

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE

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Abstract

This research explores the theoretical approaches to the development of tourism infrastructure, emphasizing its role as a fundamental driver of socio-economic growth. The study examines the classification of tourism infrastructure into general, specialized, and complementary types, as well as their contribution to enhancing the competitiveness of destinations. Particular attention is given to the relationship between infrastructure development, investment flows, and sustainable tourism. The research highlights the significance of integrating modern infrastructure with market demands, ensuring quality services, and creating favorable conditions for both domestic and international tourists. Furthermore, the study analyzes the role of institutional support, entrepreneurship, and public-private partnerships in shaping effective tourism infrastructure. The findings contribute to the formation of scientific and practical recommendations for strengthening tourism infrastructure as a key factor in national economic development.

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Introduction. The sustainable development of the economy of the regions is directly influenced by the development of the tourism industry and social infrastructure. Today, tourism is taking shape as one of the leading sectors of the national economy in many countries, becoming an important factor in sustainable development. In particular, the role of tourism in the development of human capital, the increase in population employment, the creation of new jobs, the increase in tax revenues, the attraction of investments, the preservation of cultural, historical and natural heritage is growing.

Tourism infrastructure, on the other hand, occupies a key place in the process and is becoming the strategic base of territorial development. It is the state of infrastructure, modernity and territorial fragility that determines the size of the flow of tourists, the level of their satisfaction in terms of the quality of Service and the economic efficiency of tourism activities.

President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev's appeal to the Supreme Assembly of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2021 said that "we will continue to carry out consistent reforms on the development of Tourism in 2021. Particular attention is paid to the development of pilgrimage tourism and domestic tourism. Also, 1 trillion sums will be allocated from the state budget for the improvement of the land areas, water and road infrastructure around tourism facilities," as evidenced by the strategic importance of this sector.

These approaches entail an in-depth scientific and methodological analysis of the following elements of the tourism infrastructure and their functions, as well as the development of proposals and recommendations for their further improvement. Including:

- accommodation facilities (hotels, guest houses, resorts),
- transport and communication networks (roads, airports, mobile communications and internet services),
- catering, entertainment, wellness and cultural service facilities. These approaches entail an in-depth scientific and methodological analysis of the follow.).

Methods. The study employs a comparative analysis of international practices, theoretical classifications, and statistical data. Structural-functional analysis and synthesis are used to identify the interrelation between tourism infrastructure, investment flows, and socio-economic indicators.

Therefore, analyzing the prospects of integrating tourism infrastructure into the regional economy and ensuring regional sustainable growth through it is one of the urgent tasks of current scientific and practical research.

The tourism market and its infrastructure, their content, functions, as well as the main subjects of the tourism industry, development principles, regulatory mechanisms, and practical aspects of state policy in this field have been scientifically studied by many local and foreign scholars.

In particular, in the scientific research conducted by Zorin I.V., Kvartal'nov V.A., Pardaev M.Q., Birjakov M.B., Beklaryan L.A., Pshennikov A.S., Morozov M.A., Tukhliyev I.S., Hayitboev R., Safarov B.Sh., and Tursunova G.R., attention has been paid to the following issues:

- the socio-economic essence of the tourism market;
- its main components and functions;
- the role of tourism industry actors (hotels, restaurant enterprises);
- the economic, organizational, and legal foundations of regulating the tourism market;
- emerging problems in the sector and ways to solve them.

In addition, scholars such as Jukova M.A., Alimova M.T., Mamatkulov Kh.M., Arxipova V.F., and Devisov A.S., in their scientific works, have covered the following areas:

- methods of assessing the effectiveness of services in the field of tourism;
- tourism production infrastructure;
- state policy in the field of tourism and its main directions;
- the functional role of travel agencies and tour operators in tourism;
- state measures to support regional tourism infrastructure.

In particular, Mamatkulov Kh.M., Morozov M.A., and Norchayev A.N., in their research, analyzed the importance of tourism infrastructure in the fields of economics and management, the structural elements of the infrastructure and their level of development, as well as the mechanisms of formation and improvement of regional tourism infrastructure.

These studies have served to comprehensively study the field of tourism and today represent an important theoretical and practical source for developing a scientifically grounded strategy for the development of tourism infrastructure.

During the research, innovative changes and modern requirements related to the sector were taken into account in highlighting the features and directions of the development of tourism infrastructure.

Furthermore, tourism infrastructure was studied methodologically in depth as an integrated system. In particular, in identifying the structural elements and their functions of regional tourism infrastructure, dialectical and systemic approaches, comparative and contrastive analysis, statistical methods, as well as grouping and analytical classification of data, were widely applied. The research also substantiated an approach aimed at determining the development trends of infrastructure components and defining their promising directions.

Tourism infrastructure integrates both general and specific infrastructure elements. General infrastructure includes elements that are necessary not only for tourism but also for the functioning of other sectors and industries (Figure 1). These include automobile and railway networks, electricity supply, housing and communal services, drinking water supply systems, and financial institutions (banks, insurance companies). Although these systems are not directly specialized in tourism, they serve as general infrastructural resources necessary for tourism activities. Without these resources, the development of tourism activities would be nearly impossible.

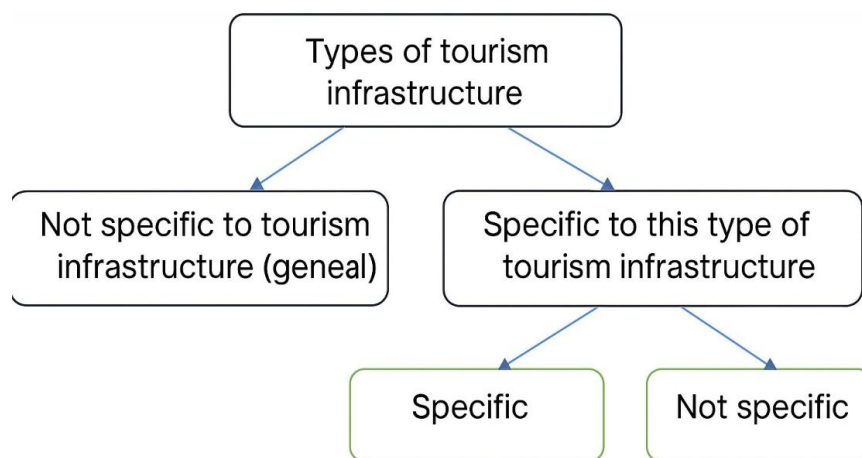


Figure-1. Composition of tourism infrastructure by appearance

It should be especially noted that in recent years, within the composition of general infrastructure elements, there has been a clear tendency for specialized units aimed directly at serving the tourism sector to stand out. For example, within the framework of institutional infrastructure, this includes tourism-related legislative acts, special departments established in insurance companies providing services to tourism activities, as well as the widespread development of international and national tourism exhibitions.

Special infrastructure, in turn, encompasses facilities and services aimed directly at meeting the needs of tourism activities. These include:

- artificially created infrastructure: means of transport, hotels, hostels, cultural centers, museums, entertainment complexes, and others;
- natural infrastructure: seas, rivers, lakes, forests, mountains, and other natural landscapes.

From this perspective, tourism infrastructure is defined as a complex of all service systems, facilities, and resources necessary for organizing and effectively managing tourism activities. Tourism resources, in turn, are recognized as sources that attract tourists' attention and shape their desire to travel. They provide economic, ecological, historical, cultural, and social motivations.

Results. The findings reveal that tourism infrastructure can be classified into general, specialized, and complementary categories. The growth of investments in the tourism sector demonstrates a direct correlation with the expansion of accommodation facilities, transport services, and cultural-entertainment institutions. Moreover, the development of infrastructure fosters the creation of new jobs, enhances service quality, and attracts foreign and domestic tourists.

The tourism sector is a socially and economically complex and multifaceted phenomenon, in which specific infrastructure components are necessary to implement various forms of tourism (pilgrimage, ecological, health, extreme, and others). Therefore, diversifying tourism infrastructure in line with modern requirements is of great importance.

In studying and effectively organizing entrepreneurial activity in the tourism sector, its direct connection with tourism infrastructure plays a key role. The structure of tourism infrastructure varies significantly depending on the directions and forms of tourism activities and influences the implementation of various models of entrepreneurship. Hence, forming appropriate infrastructure for each type of tourism requires a differentiated approach.

Tourism infrastructure is classified into two main forms:

1. General infrastructure – includes elements that serve all types of tourism but are not specifically created for a particular type of tourism. These include:
 - means of transport (trains, buses, etc.),
 - accommodation facilities (hotels, motels, private sector offers),
 - public catering establishments.
2. Special infrastructure – consists of specific facilities and services necessary for the implementation of a certain type of tourism. For example, for ski tourism:
 - ski trails,
 - ski lifts,
 - rental ski equipment and safety gear.

In addition, there is the concept of characteristic infrastructure, which refers to elements designed to create the main values and unique features of a tourism product. From a marketing perspective, this type of infrastructure makes the tourism offer competitive by creating special or additional services tailored to the needs of tourists.

For example, in gastronomic tourism — restaurants specializing in national cuisine; in ethnographic tourism — handicraft centers and institutions offering traditional entertainment programs.

Similarly, in the development of ski tourism, it is advisable to create complementary infrastructure such as water parks and swimming pools alongside it. Although not directly related to skiing itself, the presence of such facilities in the area can form new types of attractive motivations for tourists. This type of infrastructure functions as supportive infrastructure, simultaneously adding extra value to the tourism product.

The regional tourism services market has its own specific features and, depending on the type of consumers using these services, it is divided into two main directions: domestic tourists and foreign tourists. Domestic tourists represent the travel of citizens permanently residing within the country across its territory. Foreign tourists are divided into two categories: inbound tourists, who arrive from abroad to use tourism services, and outbound tourists, who are citizens traveling abroad for tourism purposes.

Expenditures related to tourism services are carried out in two stages: before the trip and during the trip. The analysis of these expenditures is of great significance in tourism marketing, financial planning, and adapting the supply of services.

The tourism services market is determined not only by the balance of supply and demand but also by the activities of institutional structures that regulate the process of providing services. These structures include state bodies at the national and regional levels, non-governmental public organizations, and

private sector representatives. From this perspective, the infrastructure of the tourism services market is considered an organizational and economic system of intermediary institutions and organizations that ensure the delivery of tourism products and services to consumers. It performs the functions of forming, regulating, and effectively managing the tourism market.

In the Republic of Uzbekistan, the management and development of the tourism services market infrastructure are based on the activities of national-level state bodies and public organizations. In particular, the State Committee for Tourism Development of the Republic of Uzbekistan is the main authorized body responsible for shaping tourism policy and defining strategic directions in the tourism services market. The Ministry of Physical Culture and Sports plays a role in supporting tourism types connected with sports, including the development of sports tourism. The Ministry of Justice and the State Customs Committee regulate the entry of foreign tourists, including visa and customs control procedures. Furthermore, the Center for Certification of Tourism Services is engaged in ensuring the safety and quality of tourism services by developing new state standards and improving existing ones, while the Chamber of Commerce and Industry supports tourism entrepreneurship, including resort, recreational, and hotel industries.

Among national-level public organizations, the Social Tourism Association holds particular importance. As a non-governmental non-profit organization, it aims to ensure equal participation of all segments of the population in tourism by providing appropriate tourism services for children, youth, the elderly, and people with disabilities. The Association also cooperates with foreign organizations in the development of inclusive tourism.

At the national level, private structures include:

- Training and consulting centers in the field of tourism;
- Firms conducting voluntary certification and licensing of tourism enterprises.

At the regional level, state organizations include:

- Regional government authorities;
- Regional departments of the State Committee for Tourism Development;
- Local bodies that ensure the alignment of interests between residents, tourism enterprises, and other stakeholders;
- Regional educational institutions specializing in the training of personnel in the field of tourism.

At the regional level, private structures include:

- Associations and unions that coordinate tourism development activities and provide financing for the development of tourism;
- Private educational institutions providing training, retraining, and professional development of specialists in the field of tourism.

When focusing on the essence and meaning of the tourism market, it performs a number of key functions such as:

- intermediary (realizing the interests of market actors),
- stimulating,
- economic,
- informational,
- monitoring,

- regulatory functions.

The development of infrastructure is directly linked to the general patterns of entrepreneurial efficiency. The higher the level of infrastructure development, the more effective entrepreneurial activity becomes. The creation of a developed infrastructure is a necessary condition for the growth of small and private entrepreneurship, and the effectiveness of its formation is directly dependent on the efficiency of this infrastructure.

Discussion. The results indicate that tourism infrastructure should be developed in line with market demands and sustainability principles. Public–private partnerships, entrepreneurial initiatives, and institutional support are vital for mitigating investment risks and ensuring long-term competitiveness. The study concludes that theoretical approaches to tourism infrastructure development must integrate economic, social, and environmental aspects, thus providing a scientific basis for policy recommendations.

Infrastructure also has a direct impact on the social conditions of a country or a specific region. The higher the level of infrastructure development, the more advanced the economy, the higher the standard of living, and the better the overall social well-being. Conversely, a low level of infrastructure development results in slow or costly production growth, ultimately leading to a decline in the population's living standards.

The development of infrastructure requires significant financial investments and cannot be achieved without the participation of the state and state organizations. For example, according to the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. PF-5611 of January 5, 2019, “On Additional Measures for the Accelerated Development of Tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan”, the Tourism Development Concept for 2019–2025 was approved. This concept is aimed at:

- improving the effectiveness of reforms being implemented to create favorable economic conditions and factors,
- defining priority goals and objectives for the accelerated development of the tourism sector,
- increasing its role and share in the economy,
- diversifying services and improving their quality, and
- modernizing tourism infrastructure.

This, in turn, emphasizes that the state and its authorized institutions are the main actors in carrying out key reforms in the development of the tourism sector. Furthermore, within the framework of national and regional tourism development programs, measures are defined to ensure the comprehensive growth of the tourism industry and its infrastructure.

Table 1. Socio-Economic Indicators of the Tourism Sector in Uzbekistan, 2020–2024

Specification	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Number of foreign tourists (thousand people)	1 500	1 880	5 200	6 600	8 200
Number of domestic tourists (thousand people)	2 500	5 200	7 300	9 100	11 000
Number of hotels	933	1 025	1 215	1 400	1 650
Number of certified guides	1 100	1 500	1 800	2 000	2 300
Number of travel agencies	321	415	510	580	650
Jobs in the field of Tourism (thousand)	170	200	225	250	280

As can be seen from this table-1, in 2020, due to the pandemic, the number of foreign tourists decreased sharply and amounted to only 1.5 million people. In the following years, especially from 2022 onwards, a gradual increase was observed. By 2024, the number of foreign tourists reached 8.2 million, which is 5.5 times higher compared to 2020. This demonstrates Uzbekistan's growing integration into the international tourism market.

Domestic tourists: A positive trend is also observed in domestic tourism. While the number of domestic tourists was 2.5 million in 2020, it reached 11 million by 2024, reflecting a fourfold growth. This change confirms the increasing demand of the population for travel and the improvement in the quality of services.

Number of hotels: In 2020, there were 933 hotels, while by 2024 this figure had risen to 1,650, an increase of 77%. This indicates a steady rise in the country's capacity to host tourists.

Number of certified guides: In 2020, there were 1,100 certified guides, and by 2024 their number doubled to 2,300. This growth demonstrates the expansion of guide services, improvement in service quality, and the sector's focus on effective interaction with tourists.

Number of travel agencies: The number of travel agencies increased from 321 in 2020 to 650 in 2024. This twofold growth reflects the activity of the private sector and the increasing dynamism of the service market.

Employment in tourism: The number of people employed in the tourism sector grew from 170,000 in 2020 to 280,000 in 2024, representing an increase of about 65%. This highlights the rising role of tourism in the national economy.

When analyzing Table 2, it becomes evident that during the period of 2014–2024, the volume of investments directed to the tourism sector of the Republic of Uzbekistan showed a consistent upward trend. In 2014, this indicator amounted to 125 billion UZS, while by 2024 it had reached 980 billion UZS, representing a 784% increase compared to the base year.

Table 2. Dynamics of Investments in the Tourism Sector of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2014–2024

Year	Investment volume (billion soums)	Growth compared to the base year (%)	Share in gross investment (%)
2014	125	100%	0.35%
2015	140	112%	0.38%
2016	165	132%	0.41%
2017	190	152%	0.45%
2018	280	224%	0.50%
2019	460	368%	0.57%
2020	420	336%	0.52%
2021	510	408%	0.54%
2022	690	552%	0.60%
2023	850	680%	0.66%
2024	980	784%	0.72%

Growth of investment volume: This increase is primarily associated with the modernization of tourism infrastructure, the construction of new hotels, passenger transport facilities, entertainment and cultural objects. At the same time, the financial inflows directed to tourism facilities demonstrate not only the growing role of domestic resources but also the participation of international investors.

2. **Share in Total Investments:** The share of tourism in overall investments increased from 0.35% in 2014 to 0.72% in 2024. This more than twofold growth indicates the strengthening role of tourism in the national economy.

3. **Macroeconomic Significance:** Investments directed into the tourism sector directly contribute to job creation, improvement of service quality, regional infrastructure development, and overall GDP growth.

4. **Development Stages:** Although there was a temporary decline in 2020 due to the pandemic (420 billion UZS), in subsequent years, investments rapidly increased as a result of economic recovery and the intensification of state policies.

Tourism infrastructure must be formed in accordance with market demands. It should be comprehensive, ensuring the all-round support of the tourism business. The relative contribution of its creators may vary significantly depending on the type of business. However, at all stages of infrastructure development, the key role can be played by an active initiator – an individual or entrepreneurial group supported by stakeholders who actively promote its implementation.

In this process, a significant reduction of investment risks can only be achieved under one condition: by creating both formal and informal associations, networks, and clubs that unite new social groups around common goals and approaches to achieving them. These associations, based on various strategies, provide parallel solutions for ensuring the sustainable development of the tourism infrastructure.

Conclusion. The analysis of tourism investments in Uzbekistan during 2014–2024 demonstrates that the sector has become a steadily expanding component of the national economy. The increase in tourism’s share of total investments—from 0.35% in 2014 to 0.72% in 2024—highlights the strengthening role of the industry in the country’s socio-economic development. Despite the temporary decline in 2020 caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, investment flows quickly recovered and accelerated in subsequent years, driven by government support and the growing attractiveness of the sector for both domestic and international investors.

Tourism-related investments have played a crucial macroeconomic role, contributing to job creation, the modernization of services, and the development of regional infrastructure, while also supporting sustainable GDP growth. The results emphasize the necessity of forming comprehensive tourism infrastructure aligned with market demands. In this process, active entrepreneurial initiatives, supported by both formal and informal associations, are essential for reducing investment risks and ensuring long-term stability.

Overall, the investment dynamics underline that tourism in Uzbekistan is evolving into a strategic sector with high growth potential, capable of strengthening international integration and enhancing the country’s economic resilience.

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