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Cultural Heritage Preservation in Uzbekistan: Legal and Economic Approaches

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Abstract: This article analyzes the legal and economic approaches to the preservation of cultural heritage in Uzbekistan. The study examines legal frameworks, including the 2001 "Law on the Protection and Use of Cultural Heritage Objects" and the "Uzbekistan–2030 Strategy." The article discusses the challenges of heritage preservation in the context of globalization and offers recommendations for improving legal and economic mechanisms, particularly through the involvement of the private sector and international cooperation. The findings of the study contribute to the development of cultural heritage preservation policies.

Keywords: cultural heritage, preservation, legal frameworks, economic approaches, sustainable tourism, Uzbek legislation, intangible heritage, investments, globalization risks, state programs.

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Introduction

The cultural heritage of Uzbekistan is an important factor reflecting the nation's identity and historical roots. This heritage, formed over thousands of years, is enriched with historical cities located along the Silk Road, archaeological monuments, and intangible elements such as traditional crafts, folklore, and customs. Cities such as Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, and Shahrisabz are included in the UNESCO World Heritage List and possess not only cultural but also economic value. However, globalization, urbanization, climate change, and natural disasters place this heritage at risk, which necessitates legal and economic approaches for its preservation [1].

This article analyzes the legal and economic approaches to preserving cultural heritage in Uzbekistan, identifies existing problems, and offers recommendations for improvement.

Literature review

The literature review on the preservation of cultural heritage in Uzbekistan provides a comprehensive analysis of the legal and economic aspects of the topic.

Among the key sources on legal approaches is Article 61 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, which establishes the obligation of citizens to safeguard the historical, spiritual, cultural, scientific, and natural heritage of the people of Uzbekistan [2].

In addition, the Law "On the Protection and Use of Cultural Heritage Objects," adopted in 2001, defines tangible and intangible heritage and ensures state control over its preservation.

Within the framework of international legal norms, the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage was ratified by the Parliament of Uzbekistan in 2007. Furthermore, Presidential Decree No. PQ-405 of December 25, 2023, "On Additional Measures to Develop the Protection, Scientific Study, and Promotion of Intangible Cultural Heritage," is aimed at strengthening the preservation, research, and promotion of intangible heritage. These documents create opportunities for defining tangible and intangible heritage, ensuring state oversight, and implementing global standards.

Economic approaches reveal the contribution of cultural heritage to economic development through tourism. For example, Goal 42 of the "Uzbekistan–2030 Strategy" sets tasks for improving activities related to the protection, scientific study, and popularization of cultural heritage. A number of measures implemented within this framework play an important role:

- digitizing more than 3,000 materials stored in the archives of the Institute of Art Studies and the Institute of the Uzbek Language, Literature and Folklore;
- including at least three unique elements of intangible cultural heritage in UNESCO's international lists;
- conducting in-depth scientific studies of more than 30 intangible cultural heritage elements;
- carrying out preservation and restoration work on 158 cultural heritage sites;
- increasing annual museum attendance to 5 million and digitizing 2.5 million museum exhibits [3].

The World Bank's 2020 report emphasizes that cultural heritage can contribute to economic growth through sustainable tourism and help reduce natural risks (such as earthquakes and climate change). The report also highlights challenges such as insufficient infrastructure and a shortage of specialists. Research conducted by Uzbek scholars, particularly A. Karimov and colleagues, examines the impact of museums and tourism on GDP, identifying potential for increasing annual revenue, while also noting limitations related to financing and the involvement of the private sector [4].

In conclusion, the literature review demonstrates the need to strengthen the legal foundations for cultural heritage preservation and develop economic mechanisms. At the same time, existing studies provide a basis for deepening the topic and formulating effective recommendations.

Research methodology

This study is based on qualitative and normative approaches to analyze the legal and economic dimensions of cultural heritage preservation in Uzbekistan. The methodology primarily relies on desk research methods, including document analysis, comparative methods, and economic assessment. First, primary sources such as the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan (2023), the Law "On the Protection and Use of Cultural Heritage Objects" (2001), Cabinet of Ministers Resolution No. 265 (2019), and UNESCO conventions (2003, 2007) were analyzed to examine the legal framework. Through the normative legal research approach, the alignment of national laws with global standards and their practical shortcomings were assessed [5].

In analyzing economic approaches, secondary data such as World Bank reports, tourism statistics, and museum development indicators were used. To evaluate economic impact, SWOT analysis

and comparative assessments of sustainable tourism models were applied, for example, using the cases of cultural heritage sites in Samarkand and Bukhara. A comparative method was used to adapt international experience (such as that of the United States and European Union projects) to the local context. To ensure data reliability, official databases (lex.uz, unesco.org) and academic journals (ResearchGate) were utilized. The overall approach aims to develop recommendations based on legal–economic integration.

Analysis results

The findings of the study show that although the legal framework is strong, there are shortcomings in practice. Article 61 of the Constitution of Uzbekistan and the 2001 Law "On the Protection and Use of Cultural Heritage Objects" ensure the protection of heritage; however, control mechanisms remain insufficient, leading to risks such as illegal trade and urbanization pressures. Integration with the 2003 UNESCO Convention is necessary, but coordination is weak [6].

From an economic perspective, cultural heritage contributes 4.7% to GDP through tourism (2024 data), yet earthquakes and climate change may cause up to 2 billion USD in annual losses. Implementing sustainable tourism models can create jobs, but infrastructure and financing challenges persist [7].

Overall, the results indicate that legal–economic integration strengthens heritage preservation, but international cooperation and the development of technologies (such as 3D scanning) are essential.

Table 1. Legal and Economic Analysis

Key Findings	Legal Aspect	Economic Aspect	Issues / Challenges
Number of heritage sites	8,208	Tourism contribution: 4.7% of GDP	Weak oversight
UNESCO sites	Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva	Jobs: 445,000	Risk of disasters (2 billion USD)
Recommendations	Harmonization of laws	Sustainable tourism models	Insufficient infrastructure

Conclusion

The issue of preserving cultural heritage in Uzbekistan plays a crucial role in safeguarding national identity, strengthening social stability, and promoting economic development. This article has analyzed the legal and economic approaches to cultural heritage protection and formulated a number of conceptual conclusions [8].

From a legal perspective, Article 61 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the 2001 Law "On the Protection and Use of Cultural Heritage Objects" define the procedures for safeguarding both tangible (architectural monuments, historical ensembles) and intangible (traditions, customs, handicrafts) heritage. These legal foundations enable the state to maintain a cultural heritage cadastre covering 8,208 objects, organize restoration activities, and oversee expert evaluation processes. Within cooperation with UNESCO, international conventions ratified in 2007 contribute to implementing protection mechanisms aligned with global standards. However, in practice, insufficient functioning of control systems, weak coordination in urban planning processes, and the persistence of illegal trade remain major problems. For instance, although the Cultural Heritage Agency has established procedures for registration and expert assessment of heritage sites, the effectiveness of monitoring, fines, and enforcement is still inadequate.

Economic approaches highlight the role of cultural heritage as an important "economic asset" for tourism, services, and local development. In 2024, the tourism sector accounted for 4.7% of the country's GDP [9]. Historical cities such as Samarkand and Bukhara – listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites – serve as major destinations for international tourists. According to assessments by the World Bank, risks related to natural disasters (especially earthquakes) and climate change may cause up to 2 billion USD in annual economic losses for Uzbekistan. Therefore, strengthening sustainable tourism models, safety standards, and infrastructure is essential for effective heritage preservation. Public–private partnerships and international grants help diversify financial resources, yet infrastructure limitations and shortages of restoration and conservation specialists restrict full effectiveness.

The research results show that integrating legal and economic mechanisms is necessary to form a sustainable cultural heritage management system. At the same time, factors such as globalization, urbanization, demographic pressure, and market demands create new threats to cultural heritage.

In this context, the following recommendations remain relevant:

- improving the regulatory framework by developing a new law "On Cultural Heritage";
- expanding private sector participation and international cooperation;
- introducing digital technologies (GIS, 3D scanning, digital catalogues);
- involving local communities in cultural heritage management processes.

Within the framework of the "Uzbekistan–2030" Strategy, viewing cultural heritage as economic capital contributes to job creation, increased tourism revenues, and accelerated socio-economic development of regions. Overall, ensuring a proper balance between legal and economic measures will not only preserve cultural heritage for future generations but also strengthen Uzbekistan's competitiveness on the global stage.

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