



Local Governance and Tourism Development in Northern Kazakhstan: Case of Akimats' Institutional Practices

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ABSTRACT

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This study assesses the impact of local government bodies, specifically Akimats, on the institutional environment for tourism development in Northern Kazakhstan. The main objective is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the institutional and organizational framework for tourism and recreation development in the region. The study applies a qualitative research design, including semi-structured interviews with 42 experts representing district Akimats and the Akimat of the city of Petropavlovsk, as well as analysis of strategic and program documents on tourism development. Expert assessments were processed using ranking procedures, and agreement among experts was measured using Kendall's coefficient of concordance. The results show a statistically significant level of agreement among experts regarding both strategic priorities and key challenges (Kendall's $W = 0.64$, $p < 0.01$; $W = 0.68$, $p < 0.01$). Among strategic directions, the highest-ranked measures include participation in tourism associations in Petropavlovsk (weight = 0.17–0.18), development of public-private partnerships (PPP) (weight = 0.18), and participation in tourism clusters (weight = 0.15). The most critical challenges are the insufficient availability of qualified tourism specialists (weight = 0.27), low level of tourist safety (weight = 0.23), and inadequate recreational infrastructure (weight = 0.18). The findings indicate that although institutional prerequisites for tourism development exist in most municipalities, the practical use of organizational mechanisms remains limited. Strengthening engagement in tourism associations, expanding PPP mechanisms, and fostering tourism cluster development are essential for improving regional tourism governance and sustainable sector growth.

1. INTRODUCTION

The components of the institutional and organizational environment for the functioning and development of tourism and recreation are institutions that directly or indirectly manage and influence the development of tourism and recreation at the regional level, as well as the organizational mechanism for the implementation of tourism and recreation policy [1, 2].

The institutions intended to promote tourism development at the regional level in Kazakhstan are local self-government bodies (Maslikhats) [1]. Thus, regional, district, and city Maslikhats approve local tourism development programs within the limits of their powers; determine local budget funds for financial support of local tourism development programs; entrust their executive bodies with financing local tourism development programs at the expense of local budget funds; take measures to stimulate business entities that carry out activities to provide tourist services [3], etc.

Directly responsible for the development and implementation of local tourism and recreation development

programs are the executive bodies of local government (Akimats).

Akimats (local executive government bodies in Kazakhstan responsible for regional administration and implementation of state policy), Maslikhats (local representative councils responsible for approving regional development programs and budgets), and public-private partnerships (PPP, cooperation mechanisms between government and private sector for infrastructure and service development) play a key role in regional tourism governance.

Within the limits of Akimats powers, the latter organizes an inventory of tourist resources and contributes to their protection and preservation. In local communities that see the tourism industry as one of the priority sectors of the development of the society's economy, special units may be created as part of the executive bodies of local government that oversee tourism and recreation issues.

The main role of local government bodies in the development of tourism and recreation on the ground is also due to their powers, which are not directly related to the field of tourism but have an impact both on the functioning of

business entities and on the popularity of the territory they manage as a tourist destination. We distinguish the following among them: establishing local taxes and fees, zoning the territory [4], and ensuring the development of housing and communal services and road facilities.

However, the most important aspect of Akimats' activities in the tourism and recreation development in the territory entrusted to them, in our opinion, is their interaction with business entities (enterprises, institutions, organizations), the activities of which are directly or indirectly related to the sphere of tourism and recreation, and residents to solve problems and determine priorities for tourism development.

The establishment of cooperation with business structures and the public takes place with the help of an organizational mechanism for the development of tourism and recreation. Its main elements are local strategies and programs for the development of tourism and recreation, membership in tourist associations, PPP agreements, and participation in a tourist cluster.

In this study, the term “Akimat” refers consistently to local executive authorities, while “tourism cluster” is used to describe a geographically and functionally connected network of tourism-related organizations and stakeholders. Capitalization is standardized throughout the manuscript.

The purpose of the article is to analyze the features and identify the problems of the institutional and organizational environment for the development of tourism and recreation in local communities today based on the example of the North Kazakhstan region.

To achieve the purpose of the study authors solving following research questions:

- 1) What role do local authorities (Akimats) play in the development of tourism in Northern Kazakhstan?
- 2) What roles do tourism associations, PPP mechanisms and tourism clusters play in local government contexts?
- 3) What inhibits tourism development at a municipal level?

The study's primary novelty lies in the fact that its findings go beyond general descriptions of Kazakhstan's tourism potential. It examines in detail the practical implementation of tourism policy at the local government level, focusing not only on the provisions of strategic documents but also on the actual measures undertaken by local administrations (Akimats).

Another key aspect of the work is a comprehensive analysis of three essential instruments: tourism associations, PPP projects, and tourism clusters. The effectiveness of their implementation was assessed through expert opinions and ranking, revealing actual disparities between the country's various districts.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Central Asia, which includes Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, is an area rich in cultural legacy, natural beauty, and historical significance. As a crossroads of civilizations on the old Silk Road, the region has unique prospects for tourism development, which can considerably contribute to the region's socioeconomic growth. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council's 2023 predictions, Travel & Tourism's direct contribution to GDP in the region is predicted to expand by 6.2% per year to USD 6.4 billion between 2023 and 2033. In Recent studies prove that the industrial and social consequences of tourism development are differentiated within the regions and tourist areas of

Kazakhstan [5], that is, on the scale of the local economy [6]. Studies convincingly show that tourism is one of the important areas of specialization of the regional economy of Kazakhstan [7] and therefore performs a function that activates the national economy of a certain territory [8]. Batyrbek et al. [9] highlighted in their studies that the possibilities and mediums of tourism in Kazakhstan are limitless. They highlighted the possibilities of exploring the role of traditional food in tourism which allows travelers to connect deeply culturally through food. Assylkhanova et al. [10] on the other hand, took a controversially innovative stance by suggesting that dark tourism which entails highlighting the significance of former gulags in Kazakhstan and converting them into historic tourist sites. New types of services are emerging that were previously in little demand in the region, for example, tourist accommodation, catering, development of transport, and recreation and entertainment facilities using products and means of industrial production for both tourists and the local community [3]. There is a development of investment activity [11]; new jobs are being created [12], revenues to local budgets from the service sector of tourist traffic, and the population is increasing [13, 14]. Consequently, the development of the tourism industry stimulates the development of regions unfavorable for industrial and agricultural production and reduces population migration [15, 16].

Several works are devoted to the activities of local government bodies in the field of tourism, among which publications can be mentioned [17, 18]. The work [19] emphasizes that since the 1990s, from the outdated sectoral approach, which interpreted rural territories exclusively as a spatial base for agricultural production [20], they have moved to the concept of multifunctional development [21]. According to this concept, rural territories should receive an additional impetus for the development of territories through the production of services, including tourist and recreational [22]. The studies [23] substantiate the possibility of creating an effective system of tourism management in Kazakhstan at the regional and local levels. Special attention is devoted to the issues of PPP in the field of tourism [23-25].

According to researchers, the main elements of the institutional-organizational mechanism for tourism and recreation development in local communities are local strategies and programs for tourism and recreation development (program documents) aimed at:

- Membership in tourism associations,
- PPP agreements,
- Participation in a tourism cluster.

However, in general, the issues of the features of the institutional and organizational environment of tourism development in the scientific literature have been studied fragmentarily [26-28].

The role of institutional frameworks and multilevel governance has become more central in the theoretical discussion of tourism development in recent decades. The success and sustainability of regional tourism development are largely dependent on institutional arrangements and efficient governance, according to theoretical models like Ritchie and Crouch's Destination Competitiveness Framework [29]. According to this model, the long-term competitiveness of tourist destinations is shaped by the interaction of institutional factors, such as legislation, policy coordination, stakeholder collaboration, and strategic planning, with socio-cultural and economic aspects.

Furthermore, decentralization and the transfer of authority to local authorities frequently lead to increased responsiveness to local tourism opportunities and challenges, according to Hall's model of governance in the tourism industry. In this sense, Kazakhstan's Akimats and Maslikhats, two types of local governance, reflect a larger global trend in which local governments play a key role in coordinating stakeholders, mobilizing resources, and fostering innovation in tourism policy. But institutional capacity which Healey defines as the sum of knowledge resources, relational capital resources, and political and cultural resources often determines successful implementation [30, 31]. Healey's theory depended on enhancing the ability of institutions to support sustainable tourism development by focusing on three major resources.

Another critical framework, tourism clusters, is based on Porter's cluster theory, which contends that economies of scale, innovation, and knowledge sharing enhance competitiveness in geographically concentrated groups of related companies and institutions. The sluggish development of tourism clusters in Kazakhstan is indicative of inadequate

financial resources, a lack of intentional policy support, and a lack of public-private collaboration. Research from Central Europe shows that the development of cluster-based tourism can stimulate peripheral rural economies when it is backed by EU funding and clever specialization strategies [32]. Issakov et al. [33] also expanded on the potential of tourism clusters in places like the Almaty agglomeration. They highlighted that mountain tourism clusters in that area will significantly contribute to sustainable development and boost the tourism industry.

To overcome siloed planning approaches, network governance frameworks could also be implemented in Northern Kazakhstan through increased involvement in local tourism councils, national tourism associations, and intermunicipal cooperation platforms. Incorporating these theoretical frameworks into the discussion of tourism governance in Kazakhstan can help to clarify institutional enablers and barriers and fully realize the region's tourism potential.

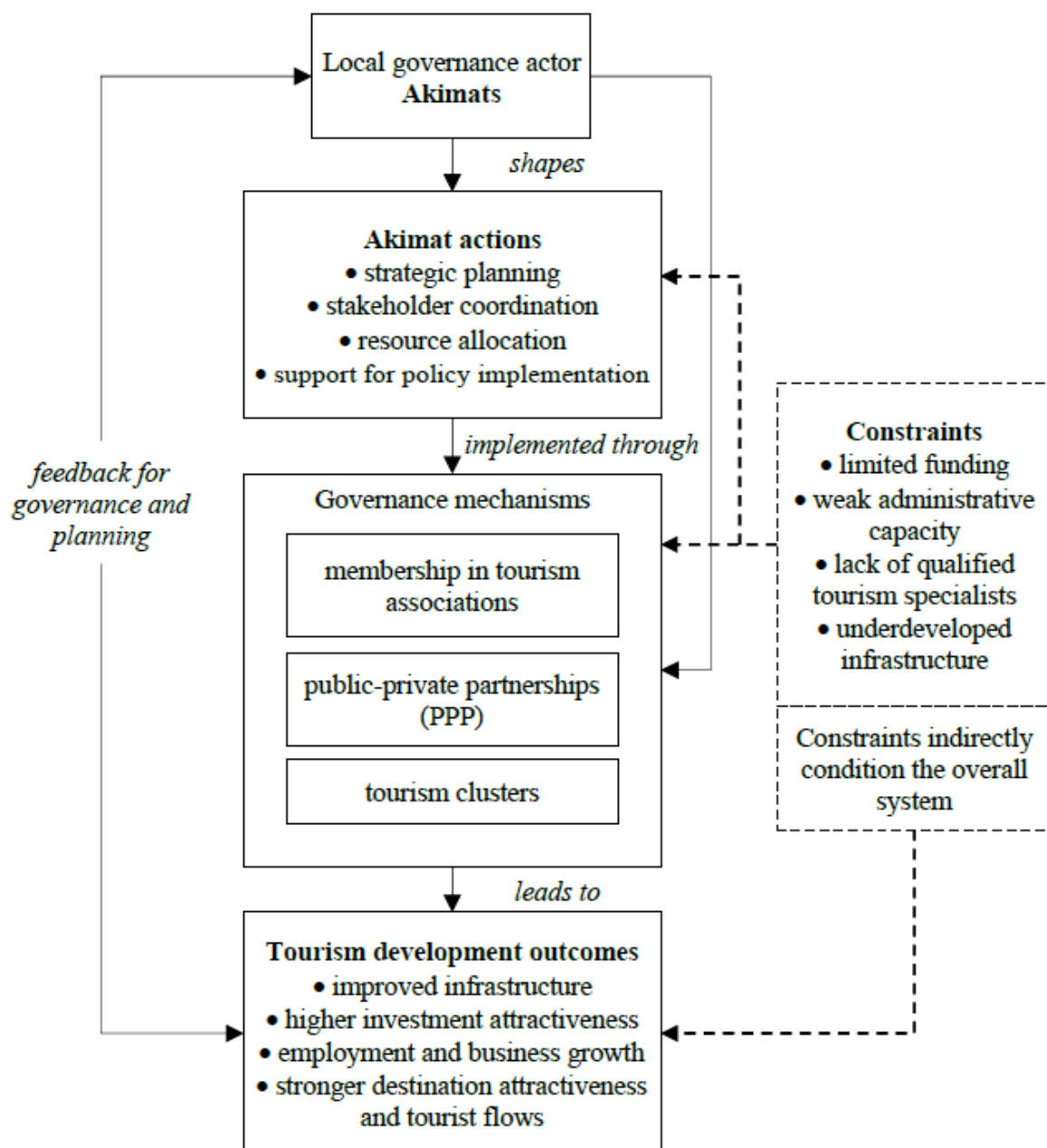


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of local governance in tourism development

To synthesize existing theoretical approaches and empirical data in the field of tourism management, we consolidated the findings into a unified analytical framework and identified several gaps. Although previous studies emphasize the role of institutional mechanisms, multi-level governance, and PPP in shaping tourism development outcomes, these aspects are often examined in isolation, lacking a clear interconnection at the local government level.

To address this gap, this study proposes a conceptual model linking the management actions of Akimats with tourism development mechanisms and their ultimate outcomes. The model also accounts for key constraints that hinder the effectiveness of these processes. The proposed model is presented in Figure 1.

Based on the proposed framework, tourism development in Northern Kazakhstan takes place in a linear, but somewhat limited, governance process. In addition to coordination, Akimats are essential to tourism policy development. The effectiveness of tourism development depends on the consistent use of governance instruments like tourism associations, public-private partnerships, and tourism clusters by Akimats. Ultimately, these mechanisms translate into concrete forms of development.

Moreover, the model makes clear that the process is not entirely linear. Structural and institutional obstacles like limited funding, weak administrative capacities, a lack of qualified experts, and weak infrastructure block the efficient use of governance tools. Consequently, the same policy tools have been found to have different effects in different municipalities.

Overall, the conceptual framework is useful for explaining the uneven development of tourism in the region despite all districts having formal institutional structures.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A qualitative approach to the study was chosen during the implementation of the study.

According to the purpose of the research, using the Google.com search engine, we selected the web pages of the district Akimats of the North Kazakhstan region and the Akimat of the city of regional significance Petropavlovsk. Based on the sample obtained, an expert pool was selected, consisting of employees of these Akimats responsible for the field of tourism.

The empirical material was obtained through expert interviews with representatives of local executive authorities (Akimats).

For example, respondents were asked questions such as:

- "How does your Akimat participate in tourism associations or cooperation platforms?",
- "What concrete PPP projects have been implemented in your municipality?",
- "Are there any functioning tourism clusters in your region, and how effective are they?",
- "What are the main infrastructural or institutional barriers that limit tourism development in your district?"

The interview responses were coded according to a coding frame, i.e., headings that indicated the governance mechanism or institutional barrier under which the statement was to be categorized. Similar statements were grouped into themes, allowing a municipality-to-municipality comparison.

In total, 42 experts participated in the study, representing

district Akimats of the North Kazakhstan region and the Akimat of the city of Petropavlovsk. The experts were selected using purposive sampling.

The main criteria for inclusion in the expert group were: formal responsibility for tourism or related areas within the structure of the Akimat; involvement in the development or implementation of local tourism and recreation programs; and practical experience of interaction with tourism businesses, public organizations, or regional authorities. Depending on the organizational structure of a particular Akimat, one to three specialists were interviewed.

They were sent e-mail messages indicating the purpose and program of the study. Thus, experts were selected who agreed to participate in the study and provide all the information necessary for the study.

The data were collected between November 25 and December 25, 2022, by conducting both field and desk research.

The field study consisted in analyzing the current situation with the development of tourism and recreation in the districts of the North Kazakhstan region and the city of Petropavlovsk and consisted of in-depth interviews with the experts. In-depth interviews were used to identify the problems of tourism and recreation development in the North Kazakhstan region. The main criteria for analysis were the presence in the tourism and recreation development program documents of areas such as: membership of tourism business entities in tourism associations, concluded PPP agreements, and participation in a tourism cluster.

The interviewer introduced himself at the beginning of the interview. They explained the purpose of the study and presented open-ended questions that were outlined by us to clarify views and opinions on the research problem. The average duration of each interview was 25–30 minutes. The received interview recordings were decrypted during the field study using the service zapisano.org.

The desk study was aimed at analyzing studies on the tourism potential of the North Kazakhstan region [34–37], as well as strategic and/or program documents approved by Akimats aimed at the development of tourism and recreation, provided by experts by e-mail.

The participation of several researchers made it possible to increase the reliability and quality of the information received regarding the state of the tourism sector in the territories of the North Kazakhstan region through the triangulation of researchers involved in information processing. The results agreed upon by all participants of the study were recorded in the final document.

To help ensure coding reliability, two researchers independently read through the data and classified it into these categories, discussing and coming to agreement on the classification to minimize subjectivity.

After processing the interview results, an email was sent to the experts, asking them to rank various strategic directions for tourism and recreation development, as well as the existing challenges in the municipal units of the North Kazakhstan region, assigning scores based on their representation. Following this, each measure was assigned a rank according to the scores given by the experts.

For a more objective data analysis, the degree of consensus among expert opinions was measured using Kendall's coefficient of concordance.

In the statistical analysis, n represents the number of experts ($n = 42$), while m corresponds to the number of ranked items,

which varies depending on the table structure. Ties in rankings were adjusted using standard tie correction procedures. All calculations were performed using SPSS and Microsoft Excel for cross-check validation. The level of significance was set at $p < 0.01$.

4. RESULTS

As the results of the study showed, strategic and/or program documents aimed specifically at the development of tourism and recreation were approved by the Akimats of the Petropavlovsk, Zhambyl, Kyzylzhar, Akkayyn, and Ayyrtau districts. In other Akimats that are the object of our research, measures for the development of tourism and recreation were indicated as one of the directions in the overall strategy of socio-economic development of the territory.

The analysis of the expert survey results reveals the

significance of strategic directions for tourism and recreation development in the municipal units of the North Kazakhstan region (Table 1).

The differences in rankings indicate that the identified strategic directions do not have the same practical role across municipalities. In this context, their “significance” reflects the extent to which these directions are actually applied in local governance, rather than their formal presence in planning documents. Higher weights are typical of territories where Akimats consistently use tourism as part of broader socio-economic development policy. Lower values, by contrast, suggest that tourism-related measures remain secondary and are implemented in a fragmented or episodic manner. This uneven pattern points to the need for targeted support and capacity building in districts with weaker institutional engagement, rather than the application of uniform tourism development measures across the region.

Table 1. Strategic directions for tourism and recreation development in the municipal units of the North Kazakhstan region

Municipal Unit	Membership in Tourism Associations		Public-Private Partnership Agreements (PPP)		Participation in a Tourism Cluster	
	rank	weight	rank	weight	rank	weight
City of Regional Significance	1	0.17	1	0.18	1	0.15
Petropavlovsk						
Ayyrtau District	9–10	0.03	10	0.04	8–9	0.06
Akzhar District	4–5	0.11	5–6	0.08	5	0.10
Akkayin District	7	0.07	8–9	0.05	6–7	0.08
Esil District	9–10	0.03	8–9	0.05	6–7	0.08
Magzhan Zhumabayev District	4–5	0.12	7	0.06	10	0.04
Kyzylzhar District	3	0.13	2	0.14	4	0.11
Mamlut District	11–12	0.02	12	0.02	8–9	0.06
Gabit Musrepov District	11–12	0.02	13	0.01	12–13	0.01
Tayinsha District	13	0.01	11	0.03	12–13	0.01
Timiryazev District	2	0.15	3	0.13	3	0.13
Ualikhanov District	8	0.04	4	0.13	2	0.14
Shal Akyn District	6	0.10	5–6	0.08	11	0.03

Note: Compiled based on the expert survey; the Kendall’s coefficient of concordance $W = 0.64$ ($p < 0.01$), indicating a strong consensus among expert opinions.

Table 2. Challenges in tourism and recreation development in the north Kazakhstan region

	Problems	Rank	Weight
Membership in Tourism Associations	Insufficient availability of highly qualified specialists in the tourism sector	1	0.27
	Low level of tourist safety	2	0.23
	Inadequate provision of recreational areas at tourist destinations	3	0.18
	Insufficient cultural and entertainment events	4	0.14
	Underdeveloped entertainment industry for various age groups of tourists, especially children	5	0.11
	Low level of destination promotion, lack of a brand identity, etc.	6	0.07
Public-Private Partnership Agreements (PPP)	Underdeveloped spaces for pedestrian and/or cyclist movement within the municipality	1	0.26
	Poor road quality within the area	2	0.20
	Drinking water quality from centralized water systems not meeting established standards	3	0.17
	Insufficient number of specially equipped parking spaces	4	0.16
	Lack of organized waste collection and disposal sites	5	0.13
	Unsatisfactory water supply and sewage infrastructure in residential buildings	6	0.08
Participation in a Tourism Cluster	Insufficient investment in tourism, including cultural and historical heritage sites	1	0.25
	Low quality of tourism, recreational, and wellness services	2	0.22
	Outdated facilities and equipment at recreation and wellness centers	3	0.16
	Lack of optimal transportation links to nearby tourist destinations	4	0.14
	Infrastructure unsuitable for people with special needs	5	0.11
	Poor condition of parks, beaches, historical monuments, etc.	6	0.07
	Absence of a marketing strategy for destination development	7	0.05

Note: Compiled based on the expert survey; Kendall’s coefficient of concordance $W = 0.68$ ($p < 0.01$), indicating a strong consensus among expert opinions.

The analysis of the expert survey results also reveals organizational issues associated with the strategic directions of

tourism and recreation development in the municipal units of the North Kazakhstan region. These issues hinder the growth

and functioning of the tourism and recreation sector, obstruct the effective use of local tourism resources, and do not support the desired increase in tourist flows (Table 2).

Finally, we also see that the categories with the highest weights in the first segment (PPP and tourism cluster) also represent structural problems: infrastructure issues (such as the condition of roads, the state of pedestrian and cycling paths and shortcomings in utility services) that affect investors and tourists alike, placing them high on the agenda. This does not mean that branding and marketing are not important, but rather that local politicians prefer to focus on concrete investments in infrastructure and institutions, rather than the symbolic components of these investments. Thus, the study suggests that local tourism development be a two-stage process, focusing first on improving the area in terms of infrastructure and institutions, and then on destination marketing and clusters.

5. DISCUSSION

The analysis of the main strategic directions for tourism and recreation development in the municipal units of the North Kazakhstan region (Table 1) showed that these directions are most effectively implemented in Petropavlovsk, Timiryazev, and Kyzylzhar districts. In contrast, Magzhan Zhumabayev and Tayinsha districts demonstrate the lowest levels of tourism and recreation development. Although limited in scope, some regional policy discussions and secondary sources indicate that tourism development in these districts requires stronger public-private cooperation and improved infrastructure. Infrastructural development such as transportation, accommodation and daily utilities are essential. There is also a need to develop cultural assets such as eco- and agrotourism and in line with the current digital age, its imperative that tourist bodies utilize mobile applications and social media platforms to increase their digital presence.

The challenges that Akimats need to address to improve the tourism sector in the North Kazakhstan region (Table 2) can be broadly categorized as follows:

1. Those directly related to membership in tourism associations;
2. Those dependent on the establishment of PPP agreements, which indirectly impact the tourism industry;
3. Those that hinder participation in a tourism cluster.

The first group includes: poorly developed offer of excursions on the territory; issues of safety of tourists and recreants (including on the water and in the mountains) have not been resolved; poorly developed infrastructure for active recreation (bicycle, motorcycle, car rental, sports entertainment, etc.); lack of tour operators and travel agents, which negatively affects the formation of the tourist brand of the territory and leads to the loss of potential consumers of tourist services; insufficient number of equipped facilities for recreation and entertainment (beaches, amusement parks, squares), low quality of tourism, recreational, wellness services, and etc. In order to address the first issue, it is important that we understand the perspective of the Akimats. The development of tourism is commonly viewed by Akimats as secondary to core mandates like infrastructure and public service delivery. This thinking pattern was also confirmed by the study [38], who identified this as a hindrance to sustainable tourism development in India. Stronger alignment of local development objectives with the potential of the tourism sector

is necessary to change this mindset. A national policy that acknowledges active participation in PPPs and tourism associations as performance indicators for Akimats should be formalized by the Ministry of Culture and Sports in collaboration with the Kazakhstan Tourism Association (KTA). An example of such would be a top-down incentive which includes tourism cluster engagement in the yearly performance reviews of local administrators. Another method of encouraging participation of the Akimats will be Fiscal decentralization. Investments in tourism are frequently deprioritized in Akimats, which currently operate under strict financial constraints. Local governments could be given the authority to test out cluster formations and PPP proposals by giving Akimats discretionary funds linked to tourism-related targets, which are comparable to performance-based budgeting models in EU rural development programs. Additionally, allowing communities to keep a larger portion of tourism-related income would directly encourage financial support for the industry [39].

The following is worth highlighting among the main problems of the second group: the lack of pedestrian and bicycle paths [40]; the lack of organized places for collecting and removing garbage; insufficient number of organized places for parking vehicles; poor condition of the road surface; deficiencies in water supply and sanitation infrastructure; unsatisfactory water quality, etc. [41].

The issues in the third group include the absence of a marketing strategy for destination development, poor quality of roads leading to the tourist destination. It is also advisable to point out another significant drawback in the organization of tourism and recreation for participation in a tourism cluster – the unsuitability of infrastructure for people with special needs. Although the Akimats of the studied communities do not indicate this problem in the list along with other unresolved issues in the program documents, in some tourist destinations (Petropavlovsk), they already allocate funds from the local budget for the formation of infrastructure suitable for people with special needs.

These problems have been described in other studies. Thus, according to the study [7], the main problems for foreign visitors are the low level of service in catering and retail establishments, public transport, and taxis; unsatisfactory condition of roads; pollution of public places; difficulties with renting housing; underdevelopment of the entertainment industry for children; unreasonably high prices that do not correspond to the quality of services provided.

Similar shortcomings are also indicated in the study [3], according to which the problems are: insufficient development of the sanatorium and resort infrastructure, which does not meet the modern needs of recreants; poor quality of services and low level of service for tourists and recreants; unsuitability of accommodation facilities and public institutions for visiting people with special needs; inadequate popularization, etc.

The development and popularization of the territory as a tourist destination, especially among national tourists, is facilitated by the participation of the local community (represented by the Akimat) in all-Kazakhstan tourist organizations and associations, the main of which is the KTA. The purpose of its activity is the comprehensive development of the national tourism industry in the state, as well as the coordination and consolidation of the activities of its participants for the development of the national market of tourism and related services and to protect their economic interests. The following can be distinguished among the

activities of the KTA: the unification of the efforts of tourism infrastructure entities and authorities and local government; the creation and promotion of a national tourism product; support of knowledge systems, education, and training in the field of tourism; development of quality systems, audit, and certification in the tourism industry, etc. [13]. One of the main means of implementing activities in these areas is the promotion of regional and local tourism products and assistance in establishing effective interaction between the state, local government, non-profit organizations, and entrepreneurs in the field of tourism [13].

However, the analysis of the current participants of the KTA showed low activity in its activities of both local government bodies and regional and local organizations of the tourist destination of the North Kazakhstan region. None of the studied Akimats are members of the KTA. This can be considered a significant disadvantage in the direction of tourism and recreation development in the North Kazakhstan region.

Participation from the local community is essential through digital storytelling projects that highlight lesser-known districts, seasonal festivals, and micro grants for family-run tourism enterprises. By incorporating social media marketing both officially and through collaborations with private indigenous bloggers participation of both local and foreign communities can be bolstered [42]. Furthermore, establishing intermunicipal tourism corridors like themed routes could disperse visitor flows and unite various communities under a common identity, which would promote a cluster mindset.

Lastly, administrative silos can be broken down by digital platforms. In order to promote openness and healthy competition, a regional "Tourism Governance Dashboard" that is available to all Akimats could monitor developments on important metrics, such as association membership, the quantity of PPPs, investment inflows, etc.

The next tourist organization we are considering (according to the participation of Akimats in it) is the National Association of Ecological Tourism "Elim-ai" (NAET). The NAET directs its activities to popularize and develop nature-friendly active recreation and ecotourism by bringing together all entities interested in the development of active ecotourism: business structures, public organizations, individuals, local government, and state authorities [13]. The main objectives of the functioning of the NAET are to promote the sustainable development of tourist territories and local communities, the development of natural tourism in Kazakhstan, the protection of biodiversity together with national parks, government agencies, and the business community, assistance in staffing and development of tourist infrastructure, conservation and rational use of natural and historical and cultural tourist resources, etc. The NAET participants include natural monuments of the North Kazakhstan region (Kokshetau, Serebryany Bor, Zhana Zhol Bor, Sosnovy Bor, etc.). However, as in the previous case, there are no representatives of Akimats among the members.

One of the elements of the organizational mechanism for the development of tourism and recreation in local communities is a PPP. Public authorities, local government bodies, and state and municipal enterprises and institutions can be participants in PPP on the part of the state. On the part of the private partner, the most interested participants in the PPP should be enterprises and organizations in the field of tourism and recreation: tour operators, travel agents, accommodation facilities, catering establishments, carrier companies, tour

bureaus, event companies, etc.

The main forms of PPP implementation in Kazakhstan are agreements on joint activities, concessions, and leases. Concession and lease agreements are the most beneficial for the state partner, since in this case the main burden of conducting activities, making investments, and taking risks is borne by the private partner, and the ownership of the object of the contract remains with the state partner.

The analysis of PPP in the North Kazakhstan region indicates a low interest of business entities (private partners) in the opportunity to realize their potential in the field of tourism and recreation. The main reasons are the unattractiveness of a significant part of the tourist infrastructure facilities for private partners due to the need to invest significant financial resources in them with an indefinite payback period for the project; the lack of a legally enshrined minimum share of financial participation in the project of a private partner; poor professional training of employees of Akimats engaged in the preparation and support of PPP; lack of effective financial incentives for private partners (for example, tax holidays in the first years of the project) for participation in PPP.

To overcome the barriers to PPP incorporations, Kazakhstan should implement a PPP Risk-Sharing Framework, based on effective procedures in Poland, to get past the obstacles and difficulties with PPP and to foster community development [43, 44]. This would entail lowering barriers to entry for private investors by establishing Project Development Facilities (PDFs) at the oblast level to co-finance feasibility studies. Introducing pre-approved PPP templates, especially for standardized facilities like visitor centers or rest areas, to speed up implementation and cut down on negotiation time; and offering credit guarantees or minimum revenue guarantees to de-risk tourism PPPs in their early stages.

Additionally, Akimat staff members need to have access to professional development courses that concentrate on the managerial, financial, and legal facets of PPPs. Similar capacity-building initiatives in Central Asia have previously been funded by international donors, and these collaborations ought to be revived.

Another direction for the development of the territory as a tourist destination may be the formation of a tourist cluster within its borders or together with similar territories of the region that have tourist resources on their territories [45].

The tourism cluster is formed based on a voluntary association of tourism infrastructure entities to increase the competitiveness of their products and the attractiveness of the tourist destination and the region as a whole through their cooperation with local governments and scientific institutions. A characteristic feature of the functioning of clusters is that cluster entities cooperate vertically (for example, accommodation institutions work closely with travel agencies, catering establishments, entertainment centers, etc.) to achieve the goals of their activities while competing horizontally with each other (for example, with other accommodation institutions) [46].

The creation and functioning of a tourism cluster in Kazakhstan depend on the initiative and steps taken in this direction by Akimats since the latter are one of the most interested parties in the functioning of the cluster association on the territory. After all, the tourist cluster contributes to an increase in revenues to the local budget through the expansion of the tax base (primarily for local taxes and fees); increases the investment attractiveness of the territory [47], which

positively affects the growth of investor interest in making investments within the community; employment growth and wage increases due to the emergence of new and expansion of existing business structures; development on the territory of related sectors of the economy [48]. That is why Akimats, first of all, should focus not on supporting individual business entities (even the largest taxpayers to the local budget), but on promoting the organization of industry clusters and maintaining good relations and competition within the cluster.

A retrospective analysis showed that the cluster initiatives of Akimats are weak in the territories that are the object of our study. Evidence of this is the absence of intentions to create a tourism cluster in the strategic and program documents for the development of tourism and recreation, developed by the majority of Akimats.

The analysis of the opportunities for the development of tourist clusters in the North Kazakhstan region allowed drawing the following conclusions:

- almost all areas have opportunities for the formation of a tourist cluster, even those in which there are no clearly defined tourist resources (for example, it is possible to create agro-tourism clusters);
- mainly tourist clusters should be built according to the classical structure, which includes all subjects of tourism infrastructure, as well as Akimats and educational institutions;
- the absence of parties in the cluster that provide support and assistance hinders the development of the tourism cluster;
- financial support from Akimats to popularize the tourism cluster at the start of its development is one of the prerequisites for the success of the cluster;
- the active activity of the tourism cluster allows Akimats to solve the problems of the local community (increasing employment, filling the local budget, improving infrastructure, increasing investment attractiveness, etc.).

The creation of Regional Tourism Cluster Councils (RTCCs), which are financed in part by the private sector and regional/oblast governments, is an additional remedy. To promote shared ownership, these councils should have a rotating leadership and include representatives from Akimats, tourism SMEs, NGOs, and universities. They would be responsible for mapping local value chains and finding synergies, such as connecting ecotourism to agrotourism and other forms of tourism. By applying for international grants and certifications (such as Green Destinations) and coordinating marketing strategies and destination branding, regional tourism can be easily funded and promoted. A good example of such application is the South Tyrol Tourism Cluster in Italy which unites through shared marketing, quality certifications, and cooperative infrastructure projects, and it operates across multilingual, multimunicipality regions.

6. CONCLUSION

The development of tourism is of great importance both for the local community and for tourists. Tourism provides an opportunity to receive additional income for territorial development, improve the infrastructure of the territory, preserve historical and cultural heritage, and ensure the personal development of the local population.

The analysis of the institutional and organizational environment of the development and functioning of tourism and recreation suggests that most of the studied territories have the institutional support necessary for the development of

tourism. However, local government bodies are poorly using all the possibilities of the organizational mechanism for the development of tourism and recreation, namely: participation in tourist associations, which would promote the popularization and development of the territory as a tourist destination; conclusion of PPP agreements, which would make it possible to improve the state of local tourist resources; formation of tourist clusters that would combine efforts all subjects of tourism infrastructure both on the territory itself and with economic entities of neighboring territories.

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