

# THE CONCEPT AND ESSENCE OF HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

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## Abstract

This article examines theoretical approaches to defining historical and cultural heritage, analyzes its structure and social value, and identifies its place within the system of tourism resources. Particular attention is paid to the relationship between tangible and intangible heritage, the legal interpretation of the category of a «cultural heritage object», and the role of heritage as a mechanism for preserving historical memory, cultural identity, and sustainable territorial development. Using the example of Uzbekistan, the study demonstrates that historical and cultural heritage is not only an object of protection, but also a significant intellectual, educational, and economic resource shaping the prospects for the development of cultural tourism.

**Keywords:** Historical and cultural heritage, cultural values, tangible heritage, intangible heritage, cultural memory, cultural tourism, tourism resources, Uzbekistan.

## Introduction

In scholarly literature, the concept of historical and cultural heritage is regarded as one of the fundamental yet simultaneously one of the most multilayered categories. This is because heritage incorporates history, culture, law, sociology, museology, architecture, archaeology, and tourism. Unlike ordinary material objects, heritage is valued not only for its physical preservation, but also for the symbolic meaning embedded in it. It links the generation of creators, the generation of custodians, and the generation of interpreters; therefore, it exists not only as an object, but also as a social attitude toward that object. This dual nature makes the topic especially important for the training of specialists in tourism.

The modern understanding of heritage is considerably broader than the traditional notion of «monuments of antiquity». Today, it includes not only architectural ensembles, fortresses, mausoleums, archaeological complexes, old quarters, and museum collections, but also languages, rituals, crafts, forms of oral creativity, local knowledge, gastronomic practices, and cultural landscapes. This approach is reflected in UNESCO documents and in the national



legislation of Uzbekistan, where cultural heritage is regarded as a national treasure and an object of special state protection.

For Uzbekistan, this topic is particularly relevant. The historic cities of Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, and Shakhrisabz, the monuments of the Great Silk Road, centers of Islamic culture, schools of craftsmanship, traditions of hospitality, and the urban environment of old mahallas form a powerful cultural framework for the country. Consequently, clarifying the concept and essence of historical and cultural heritage is important not only for theory, but also for the practice of sustainable tourism development.

### **Theoretical Approaches to Defining Historical and Cultural Heritage**

In a broad sense, historical and cultural heritage may be understood as the totality of tangible and intangible values created by society in the past and recognized as significant for the present and the future. The key criterion here is not antiquity in itself, but social recognition of value. Not every old object automatically becomes heritage; it acquires this status only when society, the state, or the scholarly community acknowledges its historical, artistic, scientific, spiritual, or memorial significance.

In the works of foreign scholars, heritage is interpreted both as a form of cultural memory and as a resource for interpreting the past. G. Ashworth and J. Tunbridge emphasized that heritage is not identical to history: history seeks to explain the past, whereas heritage selects from the past those elements that society considers valuable and worthy of preservation. In this sense, heritage is always connected with choice, cultural policy, and systems of public priorities. M. Smith, B. McKercher, and H. du Cros likewise demonstrate that heritage forms the basis of cultural tourism precisely because it creates for visitors a meaningful encounter with the past rather than merely presenting a set of visually attractive objects.

In domestic and regional scholarship, heritage is regarded both as an element of a territory's tourism potential and as part of the cultural infrastructure of society. Educational and scholarly works produced by researchers at the Samarkand Institute of Economics and Service pay special attention to the fact that the tourism value of an object emerges at the intersection of its cultural significance, accessibility, preservation, interpretation, and integration into route networks. This approach is especially important for countries with a rich historical environment, where an object must be simultaneously preserved, scientifically interpreted, and competently presented to visitors.

Accordingly, the concept of historical and cultural heritage encompasses at least four dimensions: axiological, which determines the significance of an object; temporal, which relates the object to the past; legal, which establishes the regime of its protection and use; and communicative, through which heritage becomes a means of transmitting memory, knowledge, and cultural codes. It is the combination of these dimensions that reveals the essence of the category under consideration.

### **Structure and Main Features of Historical and Cultural Heritage**

Structurally, historical and cultural heritage is usually divided into tangible and intangible components. Tangible heritage includes architectural monuments, archaeological sites,



ensembles, historic city centers, individual buildings, engineering structures, memorial sites, works of art, manuscripts, and museum objects. These forms of heritage are the easiest to visualize and most often become the core of excursion and sightseeing activities. For example, UNESCO regards the Historic Centre of Bukhara as one of the most complete examples of a medieval city in Central Asia that has preserved its coherent urban fabric. Samarkand, in turn, is characterized as a crossroads and melting pot of world cultures, where outstanding monuments reflect the multilayered character of civilizational exchange.

Intangible heritage encompasses oral traditions, performing arts, festive practices, knowledge and skills related to nature and crafts, norms of social life, and local forms of cultural behavior. Its specificity lies in the fact that it does not exist outside its bearers and everyday practices. Whereas an architectural object may be conserved, intangible heritage can be preserved only through transmission, reproduction, and incorporation into contemporary cultural life. Therefore, in both research and tourism, an important role is played not only by documenting tradition, but also by sustaining the environment in which it remains alive.

The principal features of historical and cultural heritage include authenticity, historical representativeness, cultural significance, public recognition, and the necessity of transmission to future generations. Authenticity implies the connection of an object with a real historical process and the preservation of its essential characteristics. Representativeness shows how fully an object reflects a particular epoch, artistic school, social practice, or system of values. Significance is manifested in the object's ability to generate sustained scholarly, educational, aesthetic, or tourism-related interest.

Another essential feature is the vulnerability of heritage. Unlike many other resources, it cannot be quickly restored to its original form after loss. The destruction of a monument, the disappearance of a traditional craft school, or the displacement of a historic environment by modern development leads to irreparable cultural losses. For this reason, heritage is regarded in professional discourse as a special type of resource: it can produce economic and social benefits only under conditions of careful and responsible use.

### **The Social and Tourism-Related Essence of Historical and Cultural Heritage**

The essence of historical and cultural heritage is most fully revealed through its functions. First, it performs a memorial function by preserving collective memory and ensuring continuity between generations. Second, heritage has an identificational function: through it, society forms an understanding of its own cultural identity. Third, it fulfills an educational function, since monuments, museums, archaeological sites, and traditions serve as vivid sources of historical knowledge. Fourth, heritage has a communicative function, creating a space for cultural dialogue between local communities and visitors.

In tourism, historical and cultural heritage acts not as a passive background, but as the central content of the tourist experience. A tourist comes not only to see an object, but also to receive its interpretation: to hear its history, understand its context, and relate what is seen to the image of the country and to one's own cultural experience. Therefore, heritage becomes a tourism resource only when it is supplemented by access infrastructure, guided interpretation, informational materials, museum and digital mediation, safety measures, and an appropriate



visitation regime. Otherwise, even an outstanding object may remain only weakly integrated into tourism practice.

However, the essence of heritage is not limited to its commercial applicability. A resource-based approach is acceptable only if it does not destroy the object itself or displace its cultural meaning. Excessive tourism pressure, stylization into a «convenient past», aggressive trade within historic environments, and oversimplified presentation all diminish the value of heritage. Consequently, scholarly literature increasingly emphasizes the need to balance preservation, popularization, and the economic use of cultural values. From this perspective, historical and cultural heritage should be understood as a limited and irreplaceable resource requiring responsible management.

### **Historical and Cultural Heritage in the System of Legal and Cultural Regulation of Uzbekistan**

In the Republic of Uzbekistan, the legal understanding of heritage is enshrined in the Law «On the Protection and Use of Cultural Heritage Objects». This law states that relations in this sphere are regulated both by the special law itself and by other legislative acts, while cultural heritage objects are regarded as the national treasure of the people of Uzbekistan. The law defines the system of public administration, the range of authorized bodies, and the foundations for the registration, protection, use, restoration, and popularization of heritage objects. A separate law is devoted to the protection and use of archaeological heritage objects, which is especially important for a country with a rich archaeological legacy.

The international regulatory framework is established by the UNESCO conventions of 1972 and 2003, which significantly expanded the very understanding of heritage. Whereas the 1972 Convention focuses primarily on the outstanding universal value of cultural and natural sites, the 2003 Convention emphasizes living traditions, knowledge, and practices transmitted from generation to generation. This is especially relevant for Uzbekistan, since many elements of national culture exist precisely in the form of living cultural experience closely connected with crafts, music, and family and community practices.

The practice of heritage protection in Uzbekistan shows that the most productive approach is a comprehensive one. It implies not only the restoration of individual monuments, but also the preservation of the historical environment, traditional craft quarters, the social function of old urban spaces, and the development of scholarly and educational interpretation of heritage objects. It is precisely this approach that makes it possible to regard heritage as the foundation of sustainable historical and cultural tourism rather than as a temporary source of income. For the country's tourism centers, this means combining visitation regimes with preservation regimes, digital popularization with scholarly reliability, and service development with respect for the cultural code of place.

### **Conclusion**

Thus, historical and cultural heritage should be understood as a socially recognized body of tangible and intangible values of the past that possess historical, artistic, spiritual, scholarly, and public significance and are subject to preservation for future generations. Its essence is



manifested in the unity of memory, value, legal protection, and public use. Heritage is not merely a remnant of the past; it acts as an active mechanism of cultural self-identification, education, intercultural dialogue, and territorial development.

For Uzbekistan, historical and cultural heritage represents a strategic resource of national importance. However, the effective use of this resource is possible only if priority is given to preservation over short-term commercialization. For this reason, in the training of future tourism specialists it is especially important to cultivate an understanding that heritage is not only an object of display, but also a specific form of cultural responsibility. The more deeply its essence is understood, the more meaningful, sustainable, and competitive historical and cultural tourism becomes.

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