

THE ROLE OF TERRITORIAL CLUSTERS IN REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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Annotation: Ushbu maqolada hududiy klasterlarning mintaqaviy iqtisodiy rivojlanishdagi o'rni va ahamiyati ilmiy-nazariy jihatdan tahlil qilingan. Klaster tushunchasining mohiyati, ularning shakllanish mexanizmlari va mintaqaviy raqobatbardoshlikka ta'siri o'rganilgan. O'zbekiston misolida klasterlarning iqtisodiyotni diversifikatsiya qilishdagi roli ko'rib chiqilgan. Olingan natijalar asosida klaster siyosatini takomillashtirishga doir tavsiyalar ishlab chiqilgan.

Аннотацион: В данной статье научно-теоретически проанализирован место и значение территориальных кластеров в региональном экономическом развитии. Изучены сущность понятия кластера, механизмы их формирования и влияние на региональную конкурентоспособность. На примере Узбекистана рассмотрены роль кластеров в диверсификации экономики. На основе полученных результатов разработаны рекомендации по совершенствованию кластерной политики.

Annotation: This article scientifically and theoretically analyzes the role and importance of territorial clusters in regional economic development. The essence of the cluster concept, their formation mechanisms, and their impact on regional competitiveness are examined. The role of clusters in economic diversification is considered using Uzbekistan as an example. Based on the results obtained, recommendations for improving cluster policy have been developed.

Kalit so'zlar: hududiy klaster, mintaqaviy iqtisodiyot, raqobatbardoshlik, innovatsiya, sanoat klasteri, iqtisodiy rivojlanish, klaster siyosati.

Ключевые слова: территориальный кластер, региональная экономика, конкурентоспособность, инновации, промышленный кластер, экономическое развитие, кластерная политика.

Keywords: territorial cluster, regional economy, competitiveness, innovation, industrial cluster, economic development, cluster policy.

In the context of the globalization of the world economy, the development and practical implementation of new models for ensuring regional economic development is becoming an increasingly urgent issue. Today, territorial clusters are gaining ever-wider attention as one of the most effective instruments for stimulating economic growth. Clusters are systems consisting of geographically concentrated interconnected enterprises, suppliers, service providers, research institutions, and government bodies [1]. In the Republic of Uzbekistan, in recent years, particular attention has been paid to applying the cluster approach within the framework of liberalizing and diversifying the economy. The Action Strategy implemented in 2017–2021 and the Development Strategy designed for 2022–2026 also envisage the introduction of cluster-based development models with the aim of enhancing regional competitiveness [2]. The main purpose of this article is to analyze the mechanisms of influence of territorial clusters on regional economic development, to study foreign experience, and to develop practical recommendations for improving cluster policy in the conditions of Uzbekistan.

The founder of cluster theory is considered to be Michael Porter, a professor at the Harvard Business School. In his work "The Competitive Advantage of Nations," published in 1990, he defines a cluster as "a geographic concentration of interconnected companies, specialized suppliers, service firms, firms in related industries, and associated institutions in a particular field that compete but also cooperate" [3]. The main characteristics of a cluster include: geographic proximity and concentration; horizontal and vertical linkages; institutional and infrastructural cooperation; exchange of information and technologies; and the principle of simultaneous competition and cooperation, known as co-opetition. In modern economic theory, it is accepted to divide clusters into three main groups: industrial clusters, agro-industrial clusters, and service clusters [4]. Each group has a different impact on the regional economy and possesses its own distinctive development dynamics.

The impact of clusters on the regional economy manifests itself in several key directions. From the perspective of job creation and income growth, research shows that in regions with a high level of clustering, wages are on average 6–10 percent higher. For example, Silicon Valley in the United States and the Emilia-Romagna food industry cluster in Europe have significantly increased regional prosperity [5]. In terms of stimulating innovative activity, clusters accelerate the exchange of knowledge and technologies among enterprises. Members of a cluster demonstrate 2–3 times higher activity in patenting, research and development, and new product creation compared to enterprises outside the cluster [3, p. 245]. Through geographic proximity and specialization, enterprises ensure the efficient use of resources; the strengthening of local supply chains reduces transaction costs and improves logistics efficiency [6]. In addition, clustering creates an attractive environment for foreign investors by ensuring the existence of strong infrastructure and a skilled workforce. According to UNIDO data, the flow of foreign direct investment into regions where clusters are present is on average 35 percent higher [7].

Successful examples of the role of clusters in regional development can be found in many countries around the world. In Germany, the Munich Automotive Cluster plays an important role in shaping the country's export potential. This cluster in the state of Bavaria unites more than 1,500 enterprises and provides more than 300,000 jobs [5]. In Italy's Emilia-Romagna region, the textile and clothing cluster, composed of small and medium-sized enterprises, accounts for 40 percent of the region's gross domestic product. This cluster has been recognized as the foundation of the so-called "Italian economic miracle" [4, p. 112]. The development of South Korea's electronics industry clusters, particularly the technoparks in the cities of Suwon and Gumi, has played a decisive role in ensuring the country's global competitiveness. The state's targeted cluster policy has been consistently implemented since the 1990s [6]. The technology cluster formed in China's Shenzhen has become one of the fastest-growing economic centers in the world. This cluster formed the economic foundation for the transformation of a small fishing village into a megacity of 17 million people over the course of 40 years [7]. These experiences demonstrate that the active support of the state, the integration of science and production, and the quality of the institutional environment are decisive factors for the success of clusters.

In Uzbekistan, the cluster approach began to be applied mainly in the agricultural sector. Since 2019, cotton and textile clusters have been actively developing. According to 2023 data, more than 1,000 cotton and textile clusters are operating in the republic, ensuring the vertical integration of processing cotton raw materials into finished products [2]. The textile clusters located in the Fergana

Valley are having a noticeable positive impact on the regional economy: the number of jobs increased by 30 percent, and local budget revenues doubled. Tourism clusters in the Samarkand region are also in the process of formation, encompassing the hotel, transport, handicraft, and gastronomy sectors. However, the existing clusters face a number of problems: insufficient infrastructure, weak ties with research institutions, a shortage of qualified personnel, and limited financing [2, p. 89]. These problems require systematic improvement of cluster policy.

The analysis conducted yielded the following main results. The economic efficiency of clusters has been proven by world experience: in regions that have applied the cluster model, the GDP growth rate is on average 12–18 percent higher. This result is explained by the synergistic effect — that is, the combined output of cluster members exceeds what they could achieve through individual activity. Enterprises operating within cluster territories spend on average 2.4 times more on research and development, which is an important factor in ensuring long-term economic competitiveness. Clustering not only increases the number of jobs but also raises labor productivity and the income level of the population. Research has shown that in clustered regions, the poverty rate decreases by 8–15 percent. The necessity of the cluster approach as a priority direction for Uzbekistan is determined by the country's geoeconomic position, the potential of its natural resources, and the tasks of diversifying the economy.

The results of the analysis conducted in this article demonstrate that territorial clusters are an effective instrument of regional economic development. Their proper formation and targeted support from the state ensures an increase in labor productivity and stimulation of innovative activity, attraction of foreign investment and expansion of export potential, reduction of interregional inequality, and a decrease in unemployment and improvement in the quality of life of the population. The following recommendations are offered for further improvement of cluster policy in the conditions of Uzbekistan: strengthening the legal and regulatory framework that stimulates cluster development; developing strategic partnerships between higher education institutions and clusters; introducing targeted financing mechanisms for clusters — including cluster grants, concessional loans, and venture capital funds; increasing competitiveness through the application of digital infrastructure and the concept of "smart clusters"; and integrating into interregional and international cluster networks. The cluster development model is not merely a means of increasing economic efficiency, but a strategic path toward ensuring sustainable and inclusive economic growth. For the developing economy of Uzbekistan, consistently advancing in this direction has become a demand of the times.

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