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THE IMPACT OF CULTURAL TOURISM ON LOCAL IDENTITY AND REGIONAL DESTINATION COMPETITIVENESS

Aslamova Anisa Rustamovna
Student, "Silk Road" International University of Tourism and Cultural Heritage
E-mail: aslamovaanisa18@gmail.com

Abstract. Culture is one of the main reasons people travel. For regions, it is also something that other places cannot copy. This paper looks at two sides of cultural tourism. The first is its effect on local identity: it can help people keep their traditions, but it can also turn them into a show for visitors. The second is its effect on the competitiveness of regional destinations. The paper is based on a literature review and on data of the Statistics Agency of Uzbekistan. It shows that cultural tourism strengthens both identity and competitiveness when local people take part in presenting their own culture and when cultural resources are supported by good management and services. In Uzbekistan cultural resources are rich, but leisure tourists made up only 12% of foreign visitors in 2023, which shows a large unused potential.

Keywords: cultural tourism, local identity, authenticity, commodification, destination competitiveness, regional tourism, Uzbekistan.

Introduction

The United Nations Tourism Organization (UN Tourism) estimates that 40% of all international tourists are cultural tourists [1]. Cultural tourism refers to tourism for the purposes of learning about and experiencing the culture of a place – the monuments and museums, but also the food, crafts, festivals and daily life [2]. The interest in such travel increased as education and income went up [3].

Culture is particularly significant for a region. There's a beach or hotel nearly everywhere, but a historic city, a local craft or a family recipe is unique. Simultaneously, tourism also alters the culture that it utilizes. This is the reason why it is significant that study and research both the impact of cultural tourism on the identity of the local community and the role of cultural tourism in the regions' competition with the other destinations are important.

This paper aims to discuss the impact of cultural tourism on both regional tourism competitiveness and the local identity. The goals are: to describe positive and negative impacts on identity; to analyse the process of the culture's being a competitive tool; to examine the case of Uzbekistan; to offer recommendations. Methods: literature review, analysis of statistical data and generalization.

Cultural tourism and local identity.

1. Positive effects. As tourists express an interest in local traditions, the residents get more involved in them. Old crafts attract new customers and young people a motivation to learn them [4]. At the national identity level, tourism can reinforce national identity through signs and symbols that are presented to tourists (monuments, costumes, food, etc.), which are used by people to represent themselves [5].

2. Risks. The primary risk is that of commodification, that is, the process of making culture into a commodity. Describes a public ceremony in a Spanish town that the authorities decided to have twice a day for tourists. From then on onwards, residents were no longer interested in it as it was no longer their property [6]. MacCannell demonstrated that the hosts typically offer visitors a "front" version of their life which he termed staged authenticity [7].

But not all change is a loss. Cohen believes that, over time, the tradition can be embraced by local people as their own, if it has been adapted to become a tourist tradition [8]. What, then, matters is not that culture is changing, but who is doing the changing. Tourism can enhance rather than undermine identity if it is presented in ways agreed upon by the local population. If presented in ways agreed upon by the local population, tourism can help identity rather than harm it [4],[8].

Cultural tourism and destination competitiveness.

Ritchie and Crouch's model categorizes culture and history as one of the core resources and attractors, major motivations for tourists to visit a destination [9]. Dwyer and Kim classify resources as either inherited resources (e.g., nature and heritage) or created resources (e.g., events and entertainment). They also emphasize that resources are not sufficient, a destination requires transport, services and good management [10].

In the region, this means two things. First, a famous monument doesn't necessarily attract tourists. Access, good guides, information in their preferred language and where to stay and eat are also critical [4], [10]. Secondly, small areas

do not require large cultural centres to be replicated. More people are interested in experiences that are local or everyday as opposed to monuments or must-sees such as cooking classes, workshops and visits to local families [2]. This provides an opportunity for areas with certain crafts, food or festivals to come into their own.

The case of Uzbekistan.

Cultural resources are very well developed in Uzbekistan. The historic centres of Khiva, Bukhara, Shakhrisabz and Samarkand are included in the list of UNESCO World Heritage sites [11]. It's also the land of living crafts like ceramics in Rishtan, silk weaving in Margilan, as well as cuisine and music. The reasons for foreign citizens to come to Uzbekistan in 2023 are presented in Figure 1.

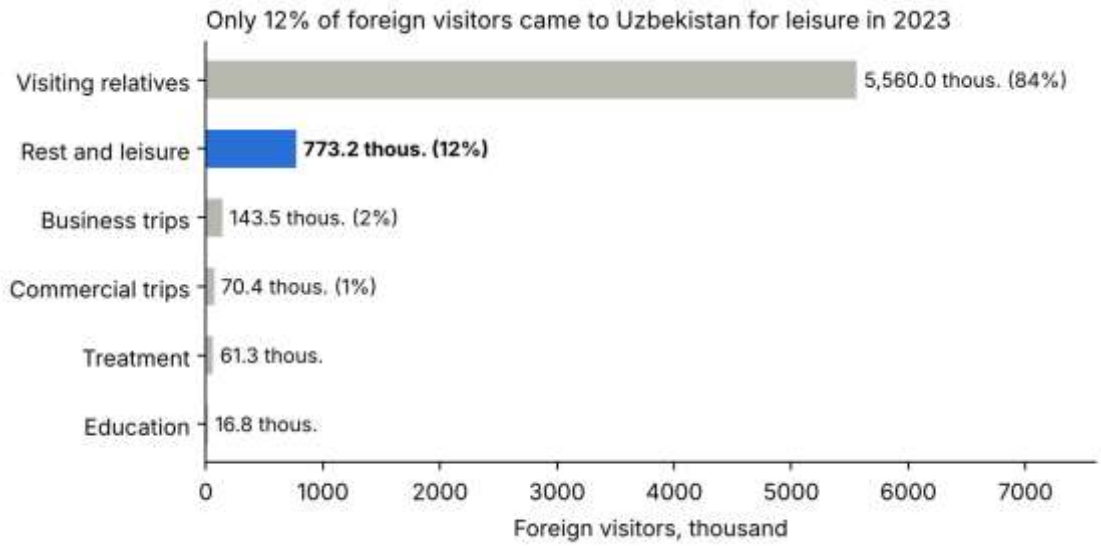

Figure 1. Foreign visitors to Uzbekistan by purpose of visit, 2023, thousand people.

Source: Statistics Agency of the Republic of Uzbekistan [12].

From the 6.63 million foreign visitors, about 5.56 million (84%) visited relatives and only about 773 thousand (12%) for rest and leisure [12]. This indicates, therefore, that cultural tourism is still a relatively minor component of the overall flow. Besides, the majority of cultural tourists take the same route, from Tashkent to Samarkand, to Bukhara and Khiva. Other parts of the country, with their own culture, like the towns of the Fergana Valley, the Savitsky Museum in Nukus in Karakalpakstan and the ancient towns around Termez in Surkhandarya get far less visitors.

Recommendations:

1. Invite local communities and local craftsmen to participate in the decision-making process of the presentation of their culture, including through workshops, home visits and festivals, but not just for them [4], [8].

2. Keep living life in historic centres, so that they do not turn into areas with only souvenir shops and hotels [6].

3. Develop local brands based on craft, food and traditions with a clear purpose to visit the region [10] [9].

4. Use interpretation (use trained guides, modern museum, information in multiple languages [4]).

6. Promote local festivals and events throughout the calendar year, connecting to the local calendar, to draw visitors to parts of the region.

Conclusion

There are two impacts of cultural tourism to local identity. It can lead to the pride of tradition, reviving crafts and also remove culture from actual people and return it to its owners [5, 6]. The outcome really hinges on the control of the representation of culture [8]. Culture is a resource for regional destinations that can't be replicated, but only if coupled with access, services and good management [9] [10]. Uzbekistan's cultural heritage is very good, but in 2023, only 12% of foreign visitors came to Uzbekistan for tourism [12]. If the country can mobilize the participation of the local community, it is possible to develop cultural tourism in the region and at the same time preserve the country's identity.

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