CONDITIONS AND DETERMINANTS FOR THE FORMATION OF TOURISM SERVICE CLUSTERS: INTERNATIONAL INSIGHTS AND REGIONAL APPLICATIONS

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Abstract. This article explores the key conditions and determinants for forming tourism service clusters, drawing on international experiences and examining their applicability in regional contexts. It highlights critical factors influencing cluster formation, including infrastructure, stakeholder collaboration, policy frameworks, innovation, and digital technologies. Comparative analysis of global case studies demonstrates how effective cluster strategies enhance service efficiency, competitiveness, and sustainable regional development. The study also discusses the potential adaptation of these approaches to emerging tourism markets, providing recommendations for policymakers and industry stakeholders to optimize cluster formation and socio-economic outcomes.

Keywords: Tourism clusters, cluster formation, service sector, regional development, international best practices, policy frameworks, innovation, ICT in tourism

Introduction. Tourism has become one of the fastest-growing sectors of the global economy, contributing significantly to employment, income generation, and regional development. The formation of tourism service clusters—geographically concentrated networks of interconnected tourism enterprises, service providers, infrastructure entities, and public and private institutions—has been recognized as a strategic approach to enhance competitiveness, efficiency, and innovation within the sector. International experiences demonstrate that well-organized tourism clusters can facilitate knowledge sharing, optimize resource utilization, and improve coordination among stakeholders, thereby fostering sustainable tourism growth. Factors such as adequate infrastructure, supportive policy frameworks, stakeholder collaboration, access to financing, and the integration of digital technologies are essential conditions for successful cluster formation. Despite the growing attention to tourism clusters worldwide, the adaptation of international best practices to regional and emerging tourism markets remains a critical challenge. Understanding the determinants of cluster formation and the conditions that support their development is vital for policymakers, tourism authorities, and industry participants aiming to improve service quality, attract investment, and enhance socio-economic outcomes. This study aims to examine the key conditions and determinants for establishing tourism service clusters by analyzing international case studies and exploring their potential application in regional contexts. It provides insights into how effective cluster strategies can be designed and implemented to strengthen tourism destinations, promote regional competitiveness, and ensure sustainable development of the tourism sector.
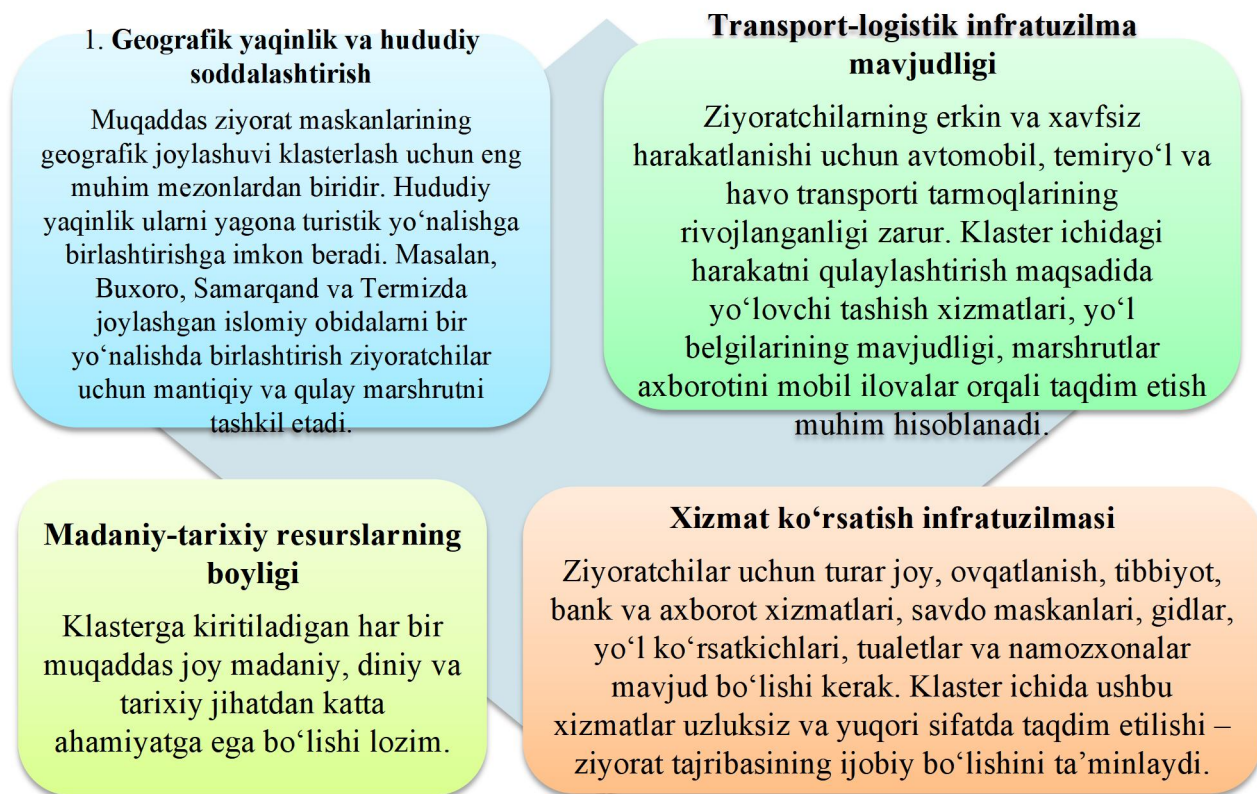
Literature Review. The concept of tourism clusters has received growing attention in academic literature as a means to enhance regional competitiveness and efficiency in the tourism sector. Porter (1998) defines clusters as geographically concentrated networks of interconnected firms and institutions that improve productivity, innovation, and collaboration. Applied to tourism, clusters encompass hotels, transport providers, restaurants, cultural and recreational services, and public institutions working together to create a cohesive tourism ecosystem. Leiper (1990) proposed a systematic model of tourism destinations, emphasizing the integration of

generating regions, transit areas, and destinations, with service providers forming critical elements of the overall tourism system. This approach highlights the importance of coordinated infrastructure and stakeholder engagement in cluster formation. Similarly, Morozov (2009) introduced a geographic approach to identifying tourism clusters, using "cartographic taxonomy" to map regional resources and evaluate logistical and economic potential. Buhalis (2000) developed the 6A model-Attractions, Accessibility, Amenities, Available packages, Activities, Ancillary services-as a framework to evaluate destination competitiveness. The model has been widely applied in countries such as the UK, Australia, and Malaysia to assess the effectiveness of tourism clusters. More recently, Buhalis and Amaranggana (2015) and Gretzel et al. (2015) emphasized the role of digital technologies in cluster efficiency, including cloud computing, Big Data, artificial intelligence (AI), and the Internet of Things (IoT). These tools support smart tourism destinations, enabling real-time service personalization and management of large tourist flows. International organizations, including the UNWTO (2021) and OECD (2020), highlight tourism clusters as a key strategy for regional development, economic growth, and employment creation. Studies in emerging markets, such as Yoqubov (2021) and Muxitdinov (2023), underline the potential benefits of adopting international best practices while adapting them to local socio-economic and cultural contexts. These studies stress that successful cluster formation depends not only on physical infrastructure but also on policy frameworks, investment incentives, stakeholder collaboration, and technological integration. In summary, the literature emphasizes that the formation of tourism clusters requires a combination of structural, institutional, and technological conditions. Integrating international insights with local capabilities is essential for fostering competitive, sustainable, and resilient tourism destinations.

Research Methodology. This study employs a qualitative and comparative approach to examine the conditions and determinants for forming tourism service clusters. Data were collected from international case studies, academic publications, and reports by organizations such as the UNWTO and OECD. The analysis focuses on key factors influencing cluster formation, including infrastructure, stakeholder collaboration, policy frameworks, innovation, and digital technology integration. Comparative evaluation allows identification of best practices and assessment of their applicability to regional tourism markets, providing practical recommendations for effective cluster development.

Result and analysis. The current traditional methods and tools for developing tourism service clusters in Uzbekistan are not fully utilized to meet the country's growing development needs. These methods include transforming major sacred sites into attractive visitation destinations, addressing the diverse demands and needs of different visitor segments, improving the quality of ethical tourism services, organizing tourism activities efficiently and cost-effectively, applying public-private partnership approaches in cluster organization, enhancing the innovation and investment activity of visitor tourism, and developing digital tourism service clusters. Despite their wide-ranging and effective potential, these strategies are not yet fully implemented to establish and advance a modern, competitive tourism sector in Uzbekistan. To address these shortcomings, it is advisable to adopt internationally tested cluster mechanisms that are capable of organizing service sectors regionally and effectively. Such mechanisms can significantly contribute to the development of tourism service clusters in the country. Within the cluster approach, it is essential to study the conditions for clustering sacred sites to develop tourism service clusters effectively. By "sacred site clustering," we mean the process of forming visitation clusters based on these sacred locations. In our view, the following conditions should be met to establish visitation clusters around sacred sites. First, the sacredness scope of the site. The "scope of sacredness" refers to the regional significance of the site as a place of worship, as well as the number of visitors it attracts for religious belief and prayer. The broader this scope,

the more likely it is to draw visitors from multiple regions, making it a strong foundation for the formation of tourism clusters.

1. Geografik yaqinlik va hududiy soddalashtirish

Muqaddas ziyorat maskanlarining geografik joylashuvi klasterlash uchun eng muhim mezonlardan biridir. Hududiy yaqinlik ularni yagona turistik yo'nalishga birlashtirishga imkon beradi. Masalan, Buxoro, Samarqand va Termizda joylashgan islomiy obidalarni bir yo'nalishda birlashtirish ziyoratchilar uchun mantiqiy va qulay marshrutni tashkil etadi.

Transport-logistik infratuzilma mavjudligi

Ziyoratchilarning erkin va xavfsiz harakatlanishi uchun avtomobil, temiryo'l va havo transporti tarmoqlarining rivojlanganligi zarur. Klaster ichidagi harakatni qulaylashtirish maqsadida yo'lovchi tashish xizmatlari, yo'l belgilarining mavjudligi, marshrutlar axborotini mobil ilovalar orqali taqdim etish muhim hisoblanadi.

Madaniy-tarixiy resurslarning boyligi

Klasterga kiritiladigan har bir muqaddas joy madaniy, diniy va tarixiy jihatdan katta ahamiyatga ega bo'lishi lozim.

Xizmat ko'rsatish infratuzilmasi

Ziyoratchilar uchun turar joy, ovqatlanish, tibbiyot, bank va axborot xizmatlari, savdo maskanlari, gidlar, yo'l ko'rsatkichlari, tualetlar va namozxonalar mavjud bo'lishi kerak. Klaster ichida ushbu xizmatlar uzluksiz va yuqori sifatda taqdim etilishi – ziyorat tajribasining ijobiy bo'lishini ta'minlaydi.

Figure 2.1.1: Organizational Structure of Conditions for Clustering the Tourism Services Sector

The flow of visitors increases significantly as the cluster-forming potential of a site rises. For example, a simple cemetery may be considered a sacred site only for the few descendants of the deceased, who usually visit it on Fridays, religious holidays, or other special occasions. In contrast, the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) tombs in the Nabawi Mosque in Medina, Saudi Arabia, are regarded as sacred by Muslims worldwide. For over 1,400 years, hundreds of thousands of people visit it daily, with millions attending during peak seasons. Therefore, one of the critical conditions for establishing visitation clusters, similar to other types of clusters, is often directly related to the geographic proximity of the unifying organizations and the existence of close connections among them. High visitor flow and strong interconnections between organizations significantly enhance the potential for successful cluster formation. Therefore, another important condition for forming visitation clusters, similar to other tourism sector clusters, is transforming sacred sites into attractive tourism destinations with adequate economic, transport, and other facilities for visitor access. These destinations constitute the core objects of tourism service clusters. The harmonious development of both domestic and international visitation generates diverse visitor demands and needs, which in turn shapes the supply system of tourism service clusters. By aligning the services offered with visitor expectations, the cluster can provide a comprehensive, well-organized, and sustainable tourism experience. The organic structure of a cluster can be organized based on the main criteria that define cluster formation. In essence, a tourism service cluster represents a "localized production (service) system defined by both territorial and network characteristics." Based on this definition, it is appropriate to distinguish two primary criteria for cluster formation. The first criterion is the territorial affiliation of the cluster, and the second is the linkage of service-providing entities within the cluster through a value-added chain. In the case of visitation tourism clusters, territorial

affiliation is directly related to sacred sites, as the geographic aspect of clusters is particularly significant in the creation and development of tourism service clusters. Before embarking on a visit, tourists first determine their "visitation area" or "tourist destination" based on their travel purpose and then undertake the journey itself. As N.V. Rubsova rightly notes, "The boundaries and roles of a tourist destination determine the geographic concentration of tourism sector clusters." In this context, the visitation site designed to achieve the purpose of the tourist trip can be considered the foundation of the core of visitation clusters. The value-added aspect of visitation clusters reflects the economic cooperation among primary and ancillary organizations providing tourism services, as well as the resulting economic benefits. Specifically, it involves the integration of tourism service providers within a single geographic territory into a coherent value-added chain. In tourism sector clusters, the value accumulation system typically consists of four main chains:

Supply value-added chain – transport and communication companies;

Accommodation and entertainment chain – hotels, resorts, cultural and recreational facilities;

Tourism product distribution chain – tour operators and travel agents;

Tourist chain – the visitors themselves.

Regarding the institutional conditions for establishing cluster initiatives, the following factors are critical:

The priority project "Ensuring the Quality of Tourism Services (2021–2030)" aimed at improving the quality of tourism services;

The presence of key enterprises interested in mutually beneficial cooperation in the formation and development of the cluster;

The availability and participation of cluster members;

The involvement of local government authorities in fostering collaboration between participants and business representatives, thereby supporting cluster creation and contributing to self-managed economic development at the regional level. The cluster object represents the tourism entities, reflecting the interests of cluster participants. This structure enhances the quality of tourism services and generates a synergistic effect for all stakeholders involved. Based on the stages of cluster creation in the tourism sector, different levels of cluster development have been identified, corresponding to the degree of integration, coordination, and cooperation among tourism entities within the cluster.

Conclusion. Tourism service clusters play a critical role in enhancing the efficiency, quality, and competitiveness of the tourism sector. The formation of these clusters depends on several key conditions, including the geographic significance of tourism sites, visitor demand patterns, the integration of service-providing entities through value-added chains, infrastructure availability, stakeholder cooperation, and the application of digital and smart technologies. International experiences demonstrate that well-organized tourism clusters improve resource utilization, stimulate innovation and investment, and generate socio-economic benefits for the surrounding regions. In the context of Uzbekistan, adapting these proven cluster mechanisms to local cultural, economic, and geographic realities can significantly enhance the development of visitation tourism destinations, elevate service quality, and foster sustainable regional growth. Effective tourism clusters require the alignment of institutional, economic, and technological factors, alongside active participation from both private and public stakeholders. By strategically planning and implementing cluster-based approaches, tourism destinations can achieve long-

term competitiveness, satisfy diverse visitor needs, and contribute meaningfully to the country's overall socio-economic development.

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