

ADAPTING GLOBAL ESG PRINCIPLES TO REGIONAL TOURISM GOVERNANCE IN UZBEKISTAN

Makhmudova Nodira Uktamovna

Bukhara State University, Senior Lecturer, PhD

E-mail: mahmudova.nodira@gmail.com

Abstract

This article examined the methodological foundations for developing integral indicators to assess socio-economic balance. International approaches to composite index construction, indicator selection, normalization, and aggregation were comparatively analyzed. The advantages of the Mazziotta-Pareto Index for evaluating balanced regional development were substantiated using established scientific sources. The findings demonstrated that the non-compensatory approach reflected regional socio-economic disparities more accurately and strengthened evidence-based decision-making in regional governance. The proposed methodology provided a comprehensive framework for assessing balanced territorial development and improving regional monitoring practices. The study concluded that the developed integral index could support more objective evaluation of regional performance and contribute to the improvement of socio-economic planning.

Keywords: integral index, socio-economic balance, composite indicator, Mazziotta-Pareto Index, AMPI, normalization, aggregation, regional monitoring.

Annotatsiya

Ushbu maqolada ijtimoiy-iqtisodiy mutanosiblikni baholash uchun integral indeks ko'rsatkichlarini ishlab chiqishning metodologik asoslari tadqiq etildi. Kompozit indeksni shakllantirishning xalqaro yondashuvlari, ko'rsatkichlarni tanlash, normallashtirish va agregatlash usullari qiyosiy tahlil qilindi. Mazziotta-Pareto indeksining mutanosib rivojlanishni baholashdagi afzalliklari ilmiy manbalar asosida asoslandi. Olingan natijalar nokompensatsion yondashuv hududlar o'rtasidagi ijtimoiy-iqtisodiy tafovutlarni aniqroq ifodalaganini hamda boshqaruv qarorlarini dalillarga asoslangan holda qabul qilish imkoniyatini kengaytirganini ko'rsatdi. Taklif etilgan metodologiya hududiy monitoring tizimini takomillashtirish va mintaqalar rivojlanishini kompleks baholashda amaliy ahamiyat kasb etishi qayd etildi.

Kalit so'zlar: integral indeks, ijtimoiy-iqtisodiy mutanosiblik, kompozit ko'rsatkich, Mazziotta-Pareto indeksi, AMPI, normallashtirish, agregatlash, hududiy monitoring.

Аннотация

В статье были исследованы методологические основы разработки интегральных показателей для оценки социально-экономической сбалансированности. Были проанализированы международные подходы к построению композитных индексов, методы отбора показателей, нормализации и агрегирования данных. На основе научных источников были обоснованы преимущества индекса Мацциотта-Парето при оценке сбалансированности регионального развития. Полученные результаты показали, что некомпенсационный подход более объективно отражал социально-

экономические различия между регионами и расширял возможности принятия управленческих решений на основе доказательных данных. Предложенная методология продемонстрировала практическую значимость для совершенствования системы регионального мониторинга и комплексной оценки территориального развития.

Ключевые слова: интегральный индекс, социально-экономическая сбалансированность, композитный показатель, индекс Мацциотта-Парето, АМПИ, нормализация, агрегирование, региональный мониторинг.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has become one of the clearest markers of Uzbekistan's economic opening. In 2016 the country received roughly one million foreign visitors; by 2024 that figure had climbed to about eight million, a rise of some twenty per cent in a single year [1]. Export earnings followed the same steep curve, moving from 2.14 billion US dollars in 2023 to 3.52 billion in 2024 [1]. The national strategy "Uzbekistan-2030" sets an even bolder target - fifteen million foreign tourists and five billion dollars in exports [2]. Figures like these signal ambition. They also raise a harder question: can growth this fast stay sustainable?

Across the world, that question has pushed environmental, social, and governance principles to the centre of tourism policy. Global instruments such as the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) criteria and the UN Tourism ESG framework now serve as a shared language for responsible tourism [3][4]. Yet these tools were built mainly for corporations and mature markets. Uzbekistan's tourism, in contrast, is organised around historic cities, a large share of small and family-run businesses, and fragile arid-climate ecosystems. What suits a multinational hotel chain does not automatically fit a family guesthouse in Bukhara.

There is also a broader reason to take this seriously. Sustainable tourism sits at the crossroads of several Sustainable Development Goals - decent work and economic growth, sustainable cities and communities, and responsible consumption. For a country whose heritage is both its main attraction and its most vulnerable asset, tourism cannot be judged by arrival counts alone. It has to be judged by whether growth protects the very places and communities that draw visitors in the first place.

This gap - between global ESG principles and the realities of regional tourism governance - defines the problem the article addresses. Bukhara shows the stakes plainly. In 2024 the city welcomed more than 1.74 million foreign tourists and earned some 435 million dollars in tourism exports, while over four million domestic visitors added to the pressure on its heritage sites and water resources [5]. Governing such flows responsibly takes more than importing a checklist; it takes adapting global principles to local institutions, capacities, and cultural assets.

The aim of this article is to examine how global ESG principles can be adapted to regional tourism governance in Uzbekistan. We pursue three objectives: to clarify the relevant ESG and sustainable-tourism frameworks; to assess the country's tourism growth and governance context; and to propose a multi-level adaptation model that

links national policy, regional destinations, and individual enterprises. The article follows the IMRAD structure.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The idea of ESG did not originate in tourism. The term first appeared in 2004, in the United Nations Global Compact report “Who Cares Wins”, which urged financial markets to treat environmental, social, and governance factors as drivers of long-term value [6]. Over the following two decades the concept spread well beyond finance, reaching corporate reporting, public administration, and eventually tourism.

Sustainable tourism has a longer pedigree. The GSTC, founded in 2010 under the umbrella of United Nations agencies, established baseline criteria built on four pillars: sustainable management, socio-economic impacts, cultural impacts, and environmental impacts [3]. Its Destination Criteria, revised in 2019, comprise thirty-eight criteria and one hundred seventy-four indicators, each tied to the Sustainable Development Goals [3]. Voluntary certification schemes - Green Key, Travelife, EU Ecolabel, Biosphere - turn these principles into everyday practice.

Recent scholarship is more cautious about how smoothly ESG travels into tourism. Bernard and colleagues show that ESG reporting in hospitality stays fragmented and externally driven, often overlooking the sector’s own stakeholders [7]. Camilleri argues that the weight and effect of ESG dimensions shift with a country’s economic capacity, regulatory framework, and environmental conditions, so outcomes differ from one destination to the next [8]. In 2024 UN Tourism answered this fragmentation with a framework designed specifically for tourism businesses, noting that existing standards suffer from reporting fatigue and a poor fit with the sector [4]. The World Travel & Tourism Council, meanwhile, reminds us of the stakes: travel and tourism generated 9.1 per cent of global GDP in 2023 and supported around 330 million jobs [9].

For Central Asia and Uzbekistan the research base is thinner still. National studies tend to concentrate on tourism’s economic potential, visitor numbers, and infrastructure, while the systematic adaptation of ESG principles to regional governance remains largely unexplored. That gap is what this article sets out to narrow, taking Uzbekistan - and Bukhara in particular - as its empirical anchor.

METHODOLOGY

This study is analytical and qualitative in design. Following methods widely used in economic and policy research, we combined observation, generalisation, grouping, and comparison, and drew on statistical, graphical, and synthesis techniques to interpret the evidence.

Three bodies of material underpin the analysis. First, we examined the content of international ESG and sustainable-tourism frameworks - the GSTC criteria, the UN Tourism ESG framework, and related certification schemes. Second, we reviewed Uzbekistan’s strategic and legal documents, among them the green-economy strategy (PQ-4477 and PQ-436), the “Uzbekistan-2030” strategy (PF-158), and the Law on Tourism. Third, we used official tourism statistics to trace growth trends and regional

patterns. We gave priority to sources published after 2000, to official data, and to internationally recognised frameworks, and on that basis built a comparative picture and a multi-level adaptation model.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Uzbekistan’s tourism has expanded quickly, and the pace itself creates governance challenges. Table 1 sets out the trajectory of international arrivals and export earnings alongside the 2030 targets.

Table 1.
Uzbekistan’s international tourism indicators, 2016-2024, and 2030 targets¹

Indicator	2016	2019	2023	2024	2030 target
Foreign arrivals, million	1.0	6.7	6.6	8.0	15.0
Tourism exports, billion USD	-	-	2.14	3.52	5.0
Classified hotels, units	-	-	1,390	2,383	-

The direction is unmistakable. Foreign arrivals have roughly doubled since 2019, and export earnings grew by almost two-thirds in a single year. The accommodation base expanded just as fast - the number of classified hotels rose by about seventy-two per cent between 2023 and 2024 [1]. Growth of this speed brings revenue and jobs. It also concentrates visitors on a handful of heritage destinations and strains local water, waste, and transport systems. This is exactly where governance, rather than marketing, becomes decisive.

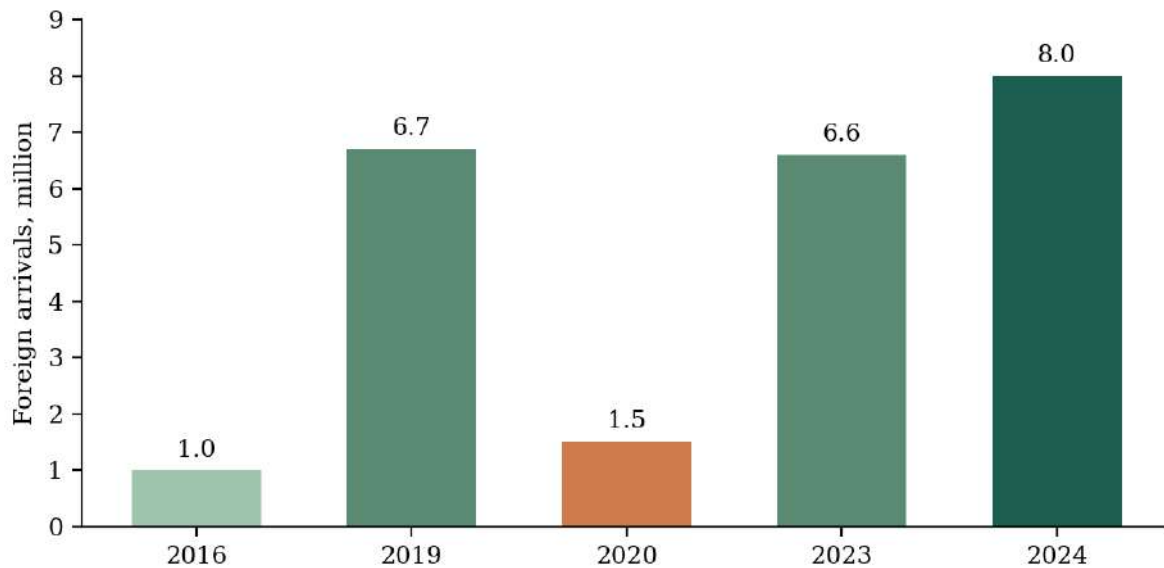


Figure 1. Foreign tourist arrivals in Uzbekistan, 2016-2024, million people².

Figure 1 also exposes the volatility behind the trend. The sharp fall in 2020, when arrivals dropped to about 1.5 million, is a reminder that tourism is exposed to shocks well beyond any ministry’s control. Recovery was fast, but uneven. Demand still clusters in a few historic centres - Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva - while many

¹ Source: compiled by the author from the National Statistics Committee and strategic documents [1][2].

² Source: compiled by the author from the National Statistics Committee and strategic documents [1][2]

districts remain on the margins of the tourism map. Concentration of this kind is a governance problem in its own right: it overloads the celebrated sites and leaves peripheral areas without the investment that might spread the benefits more fairly.

Global ESG and sustainable-tourism frameworks offer a ready vocabulary for managing such pressures, but they cannot be transplanted unchanged. Table 2 places the main frameworks against the realities of Uzbek regional governance.

Table 2.
Global frameworks and the adaptation they require in Uzbekistan¹

Framework / principle	Original focus	Adaptation needed in Uzbekistan
GSTC Destination Criteria	Certified destinations, mature DMOs	Build regional DMO capacity; localise indicators for heritage cities
UN Tourism ESG framework	Tourism businesses, reporting	A simplified “minimum ESG set” for SMEs and family hotels
Corporate reporting (GRI-type)	Large firms, full disclosure	Light-touch ESG registers rather than complex reports
Environmental pillar	Temperate, resource-rich settings	Water efficiency as the first priority in an arid climate
Cultural pillar	General heritage protection	Central role for UNESCO cities, crafts, and communities

From this comparison we derive a three-level adaptation model that mirrors how tourism is actually governed - nationally, regionally, and at enterprise level (Table 3). The logic is simple, yet often ignored: principles set at one level only work if the level below can act on them and the level above can measure the result.

Table 3.
A multi-level model for adapting ESG principles to tourism governance²

Level	Main actors	ESG governance function
National	Ministries, national tourism body, statistics agency	Set a localised ESG-tourism standard; align it with the green-economy and 2030 strategies; provide incentives
Regional	Regional authorities, destination bodies, mahalla	Coordinate destinations; manage carrying capacity; engage communities; monitor local indicators
Enterprise	Hotels, family guesthouses, tour operators	Apply a “minimum ESG set”; report basic indicators; pursue certification

Read together, the three tables point to six practical directions for adaptation. The first is regulatory - embedding ESG criteria in hotel classification and accreditation instead of leaving them voluntary. The second is institutional: appointing a sustainability coordinator within each regional destination body, arguably the cheapest high-impact step available. The third is financial, because family hotels and micro-operators cannot absorb the cost of full ESG reporting without targeted green finance

¹ Source: developed by the author on the basis of [3][4].

² Source: developed by the author.

and a simplified reporting set. The fourth is socio-cultural - in a city like Bukhara, where heritage density is exceptional, community and craft participation must sit at the heart of the social pillar. The fifth is environmental, with water efficiency taking clear priority across an arid landscape. The sixth is digital: folding ESG indicators into national tourism statistics so that progress is tracked rather than merely declared.

None of these directions is friction-free. The most common obstacles are familiar to anyone who has worked with small tourism firms: limited finance, thin managerial capacity, and low awareness of what ESG actually requires. Data is another weak point, since much of it is self-reported and hard to compare across enterprises. And there is a subtler risk - that ESG becomes a matter of paperwork and certificates rather than real change on the ground. Adaptation, then, must stay modest and measurable, beginning with a handful of reliable indicators rather than an ambitious list that quietly goes unfilled.

Bukhara offers a natural pilot for this model. A UNESCO World Heritage city with fast-growing arrivals, strong Central Asian partnerships, and a university programme in tourism and hospitality, it combines the pressures and the capacities that make adaptation both necessary and feasible. What is learned there can inform governance in Samarkand, Khiva, and beyond.

International experience reinforces the case for adaptation over adoption. Very few destinations worldwide hold full GSTC certification, and most of them sit in wealthy economies with well-resourced destination organisations; developing tourism economies usually phase the criteria in, adjusting them to local capacity [3]. The GSTC itself expects its criteria to be localised and complemented by additional local indicators. For Uzbekistan the message is plain enough - the aim is not to score well on someone else's checklist, but to build governance that fits its own cities, communities, and climate.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Uzbekistan's tourism boom is real, and so are its risks. Global ESG principles provide a sound compass, but they were not drawn for a landscape of heritage cities, family enterprises, and scarce water. Adapting them - rather than copying them - is the task that regional tourism governance now faces. The three-level model proposed here - national, regional, enterprise - is one attempt to make that adaptation concrete rather than rhetorical.

On the basis of this analysis, we recommend the following measures:

1. Develop a national ESG-tourism standard grounded in the GSTC criteria yet tailored to Uzbek conditions, and connect it to the green-economy and "Uzbekistan-2030" strategies.
2. Embed sustainability indicators in hotel classification and accreditation, moving them from voluntary aspiration to formal requirement.
3. Introduce a simplified "minimum ESG set" for small and family-run businesses, supported by targeted green finance.
4. Appoint a sustainability or ESG coordinator within each regional destination management body.

5. Integrate ESG indicators into national tourism statistics and build a destination-level monitoring dashboard.

6. Make water efficiency a headline environmental priority for arid destinations, and place heritage and community participation at the centre of the social agenda.

The contribution of this analysis is twofold. Theoretically, it reframes ESG in tourism not as a corporate reporting exercise but as a problem of multi-level governance, in which national standards, regional coordination, and enterprise practice must reinforce one another. Practically, it offers a sequence a region can actually follow: begin with a small, verifiable set of indicators, assign clear responsibility, and expand only once the data proves reliable. For Uzbekistan, where the institutional machinery of sustainable tourism is still taking shape, that sequencing may matter as much as the principles themselves.

Applied first as a pilot in Bukhara over 2026-2030, these steps could turn rapid tourism growth into durable, well-governed development. The wider lesson is straightforward: sustainability in tourism is won not by importing global checklists, but by translating global principles into local institutions. Future research should test the model empirically and refine destination-level ESG indicators for Central Asian conditions.

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