



THE ROLE OF MICE TOURISM IN PROMOTING INCLUSIVE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract. This article analysis the development of MICE tourism (Meeting, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions or Events) has become one of the most dynamic directions in the global tourism industry, directly contributing to economic diversification, international cooperation, and the establishment of a favorable business environment. In the context of Uzbekistan, where the tourism sector is rapidly expanding, the integration of inclusivity principles into MICE tourism represents both a strategic necessity and an innovative approach. Inclusivity is understood as ensuring equal access and participation for all social groups, regardless of gender, age, physical ability, or regional background. This implies the creation of barrier-free infrastructure, accessible conference and exhibition facilities, the use of sign language interpretation, and the promotion of gender equality and youth engagement. The research emphasizes that inclusivity in MICE tourism not only broadens participation and strengthens social cohesion but also increases the competitiveness of Uzbekistan's tourism market at the international level.

Keywords: MICE tourism, meeting, incentives, conferences, exhibitions, events inclusivity, Uzbekistan, accessibility socio-economic development, sustainability, international competitiveness.

O'ZBEKİSTONDA İNKLYUZİV TURİZMNI RIVOJLANTIRISHDA MICE TURİZMINİNG ROLI

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Annotatsiya. Ushbu maqolada MICE (uchrashuv, rag'batlantirish, konferensiya, ko'rgazma yoki tadbirlar) turizmining rivojlanishi tahlil qilinadi. MICE turizmi jahon turizm industriyasining eng dinamik yo'nalishlaridan biriga aylanib, iqtisodiyotni diversifikatsiya qilish, xalqaro hamkorlik va qulay ishbilarmonlik muhitini yaratishga bevosita hissa qo'shmoqda. Turizm sektori jadal rivojlanayotgan O'zbekiston sharoitida inklyuzivlik tamoyillarining MICE turizmiga integratsiyalashuvi ham strategik zarurat, ham innovatsion yondashuvni ifodalaydi. Inklyuzivlik jinsi, yoshi, jismoniy qobiliyati yoki mintaqaviy kelib chiqishidan qat'i nazar, barcha ijtimoiy guruuhlar uchun teng foydalanish va ishtirok etishni ta'minlash sifatida tushuniladi. Bu to'siqlarsiz infratuzilmani yaratish, konferensiya va ko'rgazmalar o'tkazish uchun qulay imkoniyatlar yaratish, surdo-tarjimondan foydalanish, gender tengligi va yoshlarni jalb etishni rag'batlantirishni nazarda tutadi. Tadqiqot natijalariga ko'ra MICE turizmidagi inklyuzivlik nafaqat ishtirokni kengaytiradi va ijtimoiy hamjihatlikni mustahkamlaydi, balki O'zbekiston turizm bozorining xalqaro miqyosdagi raqobatbardoshligini oshiradi.

Kalit so'zlar: MICE turizmi, uchrashuvlar, rag'batlantirish dasturlari, konferensiylar, ko'rgazmalar, tadbirlar inklyuzivligi, O'zbekiston, imkoniyatlar, ijtimoiy-iqtisodiy rivojlanish, barqarorlik, xalqaro raqobatbardoshlik.

РОЛЬ МИСЕ-ТУРИЗМА В СОДЕЙСТВИИ РАЗВИТИЮ ИНКЛЮЗИВНОГО ТУРИЗМА В УЗБЕКИСТАНЕ

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Аннотация. В данной статье анализируется развитие MICE-туризма (встреч, поощрительных поездок, конференций, выставок и мероприятий) как одного из наиболее динамичных направлений в мировой индустрии туризма, вносящего непосредственный вклад в экономическую диверсификацию, международное сотрудничество и формирование благоприятной деловой среды. В условиях Узбекистана, где туристический сектор стремительно развивается, внедрение принципов инклюзивности в MICE-туризм представляет собой как стратегическую необходимость, так и инновационный подход. Инклюзивность понимается как обеспечение равного доступа и участия для всех социальных групп, независимо от пола, возраста, физических возможностей или регионального происхождения. Это подразумевает создание безбарьерной инфраструктуры, доступных конференц и выставочных помещений, использование сурдоперевода, а также содействие гендерному равенству и вовлечению молодежи. В исследовании подчеркивается, что инклюзивность в MICE-туризме не только расширяет участие и укрепляет социальную сплоченность, но и повышает конкурентоспособность туристического рынка Узбекистана на международном уровне.

Ключевые слова: MICE-туризм, деловые встречи, incentive-программы, конференции, выставки, инклюзивность мероприятий, Узбекистан, доступность, социально-экономическое развитие, устойчивость, международная конкурентоспособность.

Introduction.

MICE tourism (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions) has emerged as one of the fastest-growing sectors of the global tourism industry. According to UNWTO, business tourism and MICE activities generated more than \$900 billion in economicⁱ value worldwide in 2023, accounting for nearly 30% of international tourism revenues. Countries such as Spain, Germany, and the United States rank among the top global MICE destinations. For example, Spain hosted over 28,000 international meetings in 2019, generating more than \$7 billion in revenue. Similarly, Singapore derives nearly 1.5% of its GDP from MICE tourism, hosting thousands of international conferences annually, supported by advanced infrastructure, digital integration, and a proactive government policy aimed at promoting inclusivity and sustainability. The United States and Germany also rank among the top MICE destinations, benefiting from well-developed convention centers, transport connectivity, and a strong business ecosystem. These figures demonstrate that MICE tourism is not only an economic driver but also a platform for international knowledge exchange, innovative, and cultural diplomacy. Beyond economic revenues, MICE tourism serves as a platform for knowledge transfer, innovation, and cultural diplomacy. International conferences and exhibitions foster the exchange of ideas across borders, facilitate academic and professional collaborations, and promote cultural understanding. For example, scientific congresses often result in joint publications and innovations, while trade fairs accelerate global supply chains and investment partnership. This demonstrates that the value of MICE tourism extends far beyond financial indicators, playing a crucial role in shaping global governance, diplomacy, and education. However, global competition in the MICE industry is intensifying. Destinations increasingly differentiate themselves through specialization, inclusivity, and sustainability. Countries that integrate accessibility measures – such as barrier-free venues, multilingual digital platform, and inclusive participation policies – tend to attract broader and more diverse audiences. Moreover,

the Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the rise of hybrid and virtual conferences, reshaping the traditional MICE model and compelling destinations to adapt through technology. This shift underlines the importance of resilience and innovation in ensuring long-term competitiveness. In recent years, inclusivity has become a central principle of international MICE tourism. Many countries have adopted accessibility standards to ensure participation of people with disabilities, women, youth, and underrepresented groups. For instance, the United Kingdom and Germany have developed inclusive conference facilities equipped with ramps, sign language interpreters, and digital accessibility tools. According to ICCA (International Congress and Convention Association), destinations that promote inclusivity in MICE tourism experience 15-20% higher participation rates, especially from diverse international audiences. Moreover, inclusivity contributes to the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Particularly Goal 10(Reduced Inequalities) and Goal 11(Sustainable Cities and Communities). This global trend highlights that the future of MICE tourism depends not only on infrastructure but also on accessibility and equality.

Uzbekistan has made significant progress in tourism development over the past decade, with the government prioritizing international events and business tourism. In 2023, the country welcomed over 6.6 million foreign tourists, generating approximately \$1.6 billion in tourism revenues. Uzbekistan now has more than 1,300 hotels, and nearly 1,000 travel companies, many of which are capable of serving business travelers. Major infrastructure projects, such as the Tashkent City Congress Hall and the Samarkand Silk Road International Tourist Center, have positioned the country as a potential MICE hub in Central Asia. Notable, the 2022 Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Summit in Samarkand, attended by leaders of 14 countries, demonstrates Uzbekistan's growing capacity to host large-scale international events. These achievements show that MICE tourism is becoming a vital component of the country's tourism and economic strategy. In Uzbekistan, the MICE sector still emerging, with fewer than 100 large-scale international conferences and exhibitions organized annually, mostly concentrated in Tashkent and Samarkand. However, recent developments – such as the construction of modern convention centers in Samarkand (Silk Road Samarkand Complex) and Tashkent City Congress Hall, as well as improved air connectivity and digital infrastructure – have laid the foundation for rapid expansion. Uzbekistan's strategic geographic location along the historic Silk Road, its rich cultural and architectural heritage, and growing reputation as a safe and affordable destination give it a unique competitive edge in central Asia. By integrating inclusivity principles into MICE policy and practice – ensuring accessibility for people with disabilities, promoting gender equality, and engaging regional hubs like Bukhara, Khiva, and Fergana – the country can enhance both social and economic participation. Incorporating international inclusivity standards (such as ISO 21902:2021 on Accessible Tourism) would not only make events more equitable but also align Uzbekistan's MICE industry with global best practices. This approach could attract socially responsible investors, international organizations, and inclusive corporate events. In the long run, systematic investments regional infrastructure, digitalization, and human capital can transform Uzbekistan from a developing MICE destination into a regional leader in inclusive event tourism across Central Asia, contributing significantly to national GDP and sustainable economic growth.

Literature review.

In the global context, MICE tourism has been extensively studied as a crucial segment of the tourism industry that stimulates economic growth, innovation, and international cooperation. According to United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO,2023), MICE tourism contributes nearly 30% of total global tourism revenue, generating more than USD 900 billion annually. Researchers such as Davidson and Cope (2020) and Rogers (2019) have highlighted that the MICE sector not only drives business travel but also fosters knowledge exchange, global networking, and cultural diplomacy. Studies conducted by ICCA (International

Congress and Convention Association, 2022) reveal that destinations such as Spain, Germany, and Singapore have achieved remarkable success through strong institutional support, modern infrastructure, and inclusive event management policies.

Within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the MICE sector has also gained increasing attention. Russian scholars (Ivanova, 2021; Petrov, 2022) have analyzed the role of Moscow and St. Petersburg as leading convention hubs, supported by digitalization and government incentives. Similarly, Kazakhstan and Georgia have incorporated MICE development into their national tourism strategies (Sadiykov, 2022; Giorgadze, 2021), focusing on regional event centers and public-private partnerships. However, inclusivity in MICE events – such as accessibility for persons with disabilities or gender balance among participants – remains an underexplored aspects in most CIS-based studies.

Uzbekistan's academic and policy-oriented literature on MICE tourism remains limited but is growing rapidly. National sources, including the State Committee for Tourism (Uzbektourism, 2023) and academic works by Karimova (2022) and (2024), emphasize the country's effort to diversify tourism position itself as a regional event destination. Although progress has been made through hosting international conferences in Tashkent and Samarkand, the research indicates that most MICE activities are concentrated in major cities. Moreover, there is a lack of empirical data and analytical work assessing inclusivity dimensions – such as equitable regional participation, accessibility, and the socio-economic inclusion of women and youth in event planning.

While global and regional studies have extensively analyzed MICE tourism's economic and strategic importance, there remain a notable gap in research on inclusive MICE development in emerging destinations like Uzbekistan. The existing literature tends to focus on infrastructure and marketing, overlooking how inclusivity principles could enhance competitiveness and sustainable growth. Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap by examining how integrating inclusivity into Uzbekistan's MICE tourism framework can strengthen its position in the Central Asian market and contribute to the boarder goals of sustainable and equitable tourism development.

Analysis and discussion of results.

In the evolving global tourism landscape, MICE tourism is recognized as a multidimensional growth engine that intertwines economic performance, innovation, and social inclusion. For Uzbekistan where the tourism industry is transitioning from a heritage-based to a knowledge-driven model, the integration of inclusivity principles represents a new and underexplored scientific direction.

This study introduces the concept of the Inclusive Triple Bottom Line (I-TBL) model, an adaptation of the classical TBL framework to the specific context of emerging economies. The I-TBL model adds a fourth dimension – Regional Equity – to the traditional pillars of Profit, People, and Planet. It emphasizes that sustainable development in MICE tourism depends not only financial outcomes and environmental responsibility but also on inclusive participation across all regions and social groups.

From a theoretical perspective, the I-TBL framework addresses a research gap in current MICE literature, which has largely focused on economic efficiency and environmental sustainability while neglecting inclusivity in developing nations. The model proposes measurable indicators for assessing inclusivity:

Gender Representation Index (GRI) – proportion of women in managerial and participant roles;

Accessibility Scores (AS) - availability of infrastructure for people with disabilities;

Regional Balance Ratio (RBR) – distribution of MICE events outside the capital cities.

Empirical observations in Uzbekistan reveal low inclusivity indicators compared to global benchmarks. For example, over 70% of national MICE events are concentrated in

Tashkent, while regional centers like Bukhara and Khiva host fewer than 5% of international events annually. However, recent initiatives – such as the Samarkand Congress Center, digital visa reform, and “Uzbekistan -2030”Strategy – demonstrate a growing policy interest in diversifying the MICE landscape.

Applying the proposed I-TBL model, Uzbekistan’s MICE development can progress along four policy dimensions:

1. Economic Empowerment – incentives for local entrepreneurs and SMEs in event services.
2. Social Inclusivity – equal gender representation, accessibility, and youth engagement.
3. Environmental Sustainability – implementation of “Green & Inclusive Events” standards.
4. Regional Equity – infrastructure investment in secondary cities and cross-border MICE corridors.

This research contributes a novel conceptual and practical framework to the academic and policy discourse on inclusive tourism. The I-TBI model not only broadens theoretical understanding but also provides a structured mechanism for assessing and improving inclusivity within Uzbekistan’s MICE sector. Its implementation could transform Uzbekistan into a regional leader in sustainable and socially responsible business tourism across Central Asia.

Conclusion and suggestions.

The findings of this study demonstrate that MICE tourism in Uzbekistan is entering a stage of strategic transformation, moving from a traditional event-hosting model towards an inclusive and sustainable framework. Despite its relatively early stage of development compared to global leaders such as Spain, Singapore, or Germany, Uzbekistan holds strong potential due to its geostrategic location, historical heritage, and government commitment to tourism modernization.

The research introduces an original conceptual approach – the Inclusive Triple Bottom Line (I-TBL) Model, which expands the classical sustainability framework by integrating Regional Equity as a fourth dimension alongside Profit, People, and Planet. This adaptation offers a more accurate analytical tool for developing nations, particularly those in Central Asia, where inclusivity and regional balance are key challenges.

Empirical insights suggest that MICE activities in Uzbekistan remain concentrated in major cities, with limited accessibility and gender diversity. However, applying the I-TBL model could help policymakers and event organizer systematically assess inclusivity through three measurable indicators – Gender Representation Index (GRI), Accessibility Score (AS), and Regional Balance Ratio (RBR). These indicators provide an evidence – based foundation for developing inclusive and competitive MICE strategies.

In practical term, the implementation of inclusive policies – such as introducing a Green & Inclusive MICE Certification System, investing in accessible infrastructure, and promoting regional participation – would significantly enhance Uzbekistan’s international image as a sustainable business destination.

In conclusion, inclusivity is not only a social value but also a strategic advantage for Uzbekistan’s MICE sector. By institutionalizing inclusivity principles through the I-TBL framework, Uzbekistan can transform from an emerging MICE destination into a regional leader of sustainable and socially responsible business tourism in Central Asia.

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