

## **Integration of the Academic and Entrepreneurial Environments to Enhance Development Opportunities for Tourism Enterprises**

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*Abstract:* - The development of modern forms of interaction between science, education, and tourism business perfects the training of specialists who meet the requirements of the tourism market and support the development of the industry. The difficulty of integrating the academic and business environment to strengthen the development opportunities for tourism enterprises necessitates the search for ways to resolve this problem. The study aims to evaluate the integration of academic and entrepreneurial environments as a mechanism for enhancing the development opportunities for tourism enterprises. To achieve the goal, the study employs the qualitative research method of document analysis, as well as the method of expert survey, followed by

statistical processing of the obtained data. The authors conclude that the integration of the academic and entrepreneurial environments in the tourism business has to be performed with due regard to the mutual interests of its participants. Key areas of cooperation are increasing the level of services and staff professionalism, improving the quality of training of young specialists through participation in research of tourism, the development of educational programs and improvement of specialists' competence, the development of incubators and accelerators, and active participation of students in the development and commercialization of business projects.

*Key-Words:* - Innovations, competencies, tourism business, tourism services, Kazakhstan, market development.

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## 1 Introduction

In recent years, national economies have faced unprecedented challenges, including fluctuating markets, technological disruptions, and the pressing need for sustainable development, [1]. These dynamics have underscored the critical role of innovative and adaptive sectors, such as tourism, in driving economic resilience and growth. As tourism becomes increasingly central to economic strategies, the integration of academic insights and entrepreneurial agility emerges as an important approach to navigating and capitalizing on these complex economic landscapes, [2], [3].

The experience of interaction of universities, companies, research institutes, and scientific centers across the world shows the diversity of forms of this integration depending on the sphere of entrepreneurial activity, [4]. Today's science, education, and business are at the stage of searching for viable areas of integration of the academic and entrepreneurial environments, [5], [6], [7], to increase opportunities for the development of the experience economy, tourism being one of its components.

Development of the tourism industry is currently among the priority directions of economic development for many countries, including the Republic of Kazakhstan, that strive to diversify their international services, change their image, reduce the degree of dependence on natural resources extraction, and create new modern jobs, [8], [9].

For instance, for the development of tourism in Kazakhstan, researchers advise focusing on integrating the academic and tourism business environments, [10], [11].

The focus of the study is on the need to identify substantive areas for integration. Integration is a form of cooperation, yet we believe that it can only be successful if its process is effective for all participants. In the study, we strive to answer the following research questions:

- (1) What forms of integration that affect the tourism business in Kazakhstan are used in the academic and entrepreneurial environments?
- (2) What are the priority directions for integration of the academic and entrepreneurial environments that need to be developed in Kazakhstan?
- (3) What are the interests of participants in integration in the context of ensuring the development of tourism enterprises?
- (4) What are the effects and results of the cooperation of tourism business entities with the academic environment?

## 2 Literature Review

We concur with [12], concerning their presentation of the essence of integration in the following types of interrelationships: 1) sustainable cooperation of the subjects of integration that provides for joint development; 2) harmonization of the levels of socio-economic development due to the diversity of relations formed in the new integrated system.

The researchers point out the following priority directions for integration of the academic and tourism business environments:

- Research and innovations. Authors [13], note that universities often serve as centers of research and innovation, one such center being the Tourism Research Institute at Turan-Astana University (Kazakhstan) established in 2012. Since Kazakhstan has adopted a program for the development of research universities, this status is going to be granted to three Kazakh universities (Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, L.N. Gumilev Eurasian National University, and M.O. Auezov South Kazakhstan State University). International branches of universities are being developed, for instance, a branch of De Montfort Leicester University (UK), a branch of the University of Arizona (US), and a branch of the National Research Nuclear University MEPhI (Russia) based in Al-Farabi Kazakh National University. It is

expected that research and innovations will promote the development of the tourism sector, [14].

- Educational programs and training. Universities create and offer special courses, seminars, and educational programs for aspiring tourism entrepreneurs and current industry professionals, [15]. This can support the creation of a skilled labor force that can fuel the growth of the tourism sector, [16]. Since 2014, the Almaty Technological University and the Hotel and Tourism Management Institute have implemented a joint Kazakh-Swiss double-diploma education program for tourism industry personnel training.

- Incubators and accelerators. Universities create or collaborate with business incubators and accelerators that support tourism start-ups, [17]. These initiatives can provide start-ups with the necessary resources, mentoring, and networking opportunities to successfully scale their business, [18]. Turan University has a business incubator as a structural unit of the university, which is designed to foster entrepreneurship and innovation among young people and improve the scientific, innovation, and educational process in the direction of entrepreneurship at the university.

- Development of tourism infrastructure. As suggested by [19], tourism enterprises and universities can together participate in the development of tourism infrastructure, including in creating theme parks, museums, ecotourism objects, and objects of cultural heritage to attract more tourists, including international ones. The Burabay resort is one of the most visited tourist destinations. The development of this area and the accommodation of the IQanat High School of Burabay campus on its territory contribute to the development of business and tourism interests of the region, [20].

- Joint marketing efforts. Professional and marketing resources are developed to attract interest in Kazakhstan, [21], [22]. Universities and entrepreneurs can cooperate in the sphere of tourism marketing, for example, by carrying out joint advertising campaigns and events and developing new travel applications to attract and interact with potential customers, [23]. Almaty hosts the annual Almaty Marathon, which is the largest sporting event in Central Asia and has been a member of the International Association of Amusement Industry Manufacturers & Suppliers (AIMS) since 2013. The marathon aims to attract many international participants to increase interest in the region, especially by attracting students from different universities in the country and other states, [24].

- Joint initiatives in the sphere of sustainable tourism. Universities and entrepreneurs can work together on projects to support sustainable tourism, [25]. This can include research on the environmental and socio-economic consequences of tourism in the region and the implementation of strategies to reduce this impact, [26]. An example here is the Sustainable Tourism educational program at the University of International Business, which aims to train highly qualified postgraduate specialists to support the development of the tourism sector with an emphasis on preserving Kazakhstan's historical and cultural heritage, improving the nation's spiritual development, and meeting the consumer demand of Kazakh citizens and foreign guests for tourism and sanatorium-resort services.

- International partnership. Universities often have strong international ties. Authors [27], suggest that these connections can be utilized both to attract foreign tourists and entrepreneurs interested in investing in the tourism sector and to learn about foreign experience in training specialists for the tourism sector. The International University of Tourism and Hospitality and Antalya Bilim University (Turkey) actively cooperate in providing international internships to students in the framework of the International Tourism Experiential Learning Program. A partner of this program is the Rixos hotel chain (Turkey), which provides its hotels for student internships, including educational theoretical courses on tourism and gastronomy.

- Conducting feasibility studies. Universities can conduct feasibility studies to identify potential tourism destinations, assess market demand, and determine the viability of tourism-related enterprises, [28]. One of the directions of research of the Tourism Research Institute under Turan University is the study of tourist and recreational resources of the Kazakhstan section of the Great Silk Road and research of the socioeconomic efficiency of active types of tourism.

- Student projects and internships. Tourism companies can offer internships and projects to university students, which not only gives students practical experience but also brings new perspectives and ideas to the tourism business itself, [29]. An example is the Tourism and Hospitality dual degree program of Narxoz University and the Excelia Group La Rochelle (France). Students in this program complete the first 2 years of study at Narxoz University, then spend 1 year in the La Rochelle Excelia Group, and in the fourth year of study, write a diploma project at Narxoz University under the supervision of professors of the La Rochelle Excelia Group, [30].

- Development of cultural and historical tourism. Kazakhstan, with its rich history and diverse culture, can benefit from cooperation between universities and entrepreneurs to preserve and promote cultural and heritage sites, [31]. Integration in cultural and historical tourism may include cultural festivals, promotion of traditional crafts, and organization of immersive events for tourists.

Considering the specifics of science, education, and business, we propose to interpret the integration of the academic and entrepreneurial environments in the tourism business as a process of interaction and cooperation between research organizations, educational institutions, and business entities in the tourism industry for mutually beneficial improvements in the efficiency of scientific, educational, and entrepreneurial activities, as well as training highly qualified specialists, raising the level of staff competence, and making rational use of financial, material, technical, and human resources. Integration does not imply the creation of complex and developed forms of cooperation on a commercial basis, such as conglomerates, consortia, or clusters. Integration of the academic and entrepreneurial environments is needed to develop a sustainable and reliable tourism industry in Kazakhstan. Using the strengths of both sectors, the country can create an efficient tourist ecosystem, which will assist the development of international partnerships, attract foreign tourists, and facilitate the country's economic growth.

The hypothesis put forward in this study is that the integration of the academic and entrepreneurial environments in the tourism business should be carried out considering the mutual interests of integration participants and include such main areas of cooperation as increasing the level of services and staff professionalism, improving the material and technical base of tourist services, and taking measures to promote tourist services and provide information support.

Research objectives are as follows: 1. to identify priority directions of integration of the academic and tourism business environments in Kazakhstan; 2. to determine the advantages of integration of the academic and entrepreneurial environments in the tourism business for the development of tourism enterprises; 3. to determine the interests of integration participants arising in the context of ensuring the development of tourism enterprises; 4. to determine the effect and results of cooperation of integration participants for the development of tourism enterprises

### 3 Methods

To achieve the research goal, we identified a provisional set of theoretical research methods, including theoretical generalization to determine the theoretical foundations of integration of the academic and entrepreneurial environments. Due to the novelty of the phenomenon under study and the exploratory nature of the stated purpose, we adopted a qualitative approach to research. The study was conducted from March 1 to August 1, 2023.

By the research goal, at the first stage of the study, we selected scientific sources concerning the research problem, which was carried out using the international databases Web of Science and Scopus with the restriction on the date of publication no more than 10 years ago. Based on the analysis of academic sources and examples from tourism practice, the priority areas of integration of the academic and tourism business environments were identified.

The second stage involved selecting a sample of experts. The selection criteria were the experience working in executive positions in tourism companies in Kazakhstan, as well as at least 10 years of experience in research and teaching in the field of tourism. The chosen experts (59 people) were sent emails inviting them to participate in the survey. The consent to participate in the survey was expressed by 53 people, after which they received e-mails with the question: "What, in your opinion, are the most priority directions of integration of the academic and tourism business environments in Kazakhstan from the listed ones?", as well as research questions (2-4) with a request to substantiate their answers in free form.

After receiving the responses, a follow-up letter was sent to the experts, asking them to rank the advantages of integrating the academic and entrepreneurial environments in the tourism business for the development of tourism enterprises in order of importance by assigning points to them. Following this, the ranking and weights of the options were determined according to the scores assigned by the experts. The final values describe the importance of the given area of integration and its advantages.

In our study, we have used statistical analysis that includes both the Pearson Chi-Square test and the t-test. The Pearson Chi-Square test was utilized to examine the non-randomness of expert agreement within the a priori ranking of the priority directions for integration between the academic and entrepreneurial environments in tourism.

Furthermore, we have included the t-test to compare the means of different groups within our

data set. This test is particularly useful for evaluating the effectiveness of different educational programs and training methods, by comparing the average performance outcomes of the students involved. The t-test will allow us to ascertain whether any observed differences are statistically significant and hence, infer the impact of these methods on student readiness for the tourism industry.

The formula to calculate the actual Pearson Chi-Square statistic with  $m = 53$  experts is:

$$Chi - Square = \frac{W \times n \times (n - 1)}{1 - W}$$

## 4 Results

According to the experts, the priority direction in the integration of the academic and entrepreneurial environments in the tourism business (Table 1). It identifies the enhancement of educational programs and the emphasis on research and innovation as top priorities. The importance of international partnerships, infrastructure development, and the promotion of cultural and historical tourism are also highlighted. Further, it emphasizes the need for joint marketing efforts, sustainable tourism initiatives, feasibility studies for tourism activities, support for tourism startups through incubators, and practical student engagement in the industry. These priorities suggest a comprehensive approach to fostering collaboration between academia and the tourism sector, aimed at driving industry growth and innovation.

Table 1. Priority directions of integration of the academic and tourism business environments

Priority directions of integration	Rank	Weight
research and innovations in tourism	2	0.20
educational programs and training of specialists in tourism	1	0.31
incubators and accelerators in the sphere of tourism	9	0.01
development of tourist infrastructure	4	0.12
joint marketing efforts in tourism	6	0.06
joint initiatives in sustainable tourism	7	0.04
International partnership in tourism	3	0.13
conducting feasibility studies of tourism activities	8	0.03
student projects and internships	10	0.01
development of cultural and historical tourism	5	0.09

Note: the assessment is based on the expert survey; the value of the coefficient of concordance  $W = 0.69$  ( $p < 0.01$ ) indicates a strong consistency of expert opinions.

Table 2. Advantages of the integration of the academic and entrepreneurial environments in tourism business for the development of tourism enterprises

Advantages of integration	Rank	Weight
training of highly qualified graduates able to master new areas of knowledge and gain new skills, which is an important precondition for their further professional career trajectory	1	0.26
opportunities for universities to interact with tourist companies in the development of commercial products to introduce their research and innovations	2	0.20
sustainable development of the research environment, which motivates the academic community to achieve joint development of science, education, and business and ensures a constant exchange between the academic environment and the tourist business community	3	0.17
support for tourism start-ups	4	0.15
joint work on projects in the development of sustainable tourism	5	0.13
joint marketing measures	6	0.09

Note: compiled based on the expert survey; the value of the concordance coefficient  $W = 0.71$  ( $p < 0.01$ ) indicates a strong consistency of expert opinions.

To determine the minimum sample size for an a priori ranking of 10 priority directions of integration with

the participation of at least 53 experts, we need to calculate if this number of experts is sufficient to confirm the non-randomness of the expert agreement with the Pearson Chi-Square test.

Given that we calculated a critical Chi-Square value of 16.919 for  $n - 1$  degrees of freedom at a significance level of  $\alpha = 0.05$ , we can now calculate the actual Chi-Square value with  $m = 53$  experts and  $W = 0.69$  to verify if  $m$  is sufficient.

After the calculation, Pearson Chi-Square test is equal to 1066.35. Since 1066.35 is much greater than 16.919, the number of experts ( $m = 53$ ) is more than sufficient to confirm the non-randomness of the expert agreement based on the Pearson criterion.

Based on the expert's opinion, the advantages they see in the integration of the academic and entrepreneurial environments in the tourism business for the development of tourism enterprises are presented in Table 2.

Kendall's coefficient of concordance  $W$  is a measure used to assess the degree of agreement among raters or experts. It ranges from 0 (no agreement) to 1 (complete agreement). When experts are completely concordant with each other in their rankings,  $W$  is 1. When there is no agreement better than what would be expected by chance,  $W$  is close to 0.

A  $W$  value of 0.71 means that approximately 71% of the variance in the rank data can be accounted for by the agreement among the raters. This is a substantial proportion, indicating that the raters share a common opinion to a large degree

when ranking the importance of the various advantages of integrating academic and entrepreneurial environments in tourism.

The  $p$ -value indicates the probability of obtaining such a  $W$  value (or one even more extreme) if there is no agreement among the raters other than what might be expected by chance alone. A  $p$ -value less than 0.01 means there is less than a 1% probability that the observed concordance occurred by chance. Therefore, it provides strong evidence against the null hypothesis of no agreement, and it supports the conclusion that there is significant consistency in the experts' opinions.

In summary, the  $W$  value of 0.71, especially with a  $p$ -value less than 0.01, suggests that the experts' agreement on the advantages of integration is statistically significant and not a result of random chance, thus demonstrating strong consistency in their opinions.

Further, we tried to determine the possible ways to combine the interests of participants in integration processes aimed at enhancing the development opportunities of tourism enterprises.

Based on the results of the expert survey, let us outline the range of interests of integration participants in all possible areas of integration of the academic and tourism business environments that arise in the framework of ensuring the development of tourism enterprises (Table 3).

Next, we closely considered the possible effects and results for participants in integration by all the possible directions of integration of the academic and tourism business environments to develop tourism enterprises (Table 4).

Table 3. Interests of participants in integration

Participants in integration processes	Personal interest	Common interest	Key objective in ensuring the development of tourism enterprises
Tourism business entities	Maximizing profit	Increase in tourist flows	Provision of quality services (production of goods) based on competitive parameters
Business entities in related industries	Maximizing profit	Increase in tourist flows	Provision of quality services (production of goods) based on competitive parameters
Research organizations	Opportunities for research and development in the field of tourism	Scientific substantiation of management decisions	Theoretical and methodological substantiation of the directions of development of tourism enterprises (multidimensionality)
Educational institutions	Attracting applicants with high potential	Practical training (industrial practice)	Training highly qualified and competitive specialists

Note: compiled based on the expert survey.

Table 4. Effects and results of cooperation of tourism business entities with the academic environment

№	Effect of cooperation on tourism enterprises	Result of cooperation	
		with research organizations	with educational institutions
1	Increased level of services	Identification of the most effective methods of tourism activities	Compliance with established standards of tourism activities
2	Increased staff professionalism	Involvement of scientists in the implementation of tourism projects	Development of various forms of training in tourism
3	Improved material and technical base of tourism services	Application of technological developments in the tourism sector	Joint development of innovative tourist products in laboratories and business incubators
4	Optimization of the price-quality ratio of the tourist product	Forecasting the consequences of imbalances in the tourism sector	Formation of specialists' orientation towards reasonable price-quality ratios
5	Flexible pricing policy with a methodologically sound approach to pricing of the tourist product	Methodological substantiation of the most effective methods of tourist product pricing, pricing strategies, etc.	Development of specialists' knowledge of various approaches to tourist product pricing and pricing strategies
6	Reinforcement of tourist product promotion measures with objective information coverage	Software support for posting information, designing tourist symbols	Development of specialists' knowledge about the methods of tourist product promotion
7	Quality information support of tourist services	Scientific substantiation of the ways of supporting tourist services	Participation in the dissemination of tourist information

*Note: compiled based on the expert survey.*

## 5 Discussion

Kazakhstan is rich in recreational resources, diverse natural landscapes, [32], vast territories with low industrial urbanization, and remarkable cultural and historical heritage, [33], which becomes a powerful driver for the development of most tourism types, [34]. However, several negative factors, such as insufficient professional competencies among tourism representatives, weak infrastructure and information support of tourism business, [35], [36], low quality of tourism services, [37] and shortcomings of the education system in the tourism sector, [38], result in a lack of interest on the part of investors and hamper the development of tourism in Kazakhstan, [39], [40].

The highlighted problems are supported by the results of the study, in which the experts identified educational programs and training and research and innovation in tourism as the highest priority areas for the integration of the academic and entrepreneurial environments in the tourism business (Table 1).

The most topical and promising directions of such integration for Kazakhstan are attracting tourism companies to the development of training programs, organization of internships, and development of students' professional competencies demanded by the tourism market, [27]; funding for targeted training of students and additional scholarships and grants for students and teachers [18]; employment of graduates, [29]; joint research and development in different innovative directions in the tourism sector [23], [40]. The results of our study are largely consistent with these conclusions.

Our findings also indicate that the leading advantages of integration of the academic and entrepreneurial environments in tourism for the development of tourism enterprises (Table 2) include the training of competitive graduates and opportunities for interaction with tourism companies in the development of company projects. Thus, the experts mainly consider the advantages of integration from the perspective of the efficiency of staff training of tourism companies' personnel, which agrees with the results of previous studies [16], [29].

The search for a circle of common interests (their convergence) among the participants of integration processes in the context of ensuring the development of tourism enterprises (Table 3) at the current stage of tourism development in Kazakhstan is hampered by deformations in the forms of cooperation and the establishment of social contacts. Nevertheless, all possible participants in integration are interested in the high level of development of tourism enterprises, [41].

For educational institutions, the low level of development of tourism enterprises is evidence of this situation partially being their fault, because a significant cause of it lies in the quality of labor potential of the specialists employed in the service sector. Therefore, we should agree with [10], that personnel training for the tourism sector has been an urgent issue in Kazakhstan for many years. The current system of higher and vocational education is gradually overcoming the destructive effect of the lack of specialization, yet the issue of the quality of personnel training remains, [26]. Insufficient

development of tourism enterprises reduces students' opportunities for industrial practice and gaining knowledge and experience in real business entities.

The effect of cooperation with the academic environment for tourism enterprises, according to the experts, lies in an increased level of service and professionalism of the staff and improvement of the material and technical base of tourist services; optimization of the price-quality ratio and a flexible pricing policy with a methodologically sound approach to the pricing of the tourist product; and advanced measures to promote the tourist product with objective information coverage and quality information support of tourist services.

In contrast to Kazakhstan's approach, a study on Norway's tourism sector reveals similar positive outcomes from integrating academic resources into their tourism enterprises. The Norwegian model, as detailed in [42], [43], emphasizes not only service quality and staff professionalism but also the strategic utilization of environmental sustainability practices. This approach has significantly enhanced the appeal and competitiveness of Norwegian tourism offerings on the global stage. By comparing these findings with Kazakhstan's initiatives, it becomes evident that while both nations recognize the value of academic collaboration for improving tourism services and infrastructure, Norway's additional focus on sustainability offers a complementary perspective that could further enrich Kazakhstan's tourism development strategy.

These conclusions also partially align with the opinion of other researchers, who consider the result of the integration of the academic and entrepreneurial environments in the tourism business to be methodological recommendations for various directions of tourism business and scientific substantiation of managerial approaches to the development of tourism enterprises, [26], [38], general solutions for evaluating management decisions aimed at the development of tourism enterprises and increasing the competitiveness of a tourism business, [27], [44], monitoring and diagnostics of the condition of the tourism business and the qualitative aspects of tourist services provided, [23].

The advantage of the integration of the academic and entrepreneurial environments in the tourism business is the possibility of cooperation between different entities to develop tourism enterprises and increase the competitiveness of tourism businesses, which will provide an opportunity to consolidate efforts and mobilize the

resource potential of all participants to achieve common strategic and current goals.

## 6 Conclusion

In modern business, the issues of scientific, technological, and personnel support are becoming more complicated. Business is forced to turn to education and science: it begins to support the structures of integration of science and education, create private educational institutions, and participate in the financing of research and scientific-technical programs and projects.

Our research confirmed the hypothesis that integration of the academic and entrepreneurial environments in the tourism business should be carried out considering the mutual interests of integration participants and include such main areas of cooperation as increasing the level of services and staff professionalism, improving the material and technical base of tourist services, and taking measures to promote tourist services and provide information support.

The main advantage is the ability to coordinate the efforts of academic and business structures (including tourism business entities themselves), allowing to unite business, science, and education for a common cause – the development of tourism enterprises and increasing the level of competitiveness of tourism business.

Among the limitations of our study, we can note the size of the expert pool, which does not allow the conclusions to be fully generalized. The prospect of further research is the study of the possibilities of social dialog as a tool for the development of tourism business in specific regions of Kazakhstan.

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