

THE ROLE OF CULTURAL HERITAGE IN TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN UZBEKISTAN

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Introduction

Cultural heritage is a key element for the creation of tourism sectors around the world. It includes physical components such as historical sites, monuments, and sites, as well as non-physical aspects such as traditions, languages, and customs (Harrison, 2013). Álvarez-García et al. (2019) also suggested that cultural heritage is an important factor of regional development and the main driving force of tourism, creating unique experiences for visitors. Understanding their identity and using cultural heritage, which is an important catalyst for arrivals, has great potential to create a natural tourism system. According to Panzera, de Graaff and de Groot (2021), the places recognized by UNESCO (2020) as tourist attractions are the "superstars" of tourism, which have a strong influence on tourist flows. This observation is consistent with the experience of cultural trends in Uzbekistan, where cities such as Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva have long been famous for their historical and architectural significance.

Cultural heritage is a collection of tangible artifacts and intangible characteristics of a society or group inherited from the past generations. As for tourism, it is crucial for the development of global awareness and awareness of different cultures. Cultural tourism in Uzbekistan is inextricably linked with The Great Silk Road, and ancient towns such as Bukhara, Khiva and Samarkand are included in the UNESCO World Heritage List. Visitors from other countries are attracted by the historical and architectural heritage of these places, which promotes intercultural communication and regional development (Kuprikov, 2020), (Rudenko, 2020).

In Uzbekistan, cultural heritage forms the basis of the tourism industry. There are three UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the country: The Historical Center of Bukhara, Ichan-Kala in Khiva, and the Crossroads of Samarkand cultures. These attractions represent the centuries-old history of trade, art, and architecture, symbolizing the rich cultural fabric of Uzbekistan. The cultural heritage of

Uzbekistan includes a rich palette of both intangible and tangible elements. While the tangible cultural heritage includes architectural landmarks such as Registan Square and Ichan-Kala, intangible elements such as Navruz celebrations and shashmakom music further enhance the cultural charm of the country. According to Qiu, Zuo, and Zhang (2022), intangible cultural heritage plays an important role in attracting tourists by exciting experiences and offering authentic.

On the other hand, tourism related to cultural heritage in Uzbekistan is on the rise, as evidenced by statistical data. UNESCO (2020) reports note that between 2010 and 2020, the number of visitors to Uzbekistan's World Heritage Sites increased by thirty percent. In addition, about 45% of Uzbekistan's total tourism revenues come from cultural tourism (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2022). Such figures correspond to the global trend according to which cultural heritage is the basis for tourism development.

The Role of Cultural Heritage in Tourism Industry

Ashworth and Tunbridge (2020) argue that cultural heritage tourism is based on historical sites, cultural representations, and traditional practices that show people traveling in search of cultural experiences around the world. On the other hand, this type of tourism stands for authenticity and preservation, which are necessary to promote sustainable tourism (Wang, 1999).

For Uzbekistan, this concept is further enriched by intangible heritage, such as the celebration of Navruz, Shashmakom music, which embody the country's identity (UNESCO, 2020). According to Csapó (2012), these intangible assets not only attract tourists, but also play an important role in the socio-economic improvement of local communities.

Cultural heritage can be expressed through tourism both in a tangible form, archaeological sites and monuments, and in an intangible form in the form of traditions, festivals and crafts. In an effort to improve the country's tourism profile, Uzbekistan strives for both. They include the development of tourism through the preservation of ancient cities and the revival of traditional arts and crafts such as Suzani embroidery, as well as other products that will appeal to foreign tourists (MDPI, 2021).

Table 1: *Key Components of Cultural Heritage Tourism*

Component	Examples	Impact on Tourism
Tangible Heritage	Monuments, historical cities, Silk Road	Infrastructure development, tourist influx
Intangible Heritage	Traditional crafts, music, festivals	Cultural education, community pride
Natural	Mountains, rivers near	Ecotourism and cultural

Heritage	historical sites	synergy
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The Role of Cultural Heritage and Tourism in Economic Growth

The economic impact of cultural heritage tourism is also known. As the World Travel & Tourism Council (2022) states, cultural tourism in developing countries such as Uzbekistan contributes significantly to GDP and job creation. Bitušíková A. (2021) notes the significance of cultural tourism for the local economy through job creation and the establishment of business enterprises. For example, more than 1.5 million tourists register in Samarkand every year, so local businesses generate income, and hotels and restaurants thrive (Nocca, 2017). Figure 1 shows the economic impact of cultural tourism in Uzbekistan over the past ten years. Tourism related to cultural heritage is an effective factor in economic development, regional growth and improving the well-being of the population. Referring to Škrabic Peric et al. (2021), In the EU, UNESCO-protected sites not only directly attract tourists, but also have a positive impact on the surrounding economy through employment and other related industries.

Cultural Heritage tourism focuses on the development of the economy through the generation of income in the form of visitor expenditure, employment opportunities and development of infrastructure. In addition, the heritage tourism expansion leads to promotion of rural development in Uzbekistan through the combination of heritage tourism, agriculture-tourism and handicrafts. This kind of diversification is helpful to mitigate the gap between urban and rural economies, stimulate self-employment and grow the local economic activities (Rudenko, 2020), (PLOS ONE, 2021).

In the case of tourism related to cultural heritage in Uzbekistan, increasing visitor spending and job creation have become the main directions of economic development. Ismagilova, Safiullina and Gafurova (2015) preserve historical sites as needed, which greatly benefits local communities economically. The situation is similar to the one when the restoration of historical madrassas in Samarkand led to an increase in tourism activity and, consequently, to the creation of jobs for local artists and entrepreneurs.

Challenges in Managing Cultural Heritage Tourism

Although it is certainly possible to achieve certain economic benefits, the management of tourism related to cultural heritage undoubtedly involves a fair share of problems, which include mass visits, damage to cultural heritage and the explicit commercialization of cultures. Along with these problems, in Uzbekistan, as in other countries, it is worth paying attention to the limitations of the existing infrastructure, the regulatory framework of the industry, as well as trained

personnel in the tourism sector. The dilemma of how to combine economic growth and protectionism remains unanswered (ResearchGate, 2020).

The management of cultural heritage tourism requires the integration of heritage management with the management of modern tourism. García-Hernández et al. (2017) point to the problems of environmental deterioration and excessive visitor numbers in the historical centers of cities, a problem that is posed by Khiva and majority of Uzbekistan's heritage cities. Despite the fact that tourism dedicated to cultural heritage opens up wide prospects, it is not without problems. The key problems are the lack of appropriate infrastructure, weak marketing, and the risk of over-commercialization of some facilities. Ismail, Masron and Ahmad (2014) have outlined the same problems in Malaysia case study which are the same case in Uzbekistan.

Yang L. and Wall G. (2009) caution against excessive professionalism in matters of cultural heritage protection. This is because it can undermine authenticity and detract from the cultural value of travel. Ensuring a balance between the preservation of heritage and the growing number of tourists in Uzbekistan is a serious problem. Sustainable tourism practices, such as controlling visitor access and public participation, offer possible solutions to these problems, Ismagilova et al. (2015) showed that insufficient funding and expertise hinder effective conservation efforts. Moreover, Bonnet and Donato (2011) argued that economic crises often divert resources away from cultural sites. As a result, the problems of nature conservation are becoming more serious.

Table 2: *Major Challenges and Proposed Solutions for Uzbekistan*

Challenge	Proposed Solution
Overcrowding	Visitor management systems
Lack of funding	Public-private partnerships
Environmental degradation	Sustainable tourism policies
Loss of authenticity	Community involvement in preservation efforts

Cultural Heritage and Sustainable Tourism

In the cultural tourism context, the notion of sustainable development is indeed one of the most important ideas. This idea is of great importance when it comes to such a topic as cultural heritage, which, as already mentioned, should be considered valuable in the tourist landscape. Said, Nocca, (2017), emphasizes the importance of multidimensional indicators of sustainable development to support sustainable development. Uzbekistan has also taken a number of measures, such as

the construction of environmentally friendly hotels in areas of historical importance and attracting tourists to local villages through the concept of cultural tourism presented at UNESCO (2020). Richards (2002) also addresses the issue of public participation in the promotion of tourism, while suggesting that the benefits of tourism development should be evenly distributed among different members of society. For example, the program “Sustainable Tourism on the Silk Road in Uzbekistan” is aimed at preserving the environment, local flora and fauna, as well as the development of tourism in the country (UNWTO, 2023).

This type of green tourism is a concept that is associated with practices targeted at reducing the negative effect of human actions on the environment, which at the same time support local development. Uzbekistan can integrate sustainable development into its heritage conservation strategy by offering sustainable infrastructure, as well as promoting the involvement of local people and respect for cultural heritage. There is an Asian and European Connectivity Vision 2025 initiative aimed at making this region a cleaner and more sustainable energy source for future generations, as well as initiatives like the one that will be launched by the MDPI (2021), PLOS ONE (2021) are in support of it.

The Role of Tangible and Intangible Heritage in Uzbekistan’s Tourism

It is important to distinguish between tangible and intangible heritage, explaining its role in tourism. Tangible cultural heritage refers to real physical objects and structures, while intangible heritage refers to practices, traditions and expressions passed down from generation to generation. In the case of Uzbekistan, tangible assets include historical buildings such as the Bibi Khanum Mosque, while intangible assets may be associated with art in the form of traditional silk weaving.

Within Uzbek tourism, there is a place for intangible heritage, including architectural wonders such as Registan Square, and intangible heritage, for example, how people rejoice at the Navruz holiday. While tangible heritage may attract tourists in the first place, it is the tangible elements that provide a more meaningful cultural connection and enrich the visitor experience. Efforts to highlight them in the light of intangible heritage include gastronomic tourism, which contributes to further portfolio diversification. (ResearchGate, 2020), (MDPI, 2021).

According to Nocca (2017), the inclusion of multidimensional indicators in the assessment of cultural heritage can make an appropriate contribution to the development of sustainable tourism. This has also been confirmed in a study by Álvarez-García et al. (2019), where the display of cultural values contributes to the development of regional tourism. In Uzbekistan, one of the best examples of using intangible heritage to attract foreign tourists is the Navruz Festival. Recognized as

part of the intangible heritage of humanity by UNESCO (2020), Nowruz has become a large-scale cultural attraction that attracts thousands of tourists every year.

Intangible heritage is one of the important factors that distinguish Uzbekistan from other countries for travel. For example, Navruz, or the vernal equinox festival, and Suzani embroidery are types of crafts that will attract many cultural tourists from all over the world. As explained by Pérez and Alonso (2019), intangible heritage helps tourists become more emotionally attached to specific destinations, increasing visitor satisfaction. This leads to repeat visits, according to Moyle et al. (2013), reinforcing tourism economies even further.

Conclusion

Equally, Uzbekistan's cultural heritage has limitless potential for tourism development, although problems need to be addressed through innovative strategies and sustainable practices. This may include the use of modern technologies, such as virtual tours of heritage sites, to improve access to them and enhance the visitor experience. At the same time, local authorities, policy makers and international organizations must cooperate fully to maximize the benefits of cultural heritage-based tourism, according to Álvarez-García et al. (2019). The long-term socio-economic consequences of cultural tourism in Uzbekistan can be assessed in future studies.

Uzbekistan's tourism sector also intends to use digital technologies such as augmented reality and virtual tours to make cultural heritage sites more accessible and attractive. These investments in education and training for sustainable heritage management, as well as international partnerships, are expected to provide significant assistance to the sector. It is believed that in this way, infrastructure development and international promotion will turn Uzbekistan into a high-class cultural tourism destination.

Immersive experiences in which virtual reality and augmented reality are medicines will mark a revolution in this field of cultural tourism. It is said by Bitušíková (2021) that with the help of such technologies, it would be possible to increase the level of tourist experience and at the same time reduce the impact of a large number of visitors on cultural heritage sites. In addition, tourism development should be based on more active public participation. Csapó (2012) states that local communities should be able to enjoy the benefits of tourism, but at the same time protect their cultural identity.

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