

LEVERAGING TERRITORIAL BRANDING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND TOURIST ATTRACTION: CASE OF ULYTAU, KAZAKHSTAN

Darken SEIDUALIN^{ID}

L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Tourism Department, Astana, Kazakhstan, e-mail: darken68@mail.ru

Kamshat MUSSINA^{* ID}

L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Tourism Department, Astana, Kazakhstan, e-mail: kamshatmussina@mail.ru

Aidar MUKANOV^{ID}

L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Tourism Department, Astana, Kazakhstan, e-mail: aidar81hamzauli@mail.ru

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Abstract: The article presents a study on the branding of the Ulytau State National Nature Park, located in central Kazakhstan. The primary objective is to identify the key branding aspects that contribute not only to attracting tourists but also to ensuring the sustainable development of the region and preserving its unique natural and cultural heritage. The research emphasizes the importance of integrating Ulytau's rich historical and cultural legacy into the park's branding, promoting ecotourism, and fostering interdisciplinary collaboration among local communities, businesses, and tourism experts. One of the innovative strategies proposed in the study is the implementation of the ethno-aul (ethnic village) management model. This approach aims to enhance the authenticity and recognition of the park while providing visitors with immersive experiences of traditional Kazakh culture. The ethno-aul concept is particularly appealing to tourists interested in ethnic and cultural tourism, offering them a unique opportunity to connect with the region's heritage. By incorporating cultural experiences with environmental preservation, this model aligns with the principles of sustainable tourism and strengthens Ulytau's position as a distinctive tourist destination. The study's methodology involved interviews with stakeholders, focusing on 14 key questions related to branding strategies, park management, and the interaction between the local community, government agencies, and the business sector. These interviews provided insights into the core characteristics and challenges of the park's branding and management processes. Based on the findings, the researchers developed the Associative Molecule of the Ulytau State National Nature Park, a conceptual model that visualizes the park's primary features, attractions, and routes. This tool serves as a foundation for identifying key branding elements and enhancing the park's marketability. The Associative Molecule helps in formulating strategies for promoting various types of tourism by grouping attractions into thematic routes and offers. These strategies aim to create more appealing opportunities for tourists while supporting the socio-economic and environmental sustainability of the region. By leveraging its natural beauty, historical significance, and cultural richness, Ulytau has the potential to become a flagship destination in Kazakhstan's tourism sector. The article underscores the importance of balancing cultural heritage preservation with innovative management practices to ensure long-term sustainability. It highlights the role of collaborative efforts among stakeholders in achieving a unified vision for the park, making it a model for sustainable tourism development in Kazakhstan and beyond.

Keywords: territory branding, national park, Ulytau, ecological tourism, historical heritage, cultural experience, stakeholders, interaction

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INTRODUCTION

In the modern world, tourism is becoming an increasingly important factor in the economic and social development of regions. The attractiveness of tourist destinations often depends on their brand, which forms a unique image and distinguishes them from competitors. In this context, the issue of branding national parks, which combine natural, historical and cultural values, becomes relevant. The idea of using branding concept in the tourism industry began to be discussed in the middle of the XX century. In the context of a tourist destination, a brand includes not only the name and logo, but also the unique features that make this destination attractive to visitors (Kotler & Gertner, 2007; Azmi et al., 2023).

From the point of view of branding, a tourist destination is compared to a product or service, where the creation of a recognizable image plays a key role. Today, most authors note that branding a place is a complex process, the purpose of which is to create a unique, attractive and recognizable image of a certain location. Effective place branding can play a key role in promoting a territory, whether it's a city, region, or country. Successful branding starts with a deep understanding of a place's identity – its values, cultural characteristics, history, and unique competitive advantages. Based on these intrinsic features, the visual and verbal elements of the brand, such as the logo, slogan and corporate identity, are developed.

They should not only draw attention, but also clearly convey the essence and "character" of the place, establishing an emotional connection with the target audience. In addition, to create a strong brand of the place, a comprehensive marketing strategy is needed that will broadcast the brand through various communication channels. Only with such a holistic approach, the brand of the place will be able to win the trust and loyalty of residents, investors, tourists, as well as

* Corresponding author

stand out among competing territories. As a result, this will increase the recognition and attractiveness of the location, and open up new opportunities for its development (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2006).

The branding of natural areas, especially World Heritage sites, plays a crucial role in their protection and management (Wang & Yuan, 2020). By building a strong and recognizable brand, we can raise awareness of the unique values and fragility of these places, mobilize resources to preserve them, and promote sustainable tourism. Effective branding of natural areas should be based on authenticity and integrity. It should reflect the unique characteristics and cultural significance of these places, as well as demonstrate a commitment to their protection. The brand's communication strategy should emphasize the need to preserve these territories for future generations and promote responsible visitor behavior. Branding can also promote sustainable tourism that benefits both local communities and natural areas (Li, 2021). An attractive brand can attract tourists who value nature and are interested in protecting it. Tourism revenues can be used to fund conservation efforts, creating a positive cycle in which tourism supports the protection of natural areas (Elliot & Wattanasuwan, 1998). Overall, natural area branding is a powerful tool that can be used to protect and manage World Heritage sites. By building strong and authentic brands, we can raise awareness, leverage resources, and promote sustainable tourism, ensuring that these priceless places are preserved for future generations.

One of the current trends in the field of branding of tourism destination is the formation and promotion of the tourist brand of national parks, the development of mechanisms and approaches to increase the attractiveness and recognition of national parks in the eyes of tourists (Danylyshyn et al., 2020). The formation of a strong brand of a national park can help to increase the loyalty of visitors, their satisfaction and trust in the territory. This in turn might have a beneficial effect on brand loyalty and the desire of tourists to visit the park again. By developing a unique brand identity that takes into account the values and characteristics of the park, the organizers can reveal new facets of the perception of the territory, expand its tourist and educational potential, which will not only preserve the natural heritage, but also bring human interaction with the environment to a more conscious and harmonious level (Kihima, 2014). Based on the above, within the framework of this study, the authors define the identification of key aspects of branding of specially protected areas in modern conditions on the example of the Ulytau National Park, located in Kazakhstan, as well as the description of factors that can contribute to the development of an effective strategy for the development of the park aimed at the sustainable development of the region and attracting tourists as the main goal. To achieve this goal, the following tasks were set in the study: to analyze the characteristics of the historical and cultural heritage and natural resources of the Ulytau Park; study of the characteristics of the target audience and the competitive environment; development of the management model "Ethnoaul" as a place of attraction for all market participants, acting as a center of synergy and cooperation; creation of a branding management model in Ulytau, taking into account the role of the coordinating council in aligning the efforts of various stakeholders; identification of key areas of interaction with local communities in the process of branding the territory; conducting interviews with the heads of large companies, travel enterprises and top managers of government agencies in terms of substantiating the opinion on the creation of the Associative Molecule of the Ulytau State National Natural Park.

Branding of specially protected natural areas (SPNAs) differs from the branding of other tourist destinations in its focus on environmental responsibility and sustainable development. In addition, one of the main tasks in the development of tourism in the territory of national parks is to ensure the conditions for the preservation of the unique qualities of objects located on the territory. In the process of branding a territory, it is necessary to take this aspect into account. In other words, the creation of the brand for national parks should not be limited on the formation of knowledge among tourists, but also to fostering respect and care for the environment. The formation of a strong brand of the national park increases visitor loyalty, strengthens trust in the territory and encourages repeat visits. The unique identity of the brand can open up new boundaries of perception of the territory, expand its tourist and educational potential and contribute to a more conscious interaction between people and the environment. This allows Kazakhstan not only to attract tourists, but also to preserve the country's natural and cultural heritage, stimulating responsible tourism and investment in environmental protection.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Branding theory and stakeholder participation in branding

In modern conditions, the theory of branding is a rather complex and multifaceted concept and includes a number of approaches based on various tools and methods. Naydenov (2019) notes the important role of branding in creating a positive image of the object, as well as in increasing income. The emergence of a brand results from the concept of identifying a specific product. Its origins are associated with the skill and desire of each master to make his work recognizable and memorable. Pedersen (2004) considers place branding as a tool to provide a competitive advantage for the Øresund region, located between Denmark and Sweden. The author emphasizes that in the context of increasing competition between regions to attract investment, tourists and qualified specialists, place branding is becoming a key development strategy. Using the example of the Øresund region, Pedersen analyses how purposeful brand building can contribute to strengthening regional identity and increasing the attractiveness of the territory. The author notes that successful branding of a place requires joint efforts of various stakeholders - authorities, businesses, local communities. Marketing communications aimed at promoting the unique image and values of the region also play an important role.

Territory branding can be carried out at the national, regional and local levels, taking into account the competitive advantages of the country, region or individual territory. Browning & Oliveira, 2017 analyze the role of nation branding in the face of global competition for investment, talent, and access to foreign markets. The authors note that countries actively use branding technologies to form a unique competitive image. Effective nation branding allows to increase the global visibility and influence of states, as well as promote their political and economic interests in the international arena. The article

discusses the key conceptual approaches to the study of nation branding, as well as its practical application by various countries in modern geopolitical conditions. A number of authors consider branding from the point of view of the main marketing tool. Thus (Buhalis, 2000) notes that traditional destination marketing focuses on the formation and maintenance of an appropriate image of the region to ensure the growth of tourist arrivals. However, while the object of marketing is protected natural areas - ecotourism destinations, the task of marketing is to balance between attracting visitors and encouraging their certain behaviors that are optimal for the preservation of ecosystems. Managing the marketing of protected natural areas based on the principles of sustainability can significantly improve the conservation, protection, promotion and appreciation of both natural and cultural heritage, which is a prerequisite for the successful positioning of a tourist destination in the global market.

Kim et al., 2015, studying the differences in attitudes and behavior of tourists from mainland China and Taiwan, analyzed their motivation, preferences and travel behaviors. The results show that tourists from mainland China are more focused on entertainment, shopping and meeting status needs, while tourists from Taiwan are more likely to value opportunities for education, self-development and immersion in the local culture. In addition, tourists from mainland China are more inclined to conspicuous consumption and seek prestigious brands, while Taiwanese tourists are more rational in their purchases. The authors emphasize that understanding these differences is important for travel companies to develop segmented marketing strategies and offerings to attract and serve these two consumer groups.

Santos-Vijande et al., 2013 note in their study that in today's competitive business environment, the brand is becoming an important source of competitive advantage for service providers. They offer a conceptual model that demonstrates the impact of four key elements of brand management on the competitiveness of service firms. These elements include: 1) internal branding focused on employees; 2) interaction with customers; 3) brand management; 4) Brand-oriented innovation. The authors emphasize that the effective management of these aspects allows service firms to achieve a high level of brand awareness, customer loyalty and, ultimately, increased competitiveness. The article contributes to the understanding of the importance of a systematic approach to brand management for achieving competitive advantages by service companies. Hanna et al. (2020) systematized and summarized the main elements of place and destination branding, such as identity, image, target audiences, brand management. A comprehensive analysis of existing models and concepts makes it possible to propose an integrated framework that can serve as a basis for future research in this area.

Branding has become a key tool for destinations to visualize the complexity of the experiences that tourists expect when visiting a destination (Almeyda-Ibáñez & George, 2017). Rather, 2020 delves into the psychological aspects of destination branding, exploring the impact of brand experience, value alignment, and destination trust on tourist behavior. These studies collectively highlight the importance of branding in tourism and the need for an integrated approach. The study by (Pike & Ryan, 2004) is devoted to the analysis of the positioning of tourist destinations based on the comparison of cognitive, affective and conative perceptions. The authors note that traditional destination marketing often focuses only on the cognitive component, that is, on consumers' knowledge and perceptions of the destination. However, for more effective positioning, it is also necessary to take into account the affective (feelings and emotions) and conative (intentions and behavior) aspects. The study examined the perceptions of three New Zealand destinations by visitors from Australia. The results showed that cognitive, affective, and conative components can vary significantly, highlighting the importance of a comprehensive approach to positioning analysis. The authors conclude that the integration of these three aspects allows travel organizations to better understand the image of the destination in the minds of consumers and develop more effective marketing strategies.

Thus, today branding acts as the main tool for increasing the attractiveness of the tourist territory, creating a positive image, and forming an associative picture of the area in the imagination of the tourist. The branding process is based on a detailed analysis of the geographical, economic, social, environmental and other characteristics of the area, as a result of which the main competitive advantages are determined (Zharkenova et al., 2023). The unique qualities of a destination are at the heart of the branding strategy. In other words, the branding process is based on the unique qualities of the element of space and a well-developed strategy. In addition, stakeholder partnerships, brand leadership, departmental coordination, brand communications, and brand culture are critical prerequisites for successful destination branding (Hankinson, 2009).

Stakeholder participation in territory branding has a positive effect on the clarity of the brand concept and the effectiveness of urban brands in attracting target groups (Klijn, 2012). Quality stakeholder relationships have a positive impact on brand equity, which in turn provides a link between stakeholder relationships and company performance (Wang, 2016). In addition, stakeholder participation in territory branding is critical to creating, developing, and owning a successful brand, as they play a central role in legitimizing and influencing its meaning (Kavaratzis, 2012). Four "levels" of stakeholders are involved in the branding of a city or locality, with key stakeholders playing a crucial role in selecting other stakeholders to participate in. Each of these stakeholder groups is involved in the city's branding process to some extent. The degree of participation is highly dependent on the main stakeholders, who are considered key decision-makers in the branding process. These primary stakeholders select other stakeholders who "may" participate in the branding process. While this can be beneficial, it is vital to provide more opportunities and engage stakeholders who are willing to participate in the branding process. The alienation of stakeholders can also lead to the loss of part of the heritage-based identity (Henninger et al., 2016).

It is worth noting that the participation of stakeholders, including local communities, is one of the crucial factors in the success of territory branding, as it enhances the civic behavior of the brand (Ripoll, 2023) and can lead to a clearer brand concept and more effective attraction of target groups (Klijn, 2012). This participation can take many forms, including joint activities, co-creation, and control (Bivainienė, 2019). However, there is a need to move towards a more participatory practice of place branding, as stakeholders are often not fully involved in the branding of their place (Kavaratzis, 2012; Hartman, 2023). Colavitti & Usai (2015) note that the involvement of various stakeholders, including local communities, authorities and businesses, is a key element of effective branding of places. This allows for diverse interests and objectives,

as well as ensuring a more sustainable development of the region. The authors analyze the process of creating a brand for a mountain heritage area, including the development of a visual identity, the promotion of tourist routes and the organization of cultural events. Particular attention is paid to the role of partnerships in raising local awareness, engaging the private sector and improving infrastructure. Within the framework of this work, the branding process is considered from the point of view of the behavior of the local community, their interest in participating in the branding of the territory. As one of the main stakeholders, local communities are able to determine the main directions for the implementation of the branding strategy. In some cases, the socio-cultural environment of the local community can become one of the central elements of the brand and can be included in the associative vocabulary of the brand book of the destination.

2. Branding of National Parks as a Tourist Unit

Specially protected natural areas around the world are real gems for travelers, wildlife connoisseurs and lovers of outdoor activities in the bosom of nature. These unique protected sites not only preserve important ecosystems of the Earth, but also provide opportunities for educational, ecological and adventure tourism. For example, one of the most iconic protected areas is Yellowstone National Park, located in the United States. This park covers an area of more than 8900 sq. km and is known for its unique geothermal phenomena - hot springs, geysers and boiling mud pots. It is also home to a rich wildlife that includes grizzly bears, wolves, bison, and other North American fauna. Yellowstone is one of the most popular national parks in the United States, attracting millions of tourists every year.

Equally renowned is the Great Barrier Reef in Australia - the largest marine ecosystem on the planet. It stretches for more than 2,300 km along the east coast of Australia and includes more than 2,900 individual reef systems and islands. This unique natural UNESCO World Heritage Site is famous for its incredible biodiversity, home to more than 1,500 species of tropical fish, hundreds of species of coral, and other marine organisms. The Great Barrier Reef is one of the most popular diving and snorkeling sites worldwide. Other continents also have their own iconic protected areas. For example, the Serengeti National Park in Tanzania is known as one of the last places on Earth where large populations of wild animals such as lions, elephants, rhinos, buffaloes, etc. have been preserved. Another famous protected area in Africa is the Kilimanjaro National Park in Tanzania, home to the highest peak in Africa, Mount Kilimanjaro. In South America, one of the most famous protected areas is the Iguazu National Park, located on the border of Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay. It is home to the majestic Iguazu Falls, some of the most spectacular water cascades in the world. In addition to natural attractions, the park is known for its diverse flora and fauna, including populations of jaguars, giant otters, and other rare species.

The role of national parks in the creation and promotion of territorial brands, as well as the analysis of the practices of implementing joint branding initiatives with their participation, is shown in the article "National Parks, Territorial Brands and Co-Branding Initiatives". The author Ferrari (2020) aims to show how the unique natural and cultural features of national parks can be effectively used to form recognizable regional and national brands. Ferrari also examines various cases of successful and unsuccessful cooperation between the public and private sectors within the framework of territorial branding strategies involving national parks. The key objective of the article is to identify the key factors that determine the effectiveness of such collaborative branding projects. Santamarina (2019) notes that the country's various autonomous communities have shown different approaches to promoting and branding their natural attractions. Thus, Catalonia focuses on ecotourism and sustainable development, emphasizing the uniqueness of its national parks. Andalusia, in turn, focuses on a "sunny" image and a variety of landscapes. The Basque Country focuses on authenticity and a traditional way of life in harmony with nature. Despite the differences, the general trend is to create strong regional brands that can attract both locals and international tourists. The author emphasizes that the competent positioning of natural assets is crucial for the preservation of Spain's fragile environmental heritage and ensuring its sustainable development. Regional differences in the marketing of natural areas reflect the broader cultural and political characteristics of the country. Understanding these differences is key to developing effective conservation strategies that take into account the local context.

National parks are unique natural objects that are the pride and heritage of each country. The branding of such places plays a key role in attracting tourists and promoting local culture and traditions. Pizzichini et al., 2020 focus on the ethical attributes of national park brands and their impact on tourists' choice of local souvenirs, primarily food and drinks. The authors emphasize the importance of positioning national parks as environmentally responsible, sustainable destinations. This perception directly affects the attractiveness of buying authentic, authentic local products as souvenirs. Tourists who value respect for nature are more likely to choose eco-friendly products produced in compliance with ethical principles. Ozretic-Dosen et al., 2019, studying the issue of branding of national and natural parks in Croatia, note that managers of such parks often consider marketing as a secondary function, while it plays a key role in promoting unique natural and cultural resources, attracting visitors and increasing the competitiveness of territories. The study revealed a gap between park managers' understanding of the importance of marketing and real-world marketing practices (Gadamus et al., 2015). Building an indigenous evidence-base for tribally-led habitat conservation policies. Marine Policy. Many managers limit themselves to traditional tools, experiencing a lack of competencies in the field of strategic branding, digital technologies and interaction with visitors. The authors of the article emphasize the need to improve the marketing skills of management personnel for the effective use of the potential of national and natural parks.

To date, there are a number of studies (Seo & Lee, 2021), (Kavaratzis & Florek, 2021), (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019), that reveal the importance of developing effective marketing strategies for national and natural parks in order to increase their competitiveness. For example, (Vučemilović & Vištica, 2017) note that in order to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage, parks should focus on differentiation based on the promotion of unique natural and cultural resources, improving interaction with visitors and the use of modern digital tools. The study emphasizes the need to develop

marketing competencies of management and the introduction of an integrated strategic approach to the management of the National park's brand. (Goodwin, 2002) explores the possibilities and limitations of community involvement in tourism around national parks. The author notes that the involvement of the local population is a key component of sustainable tourism, as it allows to take into account the interests and needs of local residents, as well as contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage and natural resources. However, Goodwin also points to a number of challenges that national parks face when engaging local communities. This can include a lack of financial and managerial resources, conflicts of interest, as well as a lack of understanding among the local population of the benefits of tourism. The author proposes various strategies to overcome these limitations, such as developing partnerships, providing training and support to local entrepreneurs, and involving communities in the planning and decision-making process.

An invaluable contribution to the development of ecotourism was made by Kazakh authors, who in their articles explore various aspects of brand development in national parks of the country. The focus is set on the problems and prospects of sustainable development, analysis of the potential and resources to attract tourists, as well as the need to preserve the unique nature and cultural heritage (Abdramanova et al., 2017). Researchers assess the sustainability of ecotourism in specific national parks ("Altnemel") by identifying problems with infrastructure, funding, and the lack of sufficient guides (Koshim et al., 2023). They also analyze the potential of different regions (Katon-Karagay) and identify the most attractive tourist sites in order to develop recommendations for the rational use of resources (Turyspekova et al., 2022).

In the field of territory branding, a number of authors (Niyazbekova et al., 2019; Sergeyeva et al., 2021), (Akbar et al., 2020) emphasize the importance of creating a recognizable image and unique positioning to attract tourists. They study the issues of territorial branding and identify factors that can make the national park more competitive in the tourism market.

In general, the works of Kazakh authors make an important contribution to the development of ecotourism in Kazakhstan and contribute to the understanding of how sustainable development can be combined with attracting tourists.

In other words, it can be noted that today the issue of branding national and natural parks is one of the topical issues. Tourist sites of national parks are of great interest to tourists. More and more vacationers today want to spend their holidays in a unique natural environment. However, to date, most parks do not have developed brand books, and practically do not implement branding strategies, hoping that the unique properties of natural objects will attract tourists to the territory of the parks. In addition, there is a rather weak involvement of members of the local community in branding processes. This compels us to reexamine the problems of forming a brand of tourist areas, particularly parks and specially protected areas.

3. Main gaps in the study of branding of the territory of national parks

To date, quite a lot of works have been published that address the problems of branding tourist areas. Many studies emphasize the importance of sustainable tourism in national parks (Maheshwari et al., 2011; Cristòfol et al., 2021), (Sharma et al., 2019), describe examples of park branding in various countries and regions (Afshardoost et al., 2020; Jiménez-Barreto et al., 2020; Zhao et al., 2022; (Sarabia-Molina et al., 2022). However, the analysis of the publication reveals several gaps in the formation of the brand of the territory, especially national parks. Thus, the mechanisms and strategies of branding that contribute to sustainable development have not been sufficiently studied. It is necessary to thoroughly study the impact of branding on the socio-economic and environmental aspects of the development of parks.

The next issue that has not been solved to date is the lack of an in-depth analysis of the influence of the brand on the behavior of tourists. It is necessary to study how the brand affects the choice of tourists, their behavior in the park and their readiness for responsible tourism. It is important to understand how a brand can encourage tourists to comply with the rules of conduct and preserve the natural environment. There is a lack of research in the context of international cooperation. In a globalized world, it is important to explore the role of branding in attracting international tourists and in establishing international partnerships for the conservation of national parks (Hopcraft et al., 2015; Kaltenborn et al., 2011; Ferrari, 2020; Wang & Yuan, 2020). The issues of involving the local community in the process of branding national and other specially protected areas have not been fully studied. It is important to examine the role and contribution of local residents in the creation and promotion of the park's brand. It is necessary to develop mechanisms for including local communities in the branding process and ensuring their participation in decision-making.

Research in these areas will help develop more effective branding strategies for national natural parks, contributing to their sustainable development and the preservation of natural and cultural heritage.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

1. Object of research

The main object of the study was the Ulytau State National Nature Park, located in the central part of Kazakhstan. This area has unique natural, historical and cultural characteristics, occupying an area of about 2200 square kilometers. The landscape is dominated by picturesque mountain ranges, rivers and lakes, as well as a variety of flora and fauna. The favorable geographical location of the park is one of the key factors contributing to the development of tourism activities in the region. Administratively, the Ulytau State National Nature Park is located in the Ulytau district of the Ulytau region, in the northwestern part of the Ulytau and Arganaty mountains. The Ulytau State National Nature Park is characterized by the following geographical features. The maximum height of the Ulytau Mountains is 1131 meters above sea level, including Mount Aulietau and Akmeshit Peak. In turn, the highest point of the Arganaty Mountains is Mount Dandygul, which reaches 757 meters above sea level. The length of the park from north to south is about 225 kilometers, and from west to east - 150 kilometers. The administrative center of the park, the village of Ulytau, is located 135 kilometers from the city of Zhezkazgan. The administrative building of the park, built in 1976, is located directly in the village of Ulytau, 250 meters

from the borders of a specially protected natural area. The total area of the Ulytau State National Nature Park is estimated at 58,912 hectares, including Arganatskaya (33,419 hectares), Ulytau (20,847 hectares) and splitting forests (4,646 hectares). A two-kilometer buffer zone with an area of 28,420 hectares has been allocated around the forest dachas.

The park's road infrastructure is primarily consists of dirt roads, while the most developed network of country roads is concentrated on the territory of the Arganat forest cottage, leading to recreation areas and farms. On the territory of the Ulytau forest dacha, the road network is poorly developed due to the mountainous terrain. Natural resources and unique landscapes of Ulytau, including picturesque mountain ranges, valleys, lakes and rivers, create favorable conditions for the development of ecological, educational and adventure tourism. In addition, the rich historical and cultural heritage of the region, with the burials of Kazakh khans, archaeological monuments, holds a solid tourist potential. The presence of certain tourist infrastructure, such as hotels, campsites and tourist centers, also contributes to the development of tourism in Ulytau.

The Ulytau Nature Park has a complex of favorable geographical, natural, historical, cultural and infrastructural prerequisites that create a solid basis for the development of various types of tourism in this region (Table 1).

Table 1. Development of ecotourism in the protected areas of the Ulytau Nature Park (Source: compiled by authors)

#	Aspects of ecotourism	Opportunities and prospects
1	Potential for ecotourism	Unique nature and history
2	Infrastructure development	Organization of a network of ecological trails and tourist routes, as well as the equipment of observation decks, information stands, visitor centers and digital tourism applications
3	Accommodation and meals for tourists	Development of accommodation sector and local cuisine
4	Environmental education	Organization of environmental centers and training
5	Socio-economic benefits	New jobs and preservation of natural and cultural values of the region

This table clearly reflects the key conclusions regarding the potential of Ulytau for ecotourism, the necessary measures for the development of infrastructure, tourist accommodation, environmental education, as well as the socio-economic benefits of this direction.

The main unique qualities of the Ulytau territory include:

1. Historical and cultural heritage of the Golden Horde:

- Ulytau was an important political and spiritual center of the Golden Horde, the residences of the last khans of the Genghisids were located here;

- the legendary commander Tamerlane visited the Ulytau mountains in 1232;

- the unique culture, traditions and life of the nomadic people have been preserved.

2. Ancient traditions of mining:

- Centuries-old history of ore deposits development rooted in antiquity;

- Ulytau was one of the key centers for the extraction of copper and other metals in the region;

- Ulytau is the heir to the technology of development and smelting of ores of ancient miners, which continues to live in the modern production of a large non-ferrous metallurgy company "Kazakhmys".

3. Natural and cultural diversity:

- unique natural landscapes, flora and fauna of Ulytau;

- preservation of the traditional nomadic way of life in harmony with nature;

- A variety of archaeological, historical and cultural sites waiting to be discovered by tourists.

The main elements of the area that attract tourists are such cultural and historical monuments as: mausoleums of Zhoshy Khan, Alasha Khan, Dombaula, Kulan ana, Bolgan ana, Edyge Peak, sacred sites Terekti Aulie, Aulie Tau, medieval sites and settlements (Khan Ordasy, Baskamyr), etc. (Seidualin et al., 2024). These objects are a reflection not only of the medieval history of the Kazakh people, but also of a more ancient period.

In general, Ulytau today is presented as an ancient land of great nomads, which symbolizes the uniqueness of this region, combines the rich historical and cultural heritage of the Golden Horde, mining and smelting of ores and natural attractions. The natural resources of Ulytau and its picturesque landscapes complement its historical significance, creating a comprehensive tourist offer that can attract a wide range of visitors. These unique characteristics of the area can fully act as the main elements of branding the territory as a destination.

2. Research methods and data collection

Research work was based on a number of methods of scientific cognition. Thus, the study employs the methods of theoretical analysis, which made it possible to determine the main trends in the development of specially protected areas and generalize their modern specific features. To search for evidence of the assumptions put forward, methods of empirical analysis were used, within the framework of which the data obtained during field studies on the territory of the Ulytau National Park were processed. The main part of the work is based on the methods of qualitative analysis. To determine the specifics of tourism development and the features of branding national parks, the primary research method employed was qualitative analysis. This included conducting interviews with key stakeholders interested in the development of tourism within national natural parks and other protected areas. Qualitative research has been extensively applied in previous studies on stakeholder perceptions in the context of destination management (Yrza & Filimonau, 2022).

The interview questions were selected based on the results of a literature review of the main sources published in the open-access and touching on the problems of branding the territory of national parks. Thus, when determining the main topics for interviews, the results of various studies (Ferrari, 2020; Ozretic-Dosen et al., 2019; Melnychenko et al., 2021)

were used since the works of these authors also considered the problems of branding the territory of national parks, but in the context of a different geographical space. The interview program consisted of 14 main questions, addressing the challenges in the development of national parks in modern conditions, especially in Kazakhstan, branding of the area and objects of specially protected territories, the participation of the local community in the process of branding the territory. In general, the questions were divided into three main blocks. The first set of questions was aimed at identifying the degree of understanding by the participants of the branding processes, especially those implemented within the boundaries of specially protected areas and national parks. The thematic focus of the second block of questions touched upon such aspects as the main recommended approaches to branding the territory of national parks, marketing promotion tools, ensuring environmental sustainability as part of brand formation, etc. In order to determine the reliability of the thematic content of the questions, the interview program was tested among representatives of the local community involved in the process of tourism development in the national parks.

As a result of the approbation, interviews were conducted among representatives of small and medium-sized tourism businesses, the academic environment, visitors to national parks, organizations involved in the promotion and branding of tourist areas, including national parks, government agencies, etc. The interview was conducted in Russian and Kazakh languages. The fundamental principles of interviewing were the principles of voluntary participation and respect for the opinion of the respondents. The total number of interviewees was 21 ($n=21$, Table 2).

Table 2. Interview participants ($n=21$)

Code	Gender	Affiliation of the respondents	Professional experience (beginner – 2 years or less, specialist – 2-5 years, expert – over 5 years)
Persons with the authority to make decisions and implement policies in the field of branding and tourism development at the republican and local levels ($n=4$)			
P1	F	Head of the Directorate of the Administrative Department of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan	expert
P2	M	Head of the Department of Physical Culture and Sports of the city of Zhezkazgan	expert
P3	M	Head of the Department of Agriculture of the Ulytau District	specialist
P4	F	Head of the Department of Strategic Planning and Project Management, Ministry of Culture and Sports	expert
Stakeholders involved in DMO ($n=5$)			
DMO1	M	Manager of JSC NC "KazakhTourism"	expert
DMO2	F	Senior Manager of JSC NC "KazakhTourism"	expert
DMO3	F	Association of Tour Operators of Kazakhstan	expert
DMO4	F	Zhetisu Tourist Information Center	expert
DMO5	F	Republican Public Association "QazaqGeography"	specialist
Representatives of the tourism business ($n=5$)			
TB1	F	Director of the travel agency "Amigo Tours"	beginner
TB2	F	Employee of the travel company "Fantasy Tours"	specialist
TB3	M	Head of Sales Department, Talisman Travel Agency	specialist
TB4	F	Director of the travel agency "DS Travel"	expert
TB5	M	Travel Agent	beginner
Researchers and academics ($n=4$)			
R1	F	Dean of the Faculty of Geography and Environmental Management of Al Farabi Kazakh National University	expert
R2	F	Professor of the Kazakh Academy of Sports and Tourism	expert
R3	F	Professor, Almaty Management University	expert
R4	M	Professor of Turan University»	expert
Посетители и туристы			
T1	F	Tourist	expert
T2	F	Tourist	expert
T3	F	Tourist	specialist

Almost all interviewees were selected using the snowball method using the professional contacts of the research team. The interview was conducted by phone, offline and online in the format of a video meeting (Zoom). Although the snowball technique has a lack of bias, the research team chose this method due to the fact that it provided access to the respondents who are involved in the implementation of tourism policy both at the level of the republic and at the regional level.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

The article proposes to create a unique and attractive brand "Ulytau", which will reflect the rich historical and cultural heritage of the region and its untouched nature. The brand should be authentic, recognizable and attractive to tourists. It is planned to involve local residents in the branding process and create an ethnic village that will become a center of attraction. The purpose of Ulytau branding is to contribute to the sustainable development of the region and the preservation of its unique characteristics. As an example, we can consider the United States, where quite effective models of interaction between the local community, government agencies and tour operators in the development of national parks and tourism are being built. In the U.S., national parks are managed by the National Park Service, a federal agency under

the Department of the Interior. This service is responsible for the development and implementation of policies in the field of nature conservation, organization of eco-tourism and interaction with local communities.

For effective cooperation between various stakeholders, special coordinating councils have been created in the United States. They include representatives of federal, state, and municipal governments, as well as the business community and local residents. Such councils are responsible for coordinating interests, developing common approaches and rules of interaction. In addition, public-private partnerships between national parks and tourism companies are actively developing in the United States. They make it possible to optimally combine the commercial interests of business and the tasks of preserving natural heritage. Tour operators obtain licenses and undertake to follow the established requirements for the organization of environmentally responsible tourism. U.S. national parks represent diverse local communities involved in the sustainable development of these areas. Native American tribes such as the Navajo, Hopi and Zuni preserve traditional crafts, cultural practices and develop ecotourism in the Grand Canyon and Canyonlands. Farming and ranching communities of ranchers and organic producers in Yellowstone, Grand Teton, and Sequoia provide services for parks and market local produce. Fishermen in Alaska and in the Olympic National Park are engaged in fishing and environmental monitoring. Creative communities of artists, craftsmen and musicians in Canyonlands and Arches create art, crafts and cultural programs. Engaging with these diverse local communities is an important element of the sustainable development of U.S. national parks.

Thus, the United States has established a systematic approach to the management of national parks, based on a balance of interests of various groups and a clear distribution of rights, responsibilities and mechanisms of cooperation.

Perceptions of regions around the world are often formed on the basis of stereotypes or dominant images, which can be both positive and negative (Hanna et al., 2020; Zharkenova et al., 2023). As a positive reputational indicator, Kazakhstan has made a significant contribution to world civilization. For centuries, Kazakhstan has been an important crossroad for trade and cultural exchange between East and West (Omarov et al., 2020). The Great Silk Road passed through the territory of Kazakhstan, contributing to the spread of ideas, technologies and goods (Issakov et al., 2023). Nomadic tribes inhabiting Kazakhstan made their unique contribution to the development of military affairs, horse breeding and jewelry art. The Scythians, Sarmatians and other tribes living on the territory of Kazakhstan were known for their skilled archers and horsemen. They also developed a rich culture and literature, including epics such as "Kyz Zhibek" and "Kozy Korpesh - Bayan Sulu". To enhance the positive perception of Kazakhstan on the global stage, it is essential to transform existing negative stereotypes and showcase the country's versatility and uniqueness through the development of a strong national brand (Sergeyeva et al., 2021). Kazakhstan has traditionally been viewed as a land of nomads, renowned for the hospitality of its people, the beauty of its natural landscapes, and its rich cultural heritage. The historical and cultural complex "Ulytau" provides a range of tourist services, including information about sights, excursions along tourist routes and museums, capable of receiving a total of about 10,000 tourists a year. Ulytau Park has unique historical and cultural resources that can be integrated into tourist products that are attractive to tourists (Seidualin et al., 2024).

It is important to consider branding not only as the development of logos and a recognizable brand, but also as the creation of a comprehensive strategy for the development of ecotourism in the Ulytau Nature Park. Despite the existence of a program for the development of protected areas and master plans, at present there is a significant drawback - the lack of a unified management system that unites all entities involved in the development of the Ulytau Nature Park, including akimats and the coordinating council under the State National Park of Ulytau. The Coordinating Councils play an important role in coordinating the efforts of various actors and ensuring an integrated approach to tourism development in the region. However, actors may sometimes ignore the work of such councils, undermining their effectiveness. First, the subjects may ignore the work of the coordinating council due to insufficient awareness. They may not be aware of the council's existence, its aims and objectives, or how their involvement can benefit them. Second, actors may not see clear benefits from participating in the work of the council or from implementing its recommendations. They may feel that the council does not represent their interests or that its work will not bring them any tangible benefit. Third, subjects may not trust the coordinating council or its members. They may perceive the council as corrupt, incompetent, or ineffective. This mistrust can lead to their reluctance to participate in or cooperate with the council. Fourth, subjects may have conflicting interests with members of the coordinating council or other subjects. These conflicts can make cooperation difficult and lead to actors ignoring the work of the council.

Finally, actors may lack resources, such as time or staff, which may limit their ability to participate in the work of the board. They may be focused on their day-to-day operations and not be able to devote time to participating in the work of the council. The Coordination Council should raise awareness of its work, clearly demonstrate the benefits of stakeholder participation, establish trust, address conflicts of interest, and provide actors with the support and resources necessary for their effective participation. By addressing these problems, the Coordination Council can increase the level of interaction with the subjects and ensure their active participation in the development of tourism in Ulytau.

The study of this problem necessitates the development of an effective system of interaction among ecotourism entities in the region, which will ensure that each participant receives dividends from the promotion of a single branding product of the Ulytau Nature Park. With its rich natural heritage and unique landscapes, Ulytau Nature Park can successfully implement a partnership strategy model to develop its brand. The study highlights that a comprehensive strategic approach based on local resources and identity is needed to create an attractive image of the park. The active involvement of local residents, the business community and government bodies in the branding process will help create a sustainable image of the park, contributing to its development and attracting more tourists, strengthening Ulytau's position as an important tourist destination. This study examines the potential of the ethno-village in the Ulytau Nature Park to stimulate the development of branding and proposes strategies for its implementation (Figure 1).

- The development of a branded product for Ulytau Park should be carried out taking into account the following principles:
- Authenticity: The brand must be based on the real characteristics of the park and reflect its unique character.
 - Recognition: A brand should be easily recognizable and memorable to stand out from other travel destinations.
 - Attractiveness: The brand should make tourists want to visit the park and experience its unique features.

The inclusion of the ethnic village in the Ulytau brand is a strategic decision that enhances the authenticity and recognition of the park. The ethno-village, which immerses tourists in traditional Kazakh culture, makes Ulytau more attractive to the target audience interested in ethnic tourism. It also fosters interaction between the local community and tourists, showcasing their crafts and traditions, boosting the local economy and creating new jobs. Thus, the ethno-village becomes an important element of the brand, contributing to the successful achievement of branding goals: creating a unique image, attracting tourists and sustainable development of the region.

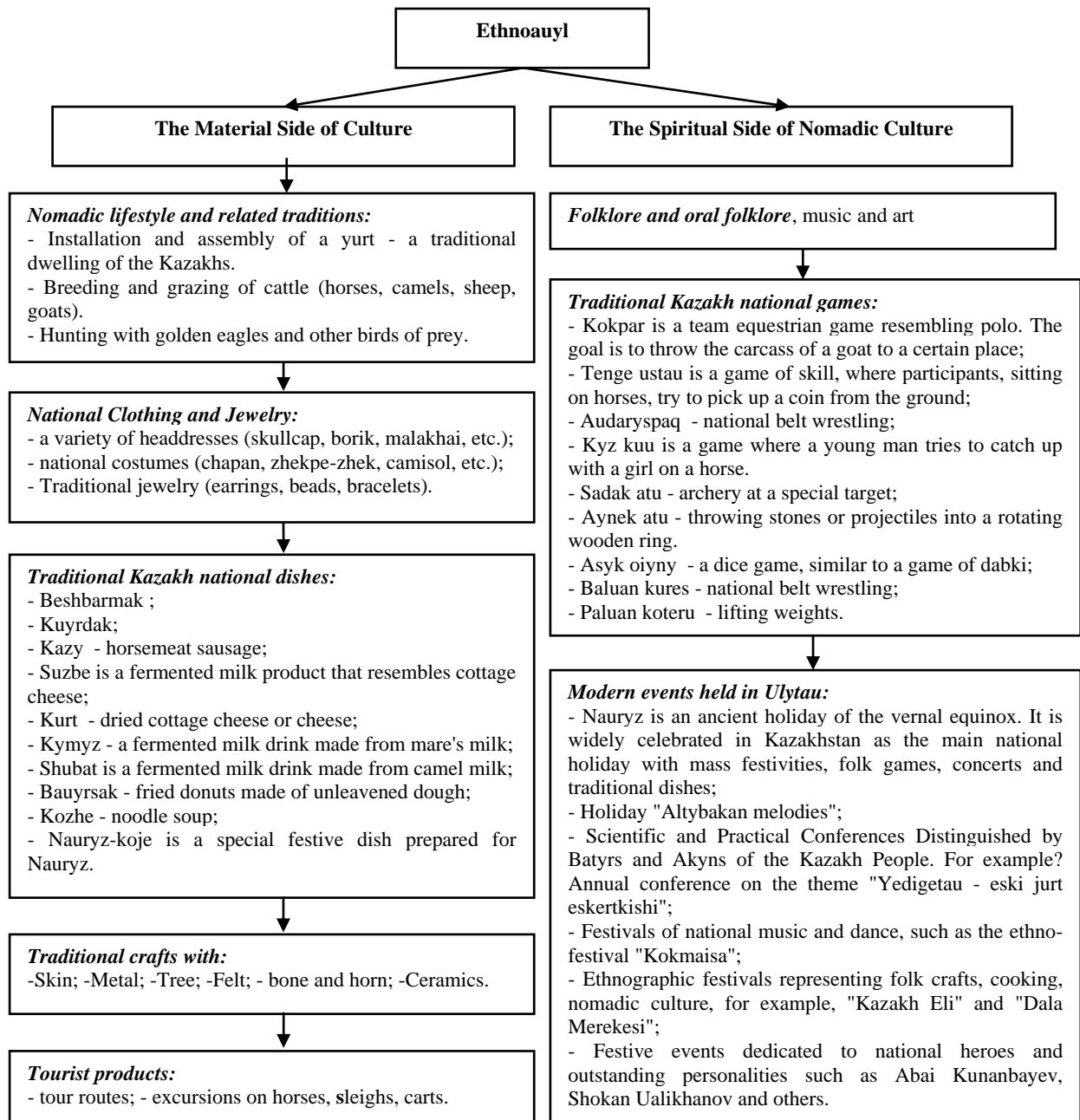


Figure 1. The main characteristics of the ethno-auyl (ethno-village)

An effective branding strategy for the Ulytau Nature Park should be based on its unique characteristics and take into account the needs of the target audience. The key elements of the recommended branding strategy should include:

- Unique Selling Proposition (USP): "Ulytau Nature Park: Where History, Mining and Nature Meet in a Unique Tourist Experience".
- Logo: The logo should be simple, memorable, and reflect the key characteristics of the park. It is recommended to use the image of Mount Ulytau in combination with elements representing the historical and natural heritage of the park.
- slogan: "Discover Ulytau: a treasury of history, nature and culture".

Currently, the logo of the Ulytau Nature Park is vaguely defined and inconsistent. There are many different logos and slogans used by different stakeholders, which creates confusion for potential tourists, as some logos feature mountains, the natural heritage of the park, the image of animals, a musical instrument. In addition, the current brand does not fully reflect the unique characteristics of the Natural part. Most importantly, if the subjects of the natural park want to represent a single brand, the coordinating council must ensure the uniform use of the logo, slogan and other elements of the Ulytau brand in all communications. An ethno-village can serve as a place of attraction for all market participants, acting as a center of synergy and cooperation. However, the lack of clear relationships between actors, duplication of functions and inefficient use of resources, conflicts and misunderstandings between stakeholders contributed to a decrease in effective work. The ethno-village in Ulytau can serve as a physical embodiment of this interaction, providing a platform for the exchange of knowledge, ideas and resources.

The model of interaction of subjects proposed by the authors of the article is a dynamic tool that should be regularly updated as the project develops. It provides project teams with a comprehensive view of stakeholders and their relationships, enabling them to effectively manage interactions and achieve project goals. The ethno-village in Ulytau has significant potential for the development of branding in the region. The interaction of market entities, the anchor role of the ethnic village and the creation of a coordinating council will contribute to the creation of a favorable environment for the development of a destination brand. Working together, stakeholders can create a unique and attractive tourism product that will contribute to the economic growth and sustainable development of Ulytau.

To date, effective methods in branding national parks can be the use of social media to draw attention to parks, the creation of interactive virtual tours to attract visitors, the development of a unique and memorable logo and design for the park, and the holding of events and festivals to attract more visitors (Garg et al., 2019).

A comprehensive approach to branding the Ulytau Nature Park is needed, going beyond just creating a logo. The lack of effective management and coordination between government agencies, the coordinating council and tourism companies hinders the development of the park. It is necessary to develop clear branding steps, including the definition of the park's positioning, brand development (logo, slogan), marketing strategies and close interaction with local residents. Particular attention should be paid to sustainable development and environmental responsibility.

It is important to pay attention to the preservation of the nature and ecosystem of the park, to ensure the safety of visitors, and to create information materials about the richness of nature and the history of the park to draw attention to its unique features. It is worth noting that in modern conditions, the issues of preserving the unique qualities of national park objects have become relevant for business representatives, who until then were mainly interested only in maximizing the benefits of the tourism projects being implemented:

«... Today, when developing and selling tourist products, we pay great attention to the preservation of the unique characteristics of objects located within the boundaries of protected areas. Our tours, which are carried out within the boundaries of national parks, are primarily based on visiting objects that attract tourists with their special properties. The attractiveness of the territory of national parks depends on the preservation of the qualities of these objects, and the longer they are preserved, the longer our products will be in demand" (TB1).

The process of branding the territory of national parks is a rather complex and multifaceted process and requires the involvement of all entities interested in promoting the territory for tourist purposes. To date, within the framework of branding, it is worth paying attention to the following:

1. Positioning and differentiation: The development of the brand of the Ulytau Nature Park should begin with the identification of the key characteristics that distinguish this park from many others. The basis of the brand should be the uniqueness and richness of the natural and cultural heritage of Ulytau. The first step will be the positioning of the park. The following positioning is proposed: "Ulytau: the heart of history, the soul of the steppe". It focuses on the deep connection of Ulytau with the history of Kazakhstan, its role as a place of concentration of the material and spiritual heritage of nomadic peoples. Also, this wording emphasizes the consonance of Ulytau with the steppe nature itself, its organic inscribement in this landscape. The target audience of the Ulytau brand should be lovers of history and archeology, tourists interested in nature and ecotourism, as well as travelers looking for an authentic and untouched by civilization kind of experience. For these groups, Ulytau should be associated with a place where history comes to life against the backdrop of majestic steppe expanses, where you can feel the heritage of nomads and enjoy untouched nature.

«... The key elements of the Ulytau brand differentiation should be a unique combination of natural and historical attractions: ancient burial mounds, petroglyphs, medieval settlements, diverse flora and fauna, rare bird species, picturesque geological formations and the sacred mountain of Ulytau. It is important to offer tourists an authentic experience through tours with local guides, horseback riding, jeep excursions, accommodation in yurts. Emphasis should also be placed on ecotourism and the opportunities for spiritual unity with nature that Ulytau can provide" (DMO1).

The visual image of the Ulytau brand should be designed in such a way as to reflect its natural and historical richness as much as possible. The identity, logo and slogan are intended to become expressive symbols that will be recognizable and associated with the park. Close interaction with the local population should play an important role in the development of the Ulytau brand. Involving residents in the branding process, providing them with opportunities to earn money on tourism will allow them to become "ambassadors" of the park, which in the long term will strengthen its sustainability and prosperity, and all these should be appealing first of all, for the tourist.

«... I visit Ulytau once a year. So far, I associate Ulytau with only one object, Aulie tau. During my last trip, I managed to visit several historical sites, of which the place has a lot to offer, each of them was unique. I think all this should be taken into account when forming the Ulytau brand. In general, the Ulytau brand should create an association with the tourist about the main resources of the park" (T2).

1. Brand development. The visual image of the Ulytau brand should be designed in such a way as to reflect its natural and historical richness as much as possible. The corporate identity, logo and slogan are intended to become expressive symbols that will be recognizable and associated with the park. Brand promotion should be carried out through various communication channels, including the website, social networks and printed materials. Close interaction with the local population should play an important role in the development of the Ulytau brand. Involvement of residents in the branding process, providing them with opportunities to earn money from tourism will allow them to become "ambassadors" of the park, which in the long term will strengthen its sustainability and turn them into competitive advantages to attract the attention of tourists and create a sustainable and prosperous tourist destination.

«... In my opinion, the key aspects in this process should be the ancient history of the region, the demonstration of archaeological sites and the reconstruction of the life of nomadic civilizations. Creation of interactive museum exhibitions. It is important to pay attention to the popularization of the cultural heritage of modern ethnic groups. Organizing workshops on traditional crafts such as felt and carpet weaving will not only enrich the tourist experience but also contribute to the preservation of these practices. I think that holding thematic festivals and events will become an effective tool for integrating history and culture into the brand of Ulytau.

In addition, in my opinion, it is important to pay attention to the visual embodiment of cultural heritage in the branding of the National Park. The use of national symbols, ornaments and architectural elements will help to create a recognizable and holistic image. An integrated approach that combines cognitive, interactive and event formats will reveal the unique history and culture of Ulytau, which will undoubtedly attract wide interest to tourists. (R4)

3. Marketing strategies. The development of effective marketing strategies is a key aspect in the development of a successful brand of the Ulytau Nature Park. An integrated approach to marketing will attract the target audience, strengthen competitive advantages and ensure the sustainable development of the park applications, etc.) will allow Ulytau to effectively interact with the target audience in the online space. The content should vividly and emotionally represent the unique nature, rich history and cultural heritage of the park.

Traditional marketing channels also play an important role. The development of advertising materials (booklets, posters, videos), participation in tourist exhibitions and forums, cooperation with travel agencies and the media will allow to convey information about Ulytau to a wide audience of potential visitors.

«... Here I would say that there is no one tool that would immediately shoot. Within the framework of branding, it is necessary to determine the points of contact with the consumer (tourist), i.e. to identify touch points.

You need to understand the so-called path of a tourist who visits the National Park, and each stage, for example, the stage of inspiration. How do we inspire people to come to this national park more, and this must be understood, and if there is a weakness there, then it must be strengthened (DMO2)

Particular attention should be paid to the creation of a strong brand in Ulytau. The development of a recognizable logo, corporate identity and slogan reflecting the uniqueness of the park will become the basis for the formation of its positive image. Competent branding will create an emotional connection with the audience and contribute to the growth of the popularity of Ulytau.

«... Building a strong brand for a national park requires a holistic approach that includes research and analysis, developing a message and concept, running marketing campaigns, engaging with local communities, and creating unique experiences. My guess is that research and analysis help to understand the competitive landscape, the target audience, and the unique features of the park. This can serve as the basis for the development of a relevant and attractive brand" (P2)

An important element of the marketing strategy should be cooperation with local communities and the involvement of local residents. This will not only provide valuable insights into the culture and traditions of the region, but will also provide support for the local population, who will be able to act as "ambassadors" of the Ulytau brand.

The comprehensive use of online and offline marketing tools, a strong branding platform, as well as close interaction with local communities - all this will become the basis for the effective promotion of the Ulytau Nature Park and attracting the attention of the target audience.

1. Interaction with local communities. A key success factor in the development of the Ulytau Nature Park brand will be close interaction with local communities.

«... I believe that first of all, before offering a certain job, it is necessary to coordinate actions with the main stakeholders, businesses and, especially, residents. Local communities provide us with services. These are places of accommodation, catering, etc., so it is necessary to coordinate any steps in the field of branding the area with local residents " (DMO4)

First, it is necessary to include local people in the branding process - ask for their opinions, use their talents and knowledge when creating a brand and marketing campaigns. This will not only provide valuable insights into the culture and traditions of the region, but will also provide support for the local population, who will be able to act as "ambassadors" of the Ulytau brand.

Secondly, it is important to offer local residents opportunities to earn money from the development of tourism - to create programs for local guides, artisans, entrepreneurs so that they can benefit and become interested partners in promoting the park. Finally, it is necessary to encourage responsible behaviour of tourists by educating them about the culture and traditions of the locals and encouraging them to respect their values. Only such close interaction with local communities will ensure the sustainable development of Ulytau Park and create an authentic tourist experience.

5. Sustainable development. Sustainability should be a key priority in the development of the Ulytau Nature Park brand. First of all, it is necessary to create an environmentally responsible brand that demonstrates commitment to the preservation of the natural environment and responsible tourism. This will emphasize the uniqueness of the park and its value as a place where nature is preserved in its original form. It is possible to introduce efficient waste recycling systems, implement

energy-saving solutions, and develop rules of environmentally responsible behavior for visitors. Such initiatives will not only reduce the burden on the ecosystem but will also become part of the responsible positioning of the Ulytau brand. Cooperation with international organizations for nature protection should be an important area. Attracting their expertise, financial and organizational support will make it possible to implement large-scale projects to preserve biodiversity, restore natural landscapes and develop sustainable tourism in Ulytau. The status of partnerships with recognized environmental organizations will also strengthen the reputation and competitiveness of the brand.

«... In the context of preserving environmental sustainability and natural heritage, balanced branding and development of tourism with nature protection requires an integrated approach and the incorporation of various strategies and activities. It is necessary to conduct a thorough analysis of the impact of tourism on the natural environment and its vulnerable components, to identify critical points and risks. Attendance management strategies should then be developed and implemented, including controlling pressures on ecosystems, optimizing routes and developing rules of conduct for tourists" (R1).

Thus, sustainable development should become the key foundation of the Ulytau brand. Environmental responsibility, programs to reduce the impact of tourism and cooperation with environmental organizations will create a brand that will not only attract tourists, but also ensure the long-term preservation of the unique nature of the park

The study of the opinions of the main stakeholders interested in the development of tourism in the territory of national parks made it possible to determine the main terms on the basis of which it is possible to form an associative molecule of the object under consideration (Table 2, Figure 2).

Table 2. Codes and sub-codes of the main interview questions regarding the branding of the State National Nature Park

Theme	Codes	Subcodes	Support of Respondents (n=21)
Tourist potential of the national park	Natural resources	Peak Auliye Mountain	16 (76,2%)
		Yedige Peak	12 (57,1%)
	Historical sites	Mausoleum of the Golden Horde Period	17 (81,0%)
		Tamerlane's legacy	11 (52,4%)
		Mining facilities	8 (38,1%)
		Terekty Auliye	14 (66,7%)
	Culture	Traditions	15 (71,4%)
		Socio-cultural environment	7 (33,3%)
	Ecology	Clean air	5 (23,8%)
Environment		4 (19,0%)	
Possible types of tourism that can be developed within the boundaries of the park	Educational types of tourism	Historical and cultural tourism	19 (90,5%)
		Ethnotourism	7 (33,3%)
		Dark tourism	11 (52,4%)
	Recreational Types of Tourism	Ecotourism	9 (42,9%)
		Rural tourism	5 (23,8%)
		Health tourism	8 (85,7%)
Branding objects	Natural objects and reserves	Ulytau Mountains	17 (81,0%)
		The steppes of Ulytau	3 (14,3%)
	Historical and cultural sites	Mausoleum of Josha Khan	20 (95,2%)
		Mausoleum of Alash Alash Khan	14 (66,7%)
		Khan ordasy	15 (71,4%)
		Terekty Necropolis	18 (85,7%)
Visual image of the park	History, culture, traditions	The History of the Golden Horde	19 (90,5%)
		Culture and traditions of the nomadic people	11 (52,4%)
	Nature and Heritage	Mountains, steppes and rivers	5 (23,8%)
		Sacred heritage	7 (33,3%)
The main participant of branding	Public Authorities Business and DMO	Local authorities	15 (71,4%)
		Regional and republican bodies	9 (42,9%)
		Tourism business	18 (85,7%)
		Associations and national companies	14 (66,7%)
		Local communities	12 (57,1%)
Local Community Engagement	Local business	Tourism enterprises	19 (90,5%)
		Service organizations	11 (52,4%)
	Local Parks Authority	National Park Management	16 (76,2%)
	Local population	Residents	1781,0%

Table 2 shows that the participants of the interview (n=21) see great tourism potential in the Ulytau SNNP, based on natural resources, historical sites and traditions, for example:

- Natural resources: Aulie Tau Peak (76.2%) and Yedige Peak (57.1%) are key nature tourism destinations.
- Historical sites: The mausoleum of the Golden Horde period (81.0%) is the main object of historical and cultural tourism.
- Culture: Traditions (71.4%) play an important role in the tourist potential of the park.

The results of the interviews regarding the branding of the Ulytau State National Nature Park emphasize the rich tourism potential of the park, based on its natural, historical and cultural values. The study revealed strong support from

local stakeholders for the development of educational and recreational tourism, as well as for positioning the park as a unique cultural and historical destination. The results show the need to improve infrastructure and services for tourists, as well as the importance of collaborating with local partners to ensure the sustainable development of the park.

These conclusions can serve as a basis for the development of an effective development strategy that will allow the Ulytau State National Natural Park to maximize its potential and become an attractive tourist destination. Practice shows that often in the formation of the brand of the territory, terms expressing the name of the area or individual characteristics of the territory, which form associative images or ideas among tourists about the area, play a special role (Zharkenova et al., 2023). The associative dictionary of the Ulytau National Natural Park includes such high-frequency words as: Zhoshy Khan, Alasha Khan, Dombaul, Khan Ordasy, Terekti Aulie, Peak Yedige, Tanbaly Tas, Aulie Tau, etc.

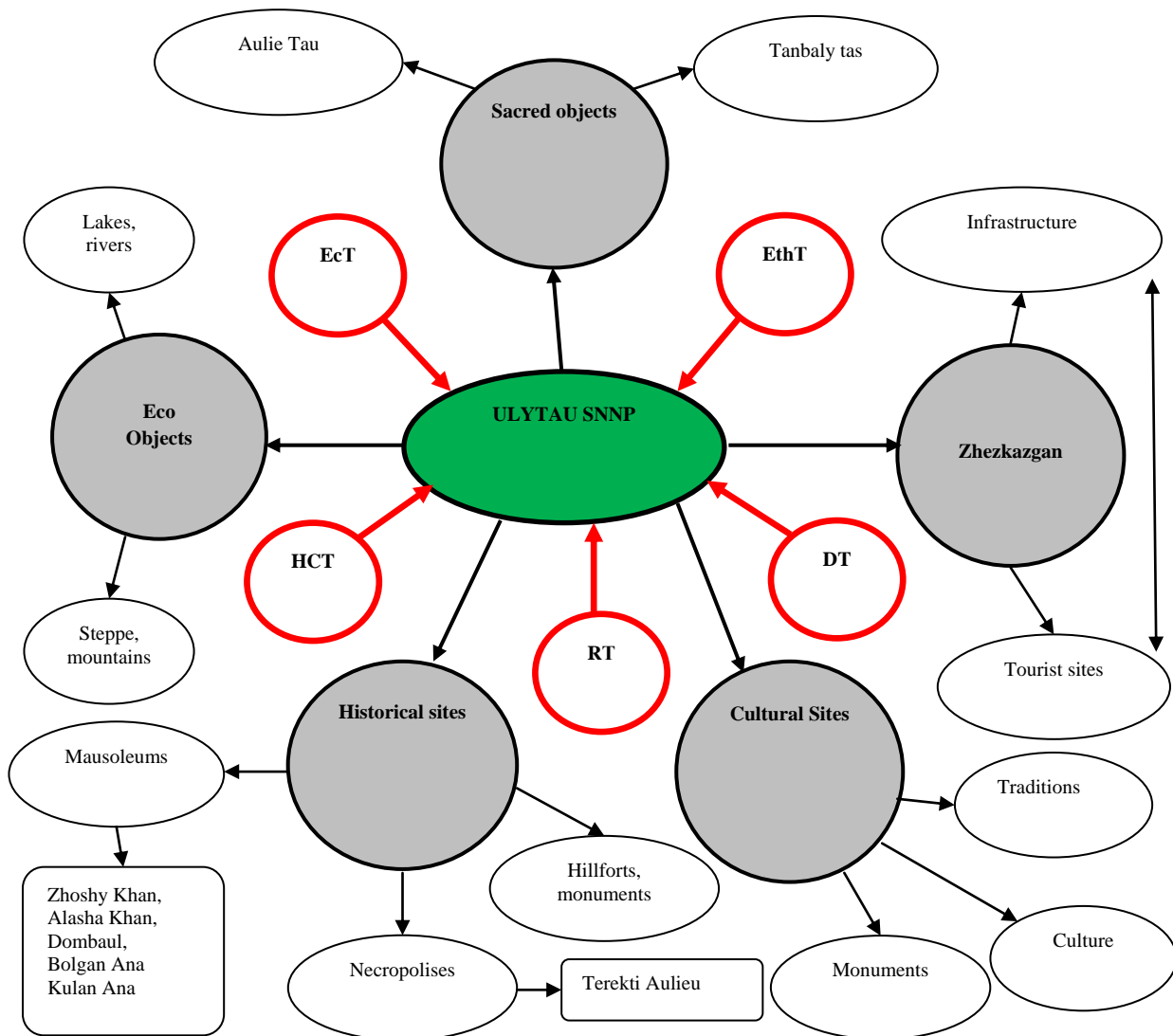


Figure 2. Associative Molecule of the Ulytau State National Nature Park (EcT – Ecological Tourism, EthT – Ethnotourism, HCT – Historical and Cultural Tourism, RT – Rural Tourism, DT – Dark Tourism) (Source: Compiled by the authors)

The associative molecule shown in Fig.2 indicates the most important directions in the formation of the symbolic image of the Ulytau State National Nature Park. It is the high-frequency terms of the associative vocabulary that reflect the images of tourists about the area and what attracts them most in this territory (Zharkenova et al., 2023). In addition, the associative molecule can underlie the concept of brand formation at the local level and determine the main strategies for promoting the area (Bolkunov, 2016). The associative molecule of the Ulytau SNNP is a valuable tool for developing a branding strategy and promoting the territory. It allows to identify the key associations of tourists with the region and use them to create a unique and attractive image of Ulytau.

The development and promotion of a local tourist brand is not limited to the creation of a graphic (logo) and verbal (slogan) designation and the search for communication channels for its promotion in various segments of the information space (Tiberghien, 2020). Branding of tourist territories is, first of all, a set of measures that are aimed at promoting certain characteristics of the region to potential consumers (tourists, travel agents, investors in the hospitality sector) with the help of a properly created image, a key idea. The formation of a brand of a tourist territory is a long process and provides for the implementation of a set of interrelated and combined measures.

CONCLUSION

Different regions of the world are associated with certain characteristics or aspects of their culture and society. For example, Paris is known for its style and fashion, Japan for its cutting-edge technology, Switzerland for wealth and precision, Rio de Janeiro for carnival and football, and Tuscany for its high quality of life. Kazakhstan strives to position itself as a modern, dynamically developing country with a rich history and culture.

The Ulytau Nature Park, which has a rich cultural and historical heritage, has significant potential for the development of ecotourism. The article examines the use of this potential to create a strong brand of the park, which will contribute not only to attracting tourists, but also to preserving the natural and cultural values of the region. Ulytau Park is famous for its unique natural landscapes and many archaeological sites, such as the mausoleum of Alasha Khan and other historical sites. These resources provide unique opportunities to create travel products that cater to environmentally conscious travelers. It is important to note that tourists are increasingly appreciating not just outdoor recreation, but a deep immersion in the history and culture of the local population. For the successful development of the brand of the park and ethno-village, the participation of various stakeholders is necessary. The article examines in detail the roles and responsibilities of such participants as large corporations, banks, investment funds, akimats, farmers, the local community and tour operators. Each of these groups plays an important role in the development and maintenance of tourism infrastructure, as well as in the promotion of tourism. Large corporations and banks provide the necessary financial resources for the development of the park's infrastructure. This includes the construction of tourist routes, the creation of visitor centers and other facilities that make the park more attractive to tourists. Corporations can also sponsor various events and festivals held in the park.

Investment funds invest in the long-term development of the region, supporting projects aimed at preserving natural resources and cultural heritage. These investments help create a sustainable tourism infrastructure that attracts tourists all year round. Akimats (Local authorities) play an important role in administrative support and coordination of projects. They ensure compliance with legal regulations and standards, as well as assist in the promotion of the park at the regional and national levels. The involvement of farmers and the local community is key to creating an authentic tourism experience. Locals can offer tourists unique products and services, such as traditional crafts, national cuisine and participation in cultural events. This not only enriches the tourist experience but also contributes to the economic development of the region. Tour operators play an important role in organizing tours and promoting the park. They develop itineraries, conduct excursions and provide marketing support, which attracts tourists from different parts of the world.

The proposed model of management of the ethno-village in Ulytau is a promising model for the sustainable development of the region and the creation of a unique tourist experience. It ensures harmonious interaction between the local population, tourism business, government agencies and scientists. The ethno-village is becoming a center of attraction, where traditions are preserved and promoted, ecotourism is developing and the Ulytau brand is being strengthened. A key role in governance is played by the Coordination Council, which ensures effective interaction between all stakeholders. The associative model developed in the article plays a key role in the development of ecotourism in the Ulytau State National Nature Park, highlighting the main natural resources, such as steppes, mountains, lakes and rivers, which attract tourists. It supports sustainable development by emphasizing the importance of protecting ecosystems and minimizing environmental impacts. The model creates a positive image of ecotourism, drawing attention to unique natural and cultural experiences. It also contributes to the development of educational programs, the involvement of the local population and the improvement of infrastructure. As a result, the associative model becomes an important tool for harmonious interaction between tourism activities and nature protection in Ulytau.

The main tool for promoting the park's products is marketing, and especially branding. Creating a strong brand for Ulytau Park will help draw attention to its unique cultural and natural attractions. Branding should emphasize the uniqueness of the park, its historical significance and natural beauty, which will allow you to stand out from other tours.

A comparative analysis of one-day and multi-day tours has shown that multi-day tours bring significantly greater economic returns. Not only do they provide higher yields, but they also contribute to an even distribution of tourist flows, reducing the burden on the most popular sites and allowing tourists to dive deeper into the cultural and natural heritage of the region. The development of the Ulytau Nature Park brand through ecotourism and ethno-aul has great potential. Interaction between different stakeholders, the use of marketing strategies and a focus on multi-day tours can ensure the sustainable development of the region. This, in turn, will help preserve Ulytau's unique natural and cultural resources for future generations, while contributing to economic development and improving the quality of life of local residents.

Appendix 1. Interview Form

Introduce yourself.

Confirm your desire to participate in the interview and do you agree to sign the consent to participate in the interview?

Explain in which organization you work or whether you are related to tourism

1. Introduction:

Q1. Branding of territories is an important tool for attracting tourists and developing tourism. How do you understand the concept of a "territory brand" and what key elements do you consider important in its formation?

1. What resources and features do you consider the most important for branding national parks?
2. What approaches and strategies, in your opinion, are the most effective for creating a strong national park brand?
3. What importance do you attach to interaction with local residents and businesses when developing and promoting the brand of the national park?
4. How do you think it is possible to balance branding and tourism development with the need for nature conservation?

5. Marketing campaigns and events can significantly increase the brand awareness of a national park. What types of marketing promotions and events do you consider the most effective for brand promotion?

6. Branding of the territory of national parks

Q2. National parks today are beginning to play an increasingly active role in the development of tourism in various countries and regions. How do you assess the development of national parks and their participation in the development of tourism, including in Kazakhstan?

7. What economic and social effects do you expect from the successful branding of the national park?

8. How much do national parks need branding today?

9. Could you explain which entities should be involved in the branding of national parks?

10. What tools are currently the most effective in branding the territory or objects of national parks?

11. Branding of the territory of the Ulytau National Park

Q3. Ulytau National Park has unique natural and cultural resources. What key elements do you consider important for the branding of the Ulytau territory?

12. What strategies and approaches do you consider the most effective for promoting Ulytau in the international arena?

13. What forms of interaction with local residents and businesses do you consider the most productive for successful branding?

14. What associations do you form when you mention the Ulytau National Park?

15. What are the most famous objects of the Ulytau National Park for you?

16. Ulytau has a rich history and cultural heritage. How do you think these aspects can be integrated into the brand of the territory and attract tourists?

17. Successful territory branding requires an interdisciplinary approach and collaboration. What steps and actions, in your opinion, are necessary to create a strong and sustainable brand of the Ulytau National Park?

Do you have any additions to the questions asked?

Thank you for your participation.

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