritage sites. Engaging in ecotourism also means delving into the heart of local communities, gaining an understanding of their customs, and contributing to their economic sustenance. This surge in ecotourism is indicative of a shifting preference amongst travelers towards more enriching and sustainable travel experiences that bear positive ramifications for both the environment and indigenous communities [2].

In this evolving narrative, ecotourism is progressively becoming an essential facet of contemporary tourism, steering it towards a path of sustainable development. Given the rising cognizance of ecological issues and a tilt towards eco-friendly practices, ecotourism is asserting itself as a vital constituent in the tourism strategies of numerous nations and territories [3].

However, to ensure ecotourism serves its purpose in nurturing and preserving the environment and cultural relics, it is imperative to foster a workforce adept in marrying tourism entrepreneurship with the principles of sustainable development. This discourse undertakes a meticulous scrutiny of the integral role universities hold in this endeavor. Universities emerge as pivotal entities in molding individuals for the ecotourism sector, a role that gains prominence as the demand for expertise in sustainable and environmentally responsible practices grows exponentially.

Research goals:

Conduct a historical analysis of the research and growth of the ecotourism sector.

Review the current educational frameworks in place in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Discern the issues and hurdles encountered by educational institutions in preparing individuals for careers in ecotourism.

The endeavor seeks to pinpoint optimal strategies and practices to foster the enduring success of ecotourism through superior training avenues, a strategy central to the preservation of natural assets and the facilitation of a remarkable tourist experience.

Methodology and Research Structure:

Literature Review. The initial phase encompasses a comprehensive examination of literary sources, encompassing academic publications and scientific documents pertinent to ecotourism, pertinent training and education, and the doctrines of sustainable development, thereby delineating the present knowledge landscape, prevailing trends, and voids in existing literature.

Research Blueprint. The research employs quantitative methodologies, including the deployment of questionnaires and the analytical evaluation of statistical figures, facilitating the derivation of quantifiable metrics and statistical inferences.

Data Procurement. The data assembly process involved the formulation of questionnaires targeting a demographic of students, educators, alongside stakeholders and various other personnel within the tourism industry.

Analysis and Deductions. Subsequent to data scrutiny, interpretations are construed, and pivotal

deductions are drawn, elucidating the role and impact of academic establishments in fostering the sustainable advancement of ecotourism.

The theoretical basis of the research is the works of domestic authors: Kulmanova G.A., Berkinbay O., Abeuova Kh., Akoeva M.T., Azhayeva G.S., as well as foreign: Fennell D. A., Cater E.

Findings and discussion.

During the 1990s, ecotourism started garnering attention from the general populace, initiating a swift upsurge in the sector. The nomenclature “ecotourism” progressively received broader recognition, encouraging governmental bodies and tour facilitators to advocate for ecotourism as a viable and sustainable replacement to the conventional mass tourism that was prevalent then. Currently, there exists a diversity in the interpretation of “ecotourism,” with different organizations ascribing varied meanings to the term. A compilation of several such definitions can be seen in Table 1 [4].

Table 1 – Some definitions of the “Ecological tourism” concept [compiled by the authors on the basis of Internet sources]

Definition	Author
Responsible travel to natural areas that preserves the environment, supports the well-being of the local population and includes oral interpretation and education.	The International Ecotourism Society (TIES)
Tourism, which includes visiting natural areas for the purpose of studying, observing or participating in activities that do not harm the environment, contributes to the preservation of natural and cultural heritage and contribute to the well-being of local communities.	World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)
An environmentally responsible journey to relatively untouched natural areas to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features, both past and present), which promotes conservation, has a low negative impact on visitors and ensures beneficial active socio-economic involvement of local residents.	International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN)
Tourism that promotes understanding of the environment and culture, appreciation and conservation.	Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)
A journey aimed at getting to know nature, culture and history, while minimizing the impact on the environment.	National Geographic Society

As indicated in Table 1, it is evident that the assorted definitions of ecotourism highlight its complex character, necessitating a harmonious integration of environmental conservation, educational endeavors, and active community participation.

Presently, numerous countries globally are home to noteworthy ecotourism development initiatives, serving as sterling illustrations of sustainable growth in the ecotourism sector (refer to Table 2).

Table 2 – Ecotourism development programs in different countries [compiled by the authors based on Internet sources]

Name of country	Regional Ecotourism Development Program
Costa Rica	Costa Rica has implemented a Sustainable Tourism Certification Program (CST). This program evaluates and certifies tourism businesses based on their commitment to sustainable development. It focuses on areas such as environmental protection, public engagement, and cultural preservation.
Australia	Australia has a certification program that provides certification to tourism operators that meet certain criteria for environmental protection and sustainable development. The program promotes sustainable practices, conservation of biodiversity and protection of natural and cultural heritage.
New Zealand	New Zealand has a Qualmark program, a national quality assurance system that provides certificates for travel companies. The program evaluates enterprises based on their environmental performance, social responsibility and economic viability.
Norway	Norway has a «Sustainable Destination» program, which aims to promote sustainable tourism in specific regions of the country. The program focuses on areas such as environmental management, community engagement, cultural preservation, and economic benefits for local communities.
Ecuador	Ecuador has an ecotourism certification program that evaluates and certifies tourism operators based on their compliance with sustainable development standards. The program focuses on aspects such as environmental conservation, social responsibility and cultural authenticity.

These instances reveal that the triumphant advancement of ecotourism is contingent upon a synergistic approach involving several elements such as robust environmental governance, active community involvement, and the education of visitors.

Kazakhstan has the potential to emulate the fruitful ecotourism strategies employed by the aforementioned nations by adhering to the guidelines delineated in Figure 3.

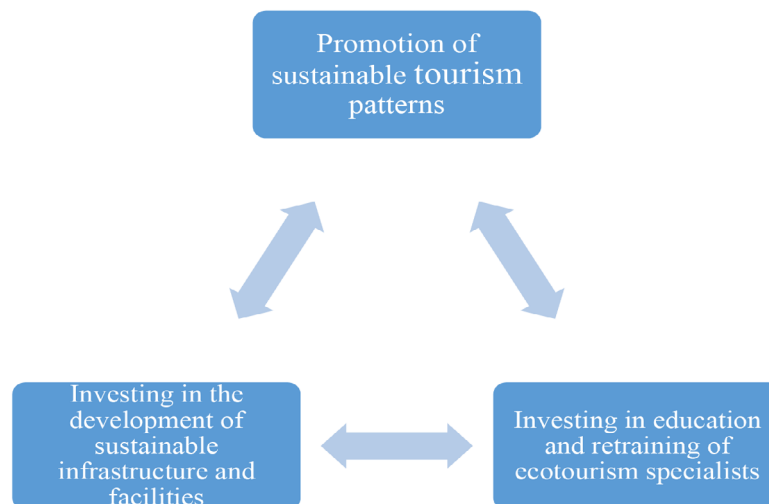


Figure 1 – Ecotourism development practices on the example of other countries [compiled by the authors based on Internet sources]

Kazakhstan has the opportunity to glean invaluable insights from the ecotourism development strategies undertaken by these countries, focusing on several pivotal aspects. Primarily, it can emphasize safeguarding and conserving its pristine landscapes and rich biodiversity, drawing parallels from the initiatives championed in nations like Costa Rica and Norway. Adherence to stringent norms and directives in the ecotourism sphere will foster environmental conservation and sustainability [5].

In addition, there is room for Kazakhstan to channel investments towards crafting sustainable infrastructures and amenities tailored to fulfill ecotourism prerequisites. Taking a leaf from the approaches adopted by New Zealand and Canada, Kazakhstan could envisage establishments like visitor hubs, eco-trails, and green lodging facilities that align with the principles of minimal environmental intrusion while offering educative experiences to tourists.

A concerted effort by the government to fuel educational endeavors and consciousness-raising campaigns would cultivate a culture of responsible ecotourism among tourists and local community stakeholders alike. Initiatives could encompass training for guides and operators in sustainable development practices, disseminating knowledge about the indigenous environment and heritage, and nurturing a sense of responsibility among tourists [6].

At the core of encouraging responsible ecotourism is the need for proficient personnel in Kazakh-

stan's ecotourism sector. With a burgeoning demand for green and responsible travel alternatives, it becomes imperative to nurture a competent workforce adept at overseeing and uplifting ecotourism locales efficaciously [7].

A critical rationale behind emphasizing the training of ecotourism personnel is the requisite to safeguard the natural habitats and cultural heritage integral to the destination. Ecotourism is centered around facilitating a deep understanding and appreciation for a locale's natural and cultural assets while mitigating adverse impacts. Well-educated personnel bring to the table the requisite expertise and acumen to enlighten tourists on the significance of preserving biodiversity and adhering to sustainable practices. Such guidance ensures a respectful and conscious engagement with the native environment and traditions [8].

Training programs for ecotourism professionals stand as potent avenues to elevate the level of professionalism and adherence to ethical norms in the sector. The dissemination of information on the tenets of sustainable tourism, coupled with instilling a sense of responsible conduct and safety protocols, nurtures a professional ethos grounded in accountability among individuals in the industry.

Bearing in mind the aforementioned considerations, a comprehensive training module for ecotourism has been conceptualized, as depicted in Figure 4.

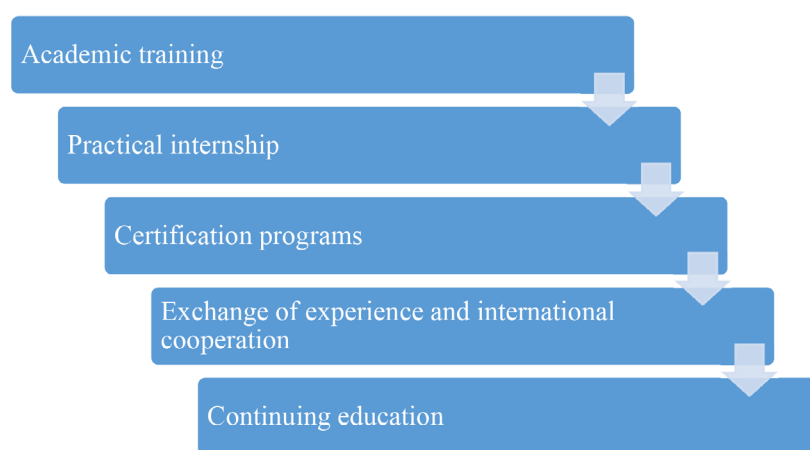


Figure 2 – Ecotourism training scheme (compiled by the author)

Subsequently, a meticulous breakdown of each element was undertaken:

Academic Education. Students have the avenue to pursue specialized academic pursuits in the realm of ecotourism through university curriculums and

courses. This encompasses learning about environmental stewardship, ecological settings, cultural heritage conservation, and proficient management of natural resources, among other pertinent subjects [9].

Hands-on Internship. Opportunities are crafted for students to undertake practical internships at entities such as ecotourism ventures, national parks, and nature preserves, establishing a foothold in the ecotourism sphere. These experiences facilitate first-hand exposure to the working dynamics of the industry and a platform to implement their theoretical learnings [10].

Certification Initiatives. There exists a spectrum of certification programs and courses targeted at honing specialized skill sets pivotal to ecotourism, encompassing facets like ecological guidance, nature interpretation, environmental assessment, and steering tourist enterprises on sustainable pathways [11].

Exchange of Expertise and Global Collaboration. Engaging in seminars, conferences, and other congregations centered on ecotourism allows for a fruitful exchange of expertise with industry stalwarts and networking opportunities. The international collaboration can further steer the direction towards assimilating the best practices and innovative strides globally in the realm of ecotourism.

Lifelong Learning. It stands imperative for professionals in ecotourism to foster a spirit of continuous learning post their formal educational phase. Engaging in lifelong learning avenues such as seminars, enrichment courses, and delving into specialized readings ensures their acumen remains attuned to the evolving trends and benchmarks in the industry.

Collaborative Endeavors. Forging partnerships between educational entities and enterprises in the ecotourism landscape proves beneficial in aligning educational agendas with the pulsating needs of the

job market. It paves the way for internship prospects, curriculum development input from industry veterans, and expert-led masterclass sessions [12].

In essence, this multifaceted approach serves to cultivate a cadre of ecotourism professionals adept at propelling the sector in Kazakhstan while adeptly navigating potential challenges.

Currently in Kazakhstan, a diverse array of higher and postgraduate educational programs are accessible through universities, colleges, and various other educational entities. These programs are crafted to facilitate students in acquiring profound knowledge and expertise in assorted domains, setting the stage for them to carve out successful careers.

Ecotourism has been garnering substantial focus in recent times, a result of its emphasis on fostering sustainable approaches, championing the conservation of natural resources, and enhancing environmental consciousness. This has given rise to an escalated demand for professionals endowed with a comprehensive understanding of the ecotourism sector and equipped with the requisite skill set to steward sustainable tourism practices effectively.

To delineate the level of engagement in the ecotourism coursework, the author embarked on an analysis of the educational program accountancy and distribution system (EPVO).

In the Kazakhstan domain, 91 educational offerings directed towards «Tourism» have been officially recorded. A breakdown of these reveals that 62 are existing programs, 25 have been recently introduced, and a niche segment comprises of 4 innovative initiatives, as illustrated in Figure 3 [13].

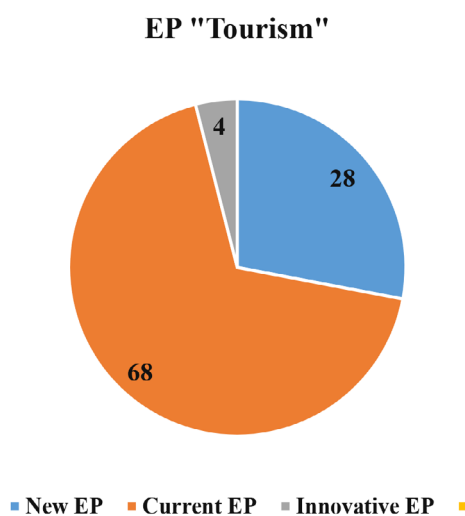


Figure 3 – EP «Tourism» [13]

The research reveals that of the 91 tourism-focused, educational programs available in Kazakhstan, merely 36 incorporate a course on «Ecological tourism». This situation highlights a pressing need to enhance and expand the coverage of ecotourism studies within these programs. Implementing a survey directed at employers and educators to gather insights on the essential qualifications for graduates in the tourism sector and the significance of ecotourism studies in university curriculums stands as a crucial initiative. It facilitates a deeper understanding of labor market demands and aids in the refinement of educational program content to meet these needs. Such a survey could effectively map out the priority skill sets and knowledge areas as per employer preferences in the industry.

Thus, to determine the results of the surveys conducted, the respondents' responses were ana-

lyzed, and it was revealed that: 1). Communication skills and the ability to work with clients are considered the most important for successful work in tourism. Effective communication with customers and the ability to meet their needs play a crucial role in achieving success in this area (Figure 4.1); 2). Quality management in the tourism industry, intercultural communication and language training are assessed as important disciplines for training in tourism (Figure 4.2); 3). The use of innovative technologies and digital tools in teaching requires more attention and improvement (Figure 4.3); 4). The majority of respondents support the inclusion of this discipline, which indicates recognition of the importance of environmental aspects in the field of tourism and the need for appropriate training of specialists (Figure 4.4).

WHAT TYPES OF TOURISM DO YOU THINK WILL BE IN DEMAND IN THE FUTURE?

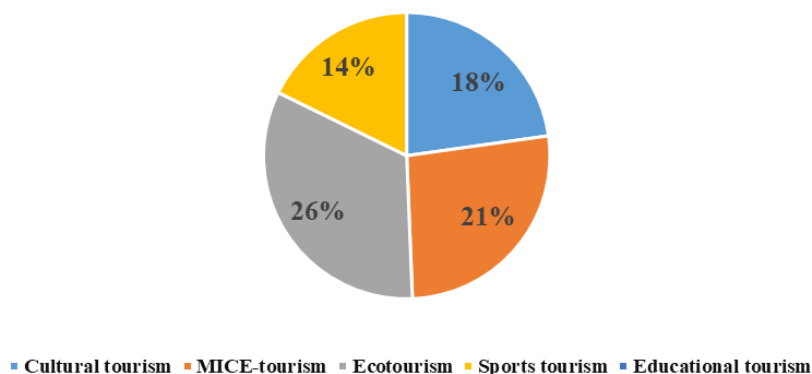


Figure 4.1 – What types of tourism do you think will be in demand in the future?

WHAT COURSES DO YOU THINK SHOULD BE STUDIED TO OPTIMIZE THE WORK OF GRADUATES IN THE FIELD OF TOURISM?



Figure 4.2 – What courses do you think should be studied to optimize the work of graduates in the field of tourism?

WHAT ASPECTS OF PERSONNEL TRAINING IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY REQUIRE ADDITIONAL ATTENTION AND IMPROVEMENT?

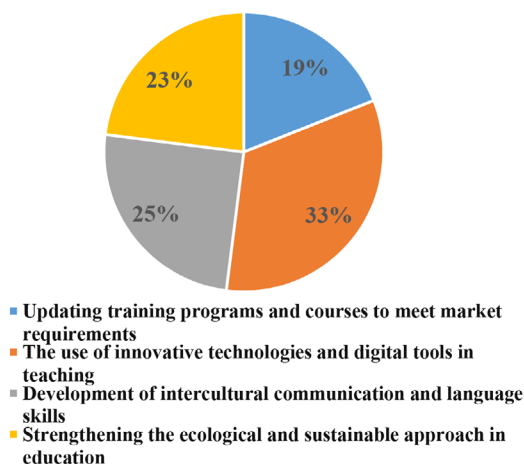


Figure 4.3 – What aspects of personnel training in the tourism industry require additional attention and improvement?

DO YOU CONSIDER IT NECESSARY TO INCLUDE THE STUDY OF THE COURSE "ECOLOGICAL TOURISM" IN THE CURRICULA OF ALL UNIVERSITIES?

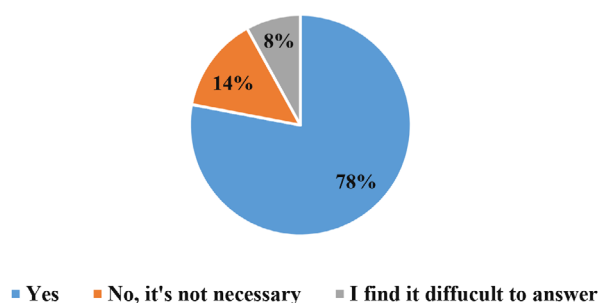


Figure 4.4 – Do you consider it necessary to include the study of the course “Ecological tourism” in the curricula of all universities?

The insights garnered from the research can guide educational establishments to fine-tune their approach to align more precisely with market demands, fostering graduates proficient in maneuvering the intricacies of the tourism sector while being cognizant of prevailing trends and consumer anticipations. Consequently, integrating the “Ecological Tourism” module into educational syllabi emerges as a pivotal stride in advancing Kazakhstan’s tourism sector and nurturing experts in ecotourism. This subject empowers learners to grasp and value the pivotal role of preserving nature, safeguarding biodiversity, and endorsing the sustainable exploitation of tourist assets.

Nonetheless, the pathway to cultivating expertise in ecotourism in Kazakhstan is marred by several hurdles, encompassing:

Program scarcity. The dearth of tailor-made educational agendas and courses crafted to mold individuals for roles in ecotourism translates to a shortage of adept professionals equipped to helm and evolve ecotourism endeavors [14].

Constricted educational reach. The distribution of ecotourism educational schemes is patchy across various Kazakh regions, engendering disparities in workforce education and the sector’s growth trajectory.

Suboptimal awareness levels. The critical notion of sustaining environmental and cultural assets

in ecotourism is not consistently grasped deeply by pupils, academics, and local populaces, a fact that dampens the sector's evolution.

Limited hands-on training. A substantial chunk of the educational portfolios leans heavily towards theory, offering insufficient avenues for learners to acquire real-world experience in the ecotourism domain [15].

Challenges in realizing sustainability. Implementing sustainable ecotourism necessitates a deep-seated understanding and skills to steward natural and cultural resources adeptly. Inadequately prepared personnel could spur environmental and cultural dilemmas in burgeoning ecotourism zones [16].

Fragmented collaboration between academia and the industry. Often, a disconnect prevails between academic content and the genuine requisites of the ecotourism landscape. This rift, propelled by inadequate synergy between educational hubs and ecotourism enterprises, can result in subpar workforce readiness [17].

To address the mentioned challenges, it is critical to craft and execute specific educational curriculums, guarantee access to education across diverse regions of the nation, emphasize hands-on learning experiences, and forge a stronger bond between the educational sphere and the ecotourism sector. Such initiatives will foster the growth of skilled personnel, further facilitating the sustainable evolution of ecotourism in Kazakhstan.

In 2022, the Kazakh Academy of Sports and Tourism initiated a fresh educational pathway titled «Recreation, sports, and wellness tourism». This program aims to nurture a cohort of high-caliber, competitive professionals skilled in orchestrating and overseeing endeavors in the recreation, sports, and wellness tourism arenas, in addition to other fields indirectly or directly linked to tourism [18].

Injecting the «Ecotourism» module into the «Recreation, sports, and wellness tourism» program harbors the significant benefit of cultivating environmental conscientiousness among the impending ecotourism experts. It equips learners with insights into the ecological repercussions of tourist activities and the approaches to alleviate these impacts. Students gain awareness of the cruciality of preserving biodiversity, steering sustainable resource management, and fostering community participation in ecotourism initiatives. This holistic education approach molds students into champions of sustainable operations in their forthcoming professional paths.

Moreover, incorporating the «Ecological Tourism» class enhances the marketability of the graduates in the job market. Given the escalating worldwide

appeal for sustainable tourism solutions, employers are on the hunt for candidates displaying profound comprehension of ecotourism doctrines and methodologies.

Therefore, the debut of the «Ecological tourism» syllabus in the «Recreation and sports tourism» educational plan stands as a pivotal move in grooming experts in the ecotourism sector. It endows pupils with the requisite expertise and acumen to advocate for sustainable tourism conduct and to be significant contributors to the ecotourism industry's expansion.

In 2023, the student body of the Kazakh Academy of Sports and Tourism actively participated in the «Stop Musor» environmental initiative, orchestrated by the Association of Environmental Organizations. This event, held in the scenic Ayusai Gorge, afforded students a prime platform for learning and skill acquisition. Accompanied by an environmental education session by the Association, this endeavor significantly broadened the ecological consciousness of the attendees. Initiatives like these underscore a critical pathway for obtaining hands-on experience in ecotourism, illustrating the potential for students to immerse themselves in real-world activities central to environmental conservation and sustainable tourism progression. It further reinforces the indispensable role of educational programs and workshops in fostering equipped and adept young professionals for ecotourism careers.

Conclusion. Ecotourism stands as not merely a gateway for individuals to relish the splendors of nature and the richness of diverse cultures but also as a vessel for safeguarding these treasures for ensuing generations. The educational realm holds a pivotal role in nurturing both ecological and cultural cognizance and in grooming professionals adept at steering ecotourism initiatives with a firm adherence to sustainability tenets. The confluence of dedicated educational syllabi, hands-on training sessions, and synergies between academic entities and the ecotourism sector emerge as the fundamental pillars in steering this sector's growth.

Nevertheless, the pathway is marred with hurdles including restricted educational accessibility, deviations from established environmental norms, and a fragmented connection between academia and the industry. Addressing these issues demands concerted efforts and focused strategies.

The enthusiastic engagement of the younger generation, demonstrated vividly through their proactive role in environmental drives, paints a hopeful picture for a future where ecotourism is both sustainable and enlightened globally, and specifically in Kazakhstan.

Incorporating “Ecological Tourism” studies is instrumental in bolstering sustainable tourism habits, conserving the vibrant natural and cultural tapestries, catalyzing economic growth, and fostering collaborations and innovations across diverse scholarly domains. It empowers students with the skill set and knowledge to architect and direct sustainable tourism endeavors, championing the ethos of responsible tourism in Kazakhstan.

Moving forward, it is imperative to invest in sound education and personnel training, the linchpins in realizing this vision and in bequeathing a rich natural and cultural heritage to coming generations, thereby nurturing the roots of sustainable ecotourism growth. Deep diving into understanding and unraveling the intricate role of education and training in sustainable proliferation necessitates further explorative studies in the ecotourism educational sphere.

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