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Sustainable tourism development along the Silk Roads

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Central Asia

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List of Abbreviations

GDP Gross Domestic Product

NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organization

SDG Sustainable Development Goals

UN..... United Nations

UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNWTO World Tourism Organization

WTO World Trade Organization

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1 Introduction

Since ancient times the Silk Roads and their unique landscapes have attracted tourists from all over the world. In the 21st century the Silk Roads are claimed as one of the most dynamic and potential tourism routes in world. The network of roads allows access to 80% of all Cultural Heritage Sites worldwide. (Shang, 2019, p. 92)

Based on the detailed analysis of the current state of the tourism sector in Central Asia, this thesis discusses its influence on the possibility of sustainable tourism development in the defined region. Challenges and opportunities of sustainable tourism development in Central Asia in the 21st century are presented in detail.

First, the definitions in the introduction set the scientific framework for the thesis and its thematic limitations. The terms Silk Roads and Central Asia are introduced through a geographical and historical approach to enable a differentiated consideration of the tourism sector. The tourism industry in Central Asia is analyzed and its development is linked to specific objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The elaboration of the main opportunities and challenges of sustainable development in Central Asia is based on the three pillars of sustainability. The possibility of sustainable development of the tourism industry in Central Asia is drawn up by appraising not only the challenges but also the opportunities of sustainable tourism development. The third chapter focuses on data collection and methodology. The approaches on the qualitative research are described, followed by the presentation of the method used. The fourth chapter includes the descriptive evaluation of the data collection, the associated interpretation and the critical consideration of the method. Concluding, the thesis is completed by the final verdict.

1.1 Central Asia

In the context of this thesis the term Central Asia is applied to the countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The region of

Central Asia has a total population of 65 million people and covers an area of approximately 4 million km². The whole area is surrounded by China to the east, Russia to the north, the Caspian Sea to the west and Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan to the south. (Hamidov, Helming, & Balla, 2016, p. 1 ff.)

Figure 1: Central Asian States



(Retrieved from: <http://origins.osu.edu/article/69/maps>)

Having been part of the former Soviet Union, these countries share a common political background, as well as similarities in terms of culture, environment and economy. (Xenarios, et al., 2018, p. 1340) After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, these countries gained their independence. After being mainly responsible for the production of raw materials in the Soviet economy, the economies in Central Asia first declined and later developed different economic sectors. (Lee, 2018, p. 187)

During the 1990s the five countries experienced a structural transition to market economies and since 2000 the oil-exporting countries in Central Asia enable a steady economic growth in the region. The rising resource demand in the neighboring countries does not only create growth, but also a dependency on a few trading partners and products. Natural resources are the sole source of economic growth in Central Asia, while the economy is otherwise characterized as weak and volatile. Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan mainly export natural resources like oil and gas products to Russia and China. Due to the increasing export of oil, Kazakhstan is the richest and fastest growing economy in the region and is followed by the economy of Uzbekistan. Both countries present the leading regional economies in Central Asia with the highest Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Being placed as third, the economy of Turkmenistan is limited due to the repression of economic freedom that causes a gap in the wealth of the population. (Pomfret, 2009, pp. 48-51) The geographic location and the natural environment of these countries are described by their landlocked characteristics and cause additional challenges in further development. (Lee, 2018, p. 187) In contrary to the three countries mentioned above, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have become impoverished and Tajikistan is ranked among the least-developed countries in the world. (Pomfret, 2009, p. 49 ff.) Being characterized by the large proportion of mountainous terrain with peaks reaching over 7000m, communities in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are mainly engaged in subsistence farming and livestock husbandry. (Xenarios, et al., 2019, p. 1340) The specific needs of these remote regions are mainly ignored in the policies of the Kyrgyz and Tajik governments. These policies are based on a centralized and hierarchical system with increasingly authoritarian elements which has led to social and political tensions including the civil war in Tajikistan in the 20th century. (Pomfret, 2009, p. 49) In general, communities in Central Asia face the issue of political strategies failing in integrating the regional needs to the national development agendas. (Xenarios, et al., 2019, p. 1340) Moreover, Central Asia is often identified as the region located between several rival countries and is presented as a

strategic backyard for Russia and China. Being neighboring countries to Afghanistan and Iran, the targeted countries face additional potential conflicts due to military interest of the United States and other members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Furthermore, the oil and gas deposits of Central Asia are getting more and more attention regarding energy policies. Due to these external factors and the short time span of independence, the interaction of Central Asian governments is reduced to its minimum and the region faces a lack of cooperation and investments. These intergovernmental conflicts and cooperation deficits influence the economic, social and environmental development of each country in Central Asia. (Mayer, 2018, pp. 121-125)

1.2 Historical review of tourism along the Silk Roads

Being the first bridge between the ancient empires of China, India, Persia and Rome, the ancient Silk Roads were not only an important network of trade roads but also a channel for intercultural contact. Science proves an economical intercourse between China and the Western Empire in the 3rd century BC. However, the trade was not officially organized, and the East and the West on the Eurasian continent had no access to intensify the connection. Settlements along this trade network existed before 2000 BC, but the first written account is dated half a century later during the Han dynasty. The Chinese emperor sent his Chinese envoy Zhang Qian to explore the Western Regions. In 126 BC, Zhang Qian wrote his report focusing on the description of the countries, their location and history. Due to this new information, the Chinese emperor decided the further exploration of the region. (Liu & Zhang, 2019, p. 6 f.)

In history the term Silk Road refers to a network of trading land routes which connected the Central Plains in China westwards with Europe. By crossing the Mongolian plateau, Central Asia and southern Russia, the formation of these routes followed the natural ecological environment. Being surrounded by mountain areas and deserts, the trading routes went through the natural steppe corridor that connected the

northern steppe in China with the Eurasian steppe belt. (Liu & Zhang, 2019, p. 45 ff.) In general, the complex trading system on the Eurasian continent changed permanently and was adapted to different historical periods. The term “Silk Road” was not used during these days but was first mentioned in the 1870s. The German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen suggested the concept of “Seidenstrassen” that includes the silk trading routes between China, India and parts of Central Asia. (Liu & Zhang, 2019, p. 2 f.) European explorers started to use the term “Silk Road” at the end of the 19th century, even though it was misleading towards the idea of just one precisely defined road. It is important to point out that at least two main trading corridors existed. Only in ancient history the center of trading had been the steppe route through Central Asia. (Liu & Zhang, 2019, pp. 6-9)

The thesis focuses on the parts of the steppe Silk Roads that were located in Central Asia. In the following the historical review of travel along the steppe Silk Roads points out the development of the tourism industry in this particular region.

The ancient steppe Silk Roads were one of the first examples of globalization that included trading, cultural exchange as well as tourism. According to the historical records, the oases along the ancient Silk road became a location of flourishing cities during the time of the Chinese Tang Dynasty from 618 AD to 907 AD. (UNCTAD, 2014, p. 1 f.) These cities functioned as suppliers of food, beverages, accommodation and daily necessities for the travelers on the Silk Roads. In comparison with the definition of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the described cities fulfill the needed characteristics to be named as tourism destinations.

“A *tourism destination* is a physical space with or without administrative and/or analytical boundaries in which a visitor can spend an overnight. It is the cluster (co-location) of products and services, and of activities and experiences along the tourism value chain and a basic unit of analysis of tourism. A destination incorporates various

stakeholders and can network to form larger destinations. It is also intangible with its image and identity which may influence its market competitiveness.” (World Tourism Organization, 2019, p. 14)

Furthermore, bodyguards, grooms and guides offered additional service products that were part of the line of tourism products. In the Han and Tang Dynasties, the Guoso System was implemented as the core of the Silk Road administration. To travel along the Silk Road a pass was needed as the official allowance. This pass functioned as a passport or a visa and travelers first had to submit an application form. While traveling, applicants needed to show the pass at different checkpoints where the responsible officials verified the documents. Traveling without the Guoso-pass was illegal and was followed up by investigation and punishment. (Shang, 2019, pp. 50-54)

The end of the Tang Dynasty in 907 AD resulted in the decreasing importance of the steppe Silk Roads. Due to the political instability, the economy in China declined. Moreover, the neighboring countries and regimes tightened the barriers and blocked trading via the steppe Silk Roads. (Liu & Zhang, 2019, p. 10) In the end, merchants utilized different and cheaper forms of transportation like shipping so that the steppe Silk Road network wasn't needed any more from the 16th century onwards. (UNCTAD, 2014, p. 1 f.) Though, trading along the Silk Roads never entirely stopped and in the 21st century the term “Silk Roads” is receiving increasing attention as an evocative label. (Williams, 2014, pp. 7-15) In the 21st century, the Silk Roads as a tourism product is known as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Along the ancient Silk Roads, tourists visit the impressive cultural and historical heritages and picturesque oases. (DIAMIR Erlebnisreisen GmbH, 2020, p. 2 f.)

1.4 Sustainability in relation to the SDGs and to tourism

Based on the theoretical assumption that the whole ecosphere and its ecosystems form one complete system, the term sustainability defines a society that uses fewer resources

than the maximum capacity of resources worldwide. According to this theory, the maintenance of all components of the system is necessary to guarantee the capability of living on earth. The implementation of a sustainable lifestyle is needed on all levels, including individuals, communities, businesses and governance. The wide range of interpretation of sustainability encourage a controversial discussion about its framework. Eventually, three different, but interrelated pillars of sustainability restrict the definition. By dividing sustainability into environmental, economic and socio-political components, the structuring of sustainable objectives is simplified, and the allocation of responsibilities is possible. Sustainable tourism development follows this framework to ensure the conservation of all of resources. The environmental pillar of sustainable tourism development aims at the preservation of essential ecological processes, biological diversity, and biological resources. In terms of economic sustainability, tourism development creates inclusive economic growth for local communities by supporting local business and politics. Being interlinked, the socio-political pillar sustains cultural heritage and supports local identity by consolidating local communities and politics. (Richins, 2009, p. 790) (Crowther & Seifi, 2019, p. 2 f.)

In September 2015, the member states of the United Nations (UN) declared the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and published the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. To achieve these goals by 2030, a transformation focused on interactions on all three pillars of sustainability is needed. The link between different goals of the SDGs is part of creating a framework to make sustainability accessible on all levels. Additionally, the Global Sustainable Development Report enables the monitoring of progress globally by using a set framework of SDG indicators. (Thomas & Chindarkar, 2019, p. 7 f.) The Figure below shows all 17 SDGs.

Figure 2: Sustainable Development Goals



(Retrieved from: <https://en.unesco.org/sdgs>)

The impact of tourism on these SDGs differs. This thesis analyzes the opportunities and challenges of tourism development based on the most applicable SDGs. In relation to the area-specific characteristics of Central Asia, the choice of SDGs is explained in detail in chapter 2.2 and chapter 2.3.

1.5 Limitations

The formal framework of this thesis is restricting the overall volume of the analysis. Due to the limitation of scope the written composition is as detailed as needed to point out all described challenges and opportunities of sustainable tourism development along the Silk Roads. The elaboration of this thesis takes into account a limited number of SDGs in order to obtain meaningful results. Furthermore, it is necessary to emphasize the complexity of the chosen topic. This work focuses on the essential analysis of the challenges and opportunities of tourism development in Central Asia. The short period of independence explains the lack of reports and studies. Published data is considered unreliable and must be critically assessed. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are not members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and do not follow the standardized rules of data collection. The weak quality of data restricts the elaboration. (Williams, 2014, p. 20)

2 Tourism in Central Asia in the 21st century

In chapter 2 the development of tourism in Central Asia in the 21st century is constituted. First, the development in tourism of the five countries is summarized by discussing history, statistics and future outlook. Afterwards, challenges of tourism development in Central Asia are defined by assigning the discussed topics to the environmental, economic and political pillars of sustainability. Following, the opportunities of tourism growth in Central Asia are pointed out to enable the comparison of challenges and opportunities related to sustainable tourism development in Central Asia. As before, the opportunities are characterized by either being environmental, economic or political.

2.1 The current state of tourism industry in Central Asia

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to the foundation of the five countries in Central Asia that are the focus of this thesis. Since their independence, these countries have faced several challenges. First, newly created borders interfered with old connections in trade, industries, water and energy systems and human relations. Especially the loss of the Soviet economy and its system caused an economic collapse in the region that affected a total population of 57 million people. Without the supply connections towards Russia, the support of skilled Russians and the subsidies from Moscow, the countries of Central Asia faced the increase in poverty and the decrease in human development and human security. (Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, 2005, p. 2) However, the disintegration of the Soviet Union enabled new relations in Central Asia with other neighboring countries like China and Iran. The Central Asian countries benefit from their richness in natural resources. The access to the world market is based on the concept of the ancient Silk Roads. The revival of this network and its benefits needs the participation of all five countries. The creation of a common strategy could minimize the disparities within the

region by using the collective strengths of Central Asia. (Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, 2005, p. 2) (Schwab, 2018, p. 28)

2.1.1 Kazakhstan

Since its independence in 1991 and the dissolution of its parliament in March 1995, President Nazarbayev has ruled the country by decree. From June 2010 onwards, the President is named as the “Leader of the Nation” and Kazakhstan is furthermore called a presidential republic. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, p. 713 f.) In regards to its political system, Kazakhstan is considered to be a country without freedom because of the lack of political freedom, and corruption. In July 2018 the president appointed himself as the chairman of the Security Council for life securing his political power beyond his presidency. (Freedom House, 2019a)

Kazakhstan is not only the biggest country of Central Asia with an area of 2 724 900 km² but also the first stage of the new Silk Road concept. (Berlie, 2020, p. 41 f.) In the east Kazakhstan is bordered by China and in the south by Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan. Both, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, have access to the Caspian Sea in the west. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, p. 713 f.) Being the closest country to the Chinese region Xiang and being rich in not only oil resources but also in chemicals and minerals like uranium, copper, lead, zinc and chromium, the economic development of Kazakhstan performs better than the economy of the other four countries in Central Asia. (Jianping, et al., 2014, pp. 545-548) Between 2000 and 2007 the economy of Kazakhstan ballooned with an average GDP growth of 10%. The average real incomes increased more than twice as in the years before which was closely connected to the high exports of energy resources. In 2008 the global financial crisis caused a sharp decline in the economic development which led to an economic slowdown in the following years. (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and International Finance Corporation, 2012, p. 2 f.) Since 2015, Kazakhstan is experiencing an economic upswing and in 2018, Kazakhstan was ranked

59th out of 140 in the Global Competitiveness Report. (Schwab, 2018, p. 315 ff.) Likewise, tourism industry records an increase and in 2018 the Travel & Tourism GDP grew by 6.1% so that the tourism sector counts 5.7% of the total GDP in Kazakhstan. (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2019a)

2.1.2 Uzbekistan

In 1992 Uzbekistan adopted a new constitution and became a pluralist democracy. Due to the abuse of his power, the first president of Uzbekistan stayed in office until his death in 2016. In 2005 the political system switched to a bicameral legislature that is known as one of the least free systems on earth. Being ranked 9th out of 100, Uzbekistan is regarded as not free and has one of the worst aggregate scores for political rights and liberties. (Freedom House, 2019, p. 15) The country covers an area of 447 400 km² and is surrounded by Kazakhstan in the north, by Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in the east, by Turkmenistan in the west and by Afghanistan in the south. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, p. 811 f.)

In comparison to the other countries in Central Asia, Uzbekistan and its economy have developed the most successful since its independence. Since the nomination of the second president of Uzbekistan in 2016, several market-oriented economic reforms have been implemented. This opening includes uniform exchange rates, the liberalization of trade and prices as well as the elimination of entry visas. Uzbekistan renewed its commitment to join the WTO, but by the time of publication of this thesis Uzbekistan is no member. Therefore, Uzbekistan is not ranked in the Competitiveness Report. The real GDP growth increased from 4.5% in 2017 to 5.1% in 2018. (Trushin, 2019, p. 1) Additionally, the tourism sector records an increase of 13.4% of its Travel & Tourism GDP so that tourism counts for 3.4% of the total economy. (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2019e)

2.1.3 Tajikistan

In contrast to the other countries in Central Asia, Tajikistan experienced a five-year long civil war after becoming independent in 1991. In June 1997 the two warring parties of Moscow-backed pro-government forces and the coalition of democratic, regional and Islamist factions signed the peace agreement. However, the country suffered negative long-term impacts from the civil war because not only up to 50.000 people were killed but also more than one-tenth of the population fled to neighboring countries. At the same period of history, president Emomali Rahmon took the role of an interim nominal head of state until 1994 when he won the first elections. Afterwards, president Rahmon won the elections in 1999, 2006 and 2013 but the country and its political system is classified as a consolidated authoritarian regime. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, p. 793 f.) Due to the restrictions of the political regime, Tajikistan is declared as one of the least free countries without civil liberties and tight control in every segment. (Freedom House, 2019c)

The country borders Uzbekistan to the north, Kyrgyzstan and China to the east and Afghanistan and Pakistan to the south. The landlocked area 143 100 km² is 93% covered by mountains and the country is rich in natural resources. Approximately 55% of the water resources in Central Asia are located in Tajikistan. Yet, the mountainous landscape restricts the extraction of both water and many natural resources. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, p. 793 f.) According to the statistics of the World Bank, the GDP per capita is the lowest in Central Asia. Even though the average GDP growth rate is about 5%, the income per capita is very low. (Deloitte, 2019, p. 83 f.) Similar to the development of tourism in the other Central Asian countries, tourism industry is growing in Tajikistan. Even though the Travel & Tourism GDP records 0.4% growth in 2018, the percentage weight of tourism in Tajikistan is higher with a share of 8.0% of total economy. (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2019c)

2.1.4 Kyrgyz Republic

After experiencing instability since gaining independence in 1991, the Kyrgyz Republic adopted a new parliamentary constitution in late 2010. Caused by political and social upheavals in 2005 and 2010, the political restructuring established the limitation of presidency to a single term and standardized elaboration. (The World Bank, 2019, p. 1) Due to these political transformations in the Kyrgyz Republic, the country is ranked as partly free. In comparison to the other countries of Central Asia, the Kyrgyz Republic allows more civil liberties like the freedom of expression and religion. (Freedom House, 2019b)

The Kyrgyz Republic is surrounded by China in the east, by Tajikistan in the south, by the Caspian Sea in the west and by Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in the north. The country covers an area of 199 945 km² and is mainly located on the Tien-Shan mountains. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, p. 721 f.) Due to its gold production, the country captured a GDP growth of 4.2% in 2019. It was listed 97th out of 140 in the Global Competitiveness Report 2018. With an increase of 0.7% in Travel & Tourism growth in 2018, the tourism industry made a small contribution of 3.9% to the economic growth. (Schwab, 2018, p. 331 ff.) (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2019b)

2.1.5 Turkmenistan

In comparison to the other countries of Central Asia, Turkmenistan is a relatively closed state with a highly centralized government system. Being a declared presidential republic, the government is characterized by the authoritarian presidency. Since 2007 president Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow has been in power and maintains a concept of political control. (ECA, 2012, p. 1 ff.) Turkmenistan is ranked as not free with only 2 out of 100 points due to the dominance of the state. (Freedom House, 2019d)

The country covers an area of 448 100 km² and is bounded by Kazakhstan in the north, by Uzbekistan in the northeast, by Afghanistan and Iran in the south and by the Caspian Sea in the west. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, p. 802 f.) Having been one of the poorest countries in Central Asia, the country has shown a great economic growth in recent years. With an average GDP growth of 6.2% in 2018, Turkmenistan benefits from the oil and gas exports that account for more than 60% of the GDP. (Trading Economics, 2019) In time of publication of this thesis no reliable data on the tourism sector in Turkmenistan is available.

These country profiles serve as a base for examining the opportunities and challenges of sustainable tourism development in Central Asia in the 21st century.

2.2 Challenges of sustainable tourism development

In this context, the published result of the “Voluntary National Reviews” serves as a guide to identify the selected SDGs. In alignment with the literature research, the most important SDGs and their challenges in relation to sustainable tourism development in Central Asia are explained and illustrated with examples.

Figure 3: Challenges of tourism industry in relation to the SDGs



(Own representation based on World Tourism Organization and United Nations Development Programme, 2017, p. 29)

Most of the challenges within sustainable tourism development in Central Asia are related to the SDGs 12, 13, 16, 14, 9 and 10. These challenges have negative impacts for either the economy, the environment or the social-political components. In the following, the different SDGs are described in detail and the impact of the tourism

sector regarding the achievement of these goals is presented. Furthermore, the most important region-specific challenges are named and verified by examples. (World Tourism Organization and United Nations Development Programme, 2017, p. 26)

2.2.1 Economic challenges

The SDG 12 and SDG 9 are primarily economic challenges and focus on “responsible consumption and production” and “industry, innovation and infrastructure”.

The economic growth over the last century is directly connected to environmental damage that is endangering the global system. Globally, the use of natural resources is increasing to support the economic progress. In addition, the efficiency of consumption remains unchanged and a high number of products are wasted. Focusing on SDG 12, it is important to increase the resource efficiency, to reduce waste and to achieve sustainability across all economic sectors. Therefore, it is necessary that national policy frameworks and instruments enable the transition towards sustainable consumption. (Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General, 2019, p. 46) Being one of the three goals that are directly connected to sustainable tourism, tourism industry should aim for sustainable consumption along the tourism value chain. Providers of tourism products need training to gain knowledge about sustainable consumption including efficient use of energy and water, reduction and recycling of waste. Moreover, seasonal and local products support the local community in its progress of sustainable development. New innovations in transport industries reduce emissions and improve overall performance. The key tool is to set tangible goals that are achievable by every participant within the tourism supply chain. (Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General, 2019, p. 49 ff.) In relation to the current consumption management in Central Asia, the sustainable development of responsible consumption in the tourism industry faces challenges. To illustrate one of these challenges, the water usage and the waste management in Turkmenistan are analyzed as an example.

Due to the geographical conditions and climate in Turkmenistan, water resources are very limited, and the management of water resources is one of the most critical factors limiting the future growth of the country. More than 80% of the territory are occupied by desert areas and the climate is extremely dry. The supply of water is dependent on transboundary water sources and the national resource management is challenged by high water losses due to ineffective conservation. Up to 75% of total usage is made up by water losses and the drainage of water flowing into the desert without any significant treatment. Mainly, the water supply system has not been improved since 1980 and in rural areas only 42% of the population has access to potable water. (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 2012, pp. 89- 95) By contrast, the average water usage per capita increased rapidly and is the highest usage worldwide. Every day, the water used per capita in Turkmenistan is 16 282 l that is 10 346 l more water usage than in Chile (2nd rank). In general, the five countries of Central Asia are among the top 11 in the world rankings of daily water used per capita. (Worldometer, 2019) Even though Turkmenistan is in 26th place of 153 in the water stress ranking for 2040, the country has not published a water management strategy. (Holzhacker & Skakove, 2019, p. 17) An additional component of sustainable consumption in tourism is the development of sustainable waste management. In Turkmenistan, the waste management system is underdeveloped and lacks a future strategy. Compared to international standards, the practices of waste management needs improvement as frequently, there is no practice of waste disposal. Moreover, municipal waste is often collected very closely to towns so that transportation costs are reduced. This proximity of the disposal sites causes long-term damages to residents and visitors. (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 2013, p. 20 f.)

The aim to achieve SDG 12 includes the implementation of SDG 9 which focuses on building a resilient infrastructure, promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialization and fostering innovation. By achieving this goal, the economic growth worldwide generates employment and income. Due to financial limitations,

less developed countries face the challenge of meeting this SGD and it is difficult to invest in innovative, sustainable growth. (Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General, 2019, p. 40) In order to connect to world markets, the landlocked countries of Central Asia are dependent on a good transport infrastructure, high-quality transport services and secure border crossing procedures. To have a positive impact, improvements of all of these components are necessary because accessibility and connectivity are closely related. (Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, 2005, p. 50)

Being a product related to international connectivity, the development of tourism along the Silk Roads faces several main barriers related to SDG 9. In Central Asia, the economic challenges are complex, interlinked and transnational. The lack of regional and international cooperation constricts cross-regional coordination and restricts cooperative planning and the implementation of destination strategies. (Berlie, 2020, p. 59 f.) The collapse of the Soviet Union caused the end of the planned economy and the landlocked location causes difficulties in joining the international markets.

The collapse of the Soviet Union led to the end of the planned economy in Central Asia and since then the connection to the international markets has been developing hesitantly. The landlocked location of the countries causes difficulties in joining world trade. The new borders disrupted regional cooperation so that trade routes, transport and financial flows disappeared. To enable economic growth, it is necessary that the Central Asian countries encourage the cross-border movement of people, goods and knowledge. (Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, 2005, p. 50) Due to limited capabilities, the infrastructure network in Central Asia is characterized by deficiencies in the regional road network, alongside with poor quality of transportation services and serious problems with border crossing. (Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, 2005, p. 60)

To evolve tourism transportation and accommodation infrastructure in Central Asia, the countries need to overcome those barriers. Being an intra-regional tourism product, the successful tourism development of the Silk Roads is dependent on a close connectivity in Central Asia.

2.2.2 Socio-political challenges

The SDG 16 and SDG 10 are both mainly socio-political challenges and focus on “peace, justice and strong institutions” and “reducing inequalities”.

One of the key issues regarding sustainable development worldwide is the inclusiveness of all countries. By reducing inequalities not only within the country but also among all countries, more countries participate in sustainable growth. By engaging local populations, the tourism industry can help in reducing inequalities. The participation of all stakeholders along the tourism value chain is needed to develop sustainable tourism and to increase socio-political integration. (World Tourism Organization and United Nations Development Programme, 2017, p. 17) However, the tourism industry cannot ensure that the growth of tourism benefits the local population. In many cases, mainly outside forces and global stakeholders gain the tourism cash flow so that social development on a local level is limited by the unequal distribution of tourism growth. Without participation of the communities it is not guaranteed that the tourism industry reduces inequalities. (Jing & Tae, 2006, p. 11)

Even though the Central Asian countries share a common history, the differences between the five neighboring countries increased. Since their independence, not only the economic development has differed, but also socio-political differences have increased. Human development is focusing on essential social needs like employment opportunities, good health, opportunities of education and access to knowledge. These factors have direct impact on the wealth of the population and especially the most

vulnerable population groups benefit from improvements in human living standards and human security. (Pomfret, 2009, pp. 48-51)

In relation to the current state of social inequalities in Central Asia, the sustainable development of responsible tourism faces challenges. To illustrate one of these challenges, the inequalities in social development and its negative impacts in Tajikistan are taken into account. Being the poorest country in Central Asia, Tajikistan faces several social development issues like health, education, knowledge and migration. (UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub; Regional Bureau for Europe and the CIS, 2016, p. 21) Approximately 44% of the population in Tajikistan is younger than 18 years old and 38% of the youth population is unemployed and not participating in education or training. (UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub; Regional Bureau for Europe and the CIS, 2016, p. 45) (Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, 2005, p. 140) (Huisman, Smolentseva, & Froumin, 2018, p. 378 f.) Since 2015, the economy in Tajikistan has grown by more than 20% without transferring this improvement to the local population. In the meantime, the poverty ratio decreased by less than 2%. This unequal distribution of resource allocation is the key driver for poverty and migration. (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development; The World Bank, 2019, p. 3 ff.) The local labor market in Tajikistan is not able to provide job opportunities; thus existing workforce is migrating towards neighboring countries. Between 1998 and 2002 close to 11% of the population decided to leave Tajikistan so that about 5% of the country's GDP is based on remittances. Especially, the younger workers migrate to escape unemployment, the weak social system and the lack of perspective. Being motivated and skilled workers, these migrants create a loss of young, talented workforce in Tajikistan that is needed to achieve sustainable tourism development. (Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, 2005, p. 141 f.)

Within this unequal socio-political environment it is even more challenging to achieve a sustainable tourism sector because of the weak development of SDG 16 in Central Asia. The goal of SDG 16 aims to achieve peace, justice and strong institutions by strengthening safety, socio-political rights and opportunities. Building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions worldwide is one of the key tools to support sustainable development. Any kind of socio-political conflict degenerates this development, whilst the general policies of sustainable tourism encourage intercultural encounters, tolerance and understanding. By supporting local communities and local enterprises, tourism can increase peace, safety and education. (Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General, 2019, p. 54) (World Tourism Organization and United Nations Development Programme, 2017, p. 17) In general, the development of SDG 16 is part of the key challenges in Central Asia. Being both, an economic and a socio-political challenge, the regional integration is prevented by strong borders that make intra-regional collaboration vulnerable and ineffective. Due to diverging economies and strong political control, the countries do not explore the potential of a common cooperation supported by common institutions. The instability of political and economic agreements restricts cross-border trade and the growth of prosperity. By rather competing against each other than minimizing barriers, the countries let local enterprises bear the consequences. Intra-regional trade and border-crossing is cost-intensive and characterized by corruption and uncertainties. For example, Uzbekistan has repeatedly closed and opened its border with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. (Krapohl & Vasileva-Dienes, 2019, p. 13 ff.) (Wright, 2014, p. 10) The failure of regional integration is affecting tourism development along the Silk Roads. Without being able to connect tourism products along the Silk Roads, the sustainable development of tourism and its positive impacts on the whole region is obstructed. (Krapohl & Vasileva-Dienes, 2019, p. 2 f.) The lack of reliable data restricts the in-depth analysis of this SGD and by adding the personal knowledge of the interviewees,

new findings complement the previous information. No literature review includes information about any common tourism institution in Central Asia.

2.2.3 Environmental challenges

Climate change and the rising temperature affects human life worldwide and the impacts of climate change are the greatest challenges to sustainable development. To avoid irreversible changes, the global warming needs to be limited to 1.5° C and the SDG 13 and SDG 14 focus on effective adaptations to minimize the rise of temperature and to maintain the environmental stability. The SDG 13 aims for urgent action to avert climate change and its impacts. The SDG 14 focus on the life below water by conserving the oceans, seas and marine ecosystems for a sustainable usage of the natural resources. (Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General, 2019, pp. 48-51)

In general, the tourism industry is one of the most dependent industries on climate and environmental conditions. Being closely connected to the environmental heritage, many tourism destinations are famous for their environmental surroundings and weather. Climate change and the loss of the environmental heritage have a direct negative impact on competitiveness and sustainability of tourism. (International Labour Office, 2010, p. 43) Additionally, the tourism sector facilitates not only climate change, but also environmental exploitation by producing emissions and consuming natural products. (World Tourism Organization and United Nations Development Programme, 2017, p. 29)

The effects of climate change have a great significance in the tourism destination “Silk Roads in Central Asia” because of its fragile ecological system. Around 80% of the surface is covered by arid land and desert. The increasing temperature causes the expansion of the desert as well as water shortages in the whole region. The surface of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan is mainly characterized by the mountainous terrain that is

identified as the most climate-vulnerable region of Central Asia. As described in the country profiles in chapter 2.1 the remote villages operate in rural agriculture that is dependent on irrigation. During periods of aridity, the glaciers guarantee the water supply and feed the two biggest rivers of the region. Both, the mountain communities and the population living in the arid region, are vulnerable in their living conditions due to limited natural resources. The achievement of sustainable prosperity is additionally challenged by climate change. The melting of the glaciers and the desertification of agricultural regions endanger the survival of these communities. Furthermore, the poor and fragile living conditions deteriorate due to the lack of knowledge and training and the inefficient use of natural resources. Facing an additional lack of capacities, strategies for political development fail, leading to an increase of poverty in rural areas. The loss of the biodiversity caused by climate change supports the trend. (Kochkarova & Mitiakova, 2019, pp. 1-4) (Xenarios, et al., 2018, pp. 1-5)

Being landlocked, the countries of Central Asia are furthermore dependent on the water supply from rainfalls, rivers and glaciers. In addition, Turkmenistan is accountable for the conservation of the ecosystem in the Caspian Sea. Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan share the responsibility for the sustainable conservation of the Aral Sea. In the latter, the drying up and salination of the Aral Sea is taken into account to analyze the environmental challenges in relation to SDG 14. During the period of the Soviet Union, the implementation of a complex irrigation infrastructure caused the drying up of the Aral Sea so that in 1991 water levels decreased by about 15 meters. The significant reduction in volume and surface area constitutes environmental, economic and social problems in the whole region. (Carlsson, Denisov, Kadyrzhanova, & Michaelis, 2005, p. 22 ff.) Once having been the world's largest inland sea, the exploitation of the ecosystem leaves two smaller Seas that are contaminated with chemicals, pesticides and deposits of radioactive tailings. This so-called Aral Sea disaster destroys unique ecosystems and the livelihood of local

communities. (Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, 2005, p. 103) As described above, the countries of Central Asia are divided into the upstream countries Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and the downstream countries Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. The national interest of these two geographical areas differs so that the management of water resources is the main challenge. The upstream countries maximize their water usage to generate electricity along the two main rivers. Correspondingly, the downstream countries have interest in the maximum usage of irrigation. The conflict of interest is aggravated by political tensions and disagreements so that the mismanagement of water usage causes environmental damage of global significance. (Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, 2005, p. 5 f.)

A growing number of tourists significantly increase consumption in the region and worsen the exploitation of the environment. It is a challenge to prepare the remote communities with knowledge and training in order to manage the negative impacts of tourism. Without the successful implementation of sustainable development strategies in tourism, the fragile habitat will be considerably destroyed.

2.3 Opportunities of sustainable tourism development in Central Asia

In this context, the published result of the “Voluntary National Reviews” serves as a guide to identify the selected SDGs. In alignment with the literature research, the most important SDGs and their opportunities in relation to sustainable tourism development in Central Asia are explained and illustrated with examples.

Figure 4: Challenges of tourism industry in relation to the SDGs



(Own representation based on World Tourism Organization and United Nations Development Programme, 2017, p. 29)

Most of the opportunities within sustainable tourism development in Central Asia are related to the SDGs 8, 17, 11, 1, 15 and 5. These opportunities within the tourism sector have positive impacts for either the economy, the environment or the social-political components of sustainability. In the following subchapter, the different SDGs are described in detail and the impact of tourism industry on the achievement of the goals is presented. Furthermore, the most important region-specific opportunities are named and verified by examples. (World Tourism Organization and United Nations Development Programme, 2017, p. 29)

2.3.1 Economic opportunities

The development of sustainable tourism in Central Asia connects several economic opportunities. The evaluation of these economic opportunities is centered upon the objectives of SDG 8 and SDG 17. In less developed countries, the objective of SDG 8 includes the creation of job opportunities and supports the reduction of inequalities across age groups, regions and genders. The SDG 17 aims for the implementation of Global Partnerships to achieve all 17 SDGs. (Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General, 2019, p. 38)

Being a growth sector for developing countries, the tourism sector has a great potential to support the achievement of the SDG 8. The contribution of jobs in the tourism industry constitutes around 10% of GDP worldwide and the sector is considered to create not only one in ten jobs but also to represent 30% of the world service exports.

In 2015, the world's 48 least developed countries received 29 million international tourist arrivals and earned \$21 billion from international tourism. These foreign exchange earnings are over five times higher than the official development support. (World Tourism Organization, 2013, p. 16) Being a growing industry, the tourism sector has a great potential to contribute directly and indirectly to sustainable development strategies. This relevance received more awareness in 2017 that was announced as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. (World Tourism Organization; International Trade Centre and Enhanced Integrated Framework, 2017, p. 8 ff.) In that same year, Uzbekistan changed its political strategy and created a more open and market-oriented economy. The implementation of new reforms enabled the liberalization of visitor requirements and the resumption of the accession negotiations with the World Trade Organization. (Trushin, 2019, p. 13) This opening supports the economic growth of the tourism sector; in 2018 nearly 25% of exports have been connected to tourism industry. The number of foreign visitors increased from 2.8 million visitors in 2017 to 6.4 million visitors in 2018. (Trushin, 2019, p. 7) The concept of the Silk Roads as a tourism product links different countries, cultures and businesses.

Achieving the SDG 17 by forming strong partnerships is one of the most important steps towards the accomplishment of sustainable tourism along the Silk Roads. The implementation of Global Partnerships enables international cooperation that is needed to overcome the challenges of sustainable development. (Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General, 2019, p. 56) The cross-sectoral character of tourism creates the need of private and public partnerships on local, regional and national levels. (World Tourism Organization and United Nations Development Programme, 2017, p. 17) By implementing the goal of tourism growth to the country's development strategy, the countries of Central Asia could decrease economic barriers and allow cross-border cooperation. The revival of the ancient Silk Roads is based on common destination management and on a common concept that

enables visitors to explore different countries along the Silk Roads as a tourism product. (Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, 2005, p. 2) TripAdvisor published the result of its survey “TripAdvisor Travel Trends for the Silk Roads 2017” that emphasized the importance of collaboration along the Silk Roads. 47% of the respondents showed interest in a unique visa regime in Central Asia to ease the border crossing along the Silk Roads. (The World Bank, 2017) In general, the achievement of SDG 17 links all objectives with each other and without the successful implementation of SDG 17 worldwide, the other goals are not achievable.

2.3.2 Socio-political opportunities

The SDG 1 and SDG 5 are both mainly socio-political opportunities and focus on ending poverty worldwide and achieving gender equality.

Over the past 25 years, more than one billion people have crossed the poverty line so that in 2018 the rate of extreme poverty is 8.6% worldwide. However, the global distribution of poverty is unequal and the poverty rate in rural areas is 17.2% and 11.9% higher than in urban areas. (Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General, 2019, p. 22) Since the growth of tourism industry directly and indirectly creates jobs, foreign income and increased investment in infrastructure, the sector is one of the most effective industries to increase wealth and to empower local communities. The development of tourism along the Silk Roads is a competitive instrument to decrease poverty in Central Asia. (World Tourism Organization, 2013, p. 144)

As described in the country profiles, the rural population is mostly employed in the agricultural sector and poverty is relatively high in Central Asia. In the following, the social sector of the Kyrgyz Republic is analyzed to measure the opportunity of poverty reduction by tourism industry. In 2017, the poverty rate in the Kyrgyz Republic is at

25.6% and the employment rate is at 55.9%. Of this total employment, about one third works in the agriculture sector and the concept of self-employment dominates the labor market. (Dubashov, Mbowe, & Ismailakhunova, 2018, p. 5) By developing sustainable tourism, the population of the Kyrgyz Republic can capitalize of the positive impacts. Mostly, the revenue of tourism is foreign currency which leads to communities gaining additional income. This income is directly earned by the suppliers and is multiplied due to the cross-linked character of the tourism sector. Another feature of tourism is the high amount of small local businesses that enable a wider distribution of revenue. Furthermore, regions with economic disadvantages, such as being landlocked, might still attract tourists and visitors so that rural communities benefit from sustainable tourism development. By creating jobs of all levels of experience and ability, tourism sector supports new businesses including opportunities for people from all backgrounds. (State Committee on Investment and State Property Management of the Republic of Tajikistan, 2013, p. 9)

Working in tourism can be the only option for young people and women to generate income which emphasizes the value of sustainable tourism as a tool to achieve SDG 5 and gender equality. In 2019, women and girls still experience the gender gap worldwide. Even though the equal treatment of men and women is part of the SDGs, it needs precise actions, laws and policies to achieve this goal. In tourism, 54% of workforce is female, making women the leading gender. Additionally, the gender wage gap is 2,1% lower, thus the tourism industry has a great potential to achieve women empowerment and gender equality. (World Tourism Organization, 2019, p. 9)

During the economic recession in 2008, mainly women in Central Asia lost their jobs so that the number of registered unemployed women increased significantly. Not only the payment of women is less but also opportunities of education are limited. The reduced income caused by the economic crises in Central Asia forces families to minimize educational spending by restricting the daughters schooling. The rise in

gender disparity has long-term consequences and a negative impact on human development. (Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, 2005, p. 149 ff. & 159 ff.) The opportunity of training and education is the main goal to achieve women's active participation in tourism. By implementing new ways of schooling like the non-profit organization "Women Rockin' Pamirs", women gain access to economic growth. Since 2016, the organization provides training programs in trekking and guidance for Tajik women to support local empowerment. (Jannin, Oriol, & Roiron, 2016, p. 4) This progress includes transferring knowledge in order to increase the awareness about environmental impacts of tourism on a local level. In this way local communities gain access to the socio-political opportunities of sustainable tourism development.

2.3.3 Environmental opportunities

As described above, the impacts of climate change are the greatest challenges to sustainable development. The opportunities of sustainable tourism development connect the objectives of SDG 11 and SDG 15 by focusing on sustainable prevention in cities and on land. (Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General, 2019, pp. 48-51)

The dependency of tourism on the quality of the environment causes the need of environmental preservation to ensure long-term growth and competitiveness. The complexity of the tourism value chain enables the collaboration of all stakeholders but requires successful destination management and the willingness of participation. Additionally, the direct interaction of consumers and producers facilitate educational work to encourage sustainable travel behavior. (World Tourism Organization and United Nations Environment Programme, 2019, p. 17 f.) Both, SDG 11 and SDG 15 focus on sustainable prevention in cities and on land. The urbanization of population grows steadily and since 2007 more than 50% of human beings live in cities. These cities account for not only about 60% of global GDP but also about over 60% of carbon

emissions and of resource use. The SDG 11 focus on these issues and requests inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable human settlements. (Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General, 2019, p. 44) The conservation of all regions worldwide that are affected by human beings is maintained by adding SDG 15. The protection of ecosystems and its sustainable use is the key objective to stop desertification, degradation and biodiversity loss. Between 2000 and 2015 about 20% of land area worldwide was degraded so that over one billion people faced the loss of their basis of existence. The integrity of healthy mountain ecosystems affects for example a wide range of communities by maintaining 60 to 80% of global freshwater. (Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General, 2019, p. 52 f.) The richness of unique biodiversity, cultural and natural heritage are the main reason for visiting a destination. The conservation and preservation of these prime tourism assets guarantee the long-term development of sustainable tourism. By generating direct revenue for local communities, tourism provides the required income to maintain the heritage in a responsible manner. (Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General, 2019, p. 17)

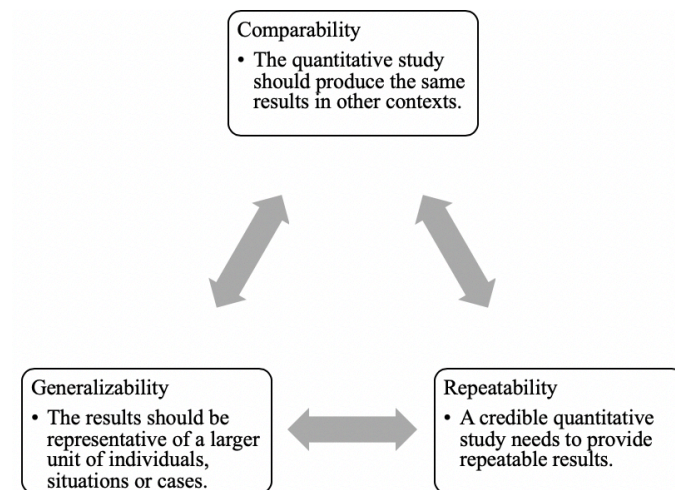
Building on the identified challenges and opportunities of sustainable tourism development in Central Asia, the following chapter makes use of the expert interview as a method to gain further insights. First, the methodology is explained in detail and then the compiled guideline is outlined. Afterwards, the selection of experts is presented, and their statements are summarized. The critical examination of the method allows the inclusion of the new findings.

3 Methodology

The methodology is the academic teaching of research and includes theoretical assumptions behind the choice of an object of investigation and the methods of investigation. It is the research strategy that conclusively combines the choice of methods with its desired results. (Wichmann, 2019, p. 7) To be able to find answers to a scientific problem, social science uses research methods such as systematic investigation. The origins of the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research approaches go back to Aristotle. In addition to quantifying and measuring approaches, Aristotle approved qualitatively oriented case studies as an additional way of gaining knowledge. (Wichmann, 2019, p. 2) Both ways of research are used to gain a better understanding, but qualitative and quantitative methodologies achieve this goal in different ways. It is important to consider the differences and the theoretical results of both methods before choosing the research method. In the following, the characteristics of quantitative and qualitative research are shortly summarized. Afterwards, the chosen method and its tools are described in detail.

By using statistical tools, quantitative research enables a deeper interpretation of data so that the scientific assertion is supported by results of the calculations. (Eisend & Kuss, 2019, p. 129 f.) Due to the assumptions of quantitative research, the results can be identified by the following characteristics of quantitative research. (Wichmann, 2019, p. 38)

Figure 5: The three characteristics of quantitative research



(Own representation based on Wichmann, 2019, p. 38)

These three characteristics subsume the qualitative research under the umbrella term “interpretativism”. In comparison, the approaches of qualitative research and its possible outcome differ. (Eisend & Kuss, 2019, p. 129 f.)

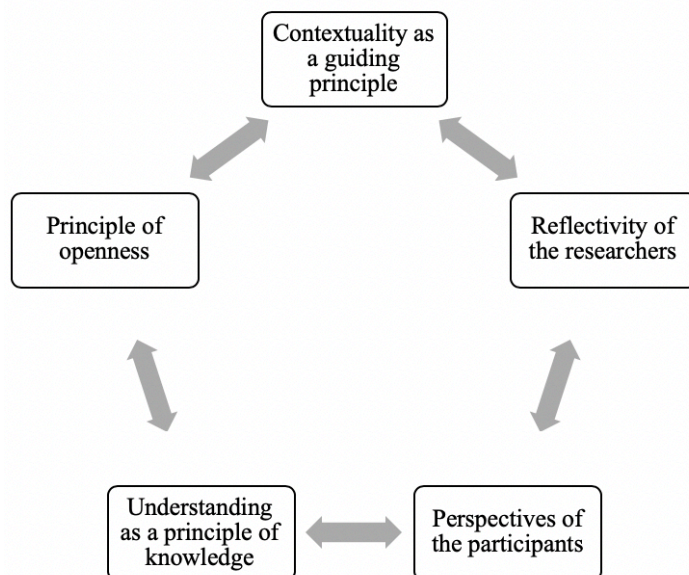
3.1 Approaches of qualitative research

In contrast to the usage of statistical tools to support the interpretation of data, qualitative investigation relies on the observation of patterns without using statistical tools. The main goal is to organize the collected data into a meaningful set of categories or themes by analyzing different forms of data. Qualitative research interprets not only words, phrases, but also tone and non-verbal communication. Furthermore, the context is taken into account so that the final outcome gives explanations for descriptive patterns, relationships between categories and theoretical developments. (Flick, 2019, p. 473 ff.) To answer the research question, qualitative methods use an inductive approach. In this case, potential answers are not previously sought in the literature, but the findings are gained through individual experiences. According to the inductive

logic, a generally valid law is concluded on the basis of individual observations. The more often a particular observation is made, the greater the probability that the theory becomes meaningful. Qualitative inductive reasoning describes the process when individual cases are examined in detail. The findings of the investigation are then transferred to other contexts. (Wichmann, 2019, p. 29 f.)

The umbrella term “constructivism” summarizes all methods that achieve results by approaching the outcome with the help of constructive processes. Its analytical mindset is based on five main characteristics. First of all, the investigation is not isolated, but is analyzed in context. Instead of explaining cause-and-effect-relationships of isolated aspects, constructive methods aim to develop an understanding of complex contexts. Therefore, research methods are mainly based on open questions and observation tools that consider the diversity of perspectives and opinions. Additionally, the perspectives of different participants are taken into account without quantifying them. Due to the influence of the researcher who chooses the topic of the investigation, its data and its questions, the perspective of qualitative research is subjective. (Wichmann, 2019, p. 39)

Figure 6: The principles of qualitative research



(Own representation based on Wichmann, 2019, p. 39)

In conclusion, the pursuit of the qualitative research is not the claim of generalization. Rather, the targeted investigation includes an individual case with contextual conditions. Thus, the results of qualitative projects have different characteristics than those arising in quantitative studies. The outcome of qualitative research is context-related, situation-specific and oriented towards the understanding of meaning. (Wichmann, 2019, p. 39) This qualitative emphasis enables the consideration of individual interpretations and experiences, as well as other forms of social interaction and communication. Typically, qualitative research is featured in the form of text with little or no use of numbers. (Schumann, 2018, p. 148 ff.)

To compare the results of qualitative and quantitative research findings, the issues of validity and reliability are taken into account. As previously mentioned, reliability is concerned with consistency and one of the main characteristics of quantitative research. The development of social statistics aims for a reliable measure that keeps

the error small. In contrast to the strong reliability of quantitative findings, qualitative research cannot ensure the reliability of its tools and instruments. By developing careful protocols, the reliable factor of qualitative results can increase. In fact, the measurement of qualitative findings is known being more valid than reliable. The validity of research is related to congruence and is divided into the two aspects of internal and external validity. Having a high internal validity indicates a high appropriateness of the research and a close connectivity between theory and the performance of the chosen method. Having a high external validity proves the ability of generalization from a specific study to a larger population. The measurement of both types of validity and reliability are independent to each other and it is possible that the research method is highly valid without having a high reliability. In conclusion, qualitative research is of use to study unknown substantive areas in order to explore uncountable topics that are difficult to measure by other methods. (Schumann, 2018, pp. 148-159)

Qualitative research includes different tools and methods which are summarized in the following section. The main techniques are named and characterized. Afterwards, the used method is described in detail by analyzing features, advantages and disadvantages. To gain a depth of understanding, qualitative research methods generate knowledge by using observation, case study approaches and different kind of interviews. (Brunt, Horner, & Semley, 2017, p. 37)

3.2 Guideline of the expert interview

Expert interviews are always semi-structured interviews, which are prepared and carried out with the help of guidelines. These guidelines do not only structure the subject areas, but also serve as concrete research aids. The preparation of the guidelines already supports the research process. During the interview, the concept of the guideline functions as an orientation aid. The scope of the guideline can vary

depending on requirements and demands. In order to maintain comparability between the interviews, it is not necessary to ask each expert the same questions. However, it is recommended to define thematic blocks with pre-formulated main questions and additional orientation questions. The main questions are obligatory and are supplemented with the prepared side issues if the answer is to be extended by details. Due to the changing interview partners, the questions and their order vary in each interview and the clarity of the guideline is crucial for its functionality. The guideline can also evolve between interviews and it might be necessary to create a separate concept for each interview. Being a series of in-depth interviews, the expert interviews are used to obtain descriptive knowledge from the interviewees about the research topic. The intention is to gain findings about the research topic from the individual's own perspective in detail by using the words of the researcher. (Bogner, Littig, & Menz, 2014, pp. 27-30)

Figure 7: Requirements for a guided interview

Openness	Clarity	Narrative flow
The statements of the interview partner must be restricted as little as possible. The openness of the interview enables a high significance of the results.	The number of questions must be adapted to the scope of the interview. Hereby, the focus is on comprehensive answers to short, precise questions.	A pleasant narrative flow has a higher priority than following the sequence of questions.

(Own representation based on Helfferich, 2019, p. 676 ff.)

The conceptual development of the guideline is crucial for a successful interview, which is characterized by an open atmosphere, a clarified structure and a pleasant narrative flow. (Helfferich, 2019, p. 676 ff.)

Structure of a guideline

The formal structure of the guide follows a three-step principle. In the first step, respondents are given the opportunity to express themselves as freely as possible. The request of narration is based on openness so that the respondent is enabled to answer spontaneously without restrictions. In the second step, additional questions are used to get further information about topics that have not been discussed during the first steps. These two steps can be repeated to increase the significance of the interview. The third step includes the conclusion of the interview and thus, structured and formulated questions are asked. (Helfferrich, 2019, p. 676 ff.)

The preparation of the structured guideline follows mainly four steps. First of all, as many questions as possible are collected regarding the interests of the research. Afterwards the questions are assessed by valuing the possibilities of expression. The examination of questions results in a minimized list of relevant questions. This list needs to be sorted and bundled according to the chronological order, content coherence and direction of questioning. Finally, each bundle of questions is described by a short headline that functions as a narrative-generating impulse. Additional aspects are noted down as keywords for questions and are used if aspects were not sufficiently addressed. (Helfferrich, 2019, p. 676 ff.) Depending on the circumstances it might be important to add the pretesting as the fifth step. The functionality of the guideline and of the technical devices should be guaranteed. (Bogner, Littig, & Menz, 2014, p. 302 ff.)

The findings of chapter 3 form the basis for conducting the interviews. The gained knowledge of the interviews is summarized in chapter 4. The prepared guideline for the interviews can be found in the appendix.

4 Evaluation of the expert interviews

In the following chapter, the experts are introduced. Thereupon, the findings of the interviews are presented regarding the challenges and opportunities of chapter 3. The critical evaluation of the method concludes the chapter 4.

4.1 Summary of the expert interviews

A total of five interview partners were selected. Stakeholders along the tourism value chain were selected to obtain different perceptions. The following figure presents the interviewees.

Matthias Poeschel	<p>Matthias Poeschel is currently a member of the board of directors of the Aschersleber Kulturanstalt.</p> <p>From 2013 to 2017 Matthias Poeschel was employed in Tajikistan to promote sustainable tourism projects in the Pamir region with the organization PECTA. Since his return to Germany in 2017 he has been working as an honorable tourism advisor in Tajikistan on a voluntary basis.</p>
Niklas von Schumann	<p>Niklas von Schumann is currently working as Component Manager for Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH in Uzbekistan. The project focuses on sustainable economic development in selected regions of Uzbekistan. Niklas von Schuman is working in Karakalpakstan to support on-site the sustainable development of the tourism industry.</p>

Stefan Hilger	Stefan Hilger has been working for DIAMIR Erlebnisreisen for 15 years and is in charge of Russia and Russian-speaking countries as destinations.
Henrik Wintjen	Henrik Wintjen joined mascontour GmbH - Sustainable Tourism Consulting & Communication in 2010. The company offers tourism consulting with the focus on sustainability. Mascontour GmbH also cooperates with development organizations such as GIZ. In September 2019, he visited the region Karakalpakstan and wrote an assessment about tourism development for the region.
Dagmar Schreiber	Dagmar Schreiber has been professionally active in Central Asia since 1994. She has been accompanying tourism projects on-site and in 2003 she founded the tour operator KazakhstanReisen, that offers sustainable tours in Central Asia. From 2008 to 2014 Dagmar Schreiber also worked as a consultant for the Kazakhstan Tourism Association and she published several travel guides about the region.

4.1.1 Findings on the challenges of sustainable tourism development

Matthias Poeschel confirms economic challenges of Central Asia as negative impacts for tourism development. Waste is not separated and the communities in rural areas are not aware of the consequences of pollution. Thus, consumption challenges the sustainable development of the tourism sector. Dagmar Schreiber explains that the population in the mountains overuse the natural resources to survive. This exploitation of the ecosystem is significantly intensified by the increasing number of tourists. She reports that out of hospitality, the communities would slaughter their last livestock for

the visitor. Niklas von Schumann and Stefan Hilger complement this statement by emphasizing the discrepancy of the tourism development along the Silk Roads. Especially since the opening of Uzbekistan in 2019, the popular cities along the Silk Roads note an increasing number of tourists leading to an increase of consumption and its negative impacts. Meanwhile, these effects are less noticeable in the rural areas of Central Asia. This difference of tourism growth within the countries and among Central Asia promotes inequalities in all pillars of sustainable development. On an economic level, the infrastructure and the range of tourism products are improving, especially in the popular cities along the Silk Roads. Due to a lack of support, the rural population does not benefit from the increasing tourism sector. On one hand, Niklas von Schumann and Henrik Wintjen report the financial exploitation of tourists as one of the first symptoms of mass tourism in the three big cities of Uzbekistan. On the other hand, both confirm the contrasting challenges of the rural communities. Due to the former planned economy and its political control, weak socio-political institutions are located in rural areas and co-determination of local communities is not possible. In addition, the current political interest prevents the expansion of small and medium-sized tourism enterprises. These barriers are the reason for the poverty in the countries of the Silk Roads and cause migration and rural exodus. Stefan Hilger visited the Pamir Mountains on behalf of DIAMIR Erlebnisreisen and experienced the great poverty on-site. In his opinion, the preservation of the ecosystems and the long-term organization of the tourism industry are not in the current focus of tourism stakeholders in Central Asia. Without income as the basis of life, there are no financial means available for environmentally sustainable management. Additionally, there is a lack of knowledge about climate change and the implementation of SDGs, although the Central Asian region is considered extremely vulnerable to climate change. This lack of knowledge also prevents the tourism industry from joining forces and there is too few cooperation and joint projects. Stefan Hilger reports on the inefficiency and shortness of joint projects. Matthias Poeschel and Henrik Wintjen emphasize the

importance of support from developed countries. Here, the principle of small steps must be applied to guarantee the participation of the local population. Currently, the weak possibilities of participation prevent the creation of additional tourism products. Without the strategic planning of further tourism development in Central Asia, the local population cannot create value and cannot benefit from the growth of tourism industry along the Silk Roads.

All respondents emphasize the complexity of the challenges of sustainable tourism development in Central Asia. The interaction of the individual components of sustainability complicates the identification of particular obstacles. As a result, the planning and implementation of next steps is equally difficult. The high number of stakeholders along the tourism value chain calls for a close interaction of all participants. However, the question of responsibility is also raised in this context. Matthias Poeschel calls for educated tourists with sustainable behavior whereas Stefan Hilger points out that tour operators cannot select their customers. Niklas von Schumann and Dagmar Schreiber confirm the lack of knowledge about sustainable tourism development in Central Asia. It is difficult to name the responsible stakeholders and this discussion prevents the successful implementation of sustainable tourism development along the Silk Roads.

4.1.2 Findings on the opportunities of sustainable tourism development

Overall, the interview partners recognize more opportunities than challenges for sustainable tourism development in Central Asia. Niklas von Schumann emphasizes that the destination offers the basis for many forms of tourism like mountain tourism, sport tourism and extreme tourism. The popularity of the region is increasing due to strong branding of the ancient Silk Roads. In addition, the heritage of the ancient Silk Roads and the picturesque landscapes offer a strong unique selling point. As an author of travel guides, Dagmar Schreiber reports on the unique landscapes. Her employer KazakhstanReisen offers sustainable trips in Central Asia and is a good example of the

possibilities of sustainable tourism development along the Silk Roads. Furthermore, Stefan Hilger confirms the increasing number of tourists and sees the opportunity of poverty reduction through the tourism industry. Especially the economic component of the increasing tourism sector in Central Asia offers an added income for the local population. Regarding the otherwise economically limited region, small and medium-sized enterprises can find a firm foundation in tourism growth. In addition, the tourism industry promotes communication and cooperation within the countries and across borders. Matthias Poeschel justifies the opening of the borders of the countries in Central Asia and the simplification of visa regulation. He says that a tourist knows no borders and that the tourism product of the Silk Roads serves as a unique invitation to cross the borders in Central Asia. Further cooperation between the countries strengthens the external region's perception worldwide. The introduction of a tourism council in the region Karakalpakstan is evaluated as a case study and can, according to Henrik Wintjen, promote the interlocking of national and sub-national levels in Uzbekistan. The sustainable development of the tourism industry requires a resolution of the flat hierarchy of decision-makers and more autonomy within the individual regions. The positive outcome of these smaller case studies enables a domino effect and supports sustainable tourism development along the Silk Roads.

4.2 Critical evaluation of the methodology

The qualitative method of the guideline-based interviews was chosen as the tool of this thesis. The critical consideration of this method is decisive for the significance of the results. The findings obtained are context-related, subjective and dynamic. The validity is high, and the data is detailed. However, the execution of the observation is situation-related and uncontrollable. No generalization can be made, and the results are not representative. Furthermore, the result of the qualitative method depends on the skills and preparation of the interviewer. (Blaxter, Hughes, & Tight, 2006, p. 65) It cannot be guaranteed to get access to the needed information. (May, 2010, p. 141 f.)

In this thesis, the qualitative approach supplements the elaboration of literature with individual knowledge. These personal experiences are limited by the selection of the interviewees. (Blaxter, Hughes, & Tight, 2006, p. 65)

5 Conclusion

In the context of this thesis, the development of tourism along the Silk Road in the 21st century was examined. The significant challenges and opportunities of sustainable development in Central Asia in relation to the SDGs were identified. The qualitative research confirmed the findings of the literature research and complemented the elaborations with additional knowledge.

The elaboration of the bachelor thesis is restricted by the limited framework.

In conclusion, the complexity of the research topic dealt with in this thesis must be emphasized. The generated challenges only partly reflect the conditions in Central Asia. Nevertheless, the great extent of the challenges with regard to sustainable tourism development is clearly visible. The interviews confirm the growth of the tourism industry and the associated opportunities for its sustainable development. The focus here is clearly on the economic opportunities. In order to use this potential responsibly and in the long term, tourism providers need knowledge transfer and training. At the time of publication of this thesis it is unclear whether the tourism industry in the region will be able to create the benefits in the future and transfer these benefits to the local population. Currently, the elaborated challenges of sustainable development outweigh the discussed opportunities and it is doubtful whether the region has sufficient financial, political and social capacity to deal with the increasing number of tourists in a sustainable way.

Further assessment of this issue requires a detailed consideration of the individual countries and additional investigations. Based on the knowledge gained in this thesis, further research is recommended to ensure that the countries of Central Asia take advantage of the opportunities of sustainable tourism development and overcome its challenge.

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Appendix

Leitfaden für die Experteninterviews

<p>Begrüßung</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Thema vorstellen → Fokus auf individuelles Wissen• Erlaubnis Aufnahme• Experte vorstellen
<p>Offene Fragen</p>
<p>Was sind deiner Meinung nach die größten (2-3) Herausforderungen für nachhaltige Tourismusentwicklung in Zentralasien?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gibt es dafür Beispiele?• Warum ist es eine Herausforderung? <p>Was sind deiner Meinung nach die größten (2-3) Möglichkeiten für nachhaltige Tourismusentwicklung in Zentralasien?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gibt es dafür Beispiele?• Warum ist es eine Möglichkeit? <p>Wie beurteilst du die aktuelle Tourismusentwicklung entlang der Seidenstraße?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Beschreibe und bewerte die Entwicklung seit der Unabhängigkeit/ in den letzten Jahren
<p>Eingrenzungen/ Halboffene Fragen</p>
<p>Spezifische Herausforderungen</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ist die politische Situation in Zentralasien eine Herausforderung? Warum?• Ist die wirtschaftliche Lage in Zentralasien eine Herausforderung? Warum?• Ist der Umgang mit der Natur/ dem Kulturerbe in Zentralasien eine Herausforderung? Warum? <p>Spezifische Möglichkeiten</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Welche politischen Möglichkeiten entstehen durch die Tourismusentwicklung? Warum?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welche wirtschaftlichen Möglichkeiten entstehen durch die Tourismusentwicklung? Warum? • Welche sozialen Möglichkeiten entstehen durch die Tourismusentwicklung? Warum? • Welche Möglichkeiten zum Natur- und Kulturschutz entstehen durch die Tourismusentwicklung? Warum?
Geschlossene Fragen
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Überwiegen deiner Meinung nach die Möglichkeiten? • Überwiegen deiner Meinung nach die Herausforderungen? • Ist die Umsetzung des nachhaltigen Tourismus in dieser Region zum aktuellen Zeitpunkt möglich?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sperrvermerk • Weitere Quellen und Dateien

Herausforderungen in Bezug auf SDG	Möglichkeiten in Bezug auf SDG
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumption • Industry& infrastructure • Strong institutions • Inequalities (social& political) • Climate change • Sustainable life below water 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global partnerships • Economic growth • End poverty • Gender equality • Life on land • Sustainable communities
Matthias Poeschel	Niklas Schumann von GIZ
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entwicklung des Tourismus über die letzten Jahre • Daten und Fakten • Destinationsmangement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aktueller Fokus und Projekte • Community-based tourism (SDG 1&11)
Dagmar Schreiber	Stefan Hilger von Diamir
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural and Environmental heritage • Persönliche Erlebnisse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourismusprodukt „Seidenstraßen“ • Connectivity und Infrastructure • Visa und Zielgruppen

	Hendrik Wintjen von Mascontour
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Zukunftsperspektive• Daten und Fakten

Eidesstattliche Erklärung

Hiermit versichere ich, dass ich die vorliegende Arbeit bisher bei keiner anderen Prüfungsbehörde eingereicht, sie selbstständig verfasst und keine anderen als die angegebenen Quellen und Hilfsmittel benutzt sowie Zitate kenntlich gemacht habe.

Harsefeld, 27.01.2020

Ort, Datum

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