THE CONCEPT OF PILGRIMAGE TOURISM AND ITS THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF STUDY

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Abstract. This thesis examines the concept of pilgrimage tourism and the theoretical and methodological approaches used to study its development in Uzbekistan. Pilgrimage tourism is considered not only as a form of religious travel but also as a complex socio-cultural and economic phenomenon associated with spiritual values, historical heritage, cultural identity, and regional development. Particular attention is paid to the scientific views of Uzbek researchers, the characteristics of sacred places, the motivations of pilgrims, and the methodological principles of studying pilgrimage destinations. The study argues that an integrated approach combining historical, geographical, sociological, cultural, and economic analysis is essential for understanding the nature and development prospects of pilgrimage tourism.

Keywords: pilgrimage tourism, religious heritage, sacred sites, spiritual values, cultural identity, tourism development, methodological approach, Uzbekistan.

Introduction

Tourism has become an important factor in the development of national economies, international cooperation, and cultural exchange. Among its various forms, pilgrimage tourism occupies a distinctive position because it combines religious motivation, spiritual experience, historical memory, and cultural traditions. Unlike conventional recreational tourism, pilgrimage tourism is primarily associated with visiting sacred places, religious monuments, memorial complexes, and sites connected with prominent religious scholars and historical personalities.

Uzbekistan possesses considerable potential for developing this form of tourism. The country is home to numerous historical and religious monuments associated with Islamic civilisation, including the architectural and spiritual heritage of Bukhara, Samarkand, Tashkent, and other regions. These destinations have significance not only for domestic visitors but also for international pilgrims interested in the religious and

cultural history of Central Asia. In this context, studying the theoretical and methodological foundations of pilgrimage tourism is important for identifying its essential characteristics, understanding the motivations of visitors, and developing scientifically grounded approaches to its sustainable organisation.

The Conceptual Essence of Pilgrimage Tourism

Pilgrimage tourism can be defined as a purposeful journey undertaken by individuals or groups to visit sacred places, religious centres, memorial sites, and locations associated with spiritual traditions and religious personalities. Its distinguishing feature is the importance of spiritual motivation, although cultural, educational, historical, and social interests may also influence travel decisions. The concept of pilgrimage tourism should be distinguished from the broader concept of religious tourism. Religious tourism may include participation in religious events, educational programmes, religious conferences, and visits to places of worship. Pilgrimage tourism, however, places particular emphasis on visiting sacred destinations for spiritual reflection, religious devotion, remembrance, and the preservation of traditional practices. The research of Uzbek scholar Farxod Beknazarov highlights the socio-economic essence of pilgrimage tourism and its relationship with religious centres, accommodation facilities, potential visitors, and religious practices [1]. This approach demonstrates that pilgrimage tourism should be studied not exclusively as a religious activity but also as an organised tourism sector with its own infrastructure, services, and economic relationships. Mohinur Kurbanova, in her analysis of scientific approaches to pilgrimage tourism, emphasises the importance of pilgrimage motivation, faith, sacred space, and the relationship between pilgrims and tourism activities [2]. These considerations indicate that the concept of pilgrimage tourism requires an interdisciplinary interpretation that takes into account both spiritual and practical dimensions. Consequently, pilgrimage tourism may be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon in which religious beliefs, historical and cultural heritage, territorial resources, tourism services, and socio-economic processes interact.

Methodological Foundations of Research

The methodological study of pilgrimage tourism should be based on an integrated system of scientific methods. No single research method can fully explain its religious, cultural, geographical, and economic dimensions. The historical-comparative method enables researchers to compare pilgrimage traditions across different periods and identify changes in the functions of sacred destinations. It also helps explain how historical circumstances have influenced the development and preservation of

pilgrimage sites. The systematic approach considers pilgrimage tourism as an interconnected structure consisting of sacred destinations, visitors, tourism infrastructure, service providers, local communities, and public institutions. This approach makes it possible to identify relationships between individual elements and assess the overall effectiveness of destination management. The sociological method, including questionnaires, interviews, and visitor observations, provides information about pilgrims' motivations, expectations, satisfaction levels, and perceptions of religious and cultural services. Such information is essential for understanding the actual needs of visitors and improving the quality of tourism services.

The comparative analysis method allows researchers to examine Uzbekistan's pilgrimage tourism practices in relation to international experience. Comparisons with countries that have established religious tourism destinations can help identify effective approaches to infrastructure development, destination management, visitor services, and international promotion. The statistical and economic methods are useful for evaluating visitor flows, tourism revenues, employment opportunities, accommodation capacity, and the contribution of pilgrimage tourism to regional development. Jamshid Uzaqov's research on improving the methodological and practical foundations of pilgrimage tourism development also highlights the importance of statistical analysis, comparative methods, and a systematic approach [4]. These methods provide a basis for developing practical recommendations that reflect the specific conditions of Uzbekistan.

Pilgrimage Tourism in the Context of Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan's pilgrimage tourism potential is closely connected with its historical cities and the religious and intellectual heritage of prominent scholars. Bukhara, Samarkand, and Tashkent are particularly important destinations because of their historical monuments, religious institutions, memorial complexes, and cultural traditions. The development of pilgrimage tourism in these regions requires more than the physical preservation of sacred monuments. It also involves improving transport accessibility, providing reliable historical information, training qualified guides, ensuring appropriate visitor services, and maintaining respect for the religious character of sacred places. An important methodological consideration is the balance between tourism development and the preservation of spiritual values. Excessive commercialisation may weaken the cultural and religious significance of pilgrimage destinations. Therefore, tourism management should be based on principles of cultural sensitivity, environmental responsibility, historical authenticity, and respect for local traditions. Saodat Azizova's research on the theoretical and conceptual foundations of applying halal standards to

pilgrimage tourism underlines the importance of religious requirements, service quality, social trust, and cultural values in organising tourism services [5]. This perspective is particularly relevant to Uzbekistan, where the development of pilgrimage tourism should reflect the expectations of Muslim visitors while maintaining an inclusive approach to other cultural and religious groups.

Conclusion

The study of pilgrimage tourism demonstrates that it represents a complex phenomenon combining religious motivation, historical heritage, cultural identity, and economic activity. Its conceptual interpretation should therefore extend beyond the traditional understanding of tourism as temporary travel and include the spiritual and social significance of visiting sacred destinations. The theoretical foundations of pilgrimage tourism are associated with historical, socio-cultural, economic, and geographical approaches, while its methodological investigation requires the application of historical-comparative analysis, systematic research, sociological surveys, statistical assessment, and international benchmarking.

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