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Railway Transport, Cultural Heritage and Tourism Development in the Lower Amu Darya Region of Uzbekistan: An Anthropological Perspective

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Abstract

The Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. 546 dated September 28, 2022 "On additional measures for the comprehensive development of the tourism potential of the Khorezm region in 2022-2026" stipulated that the railway system should also be brought to the required level in the development of tourism in the Khorezm region. This resolution also developed the "CASTLE TOUR" project, which is aimed at creating new tourist routes along ancient castles in the Khorezm region and the Republic of Karakalpakstan in order to promote the rich history and culture of Khorezm. In this regard, one of the most relevant and promising projects is the expansion of the railway transport system along the territories of the ancient Khorezm oasis, which has preserved many monuments of ancient civilizations on its territory and is a unique historical reserve and archaeological site that attracts the attention of tourists and scientists from all over the world.

Keywords: Cultural anthropology, Khorezm region, railways, presidential decrees, resolutions, Urgench, Khiva, Arda-Khiva, high-speed train, "Afrosiyob", "Jaloliddin Manguberdi", station, railway station

Introduction

The Khorezm oasis has a rich history and very broad opportunities for tourism development. In Appendix No. 2 to Resolution No. 546 of the Cabinet of Ministers dated September 28, 2022, "On Additional Measures for the Comprehensive Development of the Tourism Potential of the Khorezm Region in 2022–2026", the development of the "CASTLE TOUR" project, envisaging the organization of new tourist routes to ancient fortresses located in the territory of

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the Khorezm Region and the Republic of Karakalpakstan, and ensuring its implementation were identified as priority tasks [11]. The task of improving transport infrastructure and organizing new stopping points in the territories included in the "CASTLE TOUR" project routes was established. At the same time, the need to develop railway transport was particularly emphasized. The first steps toward expanding the railway network for the development of historical tourism in the republic were taken long before the adoption of the aforementioned resolution. In particular, construction of the new Urgench–Khiva railway line was completed in September 2018. The first train arrived on November 30, 2018, and the railway station began serving passengers on December 4 (Ro'zmetov, 2023). However, it is still premature to claim that this immediately led to the intensive development of historical tourism. It should also be acknowledged that, in terms of the development of historical tourism, the Khorezm oasis still lags significantly behind other tourist centers — Bukhara and Samarkand.

Review of the Literature

In the economic literature, tourism issues have been studied by a number of scholars who have proposed various definitions of this concept. The scientific works of domestic scholars and researchers cover many theoretical and practical aspects of the development of the tourism industry. These studies also address the railway system, which plays an important role in tourism development (O'zbekiston Respublikasi Prezidenti, 2020, 2022). Researchers B.Kh. Azizkulov and A.A. Siddikov revealed the specific features of the development of the country's tourism industry, demonstrated the role of the railway network in this process, and developed recommendations for the prospective development of the railway system (O'zbekiston Respublikasi Prezidenti, 2020, 2022).

Methodology

The article employs such scientific research methods as systematization, historical-comparative analysis, generalization of historical information, as well as the principle of objectivity.

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Analysis and Results

Ancient Khorezm represents a unique historical reserve and archaeological region, within whose territory numerous monuments of ancient civilizations have been preserved, attracting the attention of tourists and scholars from all over the world. Khorezm is called the "Land of a Thousand Fortresses" due to the countless ancient monuments located within its territory. In this regard, the development of tourism in the Khorezm region is one of the important areas of the economy. However, without a sufficiently developed transport system, the growth of the tourism industry practically comes to a halt; these two sectors cannot be considered separately from each other. Significant measures to develop the railway system alongside the region's tourism industry, undertaken from the time of independence to the present, have already been discussed above. In particular, considering the historical monuments of Khiva and the large number of tourists arriving to visit them, during his visit to the Khorezm region on January 27–28, 2017, President Sh.M. Mirziyoyev spoke about the need to construct a railway and a modern railway station in the city of Khiva, organize the operation of electric trains, and subsequently introduce the high-speed "Afrosiyob" train (Investloyiha, n.d.; O'zbekiston Respublikasi Prezidenti, 2017). In accordance with this, specialists and builders of the joint-stock company "Uzbekistan Railways" began construction of a new railway line between Urgench and Khiva. As a result, construction of the railway designed for the operation of "Afrosiyob" trains and the new Urgench–Khiva line was completed in September 2018. The first train arrived on November 30, 2018, and the station began serving passengers on December 4 (O'zbekiston Respublikasi Prezidenti, 2021). Within the framework of this project, a station and a carriage maintenance depot were built in Khiva, as well as a modern railway station with a capacity of 200 passengers, the architectural design of which combines national traditions (O'zbekiston Respublikasi Prezidenti, 2018).

In addition, on the basis of Resolution No. PQ-4937 of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated December 28, 2020, "On Measures for the Implementation of the Investment Program of the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2021–2023", and Resolution No. PQ-3857 dated July 16, 2018, "On Measures to Increase the Efficiency of Preparation and Implementation of Projects with the Participation of International Financial Institutions and Foreign Government Financial Organizations", the Capital Construction Directorate of JSC "Uzbekistan Railways", jointly with the general designer — JSC "Boshtransloyiha" — developed a feasibility

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study for the project “Electrification of the Bukhara–Urgench–Khiva Railway” (Sputnik Узбекистан, 2026).

Loans for the electrification of the Bukhara–Urgench–Khiva railway line were provided by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) (O‘zbekiston Respublikasi Prezidenti, 2018).

The implementation of this project, which contributes to increasing tourism potential and is one of the factors accelerating the country's economic growth, is of particular importance. In addition, the project is part of the “Corridor 2” program of the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation. The implementation of this program will make it possible to create a transport corridor connecting China with Europe through Central Asia. Increasing the speed and quality of railway communication will contribute not only to improving relations and trade with neighboring countries but also to the development of the tourism industry (O‘zbekiston Respublikasi, 2019; O‘zbekiston Respublikasi Prezidenti, 2017).

As is known, the total length of the electrified section connecting the cities of Bukhara, Miskin, Urgench, and Khiva amounted to 465,5 kilometers. Electrification work on this section was carried out simultaneously from both directions, from the Bukhara and Khorezm regions. More than 12 thousand reinforced concrete supports were installed for the construction of the contact network; in addition, special equipment and personal protective equipment were purchased for servicing the electrified section (O‘zbekiston Respublikasi Prezidenti, n.d.; O‘zbekiston Respublikasi Vazirlar Mahkamasi, 2022).

The electrification of this route was of great importance for organizing the operation of high-speed and high-speed environmentally friendly electric trains along the Tashkent–Samarkand–Navoi–Bukhara–Urgench–Khiva route. This naturally created conditions for reducing travel time, saving fuel, and reducing other expenses. In addition, it became possible to significantly reduce the negative impact on the environment. As a result, by 2022, the Bukhara–Urgench–Khiva railway had been fully electrified (O‘zbekiston Respublikasi Prezidenti, 2017).

Resolution No. 546 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated September 28, 2022, “On Additional Measures for the Comprehensive Development of the Tourism Potential of the Khorezm Region in 2022–2026”, provided for the

need to bring the railway system to the required level for the development of tourism in the Khorezm region (O‘zbekiston Respublikasi Prezidenti, 2017).

In recent years, new directions, goals and activities have been implemented in the development of the tourism industry of Khorezm Region. In particular, tourism in Khorezm and Karakalpakstan is developing on the basis of a unified concept, and a project for the tourist ring “Khorezm – Karakalpakstan” is being developed. Most of the archaeological monuments of the historical Khorezm oasis are currently located on the territory of the Republic of Karakalpakstan. Therefore, the development of historical tourism in Khorezm Region and the Republic of Karakalpakstan cannot be considered separately. Taking this into account, the implementation of a program to develop the road connecting the above-mentioned territories has begun; in the future, a complete renovation of the Urgench – Gurlen – Mangit road is planned. At the opening of the “Arda Khiva” tourist center in Khiva, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev particularly noted: “The peoples of Khorezm and Karakalpakstan, living on the two banks of the Amu Darya, have themselves been united by the Almighty through a common destiny. The history, culture and customs of these two neighboring regions cannot be imagined separately from one another” (O‘zbekiston Respublikasi Prezidenti, 2017a).

In particular, in the future, it is planned to extend the route of the above-mentioned high-speed trains to Nukus; measures are being taken to complete construction and put this project into operation by the end of 2026 (O‘zbekiston Respublikasi Vazirlar Mahkamasi, 2022).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Transport serves as the primary means of bringing consumers to the tourism market. To more fully harness the tourism potential of the Khorezm region, it is necessary to further expand and develop transport services tailored to tourists, including the railway network. Above all, the railway stations in Urgench and Khiva must be developed to a level where they are recognized for providing high-quality, international-standard services. It should be noted, however, that due to the relatively limited development of the regional railway network, tourists arriving in Uzbekistan currently rely more heavily on air travel. Increasing the number of high-speed interregional trains would help boost the flow of tourists to the region. In general, developing the railway system that connects the Khorezm region to other

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parts of Uzbekistan—by increasing the frequency of trains to Bukhara, Samarkand, Kashkadarya, and Tashkent, and ensuring regular, daily service—would contribute to the further development of tourism in the region.

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