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Prospects for the Development of Ethnocultural Tourism in the Republic of Kazakhstan

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Annotation

This article examines UNESCO cultural and natural heritage sites in Kazakhstan, sites whose value is undeniable for our country, including for the development of ethnocultural tourism. Today, the preservation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage is crucial for the development of ethnocultural tourism worldwide. UNESCO, the organisation whose primary mission is to preserve World Heritage sites at the international level, plays a special role in this process.

Keywords: tourism; ethnocultural tourism; natural and cultural heritage; promotion

1. INTRODUCTION

Relevance and novelty of the scientific approach. In the modern context of globalisation, the protection of cultural and natural heritage is gaining special significance both at the international and national levels. Cultural heritage is understood not only as a set of material historical objects, but also as the basis for preserving the historical memory, identity, values, and cultural diversity of a nation. International conventions, in particular the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, emphasise the universal exceptional value of cultural heritage, regardless of its geographical or political affiliation.

In recent decades, the concept of cultural heritage has expanded significantly – from a narrow approach, encompassing only immovable architectural or archaeological objects, to a broad understanding of culture, encompassing lifestyles, traditions, social practices, and the interaction between man and nature. This transformation is particularly important in the development of cultural and cognitive tourism, which is becoming a significant factor in the sustainable development of regions.

The novelty of the study is associated with the assessment of cultural heritage not only as an object to be protected, but also as a strategic resource that can increase tourist attractiveness, shape the country's international image, and contribute to social and economic development. Special attention is paid to the issues of selection, justification, and inclusion of cultural heritage objects of Kazakhstan in the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Research problem. Despite international mechanisms for heritage protection and Kazakhstan's commitments to the UNESCO Convention, the problem of scientificity and validity of the selection of objects of historical and cultural value remains. Insufficiently researched or not fully

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scientifically substantiated objects applying for World Heritage status may pose a threat to the cultural reputation of the state and undermine the credibility of the UNESCO list.

In addition, the integration of cultural heritage into tourism development processes is often carried out in a fragmented manner, lacking an interdisciplinary approach and systematic monitoring. This leads to the incomplete use of the potential of heritage as an instrument of sustainable tourism and regional development.

The purpose of the study: The aim of the study is to analyse the concept of cultural heritage and its development, assess the criteria for the selection and inclusion of UNESCO World Heritage sites, and reveal the role of cultural heritage in shaping the tourist attractiveness of Kazakhstan, with particular attention to the significance of the Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi as a World Heritage site.

Methods: Analysis and research of scientific literature; 2. Analysis and processing.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study utilised a comprehensive scientific approach based on the analysis and synthesis of theoretical and empirical sources devoted to cultural and natural heritage, as well as its role in tourism development.

The primary research method was the analysis of scientific literature and regulatory documents. Works by domestic and international authors exploring the evolution of the concept of 'cultural heritage', its classification, and the principles of protection and management of UNESCO World Heritage sites were reviewed. Particular attention was paid to international conventions, recommendations, and UNESCO policy documents regulating the selection, inscription, and preservation of cultural and natural heritage sites.

The study also utilised a comparative analytical method, which allowed for the comparison of various approaches to the interpretation of cultural heritage and the identification of the specific features of national and international levels of its protection. This method was used to analyse the status of cultural and natural heritage sites of the Republic of Kazakhstan within the UNESCO World Heritage System.

To explore the practical aspects of the topic, descriptive and analytical methods were used to systematise information about World Heritage sites located in Kazakhstan, as well as those on the tentative list. Analysis of specific examples (the Khoja Ahmed Yasawi Mausoleum, the Tamgaly petroglyphs, the natural complexes of Saryarka and the Western Tien-Shan, and sites along the Silk Road) allowed us to identify their significance in shaping the country's tourist appeal.

Furthermore, the study utilised a structural-functional approach, which considers cultural and natural heritage as an element of cultural infrastructure and the tourism industry, fulfilling social, cultural, and economic functions. This allowed us to substantiate the role of World Heritage sites as a resource for sustainable development and ethnocultural tourism.

To summarise the results obtained, methods of systematisation, classification, and logical generalisation were used, ensuring the integrity of the study and enabling the formulation of well-founded conclusions and discussion points.

Thus, the chosen methodology provided a comprehensive and interdisciplinary analysis of the problems of protecting cultural and natural heritage and their integration into the tourism space of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

Today, heritage protection at both the global and national levels requires special attention. At the time the concept of World Natural and Cultural Heritage was formulated, international conventions, recommendations, resolutions, and other documents devoted to heritage issues undoubtedly attested to the importance placed in the eyes of the world's people on preserving unique sites, regardless of their nationality (Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, 2025).

The cultural and natural heritage of people is the memory of the people themselves in the past, their historical development, their current state, and prospects for their popularisation (Селезнёва & Алисов, 2020).

Thus, the term 'cultural heritage' in its most general sense refers to the most outstanding historical and cultural monuments. Initially, cultural heritage was understood as a combination of immovable historical, cultural, and natural monuments that are of particular value to the world, a country, or a region. However, over time, the concept of cultural heritage has gradually transformed and expanded, along with the evolution of the concept of culture from traditional notions of it as the realm of literature and art to a broader interpretation, encompassing a diversity of lifestyles, fundamental human rights, values, traditions, etc. The proceedings of the World Conference on Cultural Policy, adopted in Mexico City in 1982, state: "...in a broad sense, culture can be considered as a combination of distinct features—spiritual and material, intellectual and emotional—characterizing a society or social group" (Веденин & Кулешова, 2004).

For the development of excursion and tourism activities, especially those with a historical and cultural focus, the study of the cultural heritage of a particular region is of great importance. The issue of heritage, due to its important role in preserving cultural diversity and, consequently, the sustainable development of modern society, is highly relevant (Aldybayev et al., 2021). Heritage issues are interdisciplinary in nature. Recently, geographers have become increasingly involved in this process. Cultural heritage includes:

1. Monuments – works of architecture, monumental sculpture, and painting, elements or structures of an archaeological nature, inscriptions, caves, and groups of elements that have outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art, or science;

2. Ensembles – groups of isolated or combined buildings whose architecture, unity, or relationship with the landscape are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art, or science;

3. Sites – works of man or the combined creations of man and nature, as well as areas, including archaeological sites, that are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, aesthetics, ethnology, or anthropology (Di Giovine, 2008).

Cultural heritage sites include real estate with associated works of painting, sculpture, decorative and applied art, scientific and technological objects, and other objects of material culture that arose as a result of historical events and are valuable from the perspective of history, archaeology, architecture, urban planning, art, science and technology, aesthetics, ethnology or anthropology, social culture and evidence of eras and civilisations, and authentic sources of information on the origin and development of culture (Mendoza et al., 2023).

The theoretical foundations of World Cultural Heritage include not only the terminology but also the process of transitioning a site from the status of 'national heritage' to 'world heritage':

- The process of selecting World Heritage sites.
- The process of inscription of sites on the World Heritage List.
- The process of deletion from World Heritage (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, n.d.).

When considering the role of historical, cultural, and natural sites in Kazakhstan in increasing tourist interest, we must consider the issue of selecting historical and cultural monuments. Otherwise, the UNESCO World Heritage List may include sites without a scientific basis, whose history has not yet been fully studied and proven. This could damage our country's reputation. UNESCO is the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation. Founded after World War II, the organisation is interested in the preservation of monuments. Monuments inscribed on the World Heritage List must be marked by UNESCO. If a monument remains in a war zone, a monument bearing the emblem of a country that has signed the Convention is not affected. This organisation provides a platform for the preservation of our artefacts and is an international convention of the organisation. That is, organisations that have signed the Convention allocate special funds and preserve their monuments on the organisation's list (World Heritage, 2025; Тимур, 2024).

Since gaining independence, Kazakhstan has made a significant contribution to the development of the tourism industry and is opening up new promising areas. However, in recent years, little attention has been paid to the tourism industry, which has developed as a socio-economic phenomenon with a multifaceted character and broad geography. Currently, the tourism industry is developing in the country. However, monitoring its development shows that it is on a positive trend. Kazakhstan, with its enormous natural and recreational potential, should not remain a 'blank spot' on the tourist map (Yakimova et al., 2018).

Kazakhstan joined the World Heritage Convention on April 29, 1994. This is when the process of inscription of sites in our country began. Since then, it has become possible to utilise not only modest funds but also international legal, technical, and financial assistance (World Heritage, 2025).

Such assistance is provided to States Parties to the Convention for which UNESCO World Heritage sites in the Republic of Kazakhstan have been or may be inscribed on the World Heritage List:

The Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi, located in the Southern Kazakhstan city of Turkestan, is a remarkable complex of palaces and temples, an architectural masterpiece, built between 1385 and 1405. The Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi is inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. This grand building was erected in honour of the ancient Turkic poet and Sufi preacher, Ahmad Yasawi, known in the 12th century. The word 'Yassawi' means 'from Yassi', which was the ancient name for the city of Turkestan. The entire city centre is now the Azret-Sultan Historical and Cultural Reserve (Natural Heritage Protection Fund, n.d.; Pyrénées – Mont Perdu: Natural site datasheet, 1997; World Heritage, 2025).

Tamgaly Petroglyphs, 12th–18th centuries. Location: The uniquely beautiful Tamgaly Gorge is located 170 km northwest of Almaty in the South-Eastern part of the Chu-Ili Mountains of the Almaty Region. The petroglyphs date back to the 14th century BC and the 6th–8th centuries AD, that is, from the Bronze Age to the development of the Great Steppe by the Turkic people. Monument Type: Tamgaly is an archaeological site. It is truly an ancient art gallery, the paintings of which depict individual animals and people, as well as entire scenes from the lives of ancient people. It is the most famous of the 50 rock art centres of Semirechye in the Balkhash Basin.

Saryarka – Steppes and Lakes of Northern Kazakhstan. Saryarka, a natural reserve, encompasses two state nature reserves, Naurzum and Korgalzhyn, covering a total area of 450,344 hectares. The wetlands that cover much of the area are critically important for migratory waterfowl, including a number of endangered species, such as the extremely rare Siberian crane, the Dalmatian pelican, and the long-tailed eagle. This region of Central Asia, where migratory birds travel from Africa, Europe, and South Asia to nesting grounds in Western and Eastern Siberia, serves as a major stopover. The 200,000 hectares of Central Asian steppe, which are also part of the property, are home to more

than half of the region's steppe flora, a number of endangered birds, and the specially protected saiga antelope, whose grazing population has declined sharply due to poaching. The site also includes two groups of lakes – one with freshwater and one with saltwater. They are located on the watershed separating rivers flowing north to the Arctic and south to the Aral-Irtysh basin (Natural Heritage Protection Fund, n.d., Pyrénées – Mont Perdu: Natural site datasheet, 1997; World Heritage, 2025).

Silk Road sites in the Chang'an-Tianshan Corridor. One of the main arteries of the Silk Road, the Chang'an-Tianshan Corridor network of routes, the first trade network between China and the West, became the first section of the Silk Road to be listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This section stretches for 5,000 kilometres through China, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. It was formed between the 2nd century BC and the 1st century AD and remained in use until the 16th century, linking cities and people and facilitating cultural exchange throughout Central Asia, where trade caravans crossed the mountains. In June 2014, during the 38th session of the World Heritage Committee in Doha, Qatar, the Silk Road was added to the List along with 25 other sites, recognising its social, cultural, and historical significance.

The Western Tien-Shan is a mountain system in Central Asia, the Western part of the Tien-Shan mountain range. It is located in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. The Western Tien-Shan includes the Kyrgyz Range, the Talas Ala-Too, the Chatkal Range, the Kuramin Range, the Pskem Range, the Ugam Range, and the Karatau. On July 17, 2016, at a meeting of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, the transboundary natural site of the Western Tien-Shan was inscribed on the General List. Henceforth, the Western Tien-Shan is included in the UNESCO World Heritage Lists of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan (Mukayev et al., 2022; Natural Heritage Protection Fund, n.d., World Heritage, 2025).

The preliminary World Heritage list sets priorities for the formation of the core list. The preliminary list includes 13 sites in Kazakhstan:

1. Merke Turkic Sanctuary. Zhambyl Region (6th–11th centuries);
2. Begazy-Dandybai Megalithic Mausoleums (13th–9th centuries BC);
3. Mounds with Stone Circles of the Tasmola Culture (7th–3rd centuries BC);
4. Eshkiolmes Petroglyphs (13th–9th centuries BC);
5. Arpa-Uzen Petroglyphs (1st millennium BC);
6. Palaeolithic Sites and Geomorphology of the Karatau Range'
7. Archaeological Sites of the Otrar Oasis;
8. Ulytau Cultural Landscape;
9. Northern Tien-Shan (Ile-Alatau National Park);
10. Altyn-Emel National Park;
11. Aksu-Zhabagly Nature Reserve;
12. The Great Silk Road. Region: Europe and China;
13. Sauyskandyk Petroglyphs (18th century BC – 3rd century AD).

This data allows UNESCO specialists to effectively nominate World Cultural and Natural Heritage sites (Natural Heritage Protection Fund, n.d.; World Heritage, 2025).

Thus, to date, five historical, cultural, and natural heritage sites have been included on the World Heritage List. A preliminary list of sites is being compiled based on the special, unique qualities of each site, with 13 of these sites currently being actively considered for nomination and inclusion on the UNESCO List (Aldybayev, 2021).

These sites are a 'product' of the culture, traditions, and history of the country and the people living on its territory, and are actively involved in the tourism space of modern society. The preservation of historical and cultural monuments should be a priority for the state and the entire international community. Thus, the World Cultural Heritage sites are of particular significance, and their preservation guarantees their undeniable role in contemporary culture. The more sites in the Republic of Kazakhstan that are included in the current UNESCO list, the more attractive our country will be for tourism (Aldybayev, 2021).

Effective management of the organisation and administration of modern cultural infrastructure and industry, based on international standards, will facilitate the rapid entry of the Republic of Kazakhstan into the ranks of the most developed countries in the world. The cultural policy concept was developed considering the best practices of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. In particular, it aims to strengthen the cultural and artistic sectors in terms of employment and income (Канищев, 2007).

Summary. Overall, the development of ethnocultural tourism not only offers an opportunity to increase domestic and inbound tourism flows, but also a unique chance to preserve and promote Kazakhstan's unique historical and cultural monuments.

4. DISCUSSION

The results of an analysis of the theoretical and practical aspects of cultural and natural heritage suggest that the modern understanding of heritage has significantly expanded and acquired an interdisciplinary character. While cultural heritage was previously viewed primarily as a collection of tangible objects – architectural, archaeological, and artistic monuments – it is now interpreted as a complex system encompassing historical memory, traditions, cultural practices, and human interaction with the natural environment.

In the context of tourism development, cultural and natural heritage is not only an object of protection but also an important resource for the sustainable socio-economic development of territories. A scientifically sound approach to the selection of sites for inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List is particularly important. A lack of a sufficient scientific base, incomplete historical research, or insufficient justification for the universal value of a site can lead to negative consequences, including a decrease in international trust and reputational risks for the state.

The study demonstrates that the Republic of Kazakhstan possesses significant potential in the area of cultural and natural heritage, which has already been partially realised through the inclusion of several sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Sites such as the Khoja Ahmed Yasawi Mausoleum, the Tamgaly petroglyphs, the natural complexes of Saryarka and the Western Tien-Shan, and sites along the Great Silk Road demonstrate the diversity of heritage forms – from architectural and archaeological monuments to unique natural and cultural landscapes.

At the same time, an analysis of the preliminary list of World Heritage sites demonstrates the need for systematic and consistent work on their scientific justification, preservation, and integration into tourism. Effective cultural heritage management requires coordinated efforts by the state, the scientific community, and international organisations, as well as the implementation of international standards in cultural policy and tourism infrastructure management.

Thus, the balance between preserving the authenticity of cultural and natural heritage sites and their active use in tourism activities remains controversial. This problem can only be resolved through a comprehensive approach based on the principles of sustainable development and responsibility to future generations.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Cultural and natural heritage is a vital element in preserving historical memory, cultural identity, and the diversity of people, as well as a significant resource for the sustainable development of modern society. The modern concept of cultural heritage is characterised by expanded content and an interdisciplinary approach, encompassing historical, cultural, geographical, socioeconomic, and tourism aspects.

Inscription of sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List requires rigorous scientific justification, thorough historical and cultural assessment, and compliance with the criteria of outstanding universal value.

The Republic of Kazakhstan possesses significant cultural and natural heritage potential, as evidenced by the presence of sites already inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, as well as a wide range of sites on the tentative list.

World Heritage sites contribute to the formation of a positive international image of the country and enhance its tourist appeal, while also creating the preconditions for the development of ethnocultural and educational tourism.

Effective protection and use of cultural heritage are only possible with the implementation of international management standards, the development of cultural infrastructure, and the active participation of the state and international organisations.

The development of ethnocultural tourism in Kazakhstan represents not only an economic opportunity but also an important mechanism for preserving, promoting, and transmitting its unique historical and cultural heritage to future generations.

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Etnokultūrinio turizmo plėtros perspektyvos Kazachstano Respublikoje

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Santrauka

Mokslinio požiūrio aktualumas ir naujumas. Šiuolaikiniame globalizacijos kontekste kultūros ir gamtos paveldo apsauga įgauna ypatingą reikšmę tiek tarptautiniu, tiek nacionaliniu lygmeniu. Kultūros paveldas suprantamas ne tik kaip materialių istorinių objektų visuma, bet ir kaip tautos istorinės atminties, tapatybės, vertybių ir kultūrinės įvairovės išsaugojimo pagrindas. Tarptautinės konvencijos, ypač UNESCO Pasaulio paveldo konvencija, pabrėžia visuotinę išskirtinę kultūros paveldo vertę, nepriklausomai nuo jo geografinės ar politinės priklausomybės.

Pastaraisiais dešimtmečiais kultūros paveldo sąvoka gerokai išsiplėtė – nuo siauro požiūrio, apimančio tik nekilnojamuosius architektūros ar archeologijos objektus, iki plataus kultūros supratimo, apimančio gyvenimo būdą, tradicijas, socialines praktikas ir žmogaus bei gamtos sąveiką. Ši transformacija ypač svarbi plėtojant kultūrinį ir pažintinį turizmą, kuris tampa reikšmingu regionų tvaraus vystymosi veiksniu.

Tyrimo naujumas siejamas su kultūros paveldo, ne tik kaip saugotino objekto, bet ir kaip strateginio ištekliaus, galinčio didinti turistinį patrauklumą, formuoti šalies tarptautinį įvaizdį ir prisidėti prie socialinės ir ekonominės plėtros, vertinimu. Ypatingas dėmesys skiriamas Kazachstano kultūros paveldo objektų atrankos, pagrindimo ir įtraukimo į UNESCO pasaulio paveldo sąrašą klausimams.

Tyrimo problema. Nepaisant tarptautinių paveldo apsaugos mechanizmų ir Kazachstano įsipareigojimų pagal UNESCO konvenciją, išlieka istorinės ir kultūrinės vertės objektų atrankos moksliškumo ir pagrįstumo problema. Nepakankamai ištirti arba iki galo moksliškai nepagrįsti objektai, pretenduojantys į pasaulio paveldo statusą, gali kelti grėsmę valstybės kultūrinei reputacijai ir pakenkti UNESCO sąrašo patikimumui.

Be to, kultūros paveldo integravimas į turizmo plėtros procesus dažnai vykdomas fragmentiškai, trūkstant tarpdisciplininio požiūrio ir sistemingo stebėjimo. Tai lemia, kad paveldo, kaip tvaraus turizmo ir regioninės plėtros priemonės, potencialas nėra iki galo išnaudojamas.

Tyrimo tikslas: Tyrimo tikslas – išanalizuoti kultūros paveldo sampratą ir jos plėtrą, įvertinti UNESCO pasaulio paveldo objektų atrankos ir įtraukimo kriterijus ir atskleisti kultūros paveldo vaidmenį formuojant Kazachstano turistinį patrauklumą, ypatingą dėmesį skiriant Chodža Achmedo Jasavio mauzoliejaus, kaip pasaulio paveldo objekto, reikšmei.

Metodai: Mokslinės literatūros analizė ir tyrimas; 2. Analizė ir apdorojimas.

Rezultatai. Kultūros ir gamtos paveldas yra gyvybiškai svarbus istorinės atminties, kultūrinio tapatumo ir tautų įvairovės išsaugojimo elementas, taip pat reikšmingas išteklius tvariam šiuolaikinės visuomenės vystymuisi. Šiuolaikinei kultūros paveldo sampratai būdingas išplėstas turinys ir tarpdisciplininis požiūris, apimantis istorinius, kultūrinius, geografinius, socialinius ir ekonominius bei turizmo aspektus. Įtraukimas į UNESCO pasaulio paveldo sąrašą reikalauja griežto mokslinio pagrindimo, išsamaus istorinio ir kultūrinio vertinimo bei atitikties išskirtinės visuotinės vertės kriterijams. Kazachstano Respublika turi didelį kultūros ir gamtos paveldo potencialą, ką įrodo jau į UNESCO pasaulio paveldo sąrašą įtrauktos vietovės, taip pat platus preliminaraus sąrašo objektų pasirinkimas. Pasaulio paveldo vietovės prisideda prie teigiamo tarptautinio šalies įvaizdžio formavimo ir didina jos turistinį patrauklumą, kartu sudarydamos prielaidas etnokultūrinio ir edukacinio turizmo plėtrai. Veiksminga kultūros paveldo apsauga ir naudojimas yra įmanomi tik įgyvendinant tarptautinius valdymo standartus, plėtojant kultūros infrastruktūrą ir aktyviai dalyvaujant valstybei bei tarptautinėms organizacijoms. Etnokultūrinio turizmo plėtra Kazachstane yra ne tik ekonominė galimybė, bet ir svarbus mechanizmas, skirtas išsaugoti, propaguoti ir perduoti unikalų istorinį ir kultūrinį paveldą ateities kartoms.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: turizmas; etnokultūrinis turizmas; gamtos ir kultūros paveldas; reklama

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