

# Assessment of prospects for developing the tourism industry in the Republic of Kalmykia

**Danara B. Erendzhenova** (0000-0002-8539-9027)<sup>1(1)</sup>, **Natalya B. Berikova** (0000-0003-2882-2084)<sup>1</sup>, **Ekaterina S. Kovanova** (0000-0002-4269-3795)<sup>1</sup>, **Delgir V. Mandzhieva** (0000-0001-5578-1201)<sup>1</sup>, **Galina D. Khulkhachieva** (0000-0002-1745-6499)<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kalmyk State University named after B.B. Gorodovikov, Elista, Russia

**Abstract.** In the context of limited budgetary resources of the regional authorities, it is advisable to search for new opportunities to form the tourist attractiveness of the territories. The need to involve the local social environment in managerial-decision making for tourism development actualizes research on the motivation and readiness of the local community to interact with authorities in tourism. The research purpose is to determine the priorities for the development of the tourism industry in the region through identifying the position of local residents. The research method is a questionnaire survey of the population of a regional entity the Republic of Kalmykia. The findings demonstrate the confidence of the majority of respondents in the possibility of positioning tourism as one of the priority sectors of the region's economy. According to the respondents, the key tools for tourism development are the formation of a project for the integral development of the tourist and recreational potential of the region and its financing from the state and regional budgets, as well as the introduction of digital end-to-end technologies in this area. The respondents' support for the thesis about the need to involve local residents in the formation of the tourist attractiveness of the territory can be considered as a potential opportunity for a wider use of social resources of local communities and internal territorial development sources). In the respondents' opinion, tourism development tools are associated with traditional practices that require financial investments in the creation of tourism infrastructure, objects of tourist attraction.

**Keywords:** Population · Region · Socio-economic development · Tourism · Tourist attractiveness · Tourist product.

## 1. Introduction

In the difficult socio-economic conditions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the prospects for developing the tourism industry are in the focus of state authorities and researchers looking for new benchmarks for increasing the tourist attractiveness of regional entities (Ibrahim et al., 2021; Kolodeznikova et al., 2017). This is due to the fact that the tourism industry contributes to the achievement of a synergistic effect to improve the quality of life of the population (Kvashnina, 2012), ensuring the socio-economic development of the territory (Aleksandrova, 2018; Fedotov, 2021).

Modern scientific works contain a significant number of works devoted to the study of economic effects of the tourism industry development, including a description of the tourism potential of the

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<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author: [uralan-danara@yandex.ru](mailto:uralan-danara@yandex.ru)

territory, mechanisms for increasing the competitiveness of individual tourist sites (Wessels and Douglas, 2021; Yudina and Grigoryan, 2019; Ruziev, 2018). But at the same time, the assessment by the population of tourism development processes in their region, including the consequences and benefits of attracting tourists, was not given sufficient emphasis. The research purpose is to determine the prospects for developing tourism in the Republic of Kalmykia based on an analysis of the opinions and assessments of local residents.

Research hypothesis: insufficient financial security of regional and local budgets, the presence of economic and social problems become factors that determine the orientation of the population to support the practices of forming the territory's tourist attractiveness. This is due to the perceived need for the socio-economic development of the region, where the tourism industry plays the role of the economic basis for developing the regional entity.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The theoretical basis of this article included the provisions and conclusions made in the works on the issues of tourism development. In certain works, the emphasis is on identifying the features of development of tourism infrastructure (Morozov and Morozova, 2021), cultural and historical heritage sites (Ruziev, 2018), natural resources as conditions for the formation of a tourism product in the region (Saryan, 2021; Fedorova et al., 2020).

An important role in this context is played by the inclusion of local residents in tourism development practices (Rogach and Frolova, 2020; Lysikova, 2011; Rodriguez-Giron and Vanneste, 2019), which can provide sincerity, emotionality, authenticity, support and direct participation (Ng and Chan, 2020; Pearce and Wu, 2015).

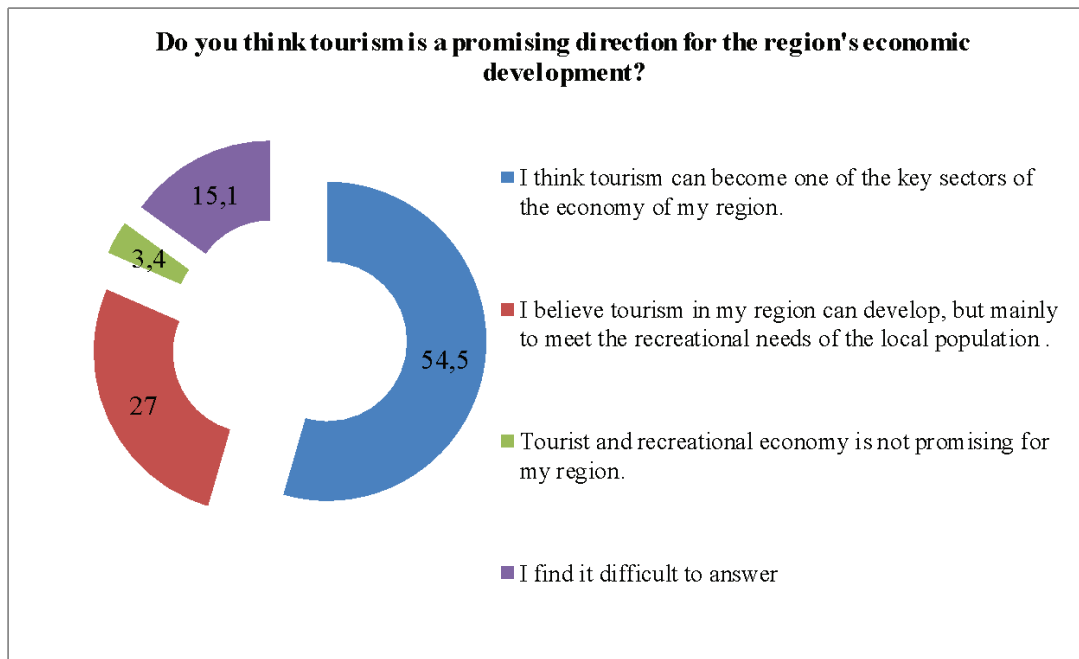
The conclusions made in the works of foreign experts direct the attention of domestic researchers to the internal resources for tourism development indicate the need to take into account the position of local residents when choosing a development path of the region.

This study presents the results of an analysis of the population's assessment of prospects for tourism development in the Republic of Kalmykia. The study was conducted in 2021. The final sample was 428 people. The uneven distribution of respondents by age can be considered as a certain limitation of the study, which, however, does not reduce the level of reliability and completeness of the empirical data obtained. It should be noted that 83.2% of the respondents live in cities and 16.8% of the respondents live in rural areas.

The authors used general scientific research methods and analytical procedures: generalization, description, systematization, document analysis, comparative and correlation analysis. A questionnaire survey was used as a priority research method. The link to the questionnaire is posted on the website of the educational and practical laboratory "Science, Education and Practice Integration Territory", the survey was implemented as part of the study "Tourism development in the region", conducted as an event of the project of one of the priority scientific areas in Kalmyk State University "Development and creation of a modern monitoring system, assessment and analysis of trends in the socio-economic development of the region".

## 3. Results

According to the results obtained, more than half of the respondents believe that tourism can become one of the key sectors of the region's economy, another 27% answered that the industry can develop, but mainly to meet the recreational needs of the local population. This distribution of answers allows making a conclusion that the development of the tourism industry in Kalmykia is promising. Moreover, increased optimism in this case was shown by young people (under the age of 35) and, especially, residents of those settlements where tourism is already actively developing (the city of Elista, Tselinny district). Pessimism about the prospects for tourism development is associated with doubts that Kalmykia might be interesting to visit; the idea of the tourist and recreational sector as a non-traditional industry for this territory (Table 1).



**Fig. 1.** Distribution of answers to the question “Do you think tourism is a promising sector of Kalmykia’s economy”, %. *Source:* Compiled by the authors.

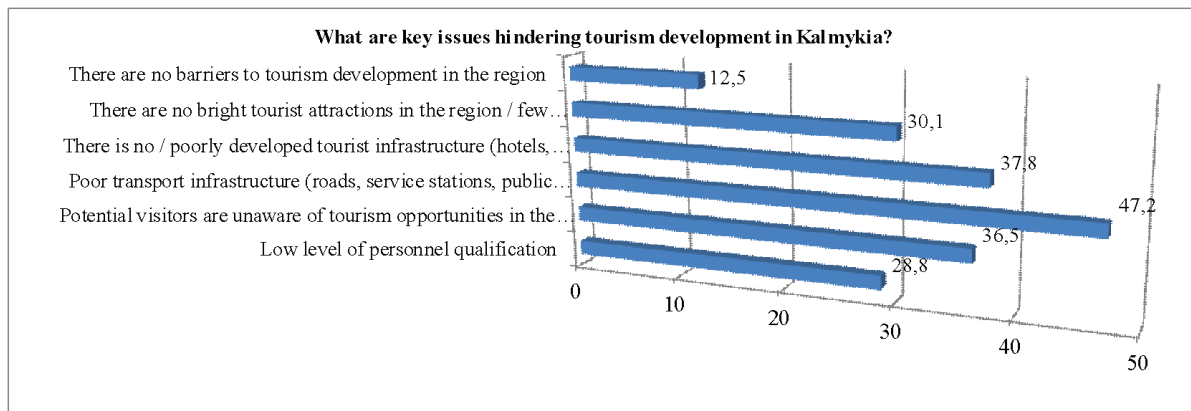
Due to the presence of a high proportion of respondents who positively answered the question about the prospects for development of the tourism industry in the region, the distribution of estimates of a number of judgments is of interest.

The data presented in Table 1 allow drawing the following conclusions: 69.5% of the respondents think that a sharp increase in tourist flow to Kalmykia will have a positive impact on the economic situation of the constituent entity of the Russian Federation. Only 3.0% of the respondents expressed a negative attitude, mostly they were people of retirement age who did not want something to change for them in their usual environment.

**Table 1.** Attitude to the possibility of a sharp increase in tourist flow to Kalmykia, %.

Column heading	
I have a positive attitude, as this will improve the economic situation in the region	69.5
I’m negative about it, because tourists cause problems.	3.0
I don’t care	14.6
Don’t know/No answer	12.9

When asked about the main positive results of tourism development in the republic, the respondents indicated the emergence of new jobs and opportunities for additional income (74.2%), improvement of the image and recognition of the region – 60.1%, development of the service sector, which can be used by both tourists and the local population (55.4%), engineering infrastructure development – 39.5%. However, it was also found that negative consequences are possible as a result of tourism and recreation development in the region, such as price increases (44.5%), deterioration of the natural environment – 40.1%, while 36.1% indicate conflicts of the local population with tourists. The key issues hindering tourism development in Kalmykia are the lack of tourist attractions, poorly developed tourist and transport infrastructure, etc. (Fig. 2)



**Fig. 2.** Distribution of answers to the question “Key issues hindering tourism development in Kalmykia”, %. Source: Compiled by the authors.

As a result, the answers to the question “Are you ready to participate in serving tourists?” were distributed as follows: 70.4% agreed if they are offered preferential conditions, while 16.7% chose the answer “no”, the rest answered “don’t know”. A negative opinion among the respondents may be due to the ambiguous perception of the role of the population in the formation of the territory’s tourist attractiveness. Most of those who are ready to participate in serving tourists intend to provide additional services, as well as sell manufactured products to tourists. However, the lack of initiative of the population in this area is clearly expressed in the structure of responses. 32% of the survey participants are ready to work in the tourism sector if they are offered good conditions. Many of the respondents (38.5%) have no idea how they could participate in this activity. But still, 24.5% of the respondents are ready to consider the tourism industry as their main source of income and build their own business in this area. In this case, this is a very high indicator, indicating, in particular, the residents’ socio-economic depressiveness and dissatisfaction with the quality of life. Finally, all respondents, regardless of their perception of the role of government agencies and the population in tourism development, were asked the question of what key tools for developing Kalmykia’s tourist attractiveness should be used by the regional authorities. The key tool for developing tourist attractiveness should be the development of a project for the integrated development of the region’s tourist and recreational potential and its financing from the budget (62.2%). The top three in the ranking also included: the training of qualified personnel – 44.6% and the development of digital technologies in tourism – 40.3%.

#### 4. Discussion

The research results showed that almost half of the respondents tend to share the opinion about the ability of the regional authorities to ensure an active influx of tourists to Kalmykia. More than 70% of the respondents believe that this requires the support of the local population. At the same time, when assessing promising tourism development tools, the respondents’ answers are dominated by those that involve the development of a project for the integrated development of the region’s tourist and recreational potential and its financing from the budget, the training of qualified personnel and the development of digital technologies in tourism. It can be assumed that in general, neither the population nor the authorities demonstrate creative and innovative practices of tourism development at the local level. Moreover, there is no such request from the residents to the regional authorities. The described trends can be considered as significantly limiting the development of tourism. In the authors’ opinion, significant efforts of the territorial authorities in this direction should be focused on identifying talents, supporting creative teams, interacting with young people and the business

community. The organization of unique tourism events: the Tulip Festival, the Lotus Festival, the Gastronomic Festival, the Jangariada and other innovative leisure practices – in the context of the transformation of consumer models, is a driver for attracting tourists. (Tsatkhlanova, 2020) Moreover, the dominant factors in the formation of creative tourism practices include such factors as attention to national identity, customs, and promotion of authentic tourism services. The practical significance of the study is to analyze the limitations of activation of local initiatives in tourism and the formation of proposals for leveling them. In the conditions of financial insufficiency of budgets, the use of the social resource of the constituent entity of the Russian Federation becomes the most relevant tool for attracting tourists through the development of commercialized hospitality practices and the organization of unique authentic events.

## 5. Conclusion

As the survey showed, more than half of the respondents note the need to develop tourism in order to improve the socio-economic sector of Kalmykia. The obtained distribution of answers allows making an optimistic conclusion about the prospects for development of the tourism industry and its potential to become a source of additional income and increase the territory's investment attractiveness. It can be stated that the acuteness of today's social problems in the regional subjects does not allow focusing on identifying alternative sources of their solution. However, such problems and the recognition of the tourism industry as the basis for the economic recovery of the territory do not form an unambiguous assessment among the local residents of the need to create the region's tourist attractiveness as a priority for territorial authorities. Thus, the hypothesis put forward in the study was partially confirmed. In general, the regional social environment is favorable for the development of the tourism industry; the residents are not so active in this direction. The local community is waiting for initiatives from outside. In the context of insufficient budget funding, the introduction of creative tourism development models (unique authentic events, innovations in the leisure sector, promotion of national customs, offering non-standard tourism products) is becoming one of the most favorable and likely scenarios for attracting tourists.

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