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**Allaberganov, Azizbek and Catterall, Pippa**

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# **Using social exchange theory to examine residents' responses to heritage tourism: Case studies of Samarqand and Bukhara in Uzbekistan**

## **Abstract**

There have been numerous studies of the impact of tourism on local communities. This qualitative study uses social exchange theory to examine tourism's effects on local communities in Samarqand and Bukhara. These are World Heritage Sites (WHS) along the ancient Silk Road that have been strongly affected by the recent growth of tourism in Uzbekistan. Our findings highlight the significant role played by perceptions of an aspect of intangible cultural heritage (ICH), the concept of hospitality, shared by both tourists and residents. This positive shared perception encourages support for tourism development among residents. This finding thus points to the need to find ways to align tourism development strategies with residents' own perception of their cultural values.

**Keywords:** tourism impact, heritage, hospitality, Silk Road, social exchange theory, Uzbekistan

## **Introduction**

A need to apply social exchange theory to examination of the impact of cultural heritage tourism (CHT) in developing countries has recently been highlighted in this journal (Matatolu, 2020). In attempting to fill that gap, this paper also addresses the need to understand how residents' perceptions of tourism development affect its potential since, as recent work has pointed out, this remains underexplored in current literature (Gannon et al., 2021). It does so through a case study of the World Heritage Sites (WHS) of Bukhara and Samarqand. These are medium-sized cities situated in Uzbekistan, a developing country which has a tourism offer of so far under-realized potential. Nonetheless, the Uzbek government has identified tourism as a key element in promoting economic development, not least as part of its post-COVID recovery (Usmanova, 2022). Furthermore, a key aspect of that tourism offer is an emphasis upon the heritage of the Silk Road and the WHS – prominently including Bukhara and Samarqand – along its route (Fayzullaev et al., 2021). The centrality of CHT to the promotion of tourism in

Uzbekistan thus makes this a particularly apt case study through which to explore the relationship of residents at WHS to the impact of tourists in their home cities.

This study seeks to examine how this promotion of CHT assets as major attractions to international tourists by the Uzbekistan government affects the local communities impacted by this development. Earlier studies of other tourist destinations have identified that the promotion of tourism can be seen as attractive to community leaders as well as national governments because of its perceived contribution to tackling local unemployment and providing economic stability and growth opportunities (Deery et al, 2012; Kim et al., 2013). This paper analyses whether residents in these two Uzbek cities focus upon such economic effects. It also explores how much priority was given to these considerations by residents in comparison to other factors, not least the impact upon and potential conflict with cultural heritage.

Tourism necessarily has social and local effects (Biagi et al, 2020). It produces changes in local demands and thereby in local markets, impacting on residents and exacting a cost on their quality of life which they may or may not be willing to pay (Wollie, et al., 2021). Labor demand is clearly affected by changes in its deployment across to service and hospitality sectors of the economy (Gómez López & Barrón Arreola, 2019). Cultural and health impacts result from the intermingling of people from different sociocultural backgrounds (Zhuang et al., 2019). These effects cannot be prevented. Nonetheless, negative side effects can be minimized, and positive ones strengthened (Ap, 1992; Archer, et al., 2005; Zhuang et al., 2019). However, if tourism's negative effects are not controlled, local support for tourism will likely decrease. This can engender resistance to developments which are felt to impact negatively on local agency, culture, and/or identities (Tosun, 2002; Cornet, 2015). There is also a risk of perceived opportunity-costs: for instance, that spending on developing the infrastructure for tourists is at the expense of funds that might otherwise go towards improvements in local education and healthcare (Saner, et al., 2019). There can be anxieties about impacts on housing costs for the local population (Deery et al, 2012; Churchill et al., 2022). Differing expectations of authenticity between tourists and residents in heritage sites adds a further level of complexity (Khanom et al., 2019). Hence, to maintain and promote tourism development that is both beneficial and sustainable for all levels of stakeholders, policy programs and decision-making implemented by governmental bodies, institutions and businesses should include assessments of the impact on local communities (UNWTO, 2017). Indeed, the effectiveness of tourism

development strategies is clearly shaped by how well these impacts are managed (Moyle, et al., 2010a; Deery, et al, 2012; Jani, 2018).

Numerous studies have investigated the impact of tourism on local communities in terms of economic, social, and environmental effects (e.g. Tosun, 2002; Wang et al., 2006; Weaver & Lawton, 2001; Andereck et al., 2005; Choi & Murray, 2010; Özel & Kozak, 2016; Jani, 2018). In the process, various factors have been identified as contributing to either positive or negative reactions among residents. Economic growth is often highlighted as the principal positive factor (Afthanorhan et al., 2017; Jani, 2018)), despite negative impacts on amenities (Biaigi et al., 2020). However, the literature has increasingly drawn attention as well to the sociocultural effects of tourism (Richards, 2018). Of particular relevance to this study is the emphasis in Matatolu (2020) on the need for researchers to develop a more sophisticated understanding of residents' own perceptions of their culture and heritage. This is particularly the case if the negative impacts observed in their analysis of tourism development in Fiji are to be avoided. This study contributes to this process by exploring the relationship between culture, identity and support for tourism in two comparable and growing sites of CHT in Uzbekistan, Samarqand and Bukhara. Our findings suggest that a better understanding of this relationship, and of how it is understood by both residents and tourists, can help to enhance the management of heritage tourism.

### **Tourism in Uzbekistan**

Uzbekistan is a double landlocked country in Central Asia bordered by Kazakhstan in the north and north-west and Turkmenistan and Afghanistan in the south, with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan on its eastern and south-eastern borders. Uzbekistan has been a tourist attraction since the Soviet era, not least because of its renowned cities of Tashkent, Samarqand, Bukhara, and Khiva along the route of the Silk Road (Airey & Shackley, 1997). Numerous significant heritage sites attract foreign tourists throughout the year. Some of these, including Samarqand and Bukhara, are recognized as WHS (World Atlas, 2022; UNESCO, 2022a; UNESCO, 2022b). This provides a distinctive contextual factor shaping the environment in which the social exchanges analyzed in this study take place.

After the breakup of the Soviet Union, tourism's potential for promoting both economic growth and national identity was identified in newly independent Uzbekistan (Airey & Shackley,

1997). Since then, Uzbekistan has been actively building its tourism sector and providing access to its cultural and historic sites. It has implemented a visa-free system with 90 countries as well as e-visas with 57 nations, has rebuilt and improved tourism infrastructure such as hotels and entertainment facilities, and initiated programs to expand and modernize its airports (MFA, 2018; International Trade Administration, 2021). Even during the Covid-19 pandemic when tourism stakeholders were in need of state support, the government of Uzbekistan showcased its commitment to the tourism and hospitality industry by implementing several policy measures such as subsidies and medical packages to alleviate the challenges faced by tourism businesses (Allaberganov et al, 2021).

This improved access has led to growing numbers of tourists travelling to Uzbekistan to visit its historic sites and experience adventure (Allaberganov & Preko, 2021) as well as the cultural heritage, interaction with the locals, and hospitality that the country offers (Raimkulov, et al., 2021). Immediately prior to the pandemic, the number of tourist arrivals soared, increasing more than threefold from 2 million tourists in 2016 to 6.7 million in 2019 (World Bank, 2022). Since an earlier study in 2010 found that Bukhara, Samarqand and the other Silk Road WHS of Khiva were the key tourism destinations in Uzbekistan, attracting 76.2% of its tourists (Fayzullaev et al., 2021), it is likely that much of this increased tourist traffic also visited these sites. Residents' perceptions that Bukhara and Samarqand are hosting growing numbers of tourists was certainly a finding of this study.

Bukhara and Samarqand have several similarities which makes them good case studies to be considered in tandem, and not just because of their shared WHS status and the way they are often linked in the CHT marketing of Uzbekistan. They are similar in size: Samarqand currently has a population of around 300,000 and Bukhara 240,000 (World Population Review, 2023). Both are known for their connections to the history of the Silk Road. Their populations share language and culture. Primarily, the people of Bukhara and Samarqand speak Tajik and have similar cultural and religious beliefs. Their respective heritagescapes also reflect comparable histories. Important sites in Samarqand, such as the Shah-i-Zinda necropolis, or the nearby mausoleum of the Islamic scholar, Muhammad al-Bukhari (Bulai et al., 2016), indicate its historic political and religious importance. Bukhara also has memorials and a museum dedicated to al-Bukhari and the Poi Kalan religious complex, as well as the ancient fortress of The Ark (Sazak, 2014; Yücel, 2014).

This study has been conducted at the level of the mahalla local to the WHS in Bukhara and Samarqand to capture the effects of tourism on those residents most proximately affected. Respondents either currently live or recently resided in Siddiqiyon, Afshor, and Furqat mahallas in Bukhara and Gur-i-Emir, Dar-i-Zanjir, and Faqi Abu Lays mahallas in Samarqand. As Urinboev and Eraliev (2022, p. 481) explain, ‘the term “mahalla” is commonly used in Uzbekistan to describe the (local) residential neighbourhood uniting residents through common traditions, language, customs, moral values and the reciprocal exchange of money, material goods and services.’ There are more than 9,500 mahallas in contemporary Uzbekistan, containing anything from 500 to 10,000 households (Seitz et al., 2020). These mahalla significantly impact the lives and well-being of local communities in Uzbekistan. Although our research found that younger people identified less with their local mahalla, it has been argued that these bodies help to generate civic pride and are valued by residents because of their role in solving neighborhood issues (Dadabaev, 2017). Mahalla constitute a neighborhood or community that has existed for centuries in various forms in the history of Central Asia and other Muslim majority countries and the people of Uzbekistan attach their sense of belonging and identity to this establishment (Urinboev, 2011). Originally from the Arabic word “mahali” meaning “local” (Urinboev, 2018), typically mahalla refers to a residential sector of a town or city managed by the mahalla committee, which consists of chosen community elders, commonly known as Aksakals, meaning Whitebeards in English (Masaru, 2006).

### **Literature Review: Theoretical Grounding**

All tourist destinations necessarily are sites where residents either passively or actively interact with tourists and vice versa. Social exchange theory is a means of exploring these interactions and has been widely used in the literatures on tourism development, tourism support, and interaction between local communities and tourists (see: Deccio & Baloglu, 2002; Moyle, et al., 2010a; Choi & Murray, 2010; Moyle, et al., 2010b; Özel & Kozak, 2016; Nunkoo, 2016; Kang & Lee, 2018; Jani, 2018). Derived from earlier works of sociology (e.g. Homans, 1961; Emerson, 1962), social exchange theory developed as a means of examining the impact of social processes such as tourism. It works by analyzing how differing actors calculate the impacts, benefits, and costs of the interactions between them. Tourism is unlikely to develop far if both residents and tourists themselves perceive its effects as negative, regardless of how much national governments may wish to promote it. On the other hand, if some in the local community have positive views of tourism and its impacts and can profit from its development,

then the potential for tourism will be enhanced. This may be the case even when other groups of residents are negatively affected by the same processes. (McGehee & Andereck, 2004). Social exchange theory can thus be used to understand the framing of perceptions of the impact of tourism among both hosts and tourists and how these perceptions shape its potential to develop in a particular location (Ap, 1992; Moyle, et al., 2010a; Kang & Lee, 2018; Gannon et al., 2021).

Previous studies utilizing social exchange theory have pointed to trade-offs between perceived economic, cultural, and environmental effects. This process of rationalization of impacts is apparent both in work related to general tourism and in research that examines the effects of tourism at sites which are sensitive either for ecological or cultural reasons. For instance, economic development was central to support for tourism development among local communities in Cappadocia, despite the collateral ecological damage. Nonetheless, environmental awareness and protection were also promoted provided it did not conflict with the economic benefits of tourism to local communities (Özel & Kozak, 2016). Similarly, residents in Malaysia were found to be satisfied by the economic benefits gained by their communities from the promotion and development of tourism, despite their awareness of the environmental downsides (Afthanorhan, et al., 2017). A prioritizing of economic benefits over environmental costs was also expressed by some members of Australia's island communities. Many residents in that study were instead concerned by the development of tourism for other reasons. Some even avoided interaction with tourists because they were seen as threats to the sociocultural well-being of the community (Moyle, et al., 2010a; Moyle, et al., 2010b).

This last finding suggests that residents may express more concern about the impact of tourism in relation to perceived cultural rather than ecological threats. This is, however, by no means universally the case. Indeed, research at the Kii WHS in Japan suggest that its designation by UNESCO has had a revitalizing effect on local culture (Jimura, 2016). Successful examples of CHT clearly can be cited, even when they have been developed with minimal input from local communities. Among the key variables are whether CHT is seen as having positive or negative effects on local culture when weighed against a cost-benefit calculation of economic impacts (Butler et al., 2022).

A further issue is the question of authenticity. For UNESCO this is an important characteristic of heritage sites and their preservation. UNESCO's Operational Guidelines (UNESCO, 2021:

para. 82) emphasizes the need to reflect authenticity in: form and design; materials and substance; use and function; traditions, techniques and management systems; location and setting; language and other forms of intangible heritage; spirit and feeling; other internal and external factors. Maintaining this authenticity can, however, sometimes be deemed inimical to the interests of local communities. As Pendlebury et al. (2009) point out, the application of this conceptualization of authenticity can cause tension in diverse and dynamic urban settings, a tension which subsequently led to one of their case study sites, Liverpool, losing its WHS status (Halliday, 2021). However, how this tension plays out in urban settings in developing countries remains under-explored.

One significant factor identified in the literature on the relationship between CHT and residents in developing countries is propinquity to the sites concerned. A recent study in Iran draws attention to how positive views of CHT amongst residents diminish with closeness to the historic sites affected (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2019). It is therefore of value that this study explores how and why residents in the immediate proximity of the WHS of Bukhara and Samarqand respond to the growing impact of tourism and affect its future growth potential.

The model proposed by Ap (1992) is employed in this study. According to this model, the first component of interaction between residents and tourists is the Need Satisfaction. Unless there is a perceived need to interact with tourists, there is no motive for residents to do so (Ap, 1992). Besides economic and social benefits, other motives such as facilitation of education, cultural exchange and preservation of flora and fauna have been identified as playing a role in Need Satisfaction (Ankomah & Crompton, 1990). Once the need to engage in communication between residents and tourists is established, then the *initiation of exchange* stage occurs. The *initiation of exchange* stage ultimately connects the Need Satisfaction component with the *exchange formation* stage.

An exchange relationship is the main component of the *exchange formation* stage, and it is composed of two sub-components: antecedents, and the form of exchange relations. Antecedents denote the opportunities perceived by residents or tourists before the exchange is formed. If the perceived opportunities are positive and rewarding, then an exchange is developed. A key facet of this *exchange formation* is the power balance between the actors. If they derive meaningful rewards from the interaction, it can be viewed as balanced in terms of power, with a positive outcome for each. This power balance is shaped by various factors, such



as how easy it is for one or the other party to exit from the relationship, and at what cost (Benner, 2020). It can also be affected by aggressive pricing strategies, which may lead to stark imbalances in the relative rewards accruing to each party (Prideaux, et al., 2006). In contrast, if one or both actors in the interaction has nothing to gain in terms of rewards, then the power is perceived as weak or unbalanced. This produces a lack of support for tourism from one or both parties involved in the transaction. These effects shape how the respective actors assess the benefits of the encounter in the final stage of the social exchange theory model, when they engage in *exchange transaction evaluation* (Ap, 1992).

## **Methodology**

A qualitative research methodology was used to examine interactions between residents and tourists in the WHS of Samarqand and Bukhara. Qualitative methods furnish rich data on participants' perceptions of the impact of tourism. This data is here used to address the under-researched relationship between residents and tourists at WHS (Chauma & Ngwira, 2022). It was collected using a purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling is a non-probability method for selecting participants in a study (Bernard, 2017; Guest, et al., 2006). In this instance, participants' knowledge of the immediate area of the WHS and experience of tourism were key criteria for their selection.

A qualitative research approach can be challenging in terms of defining the sample size (Boddy, 2016). A common approach taken to this problem involves analysis of data saturation. Data saturation is achieved when no more new information is discovered in the data analysis process (Guest et al., 2006; Hussey, 2010; O'Reilly & Parker, 2012; Boddy, 2016). Guest et al. (2006) advise that data saturation should be achieved with a sample of twelve participants, provided that the group studied is homogeneous. Guided by this recommendation, nineteen respondents were selected for this study: nine from Bukhara and ten from Samarqand (See Table 1). Out of the nineteen respondents, seven were females aged between 20 and 67 and twelve were males aged between 19 and 58. Respondents held a variety of occupations. They included students, entrepreneurs, hospitality business managers, and government workers. Table 1 outlines their demographic profile.

INSERT TABLE 1 HEREBOUT

Approaches employed in previous literature using social exchange theory (Moyle, et al., 2010a; Özel & Kozak, 2016; Afthanorhan, et al., 2017; Jani, 2018) informed the construction of the semi-structured interviews. First, the participants of the interview were asked to discuss their overall interaction with tourists in their mahalla at the start of the conversation. This allowed the interviewees to reflect discursively on past encounters with tourists. Next, the researchers asked about their main motives for interacting with tourists and the benefits obtained from these experiences. All interviews were conducted face-to-face in places the respondents felt comfortable in, such as cafés, parks, or their own homes. The interviews were conducted in Uzbek or Russian as the researchers do not speak fluent Tajik. Interviews were recorded, encrypted, and stored according to standard research ethics procedures and transcribed and translated into English. We then followed approaches to thematic analysis recommended by Braun & Clarke (2006). First, we read the responses thoroughly to familiarize ourselves with the data. The main features of the data were then coded using qualitative data analysis software and combined into themes. These themes were categorized in line with the elements of social exchange theory specified above. The researchers analyzed the data independently and reached the same conclusion to validate the data (Walsh, 2002; Lazaraton, 2017). Table 2 highlights the major themes identified during the coding process.

INSERT TABLE 2 HEREBOUT

## **Results**

### *Need Recognition*

To start an interaction between two parties, a Need Recognition must be present. Responses indicated that the motives residents had for interacting with tourists fell into three categories: financial, cultural, and educational. The financial motive was simple:

“First of all, to get profit. We are running a hotel here for more than 20 years now. This is our family business and working with tourists is very profitable.”

(C19)

However, both cultural and educational reasons were mentioned and highlighted more by our respondents. Curiosity to learn about other countries and cultures, as well as promoting and

showcasing local traditions, emerged as more important than financial or economic motives. For instance:

“I also wanted to learn about their life as well. I also wanted them to learn about our traditions and the way we dress.”

(C12)

Educational motives were only slightly less prominent. Language acquisition and improvements in communication skills were highlighted. As one respondent commented:

“In recent years our students go out to the touristic sites and try to interact with them to develop their language skills.”

(C14)

Many similarly stressed that younger local community members such as students deliberately approach tourists at historic sites to improve their language and communication skills:

#### *Antecedents of exchange*

*Positive:* Despite the presence of Need Recognition among residents, the absence of antecedents can hinder the occurrence of communication. The respondents from Samarqand and Bukhara mentioned various antecedents that either prevent or facilitate interaction between them and the tourists. For most respondents in both cities, especially the younger ones, the interactions with tourists occurred at historic or religious sites:

“[...] the tomb and this mosque are the main attraction for interaction and pilgrimage”

(C13)

Some residents mentioned that they mostly interacted with tourists through work. Interestingly, social activities which had been initiated to cater to tourist demand were also highlighted:

“People organize tea parties/events inside their houses. Tourists can go there to drink some tea or coffee and interact with the locals.”

(C6)

These were seen as positive interactions in financial terms, as they involved payment. Yet they were also seen as positive in cultural terms, providing opportunities to introduce tourists to residents’ hospitality and their food and drink culture.

It is interesting to note that the major positive antecedent that fosters interaction between residents and tourists is the festival. Samarqand and Bukhara have different festivals. In Samarqand most residents mentioned the “Sumalak” festival and the “Sharq Taronalari” as the major festive events that facilitate communication, whereas in Bukhara, residents emphasized the Silk and Spices festival:

“Well, I guess the major one is Sharq Taronalari.... Several countries come together to share their culture in a musical festival.”

(C18)

“Silk and spices festival is the biggest one, I think. This is for tourists and the locals.”

(C2)

Residents also stressed the importance of wedding parties and their associated food culture, both as part of local intangible heritage and as distinctive events which attract tourists in large numbers.

“I have seen tourists a lot at local wedding parties. As you know our weddings are big with 300-400 people and their weddings are small with about twenty people. So, in a way, this is like a festival for the tourists.”

(C7)

*Negative:* some barriers or negative antecedents were also instanced. The language barrier was particularly emphasized in interviews. Most respondents observed that many residents simply ignore or avoid communication with tourists due to their lack of fluency and confidence in

English. This language barrier is reinforced by a lack of historical knowledge among residents. As one interviewee commented:

“People do not know the language and the history so they cannot communicate and interact [...] we have to develop our language capabilities and historical knowledge of our city.”

(C12)

This illustrates that, even if residents know the language of the visitor, they might still avoid interaction due to their inability to explain the historic background of their city:

### *Forms of exchange*

Residents of Samarqand and Bukhara interact with tourists through a variety of forms of exchange. Five main themes emerged from the analysis (Table 2). Although these included cultural encounters, such as the development of friendships, the most significant of these themes was service:

“Yeah, it was more about providing service and job related.”

(C11)

These interactions also served to improve residents’ entrepreneurial and managerial skills. One shop manager in Bukhara noted:

“She taught me how to sell to the tourists, improve my marketing skills and even helped me to establish my own website online.”

(C7)

Nonetheless, cultural and educational forms of exchange were again emphasized by residents:

“Those who communicate end up talking more about lifestyles, customs and history.” (C9)

This interaction reinforced awareness of local culture and history among residents. That tourism can positively impact on residents in this way has been identified in previous studies (Mustafa, 2014; Jimura, 2016). Our findings show that this growing awareness of the global importance of their heritage also positively reinforced personal and group identities. Respondents were proud of the significance of their mahalla, exemplified by the CHT it attracted.

“We have the historical sites which go back thousands of years. It has a deep and old history. Then, we also have the great Islamic scholars who were born or studied here. I am really proud of this.”

(C6)

This was a matter of ethnic as well as local pride. Residents in both cities observed that the tourist response to these historic sites impacted positively on their sense of Tajik identity.

Tourism’s role in reinforcing pride and identity seems to be particularly important in explaining the general levels of positive support for its growth in these two cities. While the historic and religious sites play a considerable role in this process, even more important is the alignment between intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and identity. The importance of ICH in shaping positive responses among residents has been previously noted (Khanom et al., 2019), but not in the context of how it relates to identity. All respondents stressed the centrality of concepts of hospitality to their identities. Hospitality was portrayed as something that tourists valued and benefited from, and as a core value and part of their heritage and identity among the residents themselves.

“I have even heard that one tourist lost his passport in the taxi and the drivers contacted each other to find the passport. It is unique because our people are hospitable and happy to accept guests.”

(C6)

This sense of hospitality was depicted as unique, fundamental to identity and deeply valued by residents and tourists alike. It was also seen as a major element in attracting and supporting tourism.

“I was in the US, and I have seen that their communities are not like ours. It is truly unique here, the way we interact and live with each other. They have other things like museums, theaters and etc., but no community like ours. Tourists are truly amazed by this and if we develop it then the amount of tourists will increase. It will be truly unique and I would be really happy to see this.”

(C12)

Tourism thus reinforced the residents’ own perceptions of their identity while in turn, the core role hospitality plays in the formation of their identity was seen as a central element in making their cities attractive to tourists. This distinctive fit between ICH, hospitality, and concepts of identity was a key finding of this research. Given the way in which this was highlighted by all respondents, the positive feedback loop it entails is clearly of major importance in residents’ support for tourism development.

#### *Consequences of exchange*

Residents stressed that their communities are greatly benefitting from increasing numbers of tourists, with many jobs and businesses created locally in the tourism industry:

“The income of our mahalla members is higher than other mahalla. I do not see any negative impacts.”

(C10)

They also noted that the interest of international tourists stimulated their appreciation of their own culture. All respondents confirmed that there were no cultural conflicts between them and the tourists. In addition, the development of tourism was leading to improvements in the social and economic position of female workers locally:

“There are some women who do masterclasses. When tour companies bring tourists to them, they get paid. We also have many women who work in souvenir and carpentry making.”

(C14)

“I had a small shop where girls make these clothes and local traditional materials. I needed the sewing machines, and I was able to get them through this program. This is a good economic thing.”

(C7)

This contrasts with other studies which have found that, because of their greater involvement in the labor market, men were more likely to emphasize the positive benefits of tourism (Afthanorhan et al., 2017).

Environmental benefits stemming from tourism were also stressed by interviewees. Residents were happy to have tourists in their community as this encouraged the authorities to keep their streets clean. Additionally, tourists were cited as good role models in terms of waste management:

“No, it is actually less. Because the government is trying to keep it clean to provide better ambience.”

(C18)

“Actually, the funny thing is that we learn from the tourists how to be clean and not to throw away the garbage. [...] I learn how to manage waste from tourists actually.”

(C7)

CHT thus introduced different approaches locally to environmental concerns, particularly in terms of the management of domestic waste. This was not a direct outcome of CHT, but it was a collateral benefit.

Finally, the tourists also helped to draw attention to existing deficits in infrastructure and service provision. One respondent commented:

“When the guests leave our facility or the city, they usually write negative comments about the internet connection and roads. This really frustrates me as I have no control over these things.”



(C1)

Clearly, tourist comments about these deficiencies did not necessarily lead swiftly to actions to resolve them.

### *Balance of power*

Although most residents confirmed that tourism has had mainly positive outcomes for them, with locals improving their economic, social, and environmental well-being, some loss of power was recorded during the interviews. Interestingly, particular attention was drawn to the key concept of authenticity. CHT was portrayed as prompting efforts to renovate historic sites to attract more tourists, changing the existing vistas and layout of the city. In the process, the streetscape was losing what residents saw as its authenticity:

“The city is not the same anymore. We are losing the authenticity of the city due to restorations. [...] Some places were even demolished.”

(C14)

Authenticity is here used to refer to the familiar cityscape that this respondent grew up in. This understanding of authenticity is contrasted with the heritagescape created by UNESCO sanctioned restoration. For UNESCO authenticity refers to the site, whereas for this respondent it refers to how residents inhabit and navigate the spaces of the city. Interestingly, this resident chose to use a term highlighted by UNESCO but imbued it with a very different meaning. They thereby invoked their reading of heritage as distinct from that of UNESCO. This small act of linguistic resistance speaks to a context in which the role of local communities in defining their own cultural heritage has only recently become increasingly acknowledged within UNESCO (Boccardi, 2018; Patiwaël et al., 2019).

There were also complaints that only the streets and areas most visited by tourists are kept clean and renovated, while others are neglected or forgotten:

“The places where we do not expect tourists are not kept clean and it looks poorly developed. We are quite embarrassed about this.”

(C8)

Those residents who do not directly work in or for the tourism industry also mentioned that prices in certain areas have become expensive and they therefore now rarely visit those spots.

“Some areas can be a bit expensive, however, the local people are aware of these prices and do not usually go there to shop or eat out.”

(C15)

Some also noted that there are two types of prices, one for locals and the other for tourists, which can help to alleviate some of the price issues. Most respondents noted that they have raised these infrastructure and pricing issues with their mahalla committees and local governments. Overall, they nonetheless still acknowledged the positive benefits they perceived tourism development provided for their cities.

## **Discussion**

As in previous studies (Moyle, et al., 2010b; Jani, 2018; Özel & Kozak, 2016), in Bukhara and Samarqand financial reasons were often highlighted among the motives for interactions with tourists. Yet, in both cities interest in cultural exchange and educational improvements such as language enhancements were more emphasized by the respondents (Figure 1). The desire to improve language and communication skills was especially evident among younger respondents who were planning to attend university or wanted to travel abroad for education. These educational motives were also noted by older respondents, who confirmed that the younger generation were eager to communicate with tourists to improve their language and communication skills. This was both for the purpose of passing university examinations and/or to obtain an occupation in the tourism industry. Some of the common occupations for the younger residents in Samarqand and Bukhara were employment in tour companies, hotels, and restaurants.

INSERT FIGURE 1 HEREBABOUT

A variety of antecedents were discovered in the analysis of the data and categorized as positive or negative. Positive antecedents were mentioned more often than negative ones. The language barrier was seen as the main obstacle preventing quality interactions between residents and

tourists. This problem was compounded by a lack of historical knowledge of the city and its architecture among locals. Although some respondents knew English, they were still uncomfortable with tourists because of their lack of knowledge of their heritage, a heritage which was the main draw for the tourists in these cities. In this instance this negative antecedent can be seen as having the positive effect of informing residents' awareness of their own heritage. This positive effect contrasts with the contests over how heritage should be interpreted that have been noted elsewhere (Cornet, 2015).

In addition to occupation-related communications, most respondents interacted with tourists at historic sites, bazaars and cultural events. Festivals such as "Sharq Taronalari" in Samarqand and "Silk and Spices" in Bukhara emerged from our findings as major positive antecedents. This finding is in line with previous studies (Moyle, et al., 2010b). Yet traditional weddings organized by residents themselves were highlighted as the best examples of local interactions with tourists. The interviewees emphasized touristic curiosity to learn more about these wedding festivities. Indeed, they indicated their perception that these elements of ICH proved bigger attractions for tourists than the tangible heritage of the historic buildings that had led to the designation of Samarqand and Bukhara as World Heritage Sites.

As a result of these positive antecedents, residents interact with tourists in their communities, exchange cultural and historical knowledge, provide services, improve their language skills, showcase local hospitality, and establish friendships. This finding contrasts with other studies where positive attitudes among residents are correlated instead with lack of involvement with tourists (Mustafa, 2014).

Our respondents mentioned that the economic benefit of tourism development locally was significant. All, regardless of the extensiveness of their interactions with tourists, also acknowledged the positive economic effects that they felt it had produced in their communities. This is in line with the findings of previous studies (Moyle, et al., 2010b; Rasoolimanesh, et al., 2015).

Significantly, the sociocultural impact was also seen as mainly positive. Residents supported increasing the number of tourists. These positive attitudes compare interestingly with those found by Jimura (2016) in Japan. There both tourists and residents had an interest in the conservation of the pilgrimage routes in the Kii WHS. In other words, there was a positive and

shared focus on the effects on tangible heritage. In this Uzbek case study, in contrast, the most important and positive effect was on perceived ICH and identities. A positive view of tourism was reinforced by the way tourism validated residents' perceptions of their own culture, identities, and hospitality. Indeed, this was more significant than any effects, positive or negative, that tourism had on the physical heritage sites of these two cities. Interviews highlighted that tourism was positively enhancing residents' perception of themselves as hospitable and therefore leading to support for the inflow of tourists that they have experienced. Because hospitality is also perceived by the residents as having an economic element, this cultural effect in turn reinforced positive views about the economic benefits of tourism, particularly in terms of employment opportunities for young people and women. This finding can be compared with work which has assessed the range of responses to CHT according to various sociocultural factors, including age. In this case, however, the response was generally positive across the sample, in contrast to the more segmented responses found in the WHS of Dubrovnik (Pavlić et al., 2020).

Additionally, residents noted that the environmental effects of tourism development in their mahalla were mainly beneficial. Respondents confirmed that the large inflow of tourists into their communities did not result in increased environmental degradation and waste. In fact, they stated that tourism improved the environmental condition of their communities as the local authority regularly organizes cleaning services to keep the historic sites attractive for tourists. Furthermore, in common with previous findings (Ferreira et al., 2020), respondents cited that having tourists in their communities increased their environmental awareness and enhanced their own waste management as well.

In terms of the balance of power, some residents complained about rising prices in the most visited locations. This led some residents to avoid dining and shopping in those areas. Some interviewees also complained of a loss of historic authenticity in their cities resulting from renovations carried out by local authorities to attract tourists. However, these issues were minor in comparison to the cultural and environmental benefits mentioned previously. This level of support for tourism development in the communities of Samarqand and Bukhara, despite some loss of agency, implies that the inflow of tourists in Uzbekistan is in an early stage (Allaberganov & Preko, 2021). This infant stage of tourism in Uzbekistan also explains why some of the findings differ from previous research in other geographical settings. This general support, despite some negative impacts on the local population, can be explained by reference

to Doxey's Irritation Index. This suggests that Uzbek mahallas are at the initial stage of tourism development, where the tourists are generally welcomed and there is an increase of monetary flows (Doxey, 1976).

### **Theoretical implications**

These findings have several theoretical implications. First, this study extends the application of social exchange theory geographically and culturally by studying it in Uzbekistan and by using the local mahalla as the geographical units of assessment. It thus reinforces emerging findings (Rasoolimanesh et al, 2019) that have drawn attention to the importance of proximity as a variable in local responses to tourism. However, in contrast to that study, proximity in this instance did not have negative effects. Some respondents instead stressed the desirability of living near the historic sites because of their association with pride and identity. It appears that the way in which residents understand cultural heritage is the key variable here.

Second, this study therefore suggests the need for a more nuanced approach to how the effects of CHT are assessed. It is noteworthy that our respondents perceived heritage primarily in intangible terms and saw that perception as positively reinforced by their interactions with tourists. Our findings thus draw attention to the significance of understandings of intangible heritage that are shared by both residents and tourists. Despite attracting a growing body of work, ICH remains an under-theorized concept in the field. After all, as Smith (2011) points out, the very concept of heritage is itself intangible. Nonetheless, not least in terms of the tourist experience, much that might be seen as ICH still has a distinct tangibility. For instance, although bazaars are sometimes discussed as key sites of intangible heritage (Zandieh & Seifpour, 2019), they are also experienced physically as architectural spaces wherein tourists engage haptically with the goods sold therein. This study therefore points towards the need for a more complex understanding of ICH and how it relates to CHT.

Third, it draws attention to the idea of hospitality as an under-explored element in understandings of intangible heritage. As emerges from this study, resulting associations with personal and group identity can be more significant than the physical process of providing hospitality. While there has been limited work on food culture and tourism (Miguel Molina et al., 2016), this finding about how hospitality is understood by residents contributes to the theorization of ICH. Finally, this study points to the importance of a confluence of ideas around

such intangible concepts between tourists and residents, in this case leading to positive feedback loops between both groups. In the process, it also indicates that spillover effects on concepts like identity and the ways in which these are impacted need more thoroughly to be factored into analysis of residents' responses to tourism.

### **Practical implications**

One principal barrier to the development of tourism and related hospitality businesses in these two cities is language. Some traders in Bukhara have taught themselves French and English to enhance their ability to market their wares. However, further promotion of learning of key international languages is desirable, perhaps combined with free language courses for the local populace. This educational development can also include historic and cultural lessons about the region so that residents will be able to inform tourists about local heritage. Such developments have been identified elsewhere as helping to support the development of tourism and the hospitality industry (Ward & Berno, 2011).

The finding that tourists are often more interested in the ICH of local traditional ceremonies and festivals such as weddings than the physical heritage sites, and that they tend to show up more frequently at these to interact with the locals, is of particular significance. Accordingly, local ceremonies such as weddings and teahouse activities can be further developed and promoted as tourism products (Özel & Kozak, 2016). These traditional ceremonies and gatherings are an integral part of the cultural life of residents (Dadabaev, 2013) making it a natural process in tourism promotion in Uzbekistan, one which can be encouraged without the cultural conflicts or destruction of heritage assets identified elsewhere (Cornet, 2015; Chauma & Ngwira, 2022). Accordingly, incorporating residents' perceptions into tourism development strategies is not just a matter of consulting with them more effectively (Gannon et al., 2021; Chauma & Ngwira, 2022). As this study emphasizes, it is also important to align approaches to tourism development more closely with residents' self-perception of their values (Khanom et al., 2019).

Consultation is nonetheless important to allay the concerns voiced by some residents. This issue can be addressed by local authorities through organizing regular stakeholder meetings about tourism development with the involvement of local businesses and residents (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2015; Paraskevaidis & Andriotis, 2017; Jani, 2018). During such

stakeholder meetings, issues such as how to preserve what they perceive as the authenticity of the city, assisting local people with pricing issues and renovating non-touristic locations could be discussed.

## **Conclusion**

Hitherto studies have primarily used social exchange theory to understand how residents have been positively or negatively affected by the growth of tourism locally. This study has added to this body of work by extending it to the under-researched country of Uzbekistan. It has also controlled for the proximity effects identified by Rasoolimanesh et al (2019) by focusing on the attitudes of residents in the mahalla local to the WHS in the study. In the process, it draws attention to the significance of intangible understandings of cultural heritage in producing the hitherto largely positive responses of residents to the growth of tourism. Tourists' focus upon hospitality has reinforced residents' own identities and self-perceptions and positively correlated with the perceived economic benefits that tourism might bring. This finding emerges because this study addresses the gap identified by Gannon et al., (2021) and explores not only how residents are affected by the growth of tourism, but also how their perceptions impinge on that growth. It also draws attention to the need to go beyond their recommendations. Involvement, consultation, and participation are indeed important ways of building trust. Yet finding ways to align tourism development with residents' own perception of their cultural values is no less significant. Meanwhile, some of our respondents suggested that their perceptions of the defining characteristics of heritage are gradually shifting. The designation of the UNESCO sites is drawing attention to their historic significance and producing a realignment of local understandings of heritage. In time, this historic and tangible heritage may become more important to residents, change how the benefits of CHT are calculated by residents in these two Uzbek cities and therefore require a reappraisal of tourist development strategy in Uzbekistan.

## **Limitations**

This study has several limitations which undermine the extent to which it can be used as a basis for generalization. It addresses tourism only in two distinct settings in Uzbekistan drawing upon qualitative research methods. More quantitative methods are required to explore the attitudes of residents towards tourism development according to factors such as age, gender, marital status, income, and occupation. The study also indicates the need for more research into

how residents' self-perceptions and identities interact with their understandings of heritage and thereby shape their attitudes towards and support for tourism development. In pointing to the significance of these perceptions for the successful development of tourism strategies it also indicates fruitful areas for future research.

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### **Declaration of Interest**

No potential conflicts of interest were reported by the authors.

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Table 1. Demographic information of the participants

Variables	Age	Gender	City	Occupation
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C1	22	Male	Bukhara	Hotel Manager
C2	19	Male	Bukhara	Student
C3	21	Male	Bukhara	Student
C4	20	Female	Bukhara	Student
C5	52	Female	Bukhara	Entrepreneur
C6	35	Male	Bukhara	Entrepreneur
C7	42	Female	Bukhara	Souvenir Shop Owner
C8	34	Male	Bukhara	Entrepreneur
C9	51	Male	Bukhara	Lecturer
C10	20	Male	Samarqand	Student
C11	40	Male	Samarqand	Government Employee
C12	58	Male	Samarqand	Retired
C13	49	Male	Samarqand	Preacher
C14	44	Female	Samarqand	Hotel Manager
C15	67	Female	Samarqand	Retired
C16	57	Female	Samarqand	Retired
C17	35	Female	Samarqand	Lecturer
C18	24	Male	Samarqand	Company Employee
C19	20	Male	Samarqand	Entrepreneur

Table 2. Identification of Themes and Frequencies

Themes	Frequency	Cases	Percentage of Cases
<i>Need Satisfaction</i>			
Financial	14	8	42%
Cultural	20	13	68%
Educational	19	12	63%
<i>Positive Antecedents</i>			
Historic sites	9	5	26%
Festivals	49	19	100%
Occupation related	7	6	32%
<i>Negative Antecedents</i>			
Lack of Historical Knowledge	8	5	26%
Language Barriers	27	15	79%
<i>Forms of Exchange</i>			
Service	13	8	42%
Knowledge	13	8	42%

Culture	30	13	68%
Hospitality	11	9	47%
Friendship	7	6	32%

*Consequence of Exchange*

Economic Output	49	17	90%
Social Output	44	17	90%
Environmental Output	21	16	84%

Figure 1. Perceptions of Mahalla residents towards tourism development in Samarqand and Bukhara through Social Exchange Theory model adapted from Ap (1992).

