

Research paper / Оригинальная статья

<https://doi.org/10.51176/1997-9967-2024-3-73-85>

MPHTI 06.73.29

JEL: M12, M14, O13, R11



Analysis of the Tourism Revenue Sharing Status at the Aksu-Zhabagly Nature Reserve of Kazakhstan

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For citation: Akbar, I., Pazykhaiyr, B. M., Myrzaliyeva, Z. K., Tazhekova, A. Z. & Abdildayeva, N. D. (2024). Analysis of the Tourism Revenue Sharing Status at the Aksu-Zhabagly Nature Reserve of Kazakhstan. *Economy: strategy and practice*, 19(3), 73-85, <https://doi.org/10.51176/1997-9967-2024-3-73-85>

ABSTRACT

Sharing tourism-generated revenues with local people has become a popular strategy for implementing sustainability in nature-based tourism destinations globally. Although the local people have received some economic gains from tourism development, there are still some limitations to fair income sharing. These limitations are evident in many underdeveloped countries and lead to a passive situation of local community participation in tourism development. The primary purpose of this article is to determine the level of tourism revenue sharing in the Aksu-Zhabagly tourist destination and, at the same time, to make appropriate recommendations on the remaining issues. To understand the status of tourism revenue sharing, we surveyed the perceptions of 44 nature reserve employees and 66 travel company workers, respectively. The survey results show that although the business operations of tourism organizers do not harm the living environment of the local population, they usually do not spend part of the income from tourism on the common good of the local population. Most residents are unsatisfied with tourism development, and their participation in tourism is also comparatively low. The results also reveal that the comparatively low level of sharing the tourism-associated revenue with local development is the leading indirect cause of residents' dissatisfaction with the development of the tourism industry. In conclusion, we believe that the results of this study and our recommendations help local authorities understand the importance of removing constraints in the fair distribution of tourism revenues in this tourist destination.

KEYWORDS: Economic Development, Sustainability Strategy, Tourism, Revenue Sharing Practice, Aksu-Zhabagly, Nature Reserve

CONFLICT OF INTEREST: the authors declare that there is no conflict of interest

FINANCIAL SUPPORT: this research was not sponsored by any organization or project.

Article history:

Received 01 January 2024

Accepted 10 August 2024

Published 30 September 2024

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Анализ распределения доходов от туризма в Аксу-Жабагалинском заповеднике Казахстана

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Для цитирования: Акбар И., Пазылхайыр Б.М., Мырзалиева З.К., Тажекова А.Д., Абдилдаева Н.Д. (2024). Анализ состояния распределения доходов от туризма в Аксу-Жабагалинском заповеднике Казахстана. Экономика: стратегия и практика, 19(3), 73-85, <https://doi.org/10.51176/1997-9967-2024-3-73-85>

АННОТАЦИЯ

Использование доходов поступающих от туризма местным сообществом на глобальных природных туристических направлениях стало популярной стратегией обеспечения устойчивости. Местное население получая некоторые экономические выгоды от развития туризма, все же видит определенные ограничения в справедливом распределении доходов. Эти ограничения наблюдаются во многих слаборазвитых странах и в свою очередь приводят к пассивному участию местного сообщества в развитии туризма. Основная цель данной статьи – определить уровень распределения доходов от туризма в регионе Аксу-Жабаглы и дать соответствующие рекомендации по существующим вопросам. Чтобы понять состояние распределения доходов от туризма, были проанализировано мнение 44 сотрудников заповедника и 66 сотрудников туристических компаний. По результатам опроса выявлено, что если даже хозяйственная деятельность организаторов туризма не наносит вред среде обитания местного населения, они, как правило, определенную часть дохода от туризма не тратят на общее благо местного населения. По результатам исследования установлено, что большинство жителей дают низкую оценку устойчивому развитию туризма в регионе, и соответственно, уровень их участия в туризме также низок. Результаты также показывают, что относительно низкий уровень поддержки отраслей, связанных с туризмом, на туристической территории, является одной из косвенных причин неудовлетворенности местных жителей развитием туристической индустрии. Результаты исследования и предложенные рекомендации помогут местным властям понять важность устранения ограничений в справедливом распределении доходов от туризма в данной туристской дестинации.

КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА: экономическое развитие, стратегия устойчивого развития, туризм, практика распределения доходов, Аксу-Жабаглы, Природный заповедник

КОНФЛИКТ ИНТЕРЕСОВ: авторы заявляют об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

ФИНАНСИРОВАНИЕ: исследование не имело спонсорской поддержки (собственные ресурсы).

История статьи:

Получено 01 января 2024

Принято 10 августа 2024

Опубликовано 30 сентября 2024

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism Revenue Sharing (TRS) has been identified by various environmentalists and conservationists as the best way to offset human-wildlife conflict which impedes local support for national parks (Hulme & Murphree, 2001). By channeling tourism revenue to residents, conservationists hope to offset wildlife costs and improve local attitudes toward conservation. To date, tourism revenue-sharing programs have met mixed success (Western, 2001). Over the past two decades, tourism has become more popular as a significant revenue source for rural people adjacent to nature-based tourism destinations and as a means of preserving protected natures. Sharing tourism's relevant benefits with residents has become the primary tool for maintaining the sustainable development of protected areas (Balmford et al., 2009). Sharing tourism revenues with local communities can contribute to the financial sustainability of local communities, which can invest in other projects, such as agriculture, obtaining food, and bringing other benefits to the market (Imanishimwe, 2018). The PAs have unique natural resources, and tourism income is one of the primary sources of funding for managing the PAs and improving the economic conditions of local residents. Tourism Revenue Sharing (TRS) has been identified by environmentalists and conservationists as the best way to offset human-wildlife conflict, which impedes local support for national parks (Hulme & Murphree, 2001). At the same time, biodiversity conservation will be sustainable if the distribution of local interests satisfies stakeholders' wishes (Salum, 2009). Thus, effective plans for sharing the benefits of tourism with PAs are important to establish long-term local communities' support for tourism development (Rylance et al., 2017).

The principle of sharing tourism revenue also underpins a win-win policy that focuses on environmental protection and local development (Tumušime & Vedeld, 2012). Tourism activities based on natural landscapes can promote economic diversification and the well-being of people. Besides, tourism revenue will help develop infrastructure, introduce cultures, and increase the quality of social services (Davis & Morais, 2004). If household revenue-generating activities are sponsored by tourism revenue, the total income of households will increase, and as a result, household welfare will improve (Stanley, 2016). These revenue-sharing approaches increasingly promote "hybrid environmental governance," in which communities, businesses, non-governmental

organizations, and states share the responsibility and rights to manage and protect the world's biodiversity assets (Brockington et al., 2008).

Many Sustainable Tourism Development (STD) theories support that all the stakeholders must have equal opportunity and privilege to engage in tourism and earn their living from tourism development. However, it is indicated from our previous studies that nearly all tourism businesses in the Aksu-Zhabagly tourism destination were concentrated on a few stakeholders, such as the Aksu-Zhabagly heritage office and travel companies in Zhabaly village (Akbar & Yang, 2022; Akbar et al., 2019). In this article, we will analyze and discuss how the two main tourism organizers in the Aksu-Zhabagly share their revenue with local residents.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although the tourism industry plays a vital role in generating profits from tourist attractions, it is argued that the sector's costs, benefits, and power are unfairly distributed among different stakeholders, and the scale is different, affecting the effectiveness of tourism as a source of revenue, conservation, and development tool. Tourism can increase government revenue, but how to share it somewhat is unknown (Blake et al., 2006). Local communities in Third World countries cannot benefit much from tourism because they seldom control the development ways of the industry, they cannot match the financial resources available to external investors, and their opinions are hardly ever heard (Mowforth & Munt, 2003). Empirical research shows that many countries and regions rich in biodiversity and poor in the economy have been promoting tourism revenue allocation and equitable distribution as a conservation tool around PAs for improving the living standard of the people. However, despite implementing the mechanism around several PAs in developing countries, the mechanism has not achieved the desired intent. Evidence indicates that the effectiveness of this policy has been mixed because, in developing countries, there is a lack of transparency in the benefit channels and distribution schemes in most PAs, poor institutional arrangements, and corruption within revenue collection and distribution (Archabald & Naughton-Treves, 2001), which limits the goal of improving the welfare of people in PAs.

The lack of attention to individual differences in communities has led to problems of inequitable access to resources and distribution of benefits. At the same time, it has reduced locals' commitment to preserving the resource base in the long run (De Jonge, 2011). If an industry's revenue-sharing tends

to a specific class (for example, more excellent revenue class), then this will not be desirable regarding “social equity”. Therefore, economic policy must also address the sharing of interests among various stakeholders (Lee & Kang, 1998). The more transparent tourism benefits the communities, the greater the respect for tourism and the realization of its impact on people’s lives (Melita & Mendlinger, 2013).

Residents do not highly appreciate the TRS scheme, and many see themselves as deceived. At the same time, local people see the TRS scheme as a project that benefits those directly involved in nature conservation work and the tourism industry rather than a project that supports the community as a whole (Nyagah, 2017). In the case of Bwindi in Uganda, it is believed that the TRS process is not fair and transparent. For example, some residents reported that community representatives and leaders of villages spend the revenues on people in their villages to reward their electorate (Tumusiime & Vedeld, 2012). Undoubtedly, one form of TRS is to create employment opportunities for local community members. However, in the case of Maasai communities in Tanzania, the revenues from tourism in Maasai seem to have been misused and caused many conflicts within the village as most villagers do not know how much the villages earn from tourism, so the leaders often tamper with the money (Snyder & Sulle, 2011). In addition, since there is no legal agreement and no recognized TRS mechanism, few community members will enjoy such benefits (Stanley, 2016). Weaknesses of human capital have allowed only the community members to participate in the benefits of eco-tourism who are semi-skilled in the planning, business management, financial management, marketing, product research, and development community, and a group of people who are incapable of doing so often remains poor (Ashley et al., 2000).

Tourism contributes to the growth of regional economies, providing a source of revenue for resident households and local firms. This is particularly relevant for developing and the least developed countries. From the tourism revenue perspective, foreign and domestic tourists are an economic boost. With globalization, international tourism revenues in many countries have become one of the factors directly affecting economic growth. The revenue generated from tourism can be distributed to develop other sectors of the economy, such as transport, health, and education. Many scholars have revealed that tourism growth in any particular destination has the great potential to offer more economic benefits than socio-cultural and environmental benefits to the host communities in third-world (developing) coun-

tries where many poor people reside. We further emphasized that these potential economic benefits may include infrastructure facilities, transportation, employment creation, new markets, cross-industry benefits, and a diverse local economy.

Entrepreneurs in tourism, pursuing personal aims in profit receiving, satisfy the population’s needs in rest and health recovery, which is also the state’s responsibility. It means that the state’s goal is to direct entrepreneurship in the sphere of tourism to achieve maximum benefit for the country’s citizens (Huszi et al., 2016). Currently, the share of outbound tourism is much higher than the proportion of inbound tourism. Furthermore, they have been known to bring the primary revenue from this sector of the economy to domestic GDP. Today, about 750 travel companies that cooperate with the 80 countries of the world operate in the country. According to the World Business Council for Travel and Tourism (WTTC), in 2012, the range of business trips worldwide amounted to \$819 billion; by 2020, WTTC predicts a figure of \$1.589 trillion, which means an annual increase of 4.3 %. The share of non-residents who visited the republic with the aim of business and a professional purpose is 33 %; the share of Kazakhstani is higher and amounts to 50 % (Shayekina & Vaslyayeva, 2014). These examples indicate that Kazakhstan has attracted a few international tourists, and most foreign visitors come to Kazakhstan for business purposes. As a result, local residents’ revenue from inbound tourism in Kazakhstan is relatively low. The expected increase in personal revenue of the population of the world, both in industrialized and developing countries, will lead to reinforced tourist activity and, in particular, to an increase in the number of consumers of tourist products with high revenues, as well as to an increase in funds allocated by society for the development of tourism (Bespayeva, 2015).

Regarding the economic impacts of TRS, the research space in Kazakhstan needs to be compensated by research works with high scientific value. Kazakhstan authors mainly concentrated on the economic benefits of tourism, and their works do not involve studying practical methods or active measures of solving problems or creative models of acceptable future development but instead analyzing factors, comparing different situations, and demonstrating phenomena theoretically.

In the literature review section, we mainly discussed the various effects of tourism revenue sharing and barriers to tourism revenue sharing in developing countries. Here, we divided the results of scientific works according to our research topic into two stages, the first of which is the research conducted by foreign scientists within the scope of our

study, and the second is the scientific work of Kazakhstani researchers. Briefly summarizing the results of those mentioned above foreign and domestic scientific works, foreign scientists comprehensively studied the economic, social, and environmental impact of tourism income and determined that the fair distribution of tourism income guarantees sustainable tourism development. At the same time, they identified several obstacles in the fair distribution of tourism income in developing countries and proposed their appropriate solutions.

Moreover, the research of Kazakhstani authors within the scope of our scientific work is not satisfactory compared to that of foreign scientists. They have published only a small number of scientific works on the economic effects of tourism. As for the uniqueness of our scientific work, although similar topics are being studied more or less in several African countries, scientific works written according to our method are scarce. That is why this research article, a new topic not studied in our country and neighboring countries, will become one of the models for the Central Asian and CIS countries.

METHODOLOGY

Questionnaire surveys were used as the significant primary data collection methods. Government documents and tourism statistics facilitated the effective execution of the surveys and complemented results for primary data analysis. Representatives from the Aksu-Zhabagly nature reserve office and tour companies in Zhabagly village were interviewed; face-to-face interviews with some participants were conducted during the three-week survey period. Interview and survey questions include how tourism organizers share their revenue with residents.

The questionnaire was designed for all relevant respondents and had three major sections. Section 1 was designed by ticking “√” on the corresponding option to acquire basic information about their gender, age, ethnicity, education level, and working time at the current post. Section 2 was designed with multiple-choice questions that indicate the respondents’ current working field. Section 3 evaluates respondents’ perceptions of statements regarding how tourism organizers share their revenue with residents. Question items in section 3 encouraged respondents to answer on a 5-point Likert scale questions with 1 (fully agree), 2 (agree), 3 (neutral), 4 (disagree), and 5 (entirely disagree). Data collection occurred over 20 days from 2nd of March to 22nd of March 2019, with respondents selected from workers of the Aksu-Zhabagly nature reserve office (44 people out of about 60 workers) and workers of tour

companies in Zhabagly village (66 representatives out of about 100 people who engage in tourism industry). We went to Zhabagly village and personally issued our questionnaire to respondents. Using five-point Likert-scale options, the respondents were asked for their opinion on 6 statements regarding how tourism organizers share their revenue with local residents.

Description of respondents’ demographic characteristics

The sample size of workers at the Aksu-Zhabagly Nature Reserve office is 44. About 70% of the respondents in the nature reserve office are male, and female respondents are about 30%. The majority of respondents are middle age group (35–54), accounting for 68.20%, followed by the young group (18–34), accounting for 25.00%, and the elder group respondents (≥ 55) in our survey are 6.80%. Furthermore, most of the respondents in the nature reserve office are Kazakhs (93.10%). In comparison, Russian and other minorities only account for 6.90%, indicating that the community is mainly Kazakh and has a small number of other nationalities. From the perspective of education level, the proportion of people with middle-level education (including school and college) is the largest (88.60%), and those who have attended university or above account for 11.40%.

Table 1 shows the social demographic characteristics of the two representative groups, such as gender, age, ethnicity, education level, and working time at your current post.

The result showed that most of the workers of the Aksu-Zhabagly nature reserve had received middle education. As working time at your current post is mentioned, the respondents of the nature reserve office who work for “0 – 4 years” at their present post account for 27.30%, the respondents who work for “5 – 9 years” at their present post were 31.80%, and the respondents who work for “10 years or more” at their present post were 40.90%. The sample size of tour company workers in Zhabagly village is 66. About slightly more than half of the respondents in the tour companies are male (53%), while our survey’s female respondents are 47%. Respondents were concentrated in the young age group with 18–34 (56.00%), followed by the middle age group (35–54), accounting for 37.80%, and the elder group respondents (≥ 55) in our survey 6.20%. Moreover, about two-thirds of respondents are Kazakhs (69.70%), followed by the Russian ethnic group, accounting for 25.80%, and the other minorities only account for 4.50%.

Table 1. Details of sample responses (n=110)

Characteristics	Workers of the Aksu-Zhabagly nature reserve office (n=44)		Workers of tour companies in Zhabagly village (n=66)	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Gender:				
Male	31	70.50	35	53.00
Female	13	29.50	31	47.00
Age (years):				
Young (18–34)	11	25.00	37	56.00
Middle age (35–54)	30	68.20	25	37.80
Elder (≥55)	3	6.80	4	6.20
Ethnicity:				
Kazakh	41	93.10	46	69.70
Russian	2	4.60	17	25.80
Other	1	2.30	3	4.50
Education:				
Middle (school or college)	39	88.60	54	81.80
High (university or above)	5	11.40	12	18.20
Working time at your post				
0 – 4 years	12	27.30	22	33.30
5 – 9 years	14	31.80	29	43.90
10 years or more	18	40.90	15	22.80

Note: compiled by authors

They indicate that in the Aksu-Zhabagly tourism destinations, people who engage in the tourism sector are mainly Kazakh and Russian. From the perspective of education level, the proportion of tourism company workers who attended school or college (middle-level education) was the most significant (81.80%), and 18.20% of those who received high-level education (including university and above). As far as their current, engaging industries are concerned, the respondents of tour companies who worked for “0 – 4 years” at their present post account for 33.30%, the respondents who worked for “5 – 9 years” at their present post

were 43.90%, and the respondents who work for “10 years or more” at their present post were 22.80%.

Figure 1 shows that there were more respondents from the ecological protection department (43.20%), followed by respondents from the tourism and ecological education department (25.00%) of the Aksu-Zhabagly nature reserve office, and respondents from other departments of the nature reserve office account for a small proportion (various events department workers:13.60%, financial department workers: 11.40% and scientific research department workers: 6.80% respectively).

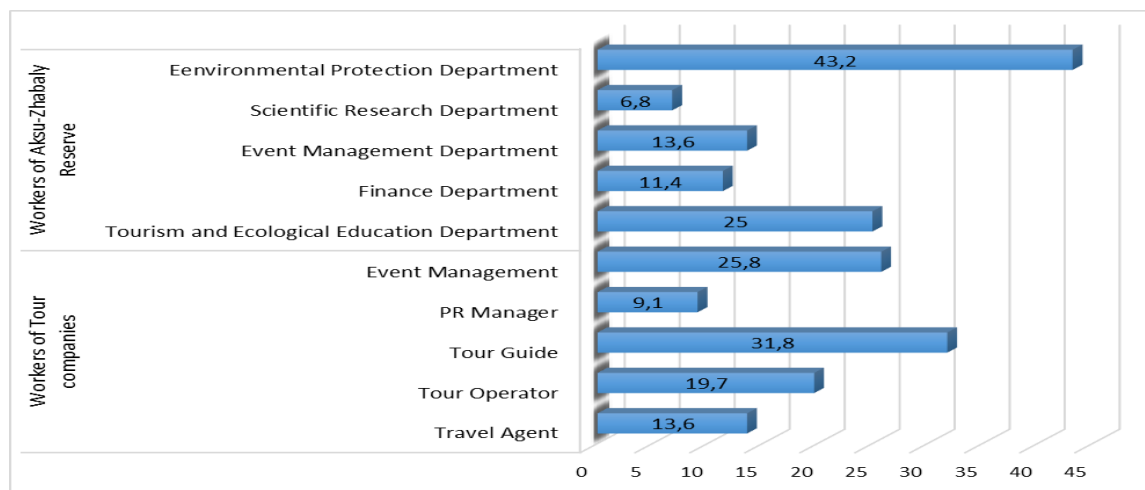


Figure 1. The proportion of the respondents in the current working field, in %

Note: compiled by authors

Concerning the workers of travel companies in Zhabagly village, there were more respondents from tour guide offices (31.80%), followed by respondents from various events organizer offices and tour operator offices (25.80% and 19.70% respectively), and respondents from travel agent office and PR manager office were 13.60% and 9.10% respectively). From the above statistical analysis, we can easily see that there were more people engaged in ecological protection in the Aksu-Zhabagly nature reserve office, and people who engaged in tourism and ecological education also accounted for a comparatively high proportion. This indicates that the nature reserve office focuses more on the ecological protection of the nature reserve while paying attention to tourism development to some extent. If we look at the statistics of travel companies in services, the number of tour guides and organizers of various events is relatively large. It can be concluded that visitors to this tourist destination usually need instructors who know the specifics of this tourist route.

To increase the popularity of the tourist facility and attract more tourists, many events are organized in the region every year.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The Aksu-Zhabagly Nature Reserve, one of the oldest protected areas in Kazakhstan, generates tourism revenues through various services offered to visitors. The reserve's income sources include entrance tickets to the nature reserve, fees for escort services, museum entrance tickets, accommodation, and meal fees. These services are provided at different rates for Kazakhstani and foreign tourists, reflecting the reserve's efforts to accommodate domestic and international visitors.

Table 2 shows that the Aksu-Zhabagly tourism revenues are collected from an entrance ticket to the nature reserve territory, a fee for accompanying guards (escorts), a museum entrance ticket, hotel accommodation, and a three-meal fee.

Table 2. Prices for various services of the Aksu-Zhabagly Nature Reserve office in 2018

Indicator Revenue	Price dimension	Time	Prices for residents	Prices for foreigners
Entrance ticket	1 adult	1 day	640.5 KZT	1440.5 KZT
	1 student	1 day	540.5 KZT	1140.5 KZT
	1 pupil	1 day	440.5 KZT	840.5 KZT
Instructors service fee	1 group of adults	1 day	1200 KZT	1650 KZT
	1 group of students	1 day	900 KZT	1237.5 KZT
	1 group of pupils	1 day	600 KZT	825 KZT
Escorts service fee	Escort for adults	1 day	850 KZT	1300 KZT
	Escort for students	1 day	637.5 KZT	975 KZT
	Escort for pupils	1 day	425 KZT	650 KZT
Museum ticket	1 adult	Once a day	150 KZT	150 KZT
	1 student	Once a day	113 KZT	113 KZT
	1 pupil	Once a day	75 KZT	75 KZT
Transport fee	Passenger car (Niva)	1 hour	2200 KZT	2200 KZT
	Passenger car (Uaz)	1 hour	2700 KZT	2700 KZT
	Microbus (Gazel)	1 hour	3000 KZT	3000 KZT
	Horses	1 hour	550 KZT	550 KZT
Accommodation and meal fees	Comfort room (with three meals)	24 hours	9000 KZT	9000 KZT
	Standard room (with three meals)	24 hours	7500 KZT	7500 KZT

Note: compiled by the authors based on the information from the Aksu-Zhabagly Reserve official site

When we interviewed the head of the tourism department in the Aksu-Zhabagly nature reserve office, she said that the first three payments are obligatory for tourists who visit the nature reserve. Most

tourists generally stay in hotels and eat three meals every day. Tourists may also pay additional fees for the instructor's (guide) service and transportation. As for the instructor's (guide) service, some office

staff give the instructor service to the travelers in this tourist destination. Thus, one of the net incomes from the nature reserve management office is the instructor's (guide) service fee. Due to the largeness of nature reserves and distant and difficult roads to travel, most tourists usually rent transportation. Here, tourists can choose from two types of vehicles: renting horses or cars provided by the nature reserve office. Most domestic and foreign tourists select hiking or hire horses, but on the contrary, few tourists rent cars. This means that the nature reserve has less profit from car rentals.

Undoubtedly, the most important indicators that show the tourism development status of one

tourist destination are the number of visitors and tourism revenue volume. Tulkibas district mayor Nurbol Turashbekov (2017) said, "In 2016, more than 12 thousand tourists had visited Tulkibas district to see the Aksu-Zhabagly nature reserve and other places of interest, including 7% foreigners". The numbers above are minimal, considering its high potential for tourism development. Below, we analyze some statistics that indicate domestic and foreign visitors to the Aksu-Zhabagly state nature reserve in the last ten years.

Figure 2 clearly shows that the total number of visitors and domestic tourists was higher in 2011, with 2890 and 2104 people, respectively.

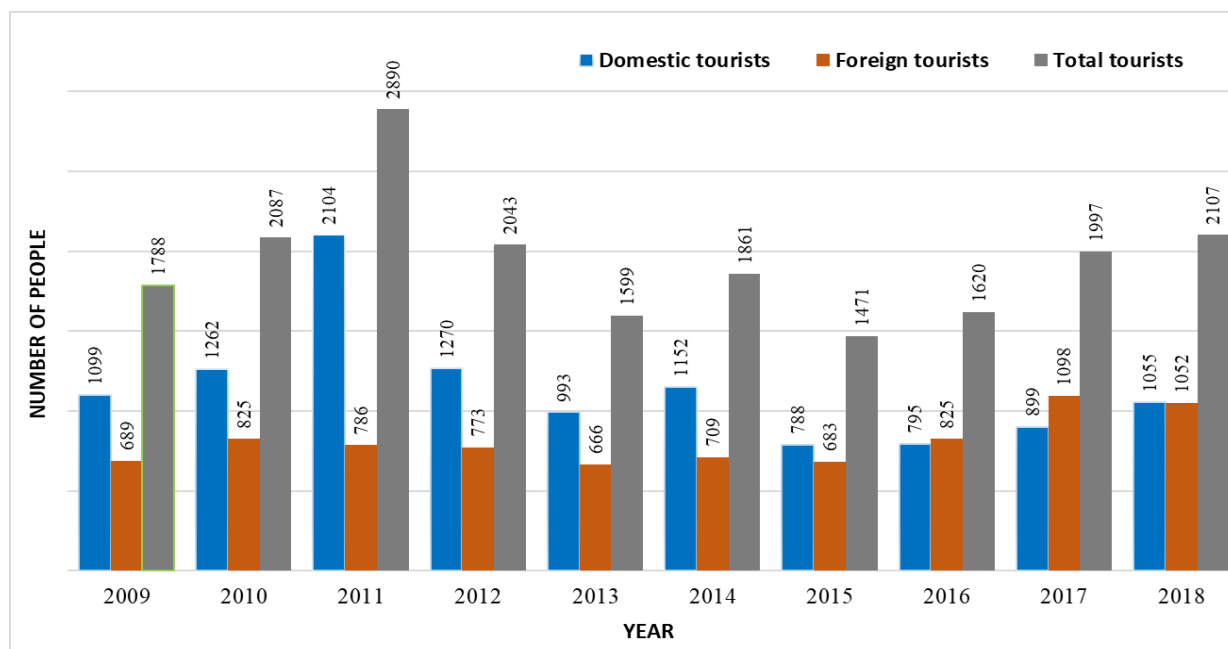


Figure 2. The number of tourists to the Aksu-Zhabagly Heritage Site for 2009 - 2018

Note: compiled by authors

Additionally, in 2015, there were fewer visitors to the Aksu-Zhabagly nature reserve, and the total number of tourists decreased to 1471. The total and domestic number of travelers has been increasing slowly over the last three years. As far as foreign visitors are concerned, there has been a fluctuation in the number of visitors. There were fewer foreign tourists in 2013, with 666 people, while more foreign tourists visited the nature reserve than at other times in 2017; the number reached 1098. It can be concluded from the analysis of the above statistics that although there is a higher potential for planning

tourism activities in Zhabagly village, for instance, the quality of accommodation and convenience of accessibility are higher and even in line with international standards, the development of tourism in the Aksu-Zhabagly is still in the primary stage or even undeveloped.

Table 3 shows that the Aksu-Zhabagly Nature Reserve's total tourism revenues reached 21,620,553.8 KZT in 2018, an increase of about 1 million KZT compared to 20,634,071.2 KZT in 2017.

Table 3. The primary annual tourism revenue of the Aksu-Zhabagly Nature Reserve for 2017 -2018

Year	Revenue from domestic tourists = Prices × Tourist number	Revenue from foreign tourists = Prices × Tourist number	Total revenue
2017	899 × 9,656.25 KZT = 8,680,968.75 KZT	1,098 × 10,866.25 KZT = 11,953,102.5 KZT	20,634,071.2 KZT
2018	1,055 × 9,656.25 KZT = 10,164,843.8 KZT	1,052 × 10,866.25 KZT = 11,452,335 KZT	21,620,553.8 KZT

Note: calculated by the authors based on information and statistics from table 2 and figure 2

Comparing domestic and foreign tourism revenues, there was more revenue from foreign tourists than from domestic tourists in 2017 and 2018. This indicates that this tourism destination attracts more travelers from outside the country and has the potential to generate more foreign tourism income. Over the past two years, let us compare the revenue from nature reserve tourism with that from local and foreign tourists. It can quickly be concluded that although there is apparent growth in domestic tourism revenue, revenue from foreign visitors has dropped slightly.

When we interviewed Zhumanova Elmira Perdebaevna, the head of the Aksu-Zhabagly State Nature Reserve's environmental education and tourism department, she said it depends on the amount of inbound travel. "I think there was less inbound travel in 2018 than that in 2017." In our opinion, this needs further research.

The two tourism organizers located in Zhabagly village are the central profitable units of the tourism development at the world heritage site, and the powers of tourism management they have to differentiate them. The two tourism organizers near the world heritage site have different tourism engagement backgrounds. However, there are no significant differences regarding how tourism organizers share their revenue with local residents. The respondents' answers are expressions of their perceptions and, therefore, subject to interpretation. Given the result from the empirical data, opinions between statements regarding the main tourism organizers' TRS status with residents are not so distinguishable. Table 4 showed a five-point Likert-scale choice of selected questionnaire statements (S-s) by indicating 5 (fully agree), 4 (agree), 3 (neutral), 2 (disagree), and 1 (entirely disagree).

Table 4. Responses of workers from nature reserve office and tour companies

Statements about how tourism organizers share their revenue with local residents:	Fully agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Fully disagree	Mean
The Aksu-Zhabagly nature reserve workers (n=44)						
1. Your organization's profits are used for the local community (such as local infrastructure, health care, and education).	6.80	18.2	15.90	22.70	36.40	2.48
2. Your organization prioritizes the employment of residents in their job occupancy.	6.90	13.6	13.60	31.80	34.10	2.34
3. Your organization regularly trains residents in the tourism industry.	11.40	13.6	13.60	34.10	27.30	2.48
4. Your organization's business operations do not undermine the living environment of local people.	22.70	34.1	13.60	15.90	13.70	3.36
5. Your organization encourages tourists to consume local products and catering foods.	11.30	18.2	11.40	27.30	31.80	2.43
6. Your organization always supports residents' involvement in tourism.	13.60	11.4	13.60	34.10	27.30	2.50
Travel company workers in Zhabagly village (n=66)						
1. Your organization's profits are used for the local community (such as local infrastructure, health care, and education).	18.20	17.6	6.10	25.80	33.30	2.61
2. Your organization prioritizes the employment of residents in their job occupancy.	16.70	16.7	12.10	22.70	31.80	2.64
3. Your organization regularly trains residents in the tourism industry.	19.70	13.6	12.10	25.80	28.80	2.70

4. Your organization's business operations do not undermine the living environment of local people.	33.20	25.8	6.10	16.70	18.20	3.39
5. Your organization encourages tourists to consume local products and catering foods.	13.60	18.2	4.50	25.80	37.90	2.44
6. Your organization always supports residents' involvement in tourism.	15.20	16.7	9.10	28.80	30.20	2.58

Note: calculated by authors

Answering questionnaires concerning the statements about how tourism organizers share their revenue with residents (S-s), except for the statement "your organization's business operations do not undermine the living environment of local people" (S4: mean=3.36 for the Aksu-Zhabagly nature reserve office workers and S4: mean=3.39 for workers of travel companies in Zhabagly village, respectively), all rest statements concerning how tourism organizers share their revenue with residents were responded by both organizers' workers with a higher disagree, and the fluctuation between disagree score of the statements were not significant, from 2.30 to 2.70. It shows that these travel organizers run their tourism business without damaging the living environment of residents.

However, the respondents in both Aksu-Zhabagly nature reserve office and travel companies in Zhabagly village did not think tourism organizers' some profits is used for local community (S1: mean=2.48 for workers in the Aksu-Zhabagly office and S1: mean=2.61 for workers in travel companies, respectively), tourism organizers prioritize the employment of local residents in their job occupancy (S2: mean=2.34 for workers in the Aksu-Zhabagly office and S2: mean=2.64 for workers in travel companies, respectively), tourism organizers regularly train local residents in the tourism industry (S3: mean=2.48 for workers in the Aksu-Zhabagly office and S3: mean=2.70 for workers in travel companies, respectively), tourists are encouraged by tourism organizers to consume local products and catering foods (S5: mean=2.43 for workers in the Aksu-Zhabagly office and S5: mean=2.44 for workers in travel companies, respectively) and tourism organizers always support local residents' involvement in tourism (S6: mean=2.50 for workers in the Aksu-Zhabagly office and S6: mean=2.58 for workers in travel companies, respectively).

From the experience of developed tourism countries, good management practices also require minimizing bureaucracy, especially where key stakeholders are illiterate. Moreover, good governance is essential since plans can be vulnerable to corruption (Snyman, 2017). Relevant organizations must identify and communicate tangible local interests (Spenceley et al., 2019). Besides, to achieve

sustainable tourism development, tourism developers should recognize and encourage greater local community satisfaction because residents are the stakeholders with the most significant impact on tourism development.

From the above results, we found that considering all indicators regarding tourism organizers' revenue-sharing status with local residents, respondents' perceptions of the two tourism organizers were nearly the same on all statements. Furthermore, the survey results showed that although the tourism organizers' business operations do not undermine the living environment of local people, they usually do not obey the principles of STD. Their perceptions on sharing tourism profit with the first main stakeholder of the tourism destination were relatively low, indicating there is less support from the two tourism mentioned above organizers for residents' development.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has revealed significant insights into the tourism revenue-sharing mechanisms in the Aksu-Zhabagly Nature Reserve, emphasizing the successes and challenges faced in the fair distribution of tourism-generated income. The survey results indicate that, despite the potential for tourism to contribute significantly to local economic development, the current revenue-sharing practices are inadequate and do not fully support the local community's needs. Most residents and workers in the tourism sector expressed dissatisfaction with how tourism revenues are reinvested into the local economy or utilized for community benefits. The findings suggest that while tourism operations in the Aksu-Zhabagly do not negatively impact the local environment, they fall short of fostering equitable economic benefits for the local population. The lack of transparency, limited employment opportunities for locals, and insufficient reinvestment into community infrastructure are critical barriers to achieving sustainable tourism development in the region. Additionally, the study highlights the minimal engagement of residents in decision-making processes related to tourism development, further contributing to their dissatisfaction.

To address these challenges, it is essential to implement a more inclusive and transparent revenue-sharing framework that prioritizes local community involvement and ensures that a significant portion of tourism income is directed towards improving local infrastructure, healthcare, education, and other essential services. Enhancing local capacity through targeted training programs and creating more employment opportunities within the tourism sector are crucial steps toward achieving a more equitable distribution of tourism benefits. In terms of established connections and impacts, the Aksu-Zhabagly tourist destination can increase residents' support for tourism development by improving the level of TRS in the region. In this regard, the following measures are proposed to improve the current situation of the Aksu-Zhabagly Natural World Heritage tourism destination: a certain amount of the tourism benefits of the relevant tourism developers must be used for the local community (for example, the use of local infrastructure, health and education); tourism organizers should give prioritization the employment of local people in their job occupancy; tourists are encouraged by tourism developers to consume local products and catering foods; tourism organizers should always support residents' participation in tourism activities and provide them with regular training opportunities. Therefore, for promoting and maintaining sustainable tourism in developing countries like Kazakhstan, it is vital to clearly understand the fair TRS mechanism, correctly evaluate the interests of key stakeholders, and how to mitigate the interests of politically and economically powerful people.

In conclusion, this study's results underscore the need for local authorities and tourism organizers to reassess and enhance their strategies for sharing tourism revenues. By adopting a more community-focused approach, more excellent local support for tourism initiatives can be cultivated, thereby contributing to the sustainable development of the Aksu-Zhabagly Nature Reserve and the surrounding region.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization and theory: IA and BP; research design: IA and BP; data collection: IA, BP, ZM and AT; analysis and interpretation: IA; writing draft preparation: IA; supervision: IA; correction of article: BP and AT; proofread and final approval of article: IA, BP, ZM and AT. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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