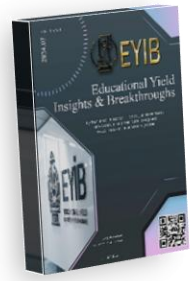
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National Tourism in Uzbekistan: Cultural Heritage, Traditions and the Path to Sustainable Growth

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Annotatsiya

Background: Global Tourism occurs when a nation depends on its monolithic origin, culture, food, arts and landscape to attract leisure tourists from other country's. Uzbekistan is a prime example of this. In the last decade the nation has opened its borders, made visa procedures easier and invested in hotel and transportation amenities which resulted in an explosion in international tourist arrival.

This article considers the basic features of the national tourism of Uzbekistan; examines the problems arising from the dynamic development and considers the advantages brought by the local population.

The process of this qualitative thesis is based on the analysis of secondary information such as government documents, statistical reports and news sources and other academic reports.

Results: Promote jobs and small business, traditional skills and Crafts through tourism on a country level, but also driven by unbalanced distribution of visitors, unbalanced quality of services, pressure on heritage and nature, proliferation and seasonality.

Summary: Better infrastructure, training, coverage of the region and protection of monuments are needed. The article ends with four attached proposals of practice.

Kalit so‘zlar: National tourism, Uzbekistan, History, Culture, Traditional crafts, Ancients hands, Ancient centers, Silk Road.

1. Introduction

Uzbeks are one of the largest Turkic peoples and have lived in Central Asia, in the middle of which is Uzbekistan. The entire region was through the ages on the main passage of the great Silk Road between east and west. Ancient centers of exchange, science and art, were cities such as Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva and Shahrisabz; a legacy that has left its mark in the characteristic blue-domed mosques and madrasahs, including four on the UNESCO World Heritage List. [4]

Tourism is not only made up of national monuments. National food (for example plov), traditional music and dancing, handmade suzani embroidery and ceramics, silk, folk festivals, mountain and desert scenery, – and naturally the legendary Uzbek hospitality. When all these open to view of the tourist, in their natural course, he or she

learns the real culture of the country and the local population gain pride and revenue. Since 2016 the state has been developing tourism as an important strategic sector of the economy. In December 2016 the government adopted Presidential Decree PF-4861 on measures to accelerate tourism development that initiated reforms: visa free or electronic visas for many more countries, new airlines and high-speed trains, new hotels and tourist zones. Official tourism numbers announced in the press increased from around 1.9 million tourists in 2021 to 11.7 million in 2025 [1, 2]. At the same time rapid growth carries risks - visitors are concentrated in several popular cities and regions; the quality of services varies around the country; important sites are under threat of deterioration due to tourist pressure. It is therefore important to determine ways of sustainable development of tourism at national level. Traditional researchers usually define national and cultural tourism as the type of travel motivated by a desire to experience the history, art and way of life of a destination, where sustainable tourism as conceived by UNWTO takes full account of its current and foreseeable economic, social and environmental effects [6]. In the practical sense this translates into three guiding principles – that tourism provides income for the local people; that it respects the traditions of the local community; and that it contributes to the conservation of the environment and heritage sites. Our researches in Silk Road destinations demonstrate that heritage is the main motivation for the high popularity of Uzbekistan, whilst the main factors influencing visitor satisfaction are local service quality, transport and information [10]. International experience, e.g., in Venice and Barcelona, indicates that heritage sites are vulnerable to overtourism unless visitor numbers are managed effectively. Community-based tourism, where local families host visitors and sell souvenirs, is often promoted as a way of distributing the benefits of tourism more evenly. In recent years ideas about cultural tourism have shifted. Richards [7] observes that earlier research was narrowly focused on monuments and museums while more recently the focus has shifted to the communities and daily lives of the local population, their food, creative industries, and the interaction with the visitors. Tourists want to go there, and they want to participate, and that interaction and involvement is central to Uzbekistan, where the country's main assets, living crafts, community hospitality, and local food cuisine, are exactly what the modern tourist is looking for. Meanwhile Cohen [9] notes that the concepts of authenticity are never fixed; traditions may change, and when transmitted to audiences they are often shortened, modified or popularized; management has the difficult task of allowing community-led change without destroying the significance of traditional practices.

Two further ideas are useful in understanding the current situation in Uzbekistan. The first is the idea of the tourist area life cycle as described by Butler [8], which can be seen as a generalised pattern through which a place passes from discovery through development, stagnation and finally to decline unless appropriately managed. Given the pressure since 2016 to develop and 6 years of growth in tourist numbers in Uzbekistan, the major urban centres are in the development stage; with a rapid increase in numbers and investment but decisions made at this point could have long term implications. The second is Pine and Gilmore's [10] experience economy whereby the notion is that the tourism consumer is prepared to pay a premium for a unique and memorable experience as opposed to simply commodity or service. Being able to take part in cooking in a courtyard or a day or more working in a workshop with clay is a

form of value creation that could generate revenue far in excess of a fleeting glance at a monument. Overcrowding is dangerous, as several authors note; Milano, Novelli and Cheer [11] have documented protests by residents of high-growth European cities over congestion and the resultant escalation in urban rents and a consequent curtailing of services, and have argued that destinations need to determine their carrying capacity to avoid social conflict. Community tourism advocates such as Goodwin and Santilli [12] show that local initiatives are only sustainable when appropriately planned and managed, with open access to markets and decision-making power. 'Only in this way will our goodhearted efforts be rewarded' (p140). These three pieces form the basis of the analysis in the next chapter. Research question: What are the most important opportunities, drawbacks and possibilities for the progress of the national tourism in Uzbekistan?

2. Methods

This work takes a qualitative approach based on secondary data. The author has reviewed all the available official documents and decrees concerning tourism promotion, statistics of incoming international tourists from the media, UNESCO's World Heritage and intangible Heritage lists, as well as all the books, reports and articles related to Silk Road tourism, educational and professional research. In this study a field survey will not be employed. An adaptation of a simple framework for four dimensions of a national tourism is chosen to guide the writing as in table 1.

Table 1. Dimensions for National Tourism Evaluation (original synthesis of the author)

Dimension Core Indicators(Brief Explanation)

ORIGINAL There is no point coming all this way just to see a copy. S Y. Heritage sites Handicrafts Cuisine Festivals Things you will find… Getting here Flights, trains, visas, roads, digital services It's got to be straightforward and secure to reach, and to navigate around. Quality of Service Hotels, guides, languages, prices Staff should be professional and prices fair for foreign and local guests. Cultural heritage conservation, trash, water and local people. Don't build at the cost of the monuments, the environment and the local people. As in Table 1, it takes more than just playing the role of developing of the tourist attraction if we want to make the success of national tourism. Access, service and responsible management are the related fields of these. The derived information were compared and grouped into three parts: the situation of the country, the problems and the opportunities. The comparison was carried out in three steps: First, study the reading documents and relating the statistics, trying to get the picture of the present situation; secondly, compare the mentioned information with the four dimensions as given in table 1, so that we are able to realize which is the strength or the weakness of each part of the country; thirdly, relate these with the viewpoints discussed in the literature review and try to suggest some policy. Since those sources which were used are secondary and some statistics were quoted from the news, the figures mentioned can only be viewed as tendency and are just estimates, and there is no exact data of the target area.

3. Results

You cannot reach the tourism magnet of Uzbekistan without entering its past. Between the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya Rivers extended the former Transoxiana, which for over two thousand years was a corridor that connected China, India, Persia

and the Mediterranean. The caravans took silk, paper, spices, metal and ponies, but also religious convictions, scientific concepts and pattern in the arts. Cities under the impact of this flow became prosperous, their producers built markets, caravanserais, observatories and schools. And so, in the end, every single ancient city has a fragment of the story of the Silk Road.

Samarkand with its magnificent madrassahs and Registan Square, the jewel of Islamic architecture; Gur-i-Amir mausoleum, Bibi-Khanym Mosque and the street of mausoleums at Shah-i-Zinda (Timurid period), are significant additions to the world heritage; In the fifteenth century, the scientist and astronomer Ulugh Beg built the first astronomic observatory in Samarkand, so has created the scientific status of the city; Bukhara (more than 140 archaeological sites and 150 monuments) as a living museum, together with its trading domes, pools, minarets, Madrasah (Kalon minaret and the Lyabi-Hauz ensemble), is illustrating the image of a historic market town; Khiva's Itchan Kala is a walled city with the unfinished minaret of Kalta Minor, the carved wooden columns of the Juma Mosque and the Tash Hauli palace, created the ambience of the life of a khanate in Central Asia. Shahrisabz (architectural and aesthetic values of the city) in this historic group have been complemented by the remains of the palace of Ak-Saray. In addition to the more popular cities in the country, there are traces of very ancient civilizations – the fortresses of ancient Khorezm in the deserts of Karakalpakstan, the Buddhist and Bactrian remains near Termez, rock carvings in the Navoi region. The places are less popular but they are necessary in the development of the story that Uzbekistan can tell, from the Antiquity until today, including the Soviet period and the post-independence years. These places have added layers of heritage – natural or artificial. Decorated stations of the Tashkent metro, the old city markets, 20th-century architecture – interest many travelers, who want to find out in what ways our region has evolved. The Western Tien-Shan (shared with other countries), a mountain region, was added to the World Heritage List in 2016 with its natural values, and in 2023 the Zarafshan-Karakum corridor of the Silk Road together with Tajikistan and Turkmenistan [4]. These decisions show that Uzbekistan's heritage is not confined to towns. For domestic tourism, this long history has two consequences: first, it allows associating the country with one of the most well-known global trademark – the Silk Road; second, it restricts it with the fact that a lot of monuments are brittle and were restored several times. An effective tourism policy should connect stories to stones. The basis of tourism in Uzbekistan is highly diverse. Most popular objects are ancient towns of Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva. They are complemented by mountain resorts in Chimgan and Zaamin; the region of the Aral Sea; Nurata mountains; deserts and yurts; and Fergana valley, with its centuries-old craft towns of Margilan (silk) and Rishtan (ceramics). Besides UNESCO has registered several elements of the Uzbek intangible heritage: the Shashmaqom musical tradition, Katta Ashula song, Lazgi dance and the tradition of plov [5].

The number of international visitors has risen by approximately six times for 2021-2025 [2], with inbound flows from neighbouring Central Asian states being the largest and steadily increasing in volume, as well as increasing foreign flow from other countries of Europe, Asia and the Middle East. Domestic tourism is also growing as Uzbek families travel more around the country, creating demand for accommodation, restaurants, guides and other services in many regions. Transport infrastructure has also

taken on major significance: the connection by high-speed trains between Tashkent and Bukhara, Samarkand and other cities now has considerably reduced the length of the journey to Samarkand to approximately two hours, and the number of domestic and international flights has increased. Tashkent itself is the portal for arrivals, but airport facilities of Samarkand, Bukhara, Urgench, Nukus and Termez are also used by tourists. The simplification of air travel, relaxation of visa regimes for a large number of countries have become an additional "driver" for attracting tourists. Accommodation has evolved in new directions: besides new hotels of well-known international chains, boutique hotels are appearing in reconstructed traditional buildings and courtyards, while the guest house on an old courtyard is becoming an extremely popular accommodation option for foreigners. On the streets there is an explosion of food and craft outlets around the main attractions, streets for walking in the historical centres and new territories of tourism are emerging. These steps mark a transition from the immature stage to the more developed stage of the country's tourist industry, but the overall tourist infrastructure is still uneven from place to place. Uzbekistan is not a single tourist product, but consists of a combination of regions with rich historical heritage, which can be viewed independently of each other and fully understood where there is already growth and where there is potential.

Tashkent. The capital is the logical starting or finishing point of any journey. Apart from serving as the welcoming hub for the capital and the enterprise and events tourism capital, the city boasts a wide range of accommodation and conferencing facilities, Chorsu market, museums, theatres, metro and the Khast-Imam complex with its unique ancient texts.

Samarkand and Bukhara Cultural highlights most visited. Highest concentration with the best quality historic settings is the best feature; however, crowded during peak season spring and autumn when weather is temperate; increased demand generated by targeted brochures for these sites has resulted in crowded up-market souvenir shops (Samarkand's Siab bazaar, Bukhara trading domes).Khorezm and Karakalpakstan. To the west Khiva and the Khorezm province (earning its own living museum city and its environment for a string of ancient desert fortresses). To the north Karakalpakstan has the Savitsky Museum in Nukus (the largest collection of avant-garde art in the world), the deserted port of Moynaq, with its ships long to be sunk and all. The Ustyurt plateau and the nightmare of the Aral Sea (a tragedy in the country, but certainly of great interest to tourists and other visitors who are interested in environmental disasters, and sustainable tourism can be an important role).

The Fergana Valley. The main heartland of all things Uzbek craft. Margilan makes silk and beautiful coloured ikat textiles called atlas and adras, Rishtan is noted for its glazed blue-green ceramics and its historic khanate palace, Kokand is renowned for its ceramics. With such a high population and workshop concentration it is ideal for craft routes through from workshop to workshop.

Surkhandarya and Kashkadarya In the south, Termez, with its ancient Buddhist sites and archaeological museum, and the mountain villages of Boysun - whose cultural space is included in the list of UNESCO intangible heritage - a very different Uzbekistan. In Kashkadarya, Shahrisabz with its mountain landscapes and hiking and rural tourism routes are just beginning to emerge. Fewer hotels and weaker tourism infrastructure mean more assistance is needed for the client. The experience of each of

the country's regions shows something different, and the main challenge remains unification of the various routes. Intangible heritage can be an attribute of national tourism the human face of the state. Among the 11 UNESCO intangible cultural heritage elements inscribed to the list were the tradition of performing music (Shashmaqom), the song Katta Ashula, the Lazgi dance of Khorezm, the cultural space of the Boysun district, the Navruz spring festival, the art of Askiya (a kind of friendly verbal duel), and the culture of plov [5]. Tourists coming to attend the classical music concert, to see a dance performance or take part in the Navruz festivities are experiencing something a monument cannot convey. Gastronomy one of the most popular types of tourism is easiest to introduce to visitors, because you don't have to know the languages to see if the food tastes good. Recognizable regional features of plov cooked in a large cast iron pot for celebrations and special occasions such as weddings and normal gatherings, can be distinguished among Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, Fergana; as well as dishes, such as non (bread), lagman, manti, shurpa, fresh hot bread from the tandoor, dried fruits and nuts, and Khorezm and Bukhara melons. Gastronomic tourism will bring direct income to producers, bakers and small cafes, and will help to preserve the recipes of famous dishes. Tourists can learn how dishes are prepared through routes by region, seasonal festivals and master classes so they can see how the dishes are made, not only what they taste like. Crafts are a remarkable highlight. Suzani embroidery of Bukhara, Samarkand and Nurata, fabric of Margilan (such as silk and ikat), copperware, knives of Chust, woodcarving of Khiva, miniatures and handmade paper of Samarkand are only some of the crafts revived with the support of tourists. Craft schools and traditional master and trainee systems transmit skills from generation to generation, and craft centers offer a space where visitors can monitor the entire process from raw material to finished product. Key remains a quality guarantee here. Cheap imported foreign goods, masquerading as local handicrafts, muddies the reputation of master craftsmen. For this reason, certification and marking of handmade products is extremely important as will be outlined below. Festivals are the ubiquitous feature of culture, combining all these items into one celebration. In Samarkand the Festival of Music, the Festival of Silk and Spices in Bukhara, celebrations of Navruz and harvest and craft fairs attract visitors and locals alike and help extend the most popular part of the tourist season. Digital technologies are changing the quality of planning and enjoying the travel. Most tourists look for information in their phone, compare prices on booking portals, make reviews, search for a location on the map and make payments with card or electronic wallet. For a country that has only recently opened to the world, this is both an opportunity and a challenge. The opportunity is that private entrepreneurs will be able to find consumers abroad without substantial advertising budgets, while the challenge is that any negative review, incidental pricing system and incomplete website will instantly spread. Uzbekistan has already introduced electronic visas, online tickets for some attractions, cashless payments within the country, mobile apps for cabs and public transport. The next step will be to make the information complete and consistent. Uzbekistan's official portals about tourism should include exact opening hours, ticket prices, maps and routes in all languages, for instance in English, Russian, Chinese, Korean, German, French, Arabic and others. Audio and augmented reality guides will be able to tell tourists the meaning of historical objects without ads and signs, while QR codes on souvenirs will give

information about the master who created them. All these instruments will help to limit unsubstantiated and overpriced fees.

4. Discussion

Policy lessons to be learned from other destinations, even when conditions are different Venice and Barcelona, among many others mentioned above, already have or are planning measures such as charging day visitors [11], restricting short-term rentals or banning big tour groups in historic areas. As these examples indicate, regulation is less painful and more effective if enacted before local people get fed-up. Uzbekistan, where the principal destinations are still expanding as tourist attractions [8], can learn how to manage its present development at the moment to take measures such as timed-ticketing, monitoring the flows of visitors and defining zones. Thematic routes can also be attractive in a different way. Today there are already some countries with routes linking small towns and villages along a shared theme, such as olive oil, wine or pilgrimage routes in Europe. Similar routes could be developed for Silk Road, craft, mountain and food routes in Uzbekistan and branding, signage and marketing can be coordinated by local agencies. These routes do not need much more than co-ordination, information and standards. Policy lessons distilled into three points. One: a national strategy has to be complemented by regional planning to counter-pollution taking into account the carrying capacity of each destination. Two: co-operation between the public bodies, private business, residents and academics must be continuous, because tourism touches so many sectors. And three: performance indicators can be not only the number of arrivals, but also the rate of staying, local expenditure, customer satisfaction, the percentage of residents working in tourism and the state of monuments. It is better to draw in a few visitors who stay longer and pay more, rather than many visitors for short periods.

- First: develop new routes for the country and make more visited areas with attractive signage, multi-language info and more accessible ways of transport so the visitors are spread all over the country.

- Second, put people on the front line by investing in more tourism awareness, more languages, certification for guides and hoteliers and microfinance for small family-run guesthouses.

- Third, preserve heritage by: management of visitor number at priority sites, operation of electronic ticketing with time slots, management of build-up at monument perimeter and encouraging reduction of waste and saving of water.

- Fourth, supporting authentic and real culture, so-called labels and certificates for handmade products, support for craft schools and craft festivals, etc.

The four proposals are interrelated. Regional and guide routes will only be successful if guides and guesthouse owners are trained; training will only be effective if tourists generate income for local people; and income will only be sustainable if heritage and environment are maintained. Therefore the four proposals should be realised simultaneously as a nationally and regionally co-ordinated programme, with clear indicators and following regular monitoring, and involving communities in all levels of the tourism pyramid. This paper has limitations. It has used secondary sources and those of other researchers; it has not provided evidence and reasoning from tourists, residents and business owners; and, as no survey work has been conducted, it is rather general. The findings could be tested in interviews and questionnaires with tourists,

residents and business owners. Satisfaction with each of the four aspects of tourism can be assessed through questionnaires, and interviews with craft producers, guesthouse owners and guides. The most appropriate models of community tourism can be identified by comparison of different regions. Researchers could also identify the carrying capacities of key monuments, as well as estimate the income generated from tourism to the local community and follow up results.

5. Conclusion

Domestic tourism is one of the most active and promising directions of the economy of Uzbekistan. It provides income, jobs, helps in the maintenance of craftsmen and the promotion of our country. This accelerated pace creates certain difficulties in the development of infrastructure, service standards, protection of historical monuments. If the country is able to protect our precious culture, rationally develop the infrastructure, and ensure quality service, the growth of our national tourism industry will be sustainable, the heritage can be preserved for now and for future generations.

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