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OPPORTUNITIES AND PROSPECTS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURIST AND RECREATIONAL SERVICES IN THE REPUBLIC OF KARAKALPAKSTAN

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Abstract: In this paper current condition of tourism industry of the Republic of Karakalpakstan and future opportunities for tourism recreational services are discussed also TOWS was conducted and S-O, W-O, S-T, W-T strategies were developed and according to them recommendations given on the development of tourism in the region

Key words: Aral Sea region, TOWS, strategies, recreation, tourism, tourism potential, recreational service.

Introduction. Tourism industry is becoming one of the leader sector of most of the world countries. According to the statistics of World Travel and Tourism Council during 2019 world economy grew by 2.5% while tourism industry 3.5% and 1 in 4 new jobs were created in this field and total more than 330 million people are employed in tourism industry which means 1 in 10 jobs. In addition, tourism contributed 10.3% of total GDP of the world. With these records tourism became the third after chemical and fuel industries with 1.5 trillion\$ [1].

Because of its tourism potential currently Uzbekistan tourism is believed one of the prospective and attractive destination of Central Asia. Tourism is developing year by year and strengthening its position in the country's economy. In 2019, more than 6,7 tourists visited Uzbekistan and the export of tourist and recreational services amounted to 1 billion 313 million US dollars, which is 26.1% more than in 2018[2]. But all over the country not all region's tourism-recreational recourses are not being used fully. Tourism mostly developed in Samarkand, Bukhara and Khorezm regions and differentiation of tour packages needs developing. President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev in his speech mentioned that "Tourism in our country is often limited to our ancient cities, historical and cultural monuments. However, the

unique nature of our country, national reserves, mountainous areas have great potential for tourism development, especially the development of recreational tourism, medical tourism, pilgrimage tourism and ecotourism will contribute not only to the development of the economy, but also the social sphere. [3].

During the last four years Tashkent region, Fergana, Andijan and Namangan valleys, Zamin district of Jizzakh were the places where recreational tourism well developed but they are accounted not all of the country. Considering all the above we decided to investigate tourism recreational potential and opportunities of Republic of Karakalpakstan which is situated in Aral Sea region in the north part of Uzbekistan border with Khorezm region.

Literature review. The term “recreation” was firstly appeared in tourism in XIV century and meant “*refreshment or curing of a sick person*” [4]. For the being time the terms of “recreation” and “recreational tourism” are interpreted differently all over the world. For example in Commonwealth of Independent States recreational-tourism services usually connected with sanatorium, boarding house, camping, wellness houses while in Europe recreation is studied connected with not only travelling but also parks, lakes, camping places in short everything which can recreate and reduce the level of stress and give energy. Charles R.G and J.R Brent differed the role of recreation according to the purpose of travel and it was written that recreation can be primary and secondary need [5]. Another western scientist S.Williams investigated recreation as one type of tourism and proved relationships between them [6].

According to the researches Uzbek scientists I.S.Tuxliev, G.X.Kudratov, M.K.Pardaev “Recreational tourism is a form of tourism that is a popular form of tourism for a number of countries and is characterized by a variety of leisure trips, as well as interesting entertainment programs, classes, ethnic trips related to the study of the culture of the visited country” [7]. So far there several dissertations have been done on recreational tourism in Uzbekistan. Z.Usmanova revealed the socio-economic essence of the concepts of "recreational activities", "recreational services" and "tourist and recreational services" in her work [8]. Tashkent region’s tourism recreational potential was studied by G.Alimova and developed proposals and recommendations

for the implementation of socio-economic development of the region through the service sector, including the effective use of recreational and tourist potential [9]. A.Mirzaev worked on developing methodology of assessment of resource component and enlightened tourist-recreation clusters as a solution [10]. Namangan valley's recreational tourism potential was studied by Z.Abdulhakimov and in his work determination of the level of socio-economic development of the region on the basis of recreational clustering, gravity models was discussed [11].

There are also some papers on Karakalpakstan's tourism by researchers. Most of them discuss Aral Sea and ecotourism opportunities in the region. A.Alimov researched the role of Lower Amudarya biosphere in the development of ecotourism in Karakalpakstan and explored two ecotourism routine [12]. Another researcher U.Matyakubov studied Aral Sea region and compare both Khorezm and Karakalpakstan in his article by the tourism stats and gave recommendations for the development of tourism in Aral Sea region [13]. Another group of economists have discussed the challenges and opportunities associated with promoting ecotourism activities in the Aral Sea region in pursuit of sustainable regional development, improved livelihood for the local population, employment opportunity and income source creation, and enriched service exports [14].

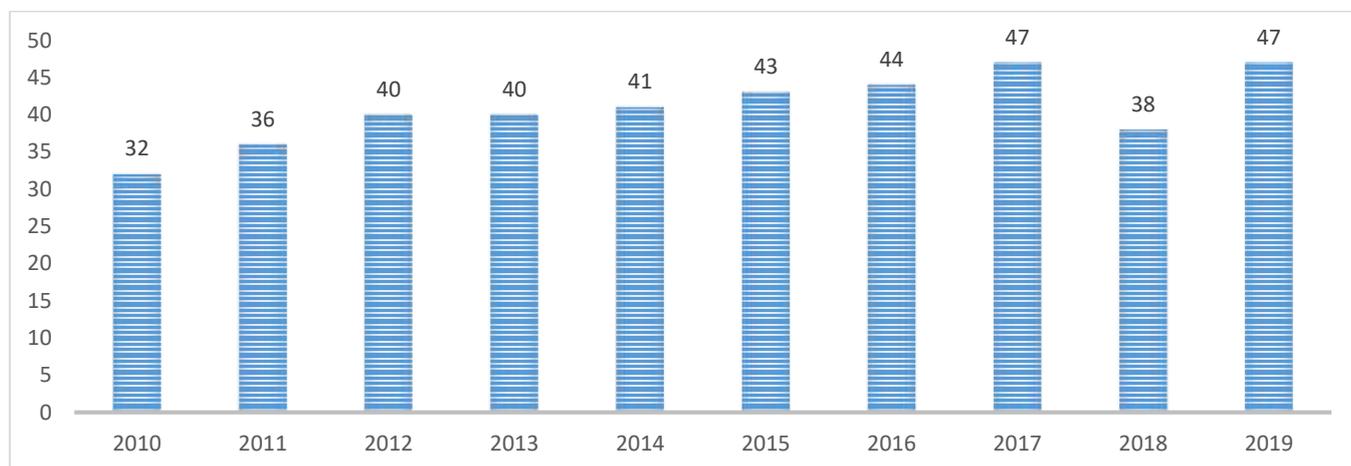
So far the recreational sites of the region have not been studies and that is the reason for writing this paper and analyzes Karakalpakstan's tourism and its possible recreational recourses.

Methodology. The study used literature in the field tourism, data from the State Statistics Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan and data from the State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan for tourism development. In the research process to study economic events and processes were used learning methods such as TOWS, grouping, abstract logical thinking, comparative and statistical analysis.

Analysis and Results. For the being time extensive actions are being done to emphasize the tourism potential and opportunities of Karakalpakstan Republic. By analyzing recent years it can be seen that there was a rise in region's tourism and travelling sphere but not in all indicators. As we know accommodation is one of the

main four factors that can impact easily on tourist arrivals. It is obvious from Figure 1 that during the last ten years the numbers of hotel and accommodations increased slowly.

Figure 1. Changes in accommodation facilities numbers in Karakalpakstan Republic 2010-2019



Source: Authors development based on the date of State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan Tourism Development

In 2010 in region only 32 accommodation facilities welcomed tourists. For the next year another 4 hotels were established and growing rate kept until 2017 and total 47 accommodation were recorded but in 2018 this number decreased because of some reason. In 2019 this indicator estimated 47 again and compared to 2010 it grew by 46%. In fact currently 30 hotels, 13 guest houses and 4 utavs are run and all together involve 612 rooms and 1246 seats. Most of them are situated in Nukus 24, Muynak 7, Kungirat 7, Nurtkul, Ellika'la and Xujayli by 2, Amudarya and Beruniy by 1 only. In general the number grew but if we compare it with other regions it seems as a little grow. For example another part of Aral sea region In Khorezm total numbers of hotel and accommodation in 2019 reached 152 and it rose 6 times more than in 2010.

Of course only with accommodation facilities it is impossible to provide tourist flow to the region. So we decided to discuss the current situation of other main factors such as the number of tour operators, guides etc.

Table 1

**Changes in the number of Karakalpakstan tourism business units
2015-2019 years**

Years	Tour operators	Tourist class transport	Tour guides
2015	5	2	8

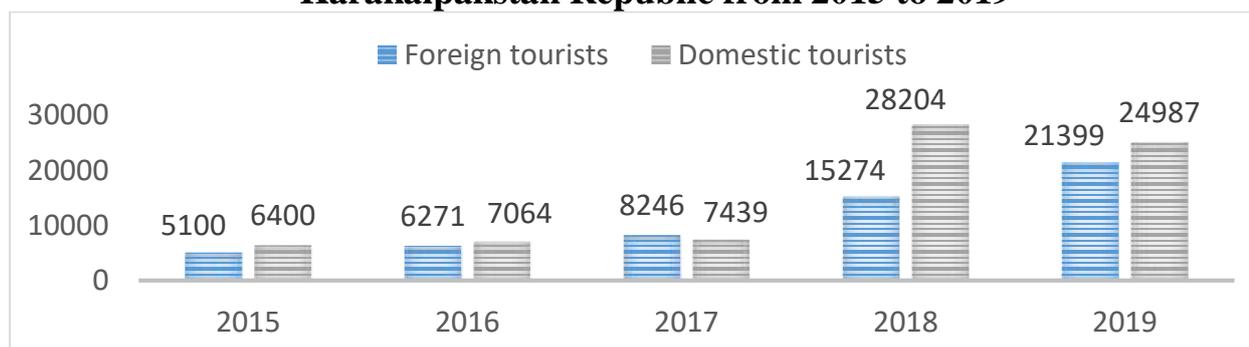
2016	4	3	12
2017	3	3	15
2018	6	6	16
2019	26	26	17

Source: Authors development based on the date of State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan Tourism Development

According to the table 1 during the last 5 years there was sharp rise in the number of tour operators, in 2015 only 5 of them were active and another 3 years it declined slowly but in 2019 year 26 tour operators registered and it increased more than 5 times compared 2015. This trend also can be seen in the numbers of tourist class transport too. By analyzing the numbers we found out that the slowest rise was recorded in the numbers of tour guides only 17 in 2019.

As a result of the ongoing reforms both foreign and domestic tourists numbers are growing year by year to Karakalpakstan.

Figure 2 The number of both domestic and foreign tourist visited to Karakalpakstan Republic from 2015 to 2019



Author's calculations based on the data of the Department of tourism development of the Republic of Karakalpakstan

For the last 5 years both foreign and domestic tourism grew steadily. In 2015 5,100 foreign visitors chose the region as a tourist destination and this number tripled in 2018 and became 15,274. This rate kept rising and estimated 21,399 in 2019. From the figure 2 it can be seen that 6,400 country citizens as a tourist in 2015, next two years it increased a bit but in 2018 the number of domestic tourists was 4 times higher 28,204, however in 2019 it declined to 24,987. Similarly, total services provided to foreign and domestic tourists amounted to 230 million UZS in 2010 and 5.776 million UZS which means 25 times higher compared to 2010. Another achievement was that average staying period of foreign tourists in the Republic of Karakalpakstan was increased from 1,7 to 2.8 days and their expenditure fro, 250\$ to 400\$ [15].

In our research paper before enlightening recreation we decided to give overall tourism destinations of the Republic of Karakalpakstan on tour routes. During our research we divided tourist destinations into main four types as they are mostly found in the region.

Table 2

Routes connecting city and inter-district distances and tourist attractions of the Republic of Karakalpakstan

№	Roads	Ecotourism	Cultural tourism	Recreational tourism	Pilgrimage tourism
1	Nukus-Kungirat		“Mizdahkan” archeological complex		“Davut ota”
2	Kungirat-Muynak-Aral sea	“Barsakelmes”, “Sudochi” lakes, Ustyurt Canyons, Aral sea,	“Aral sea” museum, “Beleuli” caravan saray	Aral sea, “Barsakelmes”, “Sudochi” lakes,	“Khakim Ota”
3	Nukus-Chimbay-Taxtakupir	“Karaterin” lake	“Iyshan” kala, “Utav ustaxonalari”,	“Karaterin” lake	
4	Nukus-Ellikka’la-Turtkul-Beruniy	“Badai tugay” reservation,	“Chilpik”, “Qizil”, “Tupraq”, “Ayaz” and other kalas.	“Badai tugay” reservation,	“Sultan Uvays bobo”

Source: Authors development

According to the Table 2 cultural tourism is possible in each routine in the region since there are several fortresses. But in our paper question is about recreational services opportunities and prospects of Karakalpakstan. It can be seen from the table above that some tourism destinations are found in both recreational and ecotourism. By studying foreign and local paper we conclude that recreational tourism can be divided into two types:

1.Active recreation: hiking, biking, skiing, climbing and others which demands more physical strength. As we know sport tourism is also connected with recreation in this situation. Because these physical activities also help people lower the level of stress and get energy.

2.Passive recreation: taking a walk on the riverside, walking on the beach, taking nature walks, treatment in sanatoriums, camping. In this kind of activities recreants usually do not have to be very active but the purpose is the same “recreation”.

During our research we found out that recreational tourism services can include partly ecotourism, sport tourism, nature-based tourism medical tourism types too. In the analyze part of paper in our opinion it is worth maintaining the main recreational places of the Republic of Karakalpakstan. There are a number of this kind of places:

1.Lower Amudarya State Biosphere reserve “Badai Tugay”.

The reserve was established in Uzbekistan in 2013, and included the territory of the former Baday-Tugay National Reserve and some areas of Beruni and Amudarya districts of Karakalpakstan that had been transferred to the reserve, which made its total area equal to 68,717.8 ha. The reserve is situated in the lower course of the Amudarya, on its right bank, at the foothills of the Sultan-Uvays mountains range. The reserve’s southern border is formed by the Amudarya River and the Taldyk tugai (riparian forest), while in the north and northwest it is bordered by the Kokdarya, the Amudarya’s tributary. The reserve area is divided into 3 parts. Specially protected area of tugay forests, rare and endangered animal and plants. Its flora and fauna are various.

In fact Baday-Tugay includes 20% of total Central Asia’s tugays and 74% of Uzbekistan tugay forests [16]. In this are you can find not only gardens but also groves and steppes have a beautiful landscape attract the visitors. Another significant role of the reserve is that rare Bukhara deer are kept here and reproduction process is well-organised here by the staff. In 1976, three Bukhara deer were brought here and an 8-hectare voler area was established. In 1978, 9 more heads were cited. When they were released in 1982, they numbered 32. Experts have taken all necessary measures to ensure the safety and reproduction of the Huns. Now they have reached 1,000. In addition it is one of the best places to watch the rise and set of sun. This makes people really relax;

Table 3

Indicators of Lower Amudarya State Biosphere reserve.

Area	The climate	Flora	Fauna	Extra features
68,717.8 ha	maximum of +44.4 °C, the minimum of lower than – 30 °C	home for 167 species of plants -Chinese clematis -Cynanchum sibiricum -Asparagus persicus -Cuscuta lehmanniana and others	-over 20 species of fish: shovelnose, barbel, bream, asp, European carp, wels; -13 types of reptiles are known -a total of 91 species of birds: chrysolomas, the rock dove, laughing dove, little owl, long-eared owl, white-winged woodpecker, crested lark, magpie, carrion crow and others -the mammals of the reserve are represented by 58 species: wild boar, tolai hare, fox, jackal, reed cat (the largest cat in Central Asia), badger, weasel, steppe ferret, big-eared hedgehog and numerous rodents	“Jonbos kala” (X century) fortress is situated in the area of reserve

Source: Authors development

2. Lakes as a recreational place. (Sudochi, Karateren, Aqchako'l)

A number of lakes are located in the region and almost all of them have great potential to organize both recreational and ecotourism. One of them is lake “Sudochi” is situated in the western part of the Amudarya River delta and is accounted the biggest water reservoir of Amu Darya. Until the Amu Darya made the Sudochye Lake full, it connected to the Aral Sea through the channel. Today, the big water left about 150 km from here, and the lake became shallower and disintegrated into several smaller ones. In the Uzbek language the lake is called "Suvdoshin", from the words "suv" (water) and "shin" (true) "fresh water".

On the Sudochie wetland there is an ornithological reserve "Lake Sudochie". In the system of the lakes of Sudochie wetland, up to the year 2000, 218 bird species were recorded, 12 of which were included in the IUCN Red Book. In low-water years, the number of birds decreased from 70.5 to 2.6 thousand. Plants forming the main landscape were karabarak, glasswort and tamarisk by that time. On the Sudochye Lake, in comparison with the Great Aral Sea, a fairly rich community of aquatic animals of Aral origin has survived: marine shell infusoria, bryozoans, sea ring clam worm, copepods, etc. Sudochie Lake, has been home for migrating birds flock to the

shallows. In 2014 on the eastern edge of Lake Sudochie, a colony of flamingos numbering 7000 adult birds was found. Speaking of the nesting of flamingos in Uzbekistan, in the Red Book of the Uzbek SSR (1983), it is listed as a species that occurs only during the autumn and spring spans. But according to the research of V.P. Kostin in 1956 there is an indication that a small colony of flamingos settled in shallow water in remote places east of Lake Sudochie. (Picture 1)



Picture 1 View of Lake Sudochi

On facebook a group of the visitor to this beautiful landscape share their impressions “The magical beauty of Lake Sudochie and the chink of Ustyurt. I remember that, waking up at dawn, we got out of our tents and ran with cameras along the chink overlooking the lake. There were not enough words to express my admiration for this beauty: the reflection of the dawn in the absolutely mirror-like surface of the lake, some extraterrestrial reed islands, rocks and cliffs of Ustyurt ...”

Another wonderful lake is Karateren its width size 5-6 km and 26 km long. Its name came from “Qora” which means black colour and “teren” deep, because its view is dark black from the top of “Borshi” mountains. In the past networks of the Amudarya and Sirdarya rivers used to flow into this lake. This place is accounted as a good place for fishing and recreation on the its beach. About 30-40 years ago there used to be camping for the children, now you can find “Qora-uy” traditional guest houses of Karakalpakstan where it is cool in summer and hot in winter, all of them are being used by mostly domestic tourists. Infrastructure of this place should be developed further in order to welcome more and more recreants.

Third one is lake “Aqchako’l” which is situated in Ellikala region of Karakalpakstan near Amudarya river. This place has great potential for active recreation especially beach tourism can be organized here very well. The nature and climate of the lake is very sufficient for recreation but this lake is still unknown for all people. In order to establish tourism complex its infrastructure should be improved Firstly, it must be provided with electricity, gas, water and the roads also need repairing. If the infrastructure is provided this place will welcome not only local people but also other region’s recreants. Beach tourism can easily reach at the top of the demand because in Aral Sea region the supply is very limited.

3.Aral sea and Muynak

If you want to take part in active recreation tours the Aral Sea is the best place for you. Once in 1960 the lake was the fourth biggest one in the world but currently only 10 % of its former size is alive. Nearly 60,000 tons of fish were harvested annually in the Aral Sea. The region’s life was flourishing. In 1960s "Cotton race" required a large amount of water. From feeding the Aral Amudarya and Syrdarya rivers a huge number of channels were dug for cotton fields irrigation. As a result, from 1961 to 1995, the sea level has dropped by 17 meters and the shoreline has receded by 100-150 km.

On the other hand this drying sea is attracting not only domestic tourists but also international too. The main attractions and activities around the Aral Sea are below:

1. **Yurt stay** - Sample nomadic life with an overnight in a traditional felt tent;
2. **Ustyurt Plateau** - Discover the Ustyurt Plateau that is the most mysterious and least researched destination in Uzbekistan;
3. **Sudochie Lakes** - stop at It is one of the most ecologically intact zones of the Amudariya River delta and a key location for the preservation and maintenance of the biodiversity of the region. The lakes support many breeding water-bird species including rare and disappearing species, all using the Western-Asian migratory route;

4. **Aral Sea** – witness contrasting landscapes of extinct sea and miracles of nature, that has become a victim of the human madness and breathtaking scenery of new Aral Kum desert;
5. **Ships cemetery** - you will drive on the dried seabed of the Aral that once was the 4th largest sea and visit the "ships cemetery";
6. **Muynak** - wander around Muynak ship graveyard that is literally a ghost town in the middle of the desert;



Picture 2 Yurts located near the Aral Sea

“Last year almost 300 foreigners went on camping trips to the coastline, and numbers are increasing,” says Tazabay Uteuliev, a local fixer who arranges transport for several Uzbek travel agencies. Spring and autumn are most popular, but this year he even had a group in January. “More and more people seem to like it extreme,” Uteuliev tells EurasiaNet.org. The tourists are usually adventurous, not looking for a trip to the beach, but to see the famous lake before the last of the water is gone, he adds. [17]

Finally, based on the collected data, TOWS analyses was prepared and analyzed and four kind of strategies have been developed

According to the TOWS analyses four types of strategies developed in order to minimize the internal weaknesses and external threats with the help of internal strength and external opportunities.

Table 4

TOWS OF TOURISTIC-RECREATIONAL POTENTIAL OF KARAKALPAKSTAN

Threatens(EXTERNAL)	Opportunities(EXTERNAL)
<p>disappearing of Aral sea; failure to benefit from long-term coastal tourism because of the negative effects of climate; threats to the state of flora and fauna in landscape reserves and bioserves along the coast due to water depletion in the Amudarya; appearing new competitors in the external market. poor environmental conditions, poor drinking water and high salinity in the region;</p>	<p>worldwide interest on Aral Sea; high demand for new types of recreation from local; possibilities diversification of tourism products(recreational ecotourism tourism,); development of tourism and hotel services in Nukus, Elikkala, Kungrad, Turtkul, Khojayli, Amudarya districts with high tourist and recreational potential; government policy to support the development tourism recreational potential (local programs) bordered with one of the main tourism destinations Khorezm region;</p>
Weaknesses (INTERNAL)	Strengths (INTERNAL)
<p>lack of security and awareness among the local community about touristic recreational potential; insufficient development of tourist infrastructure and extremely uneven distribution across regions; shortage of tourist bureaus and organizations in the region; lack or unsatisfactory coverage of tourism advertising and information materials in the region in international and national electronic and traditional media; -transport infrastructure, emergency medical services are unsatisfactory; -lack of funding and private entrepreneurship;</p>	<p>situation on the coast of Amudarya; local people strongly support; rich in recreational recourses : unique features, water bodies, great biodiversity) touristic recourses (museums, fortresses, sea, lakes, reservations, canyons); in terms of alternative income generation for the local people from tourism;</p>

Source: Authors development

The TOWS analysis provides an overview of threats, opportunities, weaknesses and strengths of the tourism-recreational services of Karakalpakstan.

According to the table exciting weaknesses and threats of tourism industry were critically analyzed and based on those weaknesses and threats a WT strategies were suggested for the future development of tourism industry sustainably. The current weaknesses such as lack of security, poor infrastructure, lack of advertising, emergency medical service and threats like failure in long-term benefit, negative affect of climate, poor environmental conditions, lack of funding, disturbing flora and fauna can be materialized through ensuring the highest level of security for tourists, introduction to tourism recourses and their economic value through the media especially on the Internet, including more local people in tourism, forming of partnership between local community and hotel owners, encourage world organizations to invest tourism

infrastructure(with the help of Aral sea), educate people on recreational tourism, increase the quality of tourism product to compete with other region's suppliers, strict fines for damaging the environment.

Table 5**TOWS Strategies**

S-O Strategies	W-O strategies
S-O strategies: Proposed opportunities that fit well with touristic-recreational potential strengths are	W-O strategies: The strategies which can be used to overcome weaknesses by pursuing opportunities are
❖ encourage local communities and local indigenous to develop attractive tourist products	❖ cooperation with Khorezm region tour-operators
❖ organising tours included both parts of Aral sea region	❖ encourage world organizations to invest tourism infrastructure(with the help of Aral sea)
❖ develop proper entrance fee	❖ develop the share of private entrepreneurship
❖ forming of partnership between local community and hotel owners	❖ hosting worldwide events(conferences, sports...)

S-T strategies	W-T strategies
S-T strategies: The following strategies which strengths can be used to reduce its vulnerability to external threats.	W-T strategies: To establish a defensive plan to prevent touristic-recreational services from making it highly susceptible to the external threats following strategies have been suggested:
❖ Strict fines for damaging the environment	❖ Ensure the highest security for tourists by the state
❖ Forming partnership with universities to better the major problems such as high salinity and poor drinking water	❖ Development of borders fences in some areas
❖ Increase the quality of tourism product to compete with other region's suppliers	❖ Educate local people the value of the natural recourses
❖ Including more local people in tourism	❖ Introduction to tourism recourses and their economic value through the media especially on the Internet

Source: Authors development

Conclusion. The present tourism activities in the region is unsustainable although the are has great tourism potential. By analyzing them it was found that both ecotourism and recreational tourism have prospective future. The location of the Aral

Sea should be used efficiently in tourism business. Furthermore, Lower Amudarya State Biosphere reserve is a good place for recreation, its flora and fauna can attract both local and international tourists. Also the lakes Sudochi, Karateren, Aqchako'l situated in the region can be recourse for the new types of tourism such as beach tourism. The Ustyurt Plateau that is the most mysterious and least researched destination in Uzbekistan can be an interesting destination for adventures. Besides Muynak and its tourism potential should be introduced more on mass media.

In this research tourism-recreational services and recourses are analyzed with the help of TOWS method and the findings of the study will help to develop recreational tourism in the future and stakeholders can analyse current problems of tourism and find out more realistic and time-fitting actions for the development tourism industry in the region.

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