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INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION OF UZBEKISTAN IN THE PRESERVATION OF CULTURAL MONUMENTS

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Annotation: This article examines the international cooperation of the Republic of Uzbekistan in the preservation, restoration, management, and promotion of cultural monuments. The study interprets cultural heritage protection not merely as a technical activity of architectural conservation, but as a complex diplomatic, legal, institutional, and socio-economic process that links national identity, urban development, cultural tourism, scientific documentation, and global heritage governance. Particular attention is paid to cooperation with UNESCO, the World Heritage Centre, ICOMOS, ICCROM, UNWTO, regional Silk Roads initiatives, bilateral cultural programs, and international expert mechanisms established for Uzbek World Heritage properties.

Keywords: Uzbekistan, cultural monuments, international cooperation, UNESCO, World Heritage, heritage diplomacy, conservation, restoration, Silk Roads, cultural tourism, historic urban landscape.

INTRODUCTION

The preservation of cultural monuments in Uzbekistan occupies a strategic place at the intersection of history, law, diplomacy, tourism, education, and sustainable urban development. The territory of Uzbekistan contains a dense concentration of architectural ensembles, archaeological remains, sacred complexes, mausoleums, madrasahs, caravanserais, fortifications, traditional mahallas, and museum collections that represent several civilizational layers of Central Asia. These monuments are associated with the ancient and medieval networks of the Great Silk Road, the urban traditions of Khorezm, Sogdiana, Bactria, and Transoxiana, the intellectual and artistic achievements of the Islamic Renaissance, and the political history of the Timurid, Shaybanid, Ashtarkhanid, and later periods. Because many of these monuments were created through transregional exchanges of craftsmen, merchants, scholars, architects, and religious institutions, their preservation cannot be interpreted only as a domestic cultural task. It also requires cooperation with international organizations, foreign research centers, restoration schools, museums, universities, donor institutions, and neighboring states whose historical routes, archives, and cultural landscapes are connected with the same heritage system. In this sense, Uzbekistan’s cultural monuments are national in legal status, but transnational in historical meaning and universal in scholarly value. The accession of Uzbekistan to the World Heritage Convention in 1993 and the subsequent development of cooperation with UNESCO created an institutional framework through which the state could transform historical monuments into objects of international responsibility, scientific evaluation, and comparative conservation policy [10]. According to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, Uzbekistan currently has seven properties inscribed on the World Heritage List, including five cultural properties: Itchan Kala, the Historic Centre of Bukhara, the Historic Centre of Shakhrisyabz, Samarkand - Crossroad of Cultures, and the Silk Roads: Zarafshan-Karakum Corridor [10]. This list demonstrates that Uzbekistan’s cooperation is not limited to individual monuments; it also includes whole historic cities and transboundary cultural corridors that demand integrated management across administrative borders and national frontiers. The inclusion of the Zarafshan-Karakum Corridor in 2023 is especially important because it shows the

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renewal of the Silk Roads approach and confirms the necessity of coordination among Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and UNESCO bodies.

International cooperation in this field has become more intensive because the problems of heritage preservation have also become more complicated. Historic cities such as Bukhara, Samarkand, Khiva, and Shakhrisabz are not frozen archaeological zones; they are living urban organisms where residential life, pilgrimage, commerce, tourism, infrastructure, and construction pressure interact every day. The integrity and authenticity of monuments can be weakened by uncontrolled restoration, inappropriate materials, insufficient documentation, visual pollution, vibration, commercialization, excessive visitor flow, and urban projects that do not respect buffer zones. At the same time, the economic significance of cultural tourism creates a strong incentive to restore monuments, improve public spaces, develop hospitality infrastructure, and promote the country internationally. The central scientific problem is therefore not whether monuments should be protected, but how protection can be organized so that conservation standards, community interests, economic development, and international obligations remain mutually compatible. Uzbekistan's cooperation with UNESCO, ICOMOS, ICCROM, and other partners addresses this problem through expert missions, management recommendations, training programs, advisory committees, documentation projects, sustainable tourism strategies, and the preparation of nomination dossiers. A visible example is the establishment of the International Advisory Committee for World Heritage sites in Uzbekistan, launched in 2021 with the participation of international experts and heritage institutions, which created a platform for discussing conservation difficulties, monitoring decisions, and improving local implementation mechanisms [10]. This mechanism illustrates a shift from episodic restoration to permanent professional dialogue.

The relevance of the topic is also determined by the growing role of cultural heritage in Uzbekistan's foreign policy. In contemporary international relations, heritage is not only a sphere of memory but also a resource of soft power, cultural diplomacy, regional connectivity, and national branding. Exhibitions of Uzbek manuscripts, textiles, ceramics, miniatures, archaeological finds, and architectural documentation abroad help strengthen cultural dialogue, while joint restoration projects bring technical knowledge and financial resources into the country. Cooperation with international organizations also increases transparency, because the state must report on the condition of World Heritage properties, respond to monitoring missions, and adapt national policy to global conservation doctrine. At the same time, Uzbekistan's experience contributes to international heritage theory: it demonstrates how a post-Soviet state with ancient urban monuments, Islamic architectural ensembles, and rapidly developing tourism can reinterpret conservation as a form of modernization without abandoning historical continuity. The scientific purpose of this article is to analyze the institutional, methodological, and conceptual dimensions of Uzbekistan's international cooperation in preserving cultural monuments. The object of the research is the system of cultural heritage protection in Uzbekistan, while the subject is the set of international mechanisms through which monuments are conserved, studied, promoted, and integrated into sustainable development. The article proceeds from the hypothesis that the effectiveness of preservation depends on the balance between international expert standards and local social participation. If cooperation is limited only to formal inscription or symbolic representation, monuments may become vulnerable to superficial restoration and excessive tourism. If, however, cooperation includes legal regulation, scientific conservation, community education, digital inventory, urban planning control, and responsible tourism management, cultural monuments can remain both authentic historical evidence and active elements of contemporary cultural life. Thus, Uzbekistan's heritage policy should be understood as a multidimensional process in which national sovereignty and international responsibility are not contradictory, but complementary

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foundations of long-term preservation. A further reason for studying this topic is the increasing vulnerability of monuments to global risks that cannot be solved by a single ministry or city administration. Climate change, seismic risk, the aging of traditional materials, migration from historic centers, and the commercialization of sacred places require comparative knowledge from other countries and coordinated preventive conservation. International cooperation provides access to conservation laboratories, architectural surveys, photogrammetry, archaeological mapping, museum standards, and educational exchange. It also permits Uzbekistan to participate in the formation of regional norms, especially in Central Asia, where the Silk Roads are shared by several states and where the preservation of one corridor depends on the protection of connected nodes. Therefore, the topic has theoretical, practical, and diplomatic importance: it explains how cultural monuments become a field where historical science, conservation technology, and international relations operate together.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature related to Uzbekistan's international cooperation in the preservation of cultural monuments may be systematized through the works of Uzbek scholars who analyze heritage protection as a practical, legal, and historical process. Among them, Jasurbek Akhmedov occupies a significant place because his studies connect the protection of monuments with museumification, tourism infrastructure, legal regulation, and the cultural meaning of historic sites. In the article written with M. Maxmadiyeva, Akhmedov argues that museumification is not simply the transformation of a building into an exhibition object, but a method of giving a monument a stable social function while preserving its historical appearance and educational value [1]. This approach is important for the present research because many Uzbek monuments are located in cities where tourism, pilgrimage, craft production, and local residence coexist. Akhmedov's later work with K. Nishanova, G. Amanxodjayeva, and F. Turgunova develops the same logic in a broader institutional framework: cultural heritage protection is presented as a practice that depends on inventory, restoration, scientific expertise, state policy, and international standards [2]. His contribution is therefore methodological as well as descriptive, since it allows the researcher to view cooperation with UNESCO and other organizations not as an external addition to national policy, but as a mechanism that improves documentation, management, and professional competence.

A second important Uzbek scholar for this topic is Mansur Abdugapparovich Mahmudov, whose article on attitudes toward historical monuments in Uzbekistan in the 1920s and 1930s reconstructs the ideological and administrative conditions under which monuments were interpreted during the early Soviet period [3]. Mahmudov's work is relevant because international cooperation after independence can be properly understood only against the background of earlier contradictions: some monuments were studied and preserved, while others were neglected, reinterpreted, or damaged under ideological pressure. His analysis of press materials demonstrates that the meaning of a monument is not fixed; it changes according to political discourse, public education, and state priorities. When Akhmedov's practical model of museumification is read together with Mahmudov's historical analysis, a coherent scholarly line emerges: cultural monuments require both material preservation and interpretive rehabilitation. This combined perspective explains why Uzbekistan's contemporary cooperation with international institutions is not limited to repairing walls, domes, tiles, and portals. It also involves the restoration of historical memory, the revaluation of Islamic and Silk Road heritage, the inclusion of monuments in educational narratives, and the creation of a responsible tourism culture. The reviewed Uzbek scholarship thus supports the central argument of the article: international cooperation becomes effective only when it is integrated with national historical consciousness, local institutional capacity, and scientifically grounded conservation practice. The value of these two scholars is also visible in

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their different temporal perspectives. Akhmedov concentrates mainly on the post-independence and contemporary practice of protection, while Mahmudov reveals the earlier historical experience that shaped the need for a new heritage consciousness. One scholar explains how monuments may be protected, used, and presented today; the other explains why the interpretation of monuments must be protected from ideological simplification. This complementarity is especially useful for examining international cooperation, because global standards can be successfully adopted only when the national scholarly tradition understands both the material fabric of monuments and the symbolic struggles around their meaning. Consequently, the literature review establishes a national academic foundation for the subsequent methodological and analytical sections.

METHODOLOGICAL SECTION

The methodological part of this article was constructed through an interdisciplinary research design that combined comparative-historical analysis, institutional-legal analysis, bibliographic synthesis, content analysis, case-study interpretation, and a systems approach to heritage management. The comparative-historical method was used to trace the transformation of monument protection from the Soviet and early independence periods to the contemporary stage of heritage diplomacy, allowing the study to distinguish between episodic restoration, state-centered preservation, and internationally coordinated conservation. Institutional-legal analysis was applied to examine the role of Uzbekistan's accession to the World Heritage Convention, UNESCO monitoring procedures, international advisory mechanisms, national heritage agencies, management plans, and expert recommendations, because cultural monuments can be preserved only when legal obligations are connected with administrative capacity and professional accountabilit.

RESULTS

The results of the study show that Uzbekistan's international cooperation in the preservation of cultural monuments has developed into a multilayered system that includes legal commitment, expert consultation, scientific documentation, regional diplomacy, tourism management, and public cultural promotion. The first result is that UNESCO cooperation has given Uzbekistan a globally recognized framework for evaluating the outstanding universal value, authenticity, and integrity of its historic cities and cultural landscapes. The presence of five cultural World Heritage properties confirms the international significance of Uzbek monuments, while the continuing number of state-of-conservation processes demonstrates that inscription is not an endpoint but a long-term responsibility [10].

DISCUSSION

The discussion of Uzbekistan's international cooperation may be deepened through a theoretical polemic between two foreign scholars whose approaches represent different but complementary positions in heritage studies. Jukka Jokilehto, one of the most influential theorists of architectural conservation, emphasizes the historical development of conservation principles, the importance of authenticity, the need for professional competence, and the role of international doctrine in protecting monuments from arbitrary intervention [5]. From this perspective, Uzbekistan's cooperation with UNESCO, ICOMOS, and ICCROM is indispensable, because ancient monuments cannot be preserved through patriotic emotion or tourism interest alone. They require scientific documentation, careful diagnosis of materials, respect for original fabric, regulated restoration, and management decisions based on internationally tested criteria. If Jokilehto's logic is applied to Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, and Shakhrisabz, the priority is clear: the state must prevent inappropriate reconstruction, control new construction in buffer zones, train specialists, and guarantee that every intervention preserves authenticity and integrity. Laurajane Smith, however, challenges the dominance of what she calls authorized heritage discourse, arguing that heritage is not only a collection of old objects authorized by experts, but a cultural practice through which communities negotiate memory, identity, belonging,

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and power [8]. In Smith's framework, international cooperation becomes problematic if it privileges expert language while marginalizing the voices of residents, craftspeople, pilgrims, local historians, and young people who experience monuments as part of everyday life. Applied to Uzbekistan, this critique warns that World Heritage status can unintentionally turn living cities into staged tourist landscapes if conservation is separated from social meaning. The polemic between Jokilehto and Smith therefore produces an important conclusion for Uzbekistan: expert conservation and community participation should not be opposed. Jokilehto is right that without rigorous standards, restoration may become decorative imitation or commercial reconstruction; Smith is right that without social inclusion, preservation may become bureaucratic control over spaces that local people still inhabit and interpret. Uzbekistan's most sustainable path lies in combining both approaches. UNESCO-based expertise should guide technical decisions, while mahalla communities, museum educators, artisans, tourism workers, and local schools should participate in interpretation and stewardship. Such synthesis corresponds with the historic urban landscape approach developed by Bandarin and van Oers, which treats historic cities as living landscapes where conservation must be integrated with social and economic development [7].

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the international cooperation of Uzbekistan in the preservation of cultural monuments represents one of the most important directions of the country's cultural policy and heritage diplomacy. The analysis shows that Uzbekistan's monuments possess a dual nature: they are protected by national legislation and state institutions, yet their historical, artistic, and civilizational significance extends far beyond national borders.

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