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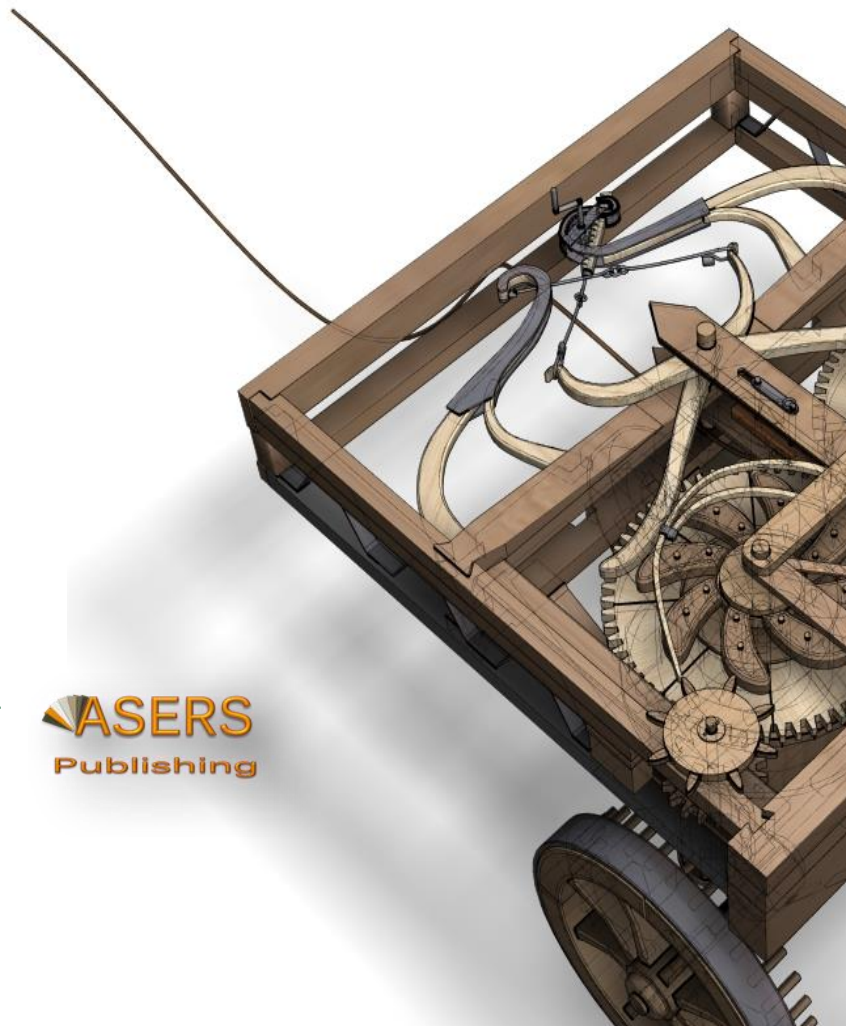
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Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism is an interdisciplinary research journal, aimed to publish articles and original research papers that should contribute to the development of both experimental and theoretical nature in the field of Environmental Management and Tourism Sciences.

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Academic Tourism as an Emerging Tourism Industry in Kazakhstan

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study is to investigate the development of academic tourism in Kazakhstan in recent years. Analytical papers and expert reports from the UN World Tourism Organization and a review of studies over the past two decades have been useful in determining the meaning of academic tourism and academic mobility. In addition, international and national tourism policy and regulatory acts were analyzed, reflecting the prospects of the tourism industry. Using a thematic analysis method, this study analyzed the development of academic tourism in Kazakhstan as an emerging tourism sector over the past few years. The new tax preferences, the approval of a special economic zone in priority areas provided by the Government were found as the greatest opportunity in facilitating academic tourism in the southern region of Kazakhstan. In this regard, the establishment of international university campuses can play a significant role. It is expected that the implementation of this idea will help to attract thousands of students and academics from neighboring countries and can become a real impetus for the development of tourism. Furthermore, it can positively influence other tourism sectors such as MICE tourism, eco-tourism.

Keywords: academic tourism, academic mobility, university campuses, Kazakhstan.

JEL Classification: I23; I28; K15; L30; L33; R11; Z32.

Introduction

Tourism industry is one of the fastest growing sectors of the global economy due to internationalisation and globalisation (McGladdery and Lubbe 2017; WTTC 2021). Kazakhstan, as a developing country, also aims to become a leader in tourism among Central Asian countries and to reach the world level. The Government identified some regions and cities as priority tourist destinations and now intends to increase the number of international and national tourists (State Program 2019). This article is an attempt to find out the public policy of Kazakhstan in academic tourism through the analysis of the State program and other legal acts. We attempt to identify what steps is the government taking to increase the attractiveness of the tourism industry for new business investment? How can the tourism sector be influenced by the provision of investment preferences for priority investment projects and the introduction of a special economic zone regime for priority activities in certain regions of the country? We also try to figure out the impact of academic mobility and the opening of international university campuses and branches of world-class universities on the development of academic tourism. However, as noted by experts from international organisations and tourism researchers, few studies have been conducted to this topic, which will be analyzed separately in the literature review section (Rodríguez *et al.* 2013; UNWTO 2018). Therefore, we will review a literature of recent years, analyse international acts and national documents adopted in this area. Based on this analysis, identify the main issues in the development of academic tourism and offer a synthesized point of view.

1. Literature Review

The international tourism and travel market continues to grow as one of the world's largest industries, creating jobs, boosting exports, and generating prosperity worldwide. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), the world economic impact of travel and tourism represents 10.4% of world GDP and 313 million jobs, or 9.9% of total employment (WTTC 2021). According to the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), in 2017 the number of international tourist arrivals reached up to 1.3 billion people, export earnings amounted to 1.6 trillion US dollars, and it is also predicted that by 2030 this figure will reach 1.8 billion (UNWTO, 2018). Because of the growing size and scope of the tourism industry has become a significant source of income for many countries around the world (Schumann 2018).

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO 1994, 5), the definition of 'tourism' is as follows: "It comprises the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited". Meanwhile, "tourist" means a person taking a trip which includes an overnight stay to a main destination outside his/her usual environment, for less than a year, for any main purpose (business, leisure, or other personal purpose) other than to be employed by a resident entity in the country or place visited" (UNWTO 2017, 6). Today, tourism is a broad industry, which includes the hospitality industry, accommodation services, transport and transport rental services, cultural, religious, and sports events, food and beverage services, and other leisure services provided to tourists (WTTC 2021). Among them, educational tourism is one of the fast-growing tourism sectors in many countries that has its own feathers and advantages (Ritchie *et al.* 2003; Rodríguez *et al.* 2013; Schumann, 2018). Ritchie *et al.* (2003, 19) have defined educational tourism as "a tourist activity undertaken by those who are undertaking an overnight vacation and those who are undertaking an excursion for whom education and learning is a primary or secondary part of their trip. This can include general educational tourism and adult study tours, international and domestic university and school students' travel, including language schools, school excursions and exchange programmes". Pitman *et al.* (2010, 223) identified three main features of an educational trip based on a quantitative survey of 850 education tourists and tour operators in Australia: "the trip was intentionally educationally focused, the style of learning was experiential, and the trip was structured around an educational program". So, the educational purpose of the trip here is clearly seen.

According to Schumann (2018), educational tourism developed over a long period, it existed in ancient times and is today one of the most popular types of travel and tourism. Since ancient times, philosophers and thinkers have visited other cities and countries to learn about their culture and way of life, to enrich their knowledge (Schumann 2018). This can be seen in numerous treaties and reports by scholars of that time. Today, knowledge acquisition and knowledge exchange have become immensely popular around the world. Millions of students, researchers, and academics are moving from country to country, from continent to continent. In an era of globalisation, this is a normal phenomenon, as demonstrated by the indicators of international organizations. According to the UNESCO, the number of international students reached approximately 6 million by the year 2020 and it is expected to increase in the future because of the globalization and internationalisation of higher

education (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020). Experts of the World Tourism Organization supposed that the number of young travellers will be raised to 370 million by 2020 (WTO 2016). Academic tourism of young travellers primarily related to learning and training activities (McGladdery & Lubbe 2017).

Other researchers have argued that international student mobility is viewed as a tourist activity, which has considerable potential in the development of tourism industry and the local economy (Cerdeira Bento, 2014; Rodríguez *et al.* 2012, 2013). Rodríguez *et al.* (2012) have proposed the term "academic tourism", which includes studies in higher education institutions and training centres outside their usual surroundings for a period of less than one year with the aim of completing studies or taking language courses. Cerdeira Bento (2014) has also considered student mobility as a type of tourism and is called "international academic tourism". Various studies from different parts of the world indicate the close link between academic mobility and tourism and that in many cases, students view themselves as tourists (Pinto *et al.* 2021a). For example, Lesjak *et al.* (2020) conducted the online survey of 546 students that participated in the Erasmus+ program in Slovenia in the 2016/2017 academic year. The main finding of this study indicated that 93% of respondents admitted that they travelled during academic mobility. In addition, authors found that when choosing mobility destination, students tend to consider touristic characteristics such as rich history and culture, safety, a high standard of living. The authors concluded that, in light of these findings, universities and tourism providers should coordinate their activities to provide the best possible experience for student-tourists. Other researchers found that geographical, demographical and economic factors of countries are important for developing the tourism industry (Altynbassov *et al.* 2021; Korgan *et al.* 2022; Shayakhmetova *et al.* 2020).

According to Menin (2017), benefits of using academic tourism include responding to the students' needs, marketization of academic institutions, cooperation with municipalities, increase in employment, specialization on academic conferences and international events and international relations with other tourism ministers. Author argues that academic tourism will contribute to increasing the attractiveness of the country for international students. Gullace and Griffin (2021) analysed international student mobility and tourism in Canadian university cities in post pandemic period and stated, "the role and impact of student mobility and of university cities in the tourism sector can promote future trends, stimulate new generational habits, and create potential economic opportunities" (p.3). Similarly, Menin (2017) highlights the importance of academic mobility for developing local tourism and creating a new world of business opportunities. Therefore, both terms educational tourism and academic tourism are thought to be appropriate, and both groups of researchers are very good at their justifications. It should be noted that both terms describe the same tourism sector, where the subjects are scholars, academics, and students. Without neglecting the meaning of the term educational tourism in our article, we prefer to call it academic tourism. The literature review on academic and educational tourism demonstrates the importance of academic mobility in the development of the tourism industry. Thus, this study attempts to understand the role of academic mobility in developing academic tourism. The practical characteristics of academic tourism in the context of the Kazakhstan will be explored in the discussion section.

2. Methodology

The study was carried out using the documentary analysis method. State program for the development of the tourism industry of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2019 – 2025, Law on Education and Law on Special economic zone were accessed through the government online database of legal acts "Adilet". Additional secondary data and publications were collected via Internet sources and official websites of international organisations and governmental bodies. To provide data triangulation in determining of the definitions of 'tourism' and 'academic mobility', the official reports of the UN MOT and the Law on Education of Kazakhstan were analyzed. The collected data were analyzed by thematic analysis method. According to Braun and Clarke (2021, 39), in thematic coding reliability approach "researcher subjectivity is conceptualised as 'bias', a potential threat to coding reliability". To avoid bias in the study, several researchers took part in the analysis of the State program and other documents. Final coding and identifying themes were determined by consensus among the authors.

3. Findings and Discussion

Government priorities in Kazakhstan's tourism industry

As mentioned in the literature review section, the tourism industry is one of the major industries in the world, providing jobs, boosting exports, and ensuring prosperity around the world (UNWTO 2018; WTTC 2021). Kazakhstan, as a Central-Asian country located alongside the Silk Way between China and Russia, has great opportunities to develop its own tourism industry. Since ancient times, all trade caravans have passed through the territory of Kazakhstan from east to west and vice versa. Today, as well, millions of passengers and goods pass

through the roads and railways of Kazakhstan, reflecting a crucial role of the transport and travel industry. The Government of Kazakhstan is very interested in the development of the trade and tourism sector and has therefore launched several political programs. The key document for developing this sector is the State program for the development of the tourism industry of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2019 – 2025. According to the State Program, agritourism, hunting and trophy tourism, ecological tourism, ethnographic tourism, youth tourism, medical tourism, and MICE tourism were defined as the principal priority sectors of tourism (State Program, 2019).

To understand in detail, the government's policy in the tourism industry, it has been analyzed the State program which indicates the main directions and indicators of the development. This document reflects the national tourism policy and the functional obligations of the government and ministries to implement the stated objectives.

Table 1. SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis of the development of tourism in Kazakhstan

Strengths	Weaknesses
1) availability of natural resources 2) the presence of cultural heritage monuments, including objects of international importance 3) stable political and domestic situation 4) favourable geostrategic location of Kazakhstan 5) high level of development in the Central Asian region	1) insufficient development of engineering and transport infrastructure in places of tourism 2) inaccessibility of tourist sites 3) low level of service in places of rest for tourists 4) lack of qualified personnel in tourism 5) insufficient amount of external investment in the tourism industry 6) imperfect visa and migration regime 7) restriction in the regulation of airspace 8) low level of information about the tourism potential of Kazakhstan in domestic and international markets 9) high prices for accommodation and air travel
Opportunities	Threats
1) proximity to countries with high potential for outbound tourism (Russia, China) 2) development of unique local tourism products 3) active participation of the state in the development of regions, including through the arrangement of tourist and transport and logistics infrastructure 4) the use of modern technologies in the communications and distribution of products	1) similar tourism products of nearby countries 2) strong dependence on the volume of business travel 3) slow development of transport communication 4) new global and regional crises

Source: State program for the development of the tourism industry of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2019 – 2025

Table 1 shows a SWOT analysis of tourism development in Kazakhstan, according to the State program. Here we can clearly see the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of tourism development in Kazakhstan. Regarding the weaknesses of this sector, Shayakhmetova *et al.* (2020) identified the key issues of the tourism industry from documentary analyses of the legislation in Kazakhstan. They found that the country's vast geography, the weakness of tourism infrastructure, the lack of investment in tourism businesses are high risk factors. Another study found that in Kazakhstan, employable and highly skilled young people leave their country of origin in search of a better life and most of them remain abroad (Korgan *et al.* 2022). The lack of a workable category of young citizens can also negatively affect the development of the service sector and tourism. In that case, they propose to launch a special law and favorable conditions to attract investment and develop infrastructure. It should be noted that the Government of Kazakhstan has already granted investment preferences for the development of the tourist industry:

“In order to increase the investment attractiveness of the tourism industry for creating a business, it is planned to provide investment preferences for priority investment projects (PIP) in the tourism sector. For PIP providing for the construction of new facilities, state in-kind grants (land plots) are provided. Tax preferences include reduction of the amount of calculated corporate income tax by 100%; application of coefficient 0 to land tax rates; calculation of property tax at a rate of 0% to the tax base. For PIP that provide for the modernization of existing facilities, tax preferences are also provided, including a reduction in the amount of calculated corporate

income tax by 100%" (State Program 2019, 111). Such preferential measures and tax incentives are introduced to attract private and foreign investors into the tourism sector.

Based on the experience of the countries with the developed tourism industry, the Kazakhstan's Government has established new goals and objectives in this sector. The Government of Kazakhstan intends to increase the tourism sector's share of the Republic of Kazakhstan's total GDP by at least 8% by 2025 (State Program, 2019). Currently, the total contribution to total GDP in Kazakhstan, according to the WTTC methodology, is 6%. Further policy decisions have also been made to achieve these goals. The Government has identified Kazakhstan's ten most promising tourism regions. For example, Lake Alakol - with a potential of 2,500,000 tourists per year (current flow - 772,000 tourists per year), the development of historical and cultural tourism in Turkestan - with a potential of 1,500,000 tourists per year (present flow - 500,000), etc. (State Program, 2019). These destinations are considered key areas for tourism development, each having its own identity, distinctive products, and market development potential.

Besides, the Government has introduced a special economic zone regime (hereinafter - SEZ) for the implementation of priority activities in some regions of the country, such as the Burabay SEZ in the Akmola region, the SEZ in the Turkestan region. According to the Law, the SEZ is a part of the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan with clearly defined borders, on which a special legal regime of a special economic zone operates in the implementation of priority activities (Law on "Special Economic and Industrial Zones", 2019). The following benefits and preferences are provided on the territory of the SEZ: reduction of the amount of calculated CIT by 100%; application of coefficient 0 to land tax rates; calculation of property tax at a rate of 0% of the tax base; VAT rate for suppliers - 0%; payment for the use of a land plot - coefficient 0 for the period of operation of the SEZ; exemption from customs duties on raw materials and equipment imported into the FEZ; simplified procedure for attracting labour force (Law on "Special Economic and Industrial Zones", 2019). Thus, we clearly see that there are relevant political and regulatory acts to allow Kazakhstan's tourism industry to develop properly.

In recent years, thanks to public policy and research grants, researchers from Kazakhstan have been actively involved in tourism issues. According to Sadykov *et al.* (2018), currently the Kazakhstani tourism market is in the active formation stage and is one of the promising export-oriented sectors of the economy. They have found that the characteristics of the shaping of the international tourism market and its interdependence with other economic sectors have not yet been adequately studied and do not have certain established development trends (Sadykov *et al.* 2018). Altynbassov *et al.* (2021) have also argued that Kazakhstan has great potential for the development of the tourism industry, through the establishment of international university campuses in the Turkestan region. They concluded that not all regions in Kazakhstan have the potential to develop tourism, but only those that have the geographical, climatic, demographic, and cultural potential. First and foremost, academic mobility and attracting international students play a crucial role here, which will be discussed in the next section.

Academic mobility

Globalisation is notably affecting partnership and collaboration between countries in various areas, including in higher education. One of the vivid examples of its impact is academic mobility. Academic mobility is an effective tool for improving the quality of training at the university and the quality of human capital. Academic mobility also includes mobility of international students and academic staff and the establishment of university campuses. The pace of academic mobility is accelerating over the last decades (Bamberger 2020; Tran 2016). Kim (2009, 397) argues that academic mobility is a direct implication of "neoliberal policy and market-framed research competition".

According to the Council of Europe's Recommendation of the Committee of ministers to member states on academic mobility, "Academic mobility implies a period of study, teaching and/or research in a country other than a student's or academic staff member's country of residence ('the home country'). This period is of limited duration, and it is envisaged that the student or staff member return to his or her home country upon completion of the designated period". Researchers pointed out various benefits of academic mobility programs including personal, cultural and career outcomes (Brooks & Waters 2011, Tran 2016). Brooks and Waters (2011, 9) define international students as those who "move for educational purposes and in doing so create new networks and circuit of identity". Factors influencing students' motivation to study abroad vary. Many authors highlight push and pull factors in academic mobility. Push factors mainly include unfavourable conditions in the home country while pull factors refer to the language of instruction and high-quality education in the host country (Hovdhaugen and Wiers-Jenssen 2021; Perez-Encinas *et al.* 2021). For example, Hovdhaugen and Wiers-Jenssen (2021) analysed motivations of Norwegian students for studying abroad through the survey with 4100 respondents and found three dimensions of students' motivation – exploration, pragmatism and differentiation.

In the case of Kazakhstan, according to Law on Education, academic mobility is the movement of students or research teachers to study or conduct research for a certain academic period (semester or academic year) to another organization of higher and/or postgraduate education (domestic or abroad) with the obligatory transfer of mastered curricula, disciplines in the form of academic credits in their organization of higher and/or postgraduate education or to continue their studies in another organization of higher and/or postgraduate education (Law on Education 2007). The driving force for developing international academic mobility was Kazakhstan's accession to the Bologna Declaration in March 2010 (Bologna Declaration 1999). On the one hand, this caused serious transformations, that is, the transition to a three-level education system, the introduction of bachelor's, master's, and PhD degrees, the implementation of European study programmes, and the development of double diploma programs. On the other hand, it has become an incentive to develop international contacts for Kazakhstan's universities, increasing the international academic mobility of scientists, faculty, and students (Amandykova *et al.* 2016). The Bologna Declaration defines the objectives of academic mobility to promote the development of academic mobility through the implementation of freedom of movement for scholars, timely and full access to educational institutions, their knowledge-intensive base and relevant educational services for researchers, recognition and confirmation of periods spent by scholars in European countries, for research, teaching and retraining. Conferences of Ministers of Education of the Bologna Process Member States pay special attention to the creation of a common educational space, where academic mobility is the main tool for its formation (Marquand and Scott 2018). From year to year, study abroad is becoming more widespread through student mobility. So, student mobility is recognised as a positive factor for the development of education and science, supported by international education organizations and governments.

Therefore, based on the definition of academic mobility given by international organisations, scholars, and the educational legislation of Kazakhstan, we see that they have the similar meaning. That is, academic mobility can be seen to be understood as the study or training of teachers, scholars, and students abroad or elsewhere for a year or less. In the next section, we will consider these categories of people as the subjects of academic tourism.

Academic tourism

In the previous section, the meaning of academic mobility has been discussed and we will now attempt to link it to academic tourism drawn upon the perspectives of international experts and scholars. According to the UNWTO experts, "Tourist" means a person taking a trip which includes an overnight stay to a main destination outside his/her usual environment, for less than a year, for any main purpose (business, leisure, or other personal purpose) other than to be employed by a resident entity in the country or place visited" (UNWTO 2017, 6). The UNWTO confirmed that "studies, education and research" are considered "other reasons" for tourist travel. Among the international recommendations for tourism statistics are, in the category "visitors", "all students attending short courses and taking no more than one full year abroad" (UNWTO 2010, 17). Cerdeira Bento (2014) has done research on Erasmus grant holders, where he found that these students generally study abroad for higher education degrees, language courses, or initial internships at companies or research institutes for up to one year. He refers to such students as international academic tourists, and the economic benefit from them to host countries is equivalent to that of conventional tourists. Because students, like regular tourists, rent accommodation, visit cultural sites, museums, use transportation, buy clothing and food, etc. Lesjak *et al.* (2020) also found that 93% of international students confirmed that they had traveled in the context of academic mobility. In addition, the authors revealed that when selecting a host country, students tend to take into account its tourist characteristics, such as historical and cultural heritage, climatic and weather conditions, a living standards and safety conditions. Thus, the literature review shows that students who go abroad fully combine their studies with travelling and recognition of cultural and historical places in host country.

Another study on academic tourism in Galicia (Spain), conducted by Rodríguez *et al.* (2013), have revealed that the economic benefits of academic tourism are even greater than traditional tourism. They explain this by the fact that academic tourism does not harm the environment and that the production of an educated generation has enormous future advantages, as well as helping to establish international partnerships between students and academics. They analyzed the economic impact of academic tourism on the host country. The economic importance of academic tourism in Galicia was primarily determined by the length of their stay. If the average stay of a conventional tourist was 8 days, but an academic tourist was 144 days. This means that students spend 18 times more nights than ordinary tourists, while their average spending was four times that of typical tourists. In addition, the benefits of academic tourism are that it is not a seasonal type of tourism. Students usually come for a longer period than regular tourists and anytime of the year, while conventional tourism is

designed primarily for the summer season. As a result of this study, it was also revealed that almost 90% of these students visit the nearest settlements and cities, and more than 50% of students confirmed that they were visited by relatives and friends (Rodríguez *et al.* 2013). This indicates additional costs from students for trains and contributes to the arrival of new tourists. They therefore concluded that academic tourism is more profitable and more sustainable than conventional tourism.

Despite the increasing popularity of educational tourism, it is too frequently neglected by tourism professionals and marketing specialists (Schumann 2018). A review of the tourism literature indicates that there are few research papers on educational tourism. This is evident in the politics of Kazakhstan, where there is no mention whatsoever of academic tourism. In Kazakhstan's State Tourism Programme, youth tourism is identified as one of the priority spheres of tourism, which covers children and youth under 18 years of age. According to statistics, as of January 1, 2018, their number is 3,050,770 children, of which 2.6% are covered by tourism and local history, while in Europe, this figure is 20% or more, in Russia - 14%, in Belarus - 10.6% (State Program, 2019). The reason for such low coverage was indicated by the weakness of the material base and the low funding of the government, the lack of staff and tourism facilities. For example, the material and technical base of youth tourism in such regions as Atyrau, Mangystau, North Kazakhstan regions and the city of Almaty is about 10 to 20%. In the Kostanay and Kyzylorda regions, there are no local tourist and historical management organisations at all. In this case, academic tourism refers to youth tourism associated with the learning process, and the subject is children of primary or secondary school age (McGladdery and Lubbe 2017). However, the State program on tourism in Kazakhstan is limited by using youth tourism, while academic tourism is not mentioned at all. It is only indirectly mentioned that children under the age of 18 visit tourist sites, travel, become familiar with cultural and historical heritage, etc. In our opinion, the neglect of academic tourism in the State Program does not allow using the huge potential of academic mobility in the development of the national tourism industry.

As mentioned above, tourism and academic tourism definitions are not specified an age limit for tourists and a tourist trip includes all personal and professional trains (Part *et al.* 2017; Pinto *et al.* 2021b; Ritchie *et al.* 2003; Rodríguez *et al.* 2012; UNWTO 2018). Moreover, in the UN WTO report, "studying, education, and research" are classified as "other reasons" for tourist traveling (UNWTO 2010, 17). Thus, a student or an academic staff member traveling abroad or other places for less than a year may be considered academic tourism. The analysis of the State Program shows that the Government has adopted pertinent political and normative acts, which promote academic tourism in Kazakhstan. Nevertheless, some challenges and obstacles to the development of this economic sector are mentioned in formal reports and research papers. For example, Shayakhmetova *et al.* (2020) highlighted the lack of investment, poor tourist infrastructure and the vast geography of Kazakhstan as key risk factors. They assume that public-private partnership may be helpful to the development of this sector. That is why the Government has identified Kazakhstan's ten most promising tourism regions, set out special economic zones, provided investment preferences for priority investment projects, provided tax preferences and benefits. Therefore, there is a real opportunity to develop new business and tourism infrastructure in Kazakhstan.

Other researchers suggest that some parts of Kazakhstan have great opportunities to develop academic tourism by setting up international university campuses in these regions. According to Altynbassov *et al.* (2021), the Turkistan region is a more appropriate place for developing academic tourism due to its location, population density, climate and weather conditions, rich historic and cultural heritage. These characteristics of tourism destinations were also revealed as key elements in tourist attraction by other authors (Gullace and Griffin 2021; Schumann 2018). Thus, the establishment of new international university campuses in the region and the attraction of international students and scholars can have a significant impact on the development of academic tourism. Discussion of these issues will be explored in detail in the next section.

The establishment of the international university campuses as a key driver of academic tourism

Many studies show that the establishment of international university campuses and branches of world-class universities has had a positive impact on higher education system in some countries (Altbach 2004; Altbach and Knight 2007; Knight 2018, 2021). As a result of internationalization, some countries and cities have become regional education hubs, and such policies have greatly facilitated the arrival of international students and academics. Knight (2018) highlights six education hub countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Botswana, Malaysia, Singapore, and Hong Kong. The establishment of international university campuses or branches of world universities is one of the manifestations of internationalization and it will allow the southern region of Kazakhstan to become an educational hub in Central Asia. We believe that such a political decision will

greatly facilitate the arrival of thousands of international students and academics to the region and the development of local tourism.

There is an opportunity for the rapid development of academic mobility through the establishment of international university campuses and branches:

First, the successful practice of English-speaking universities in the world. Undoubtedly, English has a high status in the global higher education and research. For example, currently the US, the UK, Canada, and Australia are leading countries in attracting international students. Universities of these countries occupy first places in reputable global rankings such as QS WUR, TIMES. In addition, in the Netherlands, Germany, Spain and other European countries, English is often medium of instruction at leading universities (Gill and Kirkpatrick 2012). Even in Asian countries such as China, India and South Korea, English is becoming popular in higher education and research, and their universities are constantly improving their position in global rankings (Hu 2019). For example, Chinese C9 League universities Tsinghua University and Peking University are ranked 17th and 18th in the QS WUR (QS WUR 2022). In these universities, English has become the language of teaching and research. This is directly influenced by the influence of international rankings, for example, the requirement to publish articles in international journals in English. The experience of leading international university campuses shows that instruction in English attracts students from all over the world. Thus, it is hard to attract international students by teaching in the Kazakh and Russian languages.

Secondly, international students and young researchers often come to the international university campuses within short-term academic mobility programs. This can be seen in the example of Nazarbayev University. Teaching and research there is entirely in English. Therefore, there is no language barrier for international students and young researchers. Undoubtedly, such an environment is very conducive to the development of international relations. Also in recent years, because of internationalization of education, teaching in English has become more widespread in the CIS countries. In Kazakhstan, State Program in education introduced the obligation to teach English in secondary schools, as well as the practice of teaching only in English in Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (State Program on Education, 2019). In Kazakhstan and other countries of the CIS, there are a plenty of international and private elite schools, such as Haileybury, Miras, where teaching is conducted in English according to a purely Western system, and its graduates accepted at leading universities such as Harvard, MIT, and Stanford. This trend is rapidly increasing the popularity of the English language. Thus, the number of students who will study in future international campuses and the number of students arriving under the academic mobility program will be sufficient.

Third, the academic mobility of faculty and scholars over a period of up to one year is increasingly popular. Academic mobility plays a significant role in the integration of higher education institutions into the global higher education area, and it is also an important factor contributing to the formation of qualitatively new labor resources (Larsen 2020; Rodríguez *et al.* 2013). Increasing the academic mobility is an important direction of the Bologna process. It is clear that a high degree of academic mobility implies a developed infrastructure, which in turn has a positive effect on the growth of the academic tourism. International academics usually come for short periods of up to a year. That is, they can be regarded as international academic tourists. In addition, according to the requirements that established in the educational legislation of Kazakhstan, doctoral students must have two supervisors. According to Law on Education, one supervisor should be an international academic and should come to teach for a minimum of two weeks or a semester. This requirement also contributes to the growth of the number of international academic mobility.

Fourth, since the language of instruction in international university campuses is English, there are many opportunities for various research conferences, forums, summits, and summer schools. This will allow the development of MICE tourism in Kazakhstan. According to Dwyer & Forsyth (1997), business tourism refers to the travels for business purposes and can be described by the acronym MICE: meetings, incentives, conventions, exhibitions. Cieřlikowski and Brusokas (2020) carried out the study with participants in international conferences in several European countries and identified the success factors of the conferences as tourism products. They found that the important factor in the success of conferences is the organization of a programme of side events, in particular, city sightseeing, visits to cultural and entertainment venues, making professional contacts and promoting their own institution (Cieřlikowski and Brusokas 2020). Hence, conference participants, as tourists, expect organizers to meet their personal and professional needs. On the one hand, such events will greatly contribute to the development of MICE tourism, which is recognized as a priority in the State Program. On the other hand, it allows university academics to establish international partnerships. In this regard, researchers have found that international academic mobility enables academics to engage in informal interactions, cooperation, language practices and internationalization (Greek and Jonsmoen 2021). For example, university academic staff

often conduct joint research projects with foreign colleagues and publish articles. University will also be able to raise funds by renting out its buildings to public and private organizations for various events. During the summer, short-term English courses can attract students and tourists from nearby countries and cities. It is also an effective way to develop the entrepreneurial potential of universities and financial diversification.

Altynbassov *et al.* (2021) explored the possibility of setting up international university campuses in the southern regions of Kazakhstan. They found that university campuses can significantly enhance the quality of education and research, attracting hundreds of thousands of students from neighboring countries. They also found that the Turkistan region is an ideal place for establishing new university campuses and branches of leading universities of Kazakhstan and around the world for several reasons. First, the Government has introduced a special economic zone regime in the Turkestan region where a special legal regime operates with relevant fiscal preferences and tax benefits. For example, the Government can allocate land plots to investors without taxes and can support in providing touristic infrastructure. It should also be noted here that in Kazakhstan the organizational and legal status of public universities is being transformed and now they can freely operate as business companies (Altynbassov *et al.* 2020). This legal amendment allows leading Kazakhstan's universities to open their branches in the Turkestan region. Second, the Turkistan region is the only location with a high population density and neighboring with Uzbekistan (35,3 million population) and Kyrgyzstan (7 million). According to statistics, around 20,000 students from neighboring counties studied in the Turkestan region. For example, 10,184 international students study only at Auezov South Kazakhstan State University and more than 7,000 of them from Uzbekistan (Brand Book 2020). The universities of the Turkistan region are ordinary state and private universities where medium of instruction is Kazakh and Russian languages. Thus, establishing new university campuses with English as the language of instruction may extremely elevate international students from neighboring countries. Third, the weather and climatic conditions in the Turkistan area are milder than in other parts of Kazakhstan. Besides, there are plenty of historic, architectural, and cultural places for tourists. For example, the capital Turkistan is a former capital of Kazakh Khanate, which has cultural heritages protected by UNESCO, such as the Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi, Arystan Bab Mausoleum. In addition, there are Aksu-Zhabagly State Nature Reserve and Karatau State Nature Reserve in the Turkestan region with a lot of stunning mountain areas, lakes, rivers, rare wild animals, and plants. In this respect, there is an excellent opportunity for eco-and geo-tourism, which is considered a potential secure tourism in times of pandemic (Afifi and Negm 2020). Therefore, such characteristics of the Turkestan region indicate that it has great potential for tourism development and make it an attractive place for tourists.

In general, the total number of international students in the analysis of academic tourism issues must not be neglected, as it may also indirectly influence this sector. As mentioned above, international students who come for more than a year do not belong to academic mobility, but bring income to the state, such as academic tourists. Higher education in the Western world is proof of that. For example, more than 1 million international students study in the USA, 500 thousand in the UK. Totally, in the UK about 2,5 million students study at 162 universities, of which 2.0 million are domestic and about 500 thousand international students. In the UK, 2.0 million domestic students pay from £7,000 to £11,000 a year, while international students pay three or four times as much. In the UK, for international students, undergraduate fees of up to £38,000 (US\$53,700) or more for an undergraduate medical degree. At the postgraduate level, international charges started at about £11,000 (US\$15,545) and rose to £32,000 (US\$45,200) (Playdon 2022). In other words, the total income from 500,000 international students is almost equal to the income from 2.0 million domestic students. Among them, hundreds of thousands study within a year of language and master's courses, which can be considered international academic tourists. Therefore, Western countries pay special attention to higher education and strive to create a favorable environment for international students.

To sum up, we can suggest that the establishment of international university campuses in the southern part of Kazakhstan can enhance academic tourism. A series of policy and legal measures introduced by the Government of Kazakhstan concerning preferences and tax benefits are favorable conditions for investor participation. The natural, geographic, population, climate, weather, historical and cultural heritage of the Turkestan region are key factors in attracting international and domestic tourists. Furthermore, it can have a positive impact on business tourism, eco, and geo-tourism.

Conclusion

This study revealed that academic tourism is an emerging tourism sector that has significant potential for the national economy. However, little research has been carried out on this topic, particularly in the context of Kazakhstan. To this end, the reports and articles of the WTO experts have been studied, which provide an

accurate definition and classification of the notions regarding tourism and tourist activities. This allowed us to establish a link between academic mobility and academic tourism, which was an important part of this work. Based on studies in educational tourism, academic tourism and international academic tourism conducted by scholars from various continents of the world, we managed to understand that academic tourism exists, and it plays a crucial role in the development of the tourism industry and national economies.

Analysis of the State Program showed that the Government of Kazakhstan sets very ambitious goals and objectives for ministries and local authorities to develop tourism. The Government has identified special economic zones, priority areas for development, preferences for priority investment projects with all fiscal incentives for investors, such as free land for building tourist bases, hotels, facilities, and many other benefits associated with the development of tourism activities. However, the Government's program focuses on tourism for children and young people but does not mention university tourism. This confirms the opinion of experts and scholars who argued that academic tourism is neglected by professionals and experts involved in the creation of a national tourism policy. We believe the government should view academic tourism as a priority tourism sector with tremendous potential for local tourism and economic development. In this regard, the establishment of international university campuses can play a significant role. The implementation of this idea will help to attract thousands of students and academics from neighboring countries and can become a real impetus for the development of tourism activities. Furthermore, it can positively influence other tourism sectors such as MICE tourism, eco-tourism.

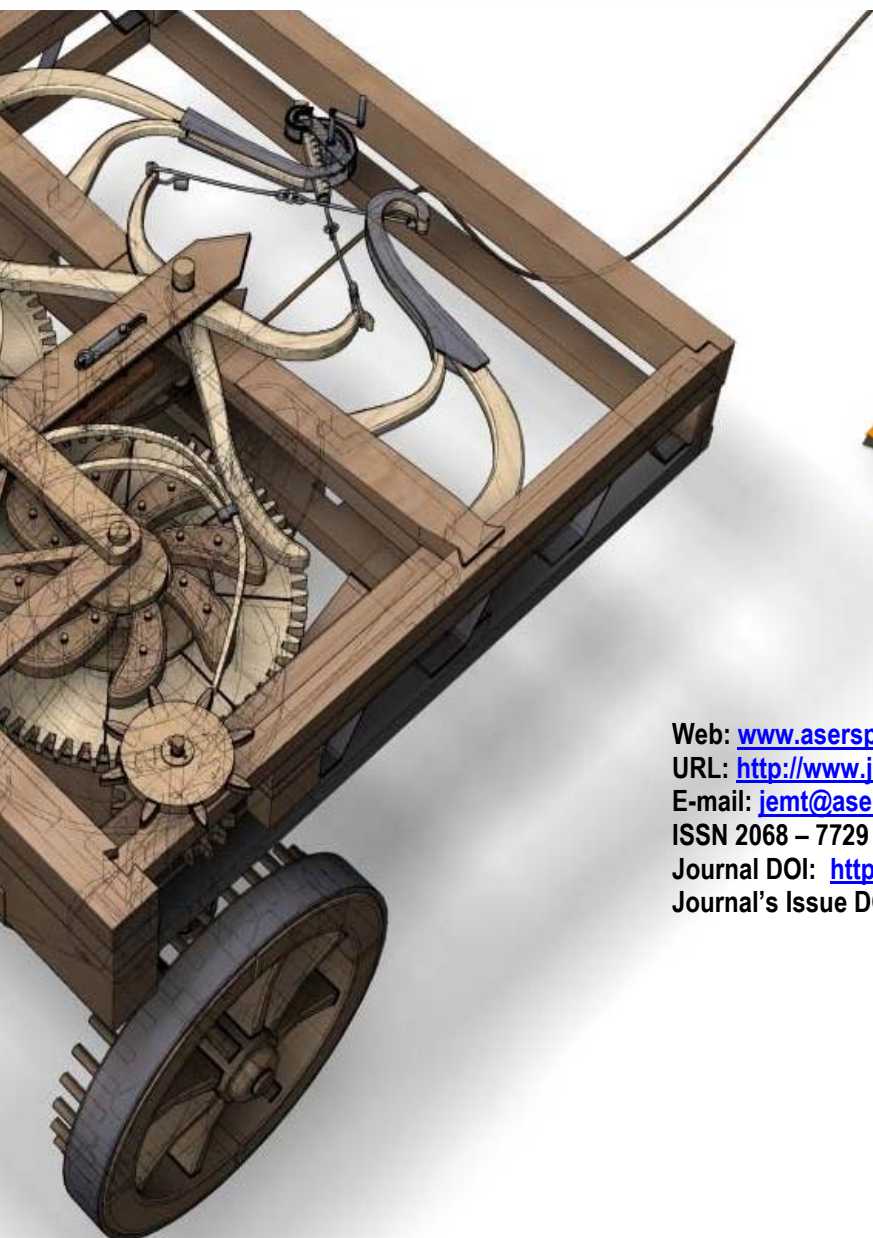
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