

THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN UZBEKISTAN IN THE MIRZIYOYEV
ERA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE DEVELOPMENTAL STATE
APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN UZBEKISTAN IN THE MIRZIYOYEV ERA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE DEVELOPMENTAL STATE APPROACH

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Tourism is a major industry for many countries worldwide and plays an important role in developing countries. Since the 1980s, many developing countries have implemented tourism-friendly policies to become one of the preferred touristic destinations of the world. Uzbekistan has always been a well-known tourist destination. Even during the Soviet era, many visitors used to visit Uzbekistan to see the rich cultural heritage of the country. When Shavkat Mirziyoyev became the president of Uzbekistan in 2016, following the death of the country's first president, Islam Karimov, economic policy, and ultimately tourism policy, began to take a different course. After he was elected president, the Mirziyoyev administration immediately declared tourism as a strategic sector and started to implement policies to make Uzbekistan one of the favorite tourist destinations in the world. It can be argued that there is a link between the economic policies pursued by countries and the tourism policies pursued in the same countries. Countries tend to reflect their preferred economic model in their tourism policies. In other words, the state's approach to political economy in some way shapes the tourism development policies

implemented in these states. States that play a crucial role in shaping economic policy tend to implement their tourism development policies through strong and state-directed institutions which are also called developmental state policies. Mirziyoyev administration has been using developmental state's tools for the development of tourism in Uzbekistan since December 2016.

Keywords: Uzbekistan, Tourism, Developmental State, International Political Economy, International Tourism Policies



ÖZ

KALKINMACI DEVLET YAKLAŞIMI KAPSAMINDA MİRZİYOYEV DÖNEMİNDE ÖZBEKİSTAN TURİZMİ GELİŞİMİ

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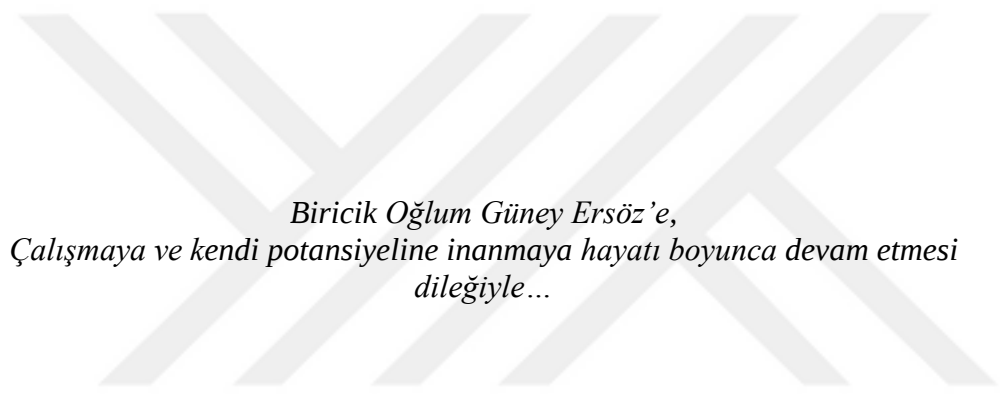
Nisan 2025, 336 sayfa

Turizm, dünya çapında pek çok ülke için önemli bir iş kolu olmuştur ve gelişmekte olan ülkelerin ekonomik kalkınmasında önemli bir rol oynamaktadır. 1980'lerden bu yana, birçok gelişmekte olan ülke, dünyanın tercih edilen turistik destinasyonlarından biri olmak için turizm politikaları uygulamaktadır. Özbekistan her zaman iyi bilinen bir turizm destinasyonu olmuştur. Sovyet döneminde dahi, pek çok ziyaretçi, ülkenin sahip olduğu zengin kültürel mirasını görmek için Özbekistan'ı ziyaret ederdi. Shavkat Mirziyoyev, ülkenin ilk cumhurbaşkanı İslam Kerimov'un ölümünün ardından 2016 yılında Özbekistan cumhurbaşkanı olduğunda, ekonomik politika ve nihayetinde turizm politikası farklı bir yol izlemeye başladı. Mirziyoyev, cumhurbaşkanı seçildikten sonra, turizmi stratejik bir sektör olarak ilan etti ve Özbekistan'ı dünyanın önde gelen turistik yerlerinden biri yapmak için politikalar uygulamaya başladı. Ülkelerin izlediği ekonomik politikalar ile aynı ülkelerde izlenen turizm politikaları arasında bir bağlantı olduğu ileri sürülebilir. Ülkeler, tercih ettikleri ekonomik modeli turizm politikalarında yansıtmaya eğilimindedir. Başka bir deyişle, devletin siyasi ekonomiye yaklaşımı, bu devletlerde uygulanan turizm geliştirme politikalarını şekillendirmektedir. Uluslararası ekonomi

politikalarını şekillendirme sürecinde önemli rol oynayan devletler, turizm geliştirme politikalarını da aynı şekilde, devletin özel sektöre liderlik ettiği şekilde devlet uygulama eğilimindedir; ki bu da “Kalkınmacı Devlet Politikaları” olarak adlandırılmaktadır. Mirziyoyev yönetimi, Aralık 2016'dan bu yana Özbekistan'da turizmin geliştirilmesi için kalkınmacı devletin politikalarını kullanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Özbekistan, Turizm, Kalkınmacı Devlet, Uluslararası Ekonomi Politikaları, Uluslararası Turizm Politikaları





*Biricik Ođlum Güney Ersöz 'e,
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APTA	: Private Tourism Agencies of Uzbekistan
B2B	: Business to Business
BRI	: Belt and Road Initiative
CSTO	: Collective Security Treaty Organization
ECLAC	: Economic Commission for Latin American Countries
E-Visa	: Electronic Visa
FDI	: Foreign Direct Investment
GDP	: Gross Domestic Product
GUAM	: Organization for Democracy and Economic Development - Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova
ICT	: Information Communications Technology
IMF	: The International Monetary Fund
IPE	: International Political Economy
LLC	: Low-Cost Carriers
MICE	: Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions
MNC	: Multinational Corporation
NGO	: Non-Governmental Organization
PPP	: Public Private Partnership
PR	: Public Relation
SAP	: Structural Adjustment Program
TDGPD	: Tourism Direct Gross Domestic Product
TTDI	: Travel & Tourism Development Index
TUROFED	: Türkiye Hoteliers Federation
TURSAB	: Association of Turkish Travel Agencies
UK	: United Kingdom
UNESCO	: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNWTO	: The United Nations World Tourism Organization
UzA	: Uzbekistan Airways
Uzbek SSR	: The Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic
WB	: World Bank
WHC	: World Heritage Centre
WTM	: World Tourism Market

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a major industry for many countries worldwide and plays an important role in their development. Since the 1980s, many developing countries have opened their destinations to become the world's preferred tourist destinations. Tourism is significant and unique in developing and less developed countries. As an employment-generating sector, tourism helps developing countries create new employment opportunities for their educated and less educated populations.

According to research of Statista, by 2025, tourism revenue is estimated to reach \$955.94bn worldwide and is projected to grow annually at a rate of 3.91%, resulting in a market volume of US\$1.11tn by 2029.¹ According to the International Labor Organization, by September 2024, more than 270 million workers, or approximately 8.2 percent of the global workforce, are employed in the tourism sector.² As stated by the World Travel and Tourism Council, by 2034, the tourism industry will also be a job creation juggernaut, employing 449 million people worldwide. Nearly 12.2% of the workforce will power this vibrant sector, showcasing Travel and Tourism's³ pivotal role in global employment.⁴

Central Asia has been a crossroads for many civilizations throughout history and played an enormous role in connecting East and West through the Silk Road. Silk

¹ "Travel & Tourism -Worldwide." Available at: <https://www.statista.com/outlook/mmo/travel-tourism/worldwide>. Accessed on 15 March 2025.

² "Tracking the Rebound in Tourism Employment." Available at: <https://ilostat.ilo.org/blog/tracking-the-rebound-in-tourism-employment/>, accessed on 8 August 2024.

³ Travel and tourism is the movement of people for leisure, business, or other reasons. It includes various services and industries such as transport, accommodation, attractions, and hospitality.

⁴ "Travel & Tourism Set to Break All Records in 2024, reveals WTTC." <https://wttc.org/news-article/travel-and-tourism-set-to-break-all-records-in-2024-reveals-wttc>. Accessed on 8 August 2024

Road, which is also considered one of the first touristic routes in history, has been analyzed by various scholars. In such scholarly works, Uzbekistan has always been at the core of attention and academic analyses, being relatively rich in cultural and touristic heritage.

During the Soviet era, Uzbekistan was one of the main tourism destinations of the Soviet Union. Contrary to common tenet, there was a tourism movement during the Soviet era within the Soviet Union, and Uzbekistan was considered the leading cultural tourism destination of the Union. Many foreign tourists, mainly from other communist countries, would come and see Uzbekistan's attractive destinations, namely Samarkand, Bukhara, Hiva. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Uzbekistan preferred to follow the Soviet legacy and pursue a more protectionist economic policy. Instead of liberalizing its economy and adopting the economic reforms that the international financial institutions proposed, Uzbekistan preferred to establish a system based on import substitution and state direction under strict state control. The protectionist approach has also affected the country's tourism sector, and despite having great potential, tourism in the country has not flourished enough during Karimov's presidency.

During the initial years of Karimov's era, the state's main focus was to reduce the negative effects of the transition process on households from command to market economy; therefore, tourism as an industry was neglected. The second part of Karimov's term can best be described as a period of isolation from the world following the Andijan events of 2005, which also made tourism a neglected industry.

When Shavkat Mirziyoyev came to power in Uzbekistan in 2016, following the death of the country's first president, Islam Karimov, economic policy, and indirectly tourism policy, began to take a different course. Uzbekistan started to adopt a more liberal economic policy in the tourism sector. Since then, the country's tourism sector has been considered one of the key sectors of the national economy. In a sense, the Uzbek authorities wanted to find ways to develop the economy and increase employment through tourism and the income generated by large numbers of international visitors.

The Mirziyoyev administration prioritized the transition from an agro-industrial to a post-industrial economic system, where the development of the service sector in general and tourism, in particular, would play a crucial role in achieving economic growth, development, and employment. As a result, the tourism sector was among the first to be focused on by the Uzbek government after Mirziyoyev took office in late 2016. Therefore, it can be argued that the Mirziyoyev administration's new approach to tourism and tourism policy marked a dramatic departure from Karimov's economic policies.

Regarding the economic and tourism policy, Mirziyoyev has always been clear about the expected results. He expressed this change in economic and tourism policy in a number of ways, including in his address to the ambassadors of the Uzbek Republic. He called on diplomatic staff and ambassadors in December 2017, saying, "Listen carefully. We are going to change the work from the new year drastically. I don't need ambassadors who don't report weekly on their work on investments or bring even 10 tourists to the country."⁵

The Mirziyoyev administration has prioritized tourism as one of the key sectors and aggregators of the Uzbek economy. In December 2016, just a few days after being elected president, Mirziyoyev declared that tourism had been recognized as one of the strategic sectors of the Uzbek economy by issuing a presidential decree entitled "On Measures for Rapid Development of the Tourism Industry in Uzbekistan."⁶ By signing the said decree, the Mirziyoyev administration has clearly stated that the tourism industry and its development will be one of the main priorities of his era. Focusing on the decree, it can be seen that Uzbekistan aims to develop the local tourism industry with the help of well-designed state intervention. Measures such as facilitating travel, easing the visa regime, improving tourism infrastructure, creating joint tourism packages with neighboring countries, and increasing the visibility of Uzbekistan's tourism destinations and products are among the priority measures that

⁵ Dadabayev, Timur. "Developmental State and Foreign Policy in Post-Kerimov Uzbekistan." The SAGE Handbook of Asian Foreign Policy, Editor In Takahashi Inoguchi, 2019, SAGE, ss. 641-656.

⁶ "Turizm-Budushee Ekonomiki Nashei Strany." (Tourism- the Future of Our Country) available at: <https://president.uz/ru/lists/view/1516>, accessed on 8 August 2024

can only be achieved through state intervention and high-level cooperation between the state and the private sector.

Tourism policies have direct or indirect links with different sectors. Managing tourism policies becomes more complicated as an industry that relies on different sectors. Therefore, the role of the state and its developmental policies have a profound impact on late-developing tourism destinations. As it is a fact that Japanese and Korean governments preserved the state protection policies of infant industries such as the automobile industry in the 1980s, the late-developing tourism destinations should also be protected and encouraged for some time until they get enough power and experience to engage in competition with the world-famous tourism destinations. Therefore, developmental state and state intervention policies are crucial in Uzbekistan's tourism development, which is the case where the tourism industry is considered an infant.

After he was elected president, the Mirziyoyev administration immediately began to implement a tourism policy to make Uzbekistan one of the main cultural tourist destinations in the region. As a good example of developmental state economic policy, the state aimed to facilitate the process for the private sector in tourism development and sought to create favourable conditions for developing tourism infrastructure. This was to be followed by implementing the right policies to promote Uzbekistan as a favourable destination along with its tourism products and establishing smooth and accessible air transport to enable international visitors to reach the country easily.

One of the first steps the Mirziyoyev government took was to abolish visas for countries with a potential source of tourism market for Uzbekistan. The Uzbek government made it possible for the citizens of various countries with a huge tourism potential to visit Uzbekistan without a visa, which can be considered a big step for developing the tourism industry. The tourism industry could only flourish if the destination's accessibility by air was not a problem. Moreover, national flag carriers are crucial in connecting a destination with other potential tourism source markets. Therefore, one of the most important steps taken by the Mirziyoyev administration

was to assist the country's national carrier, Uzbek Airlines, in purchasing new aircraft so that air connectivity would contribute to the tourism development process.

Although Western scholars have mostly neglected state involvement in tourism development because it is contrary to Western values and types of development, it can be very useful for late-developed countries if used wisely and effectively. In this regard, the main focus of my dissertation will be on developmental state policies in the sphere of tourism and their implications in Uzbekistan and their possible outcomes for the development of the tourism industry in the country.

1.1. Historical Background

Central Asia is a geographical region bordered by Mongolia, Xinjiang⁷, and Afghanistan. It includes five former Soviet states that have become sovereign states following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Nomadic and sedentary lifestyles would help us to understand the historical and cultural characteristics of the Central Asian region. Kazakh and Kyrgyz nomads were mostly part of the Kokand Khanate and were active in Xinjiang. At the same time, sedentary people were part of the three largest Islamic states of their time, namely the Emirate of Bukhara and the Khanates of Khiva and Kokand.⁸

Uzbekistan became an independent state for the first time after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Throughout history, the territory of present-day Uzbekistan was dominated by various civilizations and disorganized khanates until Tsarist Russia occupied the Turkestan region. The origin of the name Uzbek is linked to the ruler of the Golden Horde. The present-day Uzbek nation is believed to be a mixture of Turkic and Mongolian peoples. The name Uzbek was first used at the end of the 13th century. The Uzbek state was founded by the Uzbek Han, who came to the Fergana

⁷ Xinjiang, an autonomous territory in northwest China. Also known as: Chinese Turkistan, Uighur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang, Uyghur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang, Uygur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang

⁸ Zvyagelskaya, Irina. "Stanovlenie Gosudarstv Tsentral'noi Azii: Politicheskie Protsesy." (The Formation of Republics in Central Asia: Political Processes) Moscow: Aspect Press 2009. p. 5

Valley in the 13th century. Uzbek Han was the leader of the Turkic entity, which was part of the Golden Horde state that came under the Mongol Empire.⁹

It is believed that irrigated agriculture was the source of development in the Central Asian region in general and the territory of present-day Uzbekistan in particular before Christ. However, by the 1st century BC, the Silk Road and the trade and cultural links that developed around it played an important role in the region's history.

By the 1st century BC, Central Asia, including present-day Uzbekistan, was an important part of the Great Silk Road trade routes, which connected China with the Middle East and imperial Rome. The region was the target of various communities as it played an important role in world trade until the 16th century. Several Turkish, Iranian, and Arab entities attacked the region until the Tsarist occupation of the region.

The region witnessed a struggle between nomads and settlers and ultimately did not become a single state. Parts of its territory became provinces of empires whose centers were outside Central Asia (for example, the empire of Alexander the Great and the Mongol, Chinese, and Russian empires). As a result, Central Asia was the home of various entities such as khanates, emirates, etc. It was also the center of attraction for different cultures and religions, encompassing political, economic, and cultural situations. The emergence of Islam and its expansion through the Central Asian region also had a profound impact on the culture and destiny of the region.

By the first century, nomads from the East migrated into the Central Asian region through the Altay Mountains. By the half of the 6th century, Central Asia was controlled by Turkish entities. The struggle of the nomadic tribes at that time underscored the existence of a unique entity, not an ethnic one.¹⁰

⁹ Ulku, İrfan. "Moskova ile İslam Arasında Orta Asya." (Central Asia between Moscow and Islam) İstanbul: Kum Saati Yayınları, 2002, p.373

¹⁰ Hadimov O.A. İstoriya Uzbekistana. (The History of Uzbekistan) Termezeskiy Gosudarstvennyy Universitet, Kafedra İstorii. (Term State University Department of History) 2016 p. 25, available at:

The Sogdian¹¹ community controlled the region until the 7th century. With the advent of Islam, Arab communities, namely the Omayyad state, began to conquer the region to spread their religion. The first attempts to conquer the region by the Arabs started in 673 AD.¹² During this period, the region's famous trading cities, Bukhara and Samarkand, were controlled by the Sogdian state with the support of Turkish communities. Later, during the Abbasid period, the defeat of the Chinese at Talas in 751 led to the widespread spread of Islam throughout West Turkestan. Arab efforts to convert the Sogdians to Islam were so fierce and destructive that the heritage and culture of the Sogdian people, built up over many centuries, was completely lost.

In the 9th and 10th centuries, Central Asia was controlled by the Samanid dynasty.¹³ During this period, the Samanid dynasty ruled the capital city of Bukhara, along with other cities and regions of Transoxiana¹⁴ and Khorasan.¹⁵ It can be argued that during their time, the Samanids reduced the influence of the nomadic Turks and restored Samarkand as a regional capital and international trading center.

Under their rule, former trade along the Great Silk Road and the Great Spice Road¹⁶ resumed, and irrigation system improvements helped increase agricultural production. New canals and dams were constructed, and the main canal, which

https://namdu.uz/media/Books/pdf/2024/08/05/NamDU-ARM-13055-%D0%98%D0%A1%D0%A2%D0%9E%D0%A0%D0%98%D0%AF_%D0%A3%D0%97%D0%91%D0%95%D0%9A%D0%98%D0%A1%D0%A2%D0%90%D0%9D%D0%90.pdf. Accessed on 8 February 2025

¹¹ Sogdia or Sogdiana was an ancient Iranian civilization located between the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers in what is now Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. Samarkand and Bukhara were the Sogdians' most important cultural and economic cities.

¹² Gibb H.A.R. "The Arab Conquest in Central Asia." New York: AMS Press, 1970. p.33

¹³ Persian Sunni Muslim empire, ruled by a dynasty of Iranian Dehqan origin in the eastern part of Iran and Uzbekistan.

¹⁴ Historical region of [Turkistan](#) in [Central Asia](#) east of the [Amu Darya](#) (Oxus River) and west of the [Syr Darya](#) (Jaxartes River), roughly corresponding to present-day [Uzbekistan](#) and parts of [Turkmenistan](#), [Tajikistan](#), and [Kazakhstan](#).

¹⁵ Komaluddin Ş.S. "K voprosu o Prihozhdennii Samanidov." (About the Questions of the Emergence of Samanids) Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi Sayı 22, 2009. (The Journal of Social Sciences) available at: <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/843260>. Accessed on 8 February 2025

¹⁶ The Spice Routes, also known as Maritime Silk Roads, is the name given to the network of sea routes that link the East with the West

brought water to Samarkand, was lined with lead. A lead aqueduct built during this period provided drinking water to Samarkand until the Mongol invasion in 1220.¹⁷

During this period, while Samarkand was growing economically, Bukhara developed culturally. It became the religious center of Central Asia and the center of scientific development. Physician Ibn-Sina, philosopher Biruni, historian Narshaki, and poet Rudaki helped Bukhara become the center of the Persian Renaissance and of Islamic science.¹⁸

At the end of the 10th century, a Turkic-speaking people took over Samarkand and Bukhara. The arrival of the Karakhanids signaled a shift from Iranian to Turkic dominance in Central Asia. The Karakhanids (999-1212) were the first Turkic dynasty after the Arab conquest to come from the steppe and take control of the ancient urban centers of Transoxiana, the region corresponding to present-day Uzbekistan, and parts of Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan.¹⁹ The Karakhanids could rule the Central Asian region for only 100 years. In the eleventh century, the Seljuk Turks, allied with the Samanid rulers, acquired vast territories in Central Asia and ended the Karakhanid influence.

The Seljuks established control over the major cultural centers, Khorezm, Merv, Herat, Balkh, and other cities on the Silk Road. In 1044, they took Khorezm and defeated Samarkand in 1084. They ruled until 1141, when another Turkic tribe, the Karakitai, defeated them.²⁰

Early expeditions into Eastern Turkestan by the Mongols started as early as 1207, and a punitive action against the Karakitai was the prelude to an all-out Mongol invasion.²¹ In the year 1220, Bukhara was destroyed during the Mongolian invasion, and many scholars died under Genghis Khan's rage.

¹⁷ Roudik, Peter. "The History of the Central Asian Republics". USA: Greenwood Press, 2007, p.52

¹⁸ Roudik, Peter. "The History of the Central Asian Republics". USA: Greenwood Press, 2007, p.56

¹⁹ Guedy, David Durant. "Turko-Mongol Rulers, Cities, and City Life". Leiden Boston: Brill: 2013, p.1

²⁰ Roudik, Peter. "The History of the Central Asian Republics". USA: Greenwood Press, 2007p.60

²¹ Islam Arshad. "The Mongol Invasions of Central Asia." [International Journal of Social Science and Humanity](#) 6(4):315-319, 2016, Doi:[10.7763/IJSSH.2016.V6.664](#)

In 1370 Timur made Samarkand his capital. He brought under this sway the whole Transoxiana and set the region's affairs in order so there was no room for rebellion.²² He gathered all the best architects and artists in the city, making it the science and art center of the world. Timur erected magnificent architectural monuments (madrasahs, palaces, tombs, complexes, etc.) to redefine the appearance of the city.²³

After the Mongol invasion, Bukhara did not completely revive until the sixteenth century. Some nomadic tribes called themselves the Uzbeks and claimed to be the descendants of Uzbek Khan, one of the grandsons of Genghis Khan. Under the leadership of Sheybani Khan, they ended the Timurid sovereignty in Bukhara and Samarkand and moved the capital from Samarkand to Bukhara.²⁴ The Uzbek conquest of Transoxiana catalyzed a dramatic change in the region, which can be described as the rise of Uzbek influence. Most of the Uzbek tribes moved to the area and, through interaction with local settled populations, began forming a new national identity.²⁵

In the early seventeenth century, the Bukhara Emirate and the Khiva Khanates played a decisive role in the territory of present-day Uzbekistan. It can be argued that until the Tsarist occupation began, all Central Asian emirates, khanates and other entities struggled among themselves and avoided Russian and British interests in the region. In the north, Russia was rapidly growing into a major international player. In the south, the British Empire defeated the Mogul Empire in a series of offensive operations and began its colonization of the Hindustan peninsula. In the east, the Chinese Empire wished to secure its western border and to establish control over eastern Turkistan.²⁶

²² Ashrafyan, Klara "Central Asia Under Timur from 1370 to the Early Fifteenth Century." Available at: <https://en.unesco.org/silkroad/knowledge-bank/central-asia-under-timur-1370-early-fifteenth-century>. Accessed on 10 August 2024.

²³ Roudik, Peter. "The History of the Central Asian Republics". USA: Greenwood Press, 2007, p.98

²⁴ Mangaltepe, İsmail. "Khiva: A Conserved Heritage within the Sands." In Book "*Tourism in Central Asia*." Edited by Kantarci Kemal, Uysal Muzaffer and Magnini Vincent. New York: Apple Academic Press, p.98

²⁵ Abazov, Rafis. "Palgrave Concise Historical Atlas of Central Asia." New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p.77

²⁶ Abazov, Rafis. "Palgrave Concise Historical Atlas of Central Asia." New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p.77

Tsarist Russia had trade relations with the Khanates of Bukhara, Kokand, and Hiva, where the Khanates supplied Russia with raw materials for its domestic needs. Tsarist Russia conquered the Khiva Khanate in 1873 and took control of the Kokand Khanate in 1875.²⁷ In 1869, the Khiva Khanate followed the fate of the other khanates, offering no significant resistance and falling under the influence of Tsarist Russia.

Following the Soviet Revolution, Central Asian people were divided according to their vague ethnic differences. In 1924, The Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic (Uzbek SSR) was established as a union republic with its capital in Samarqand and also included the Tajik region as an autonomous republic. It acquired most of the former territory of the Bukhara Emirate and Turkistan Province.²⁸ Between 1926 and 1936, the Soviet administration changed the status of some of the republics. In 1930, Tashkent replaced Samarqand as the capital.

In 1929, the Uzbek SSR lost the Tajik ASSR, which gained the status of a union republic and transferred the territory of the Khojand region to the new Tajik SSR. However, in 1936 the Uzbek SSR added the Karakalpak ASSR to its jurisdiction.²⁹ Finally, in 1991, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Uzbekistan gained the status of an independent and sovereign republic with Tashkent as its capital.

Today's independent Republic of Uzbekistan covers 173,591 square miles of primarily semi-arid and desert terrain in Central Asia. Although many landlocked countries exist, Uzbekistan's situation is unique because all its neighbors are also landlocked. Uzbekistan is a double landlocked country. In addition, Uzbekistan is the most populous country of the post-Soviet states of Central Asia, with a population of more than 36 million as of March 2025.³⁰

²⁷ Zvyagelskaya Irina. "Stanovlenie Gosudarstv Tsentral'noi Azii: Politicheskie Protsey." (The Formation of Republics in Central Asia: Political Processes) Moscow: Aspect Press 2009. p. 5

²⁸ Abazov, Rafis. "Palgrave Concise Historical Atlas of Central Asia." New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p.96

²⁹ Abazov, Rafis. "Palgrave Concise Historical Atlas of Central Asia." New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p.96

³⁰ "The World Fact Book." Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/uzbekistan/#geography>. Accessed on 20 March 2025.

Throughout history, most of Uzbekistan's territory has been used for agriculture. As a result, the country's workforce has been organized around agriculture, which has been the country's largest sector. During the early years of the Soviet Union, agriculture remained the primary source of employment. However, various industries began flourishing in the country during the Second World War. To survive, the large Soviet production enterprises were evacuated from the European part of the Union to the Central Asian republics.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Uzbekistan was cautious about the effects of the transformation of the economy from a planned to a liberal one. As president of Central Asia's most populous state, Karimov, independent Uzbekistan's first president opted for a more protectionist policy, avoiding the potential crises and fluctuations of shock therapy, which kept the economy more or less stable. However, employment became an issue for Uzbekistan. Most of the Uzbek population had to leave the country to work in other post-Soviet countries, particularly the Russian Federation. When Mirziyoyev was elected president, one of his primary goals was to increase the number of Uzbeks working in Uzbekistan. As a result, tourism, which is labor-intensive and provides employment opportunities for the less educated and vulnerable, has become one of Uzbekistan's strategic industries in the Mirziyoyev era.

1.2. Research Aim and Questions

The dissertation analyses the development of tourism and its role in contributing to the national economy of Uzbekistan from the developmental state approach. In my dissertation, I argue that the Uzbek government aims to serve as the main actor in tourism development and has been using state-led tourism tools to transform the entire country into a well-known and preferred international tourist destination since the beginning of Mirziyoyev's presidency. In this regard, the main tools of state tourism policy, such as allocation of tourism investment areas, support and incentives for tourism investment in the priority areas, management and implementation of tourism promotion activities in the countries considered as the main source markets, training and raising the standard of services of personnel

working in the tourism industry, and ease of travel to Uzbekistan will be analyzed through the lens of developmental state tourism policy.

In doing so, I will support the idea that Uzbek policymakers would pursue developmental state policies in tourism. I propose to focus on the country's neo-statist tourism development policies and analyze whether Uzbekistan can achieve the goal of becoming one of the most preferred tourist destinations in the Eurasian region and the world.

Neo-statism or developmental state economic policies have not been among the main theoretical approaches to tourism development. I aim to contribute to the literature by highlighting the importance of state-led tourism policies in developing countries. I will also analyze the structure of government bodies in tourism and their practical approach to policy-making processes. Consequently, I aim to contribute to the theory of tourism development and the tourism development process of Central Asian countries by elaborating on tourism development policies in Uzbekistan.

In this sense, three major research questions have been formulated throughout the thesis:

1. What kind of economic and tourism policies has the Mirziyoyev government been pursuing to transform Uzbekistan into an international tourist destination?
2. To what extent have developmental state economic policies pursued in international tourism policy under Mirziyoyev?
3. To what extent have the international political economy and tourism policies of the Soviet and Karimov eras influenced Mirziyoyev's tourism policies in Uzbekistan?

Of these three questions, the first is the thesis' major research question. The second and third questions are dependent on the first question. The first question aims to discover the type of tourism policies, including the international ones under Mirziyoyev's presidency. The second question aims to provide an answer to the level of development of state policy in the field of tourism policy in Uzbekistan after

2016. It tries to find out the guidance and role of the government for the private sector in developing tourism policy under Mirziyoyev's rule. The third question seeks an answer to the impact of Soviet and Karimov-era economic and tourism policies on the development of the Mirziyoyev administration's tourism policy.

1.3. Literature Review

The dissolution of the Soviet Union forced the newly independent countries to deal with their basic economic problems, such as unemployment, inflation and privatization of state-owned enterprises, as a legacy of the Soviet Union. In the early years of the post-Soviet era, the previous administrations of the Central Asian states in general, and Uzbekistan in particular, did not consider tourism as one of the prior economic tools for the prosperity of the nations. Therefore, while there are many studies in the literature on the general economy and transitional economic policies of Uzbekistan and other post-Soviet and Central Asian countries, the number of studies on tourism development in post-Soviet Uzbekistan is limited because tourism has not been one of the main revenue generating industries in post-Soviet states in general and in Uzbekistan in particular.

Although there is considerable literature on the tourism potential of Uzbekistan, very few studies have focused primarily on tourism development and policy in Uzbekistan compared to tourism development studies for other parts of the world. This can also be explained by the fact that no post-Soviet country is considered a potential tourist destination. As Uzbekistan has potential in terms of the number of tourism products and destinations, the number of researchers dedicated to Uzbekistan's tourism richness is many.

Many books and articles focus on the cultural richness and beauty of Uzbekistan's destinations, such as Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva. Still, limited studies are observed in terms of tourism development. Among the few studies focusing on the development of tourism in Central Asia and Uzbekistan, we can classify the book "Tourism in Central Asia", edited by Kemal Kantarci, Muzaffer Uysal, Vincent P. Magnini, as a study aimed at explaining the reasons for the less developed tourism

industry in Central Asian region.³¹ In his book, Kantarci, along with 15 different authors, focuses on exploring the tourism potential of Central Asian states, including Uzbekistan. In addition to focusing on the tourism potential of Uzbek destinations such as Bukhara, Khiva and Samarkand, the book also focuses on the tourism development policies of Uzbekistan, including obstacles such as government corruption and bureaucratic red tape, which have also been formidable challenges encountered by those trying to develop successful tourism businesses in the region.

David Airey and Myra Shackley in their 1997 article entitled "Tourism development in Uzbekistan" examine the development of tourism in Uzbekistan in the context of the transition to a market economy following the collapse of the Soviet Union. While analyzing the potential strengths and weaknesses of Uzbek tourism, they conclude that the transformation of tourism in Uzbekistan still has a long way to go, but that the quality of attractions and the development of services provide a basis for optimism.³²

Nursultan Tukhliev and Abdullayeva (2007) describe the Uzbek tourism industry and marketing strategies in their Russian-language research book. In their book, the title of which can be translated as "National Models of Tourism Development", the authors argue that Uzbekistan's tourism industry cannot make any remarkable progress compared to other Central Asian countries, although the country is rich in terms of tourist destinations and tourism products. Their main criticism focuses on the failure of the Uzbek National Tourism Board to develop and implement a dynamic and effective promotional strategy. They also suggest the creation of an independent organization to carry out the marketing activities of the Uzbek National Tourism Board and the destinations it manages. In addition, they strongly recommend the formulation and implementation of an appropriate marketing strategy to fully exploit the potential of the tourism market. They also tried to link their policy to the development of tourism in Uzbekistan by studying the development of tourism

³¹ Kantarci Kemal, Uysal Muzaffer and Magnini Vincent. "Tourism in Central Asia." New York: Apple Academic Press, 2014

³² Airey David, Shackley Myra. "Tourism Development in Uzbekistan." *Tourism Management* Vol. 18, No. 4, pp. 199-208, 1997. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S026151779700006X>. Accessed on 15 June 2024.

and the main segments of some international destinations such as Croatia, Bulgaria, Spain and Vietnam.³³

Aleksandra Kim wrote an article entitled “Analysis and Perspectives of Tourism Development” in Uzbekistan in 2014. In her article, aimed at the analysis of tourism development and its perspectives in Uzbekistan, she claims that Uzbekistan has a very modest place in the global tourism market wherein an objective assessment of Uzbekistan's tourist resources has shown that, despite their exotic and unique features, they are losing out to foreign offers in terms of service levels, accessibility and promotion. Tourism could easily become the most important Uzbek industry in terms of income, job creation and the number of people who benefit from its direct and indirect effects. However, today (2013) it doesn't have its rightful place in the economy of Uzbekistan.³⁴

Soultana Tania Kapiki and Marufjon Tarikulov, in their article published in 2013 entitled "Development Prospects of Uzbekistan's Tourism and Hospitality Industry by Utilizing the EU Experience", attempted to provide Uzbek stakeholders with a development model to promote the development of tourism in Uzbekistan by examining tourism development policies and strategies in three European countries, namely the UK, Greece and the Czech Republic for the period 2007-2012. According to them, the tourism potential of Uzbekistan is being exploited to a much lower level than its capacity. The tourism industry and its corresponding products are dependent on a few certain destinations. The lack of qualified human resources is also a drawback. A high level of bureaucracy related to incoming and outgoing tourism is observed. Among the three EU developmental models that have been examined in this paper, it seems that the Czech model is the most suitable one to be applied in Uzbekistan.³⁵

³³ Tuhliev Nurislam. “Natsionalnye Modeli Razvitiya Turizma.” (National Models of the Development of Tourism) O‘zbekiston milliy ensiklopediyasi, (National Encyclopedia of Uzbekistan) 2006. Available at: https://kitob.sies.uz/frontend/web/kitob/kitob_005ff86b007253d.pdf. Accessed on 15 November 2024.

³⁴ Kim Aleksandra. “Analysis and Perspectives of Tourism Development in Uzbekistan.” [AGALI journal: journal of social sciences and humanities](#), ISSN-e 2444-2445, ISSN 2253-9042, [Vol. 3, N°. 3, 2013](#).

³⁵ Kapiki Soultana Tania, Tarikulov Marufjon. “Development Prospects of Uzbekistan’s Tourism and Hospitality Industry by Utilizing the EU Experience. Available at:

In order to transform a particular destination into a preferred tourist destination, a lot of efforts should be made so that international visitors can come and visit the destination without any difficulties. Uzbekistan needs to invest more in this area as a less developed destination in terms of tourism infrastructure. In this context, Azizova argues that Central Asian countries, including Uzbekistan, should focus on issues of tourism legislation, improvement of infrastructure, protection of cultural heritage, expansion of international cooperation, attraction, and realization of investments, and raising the qualification of employees working in the tourism industry.³⁶

Firdavs Saliev and Mukhammadkhon Soliev tried to position Uzbekistan as a competitive tourism destination by analyzing its tourism products, quality of services, and infrastructure in their article entitled “Economic Advancement of Tourism Industry in Uzbekistan.” They support the idea that Uzbekistan has great potential for tourism development. According to them, the policies and measures implemented in the country have already yielded results. Future diversification and modernization of the industry can make an exponential contribution not only to Uzbekistan's economy but also to the economies of Central Asian countries.³⁷

Obidjon Khamidov (2017) in his article titled "New Stage of Tourism Development in Uzbekistan: Actual Problems and Perspectives" mentioned that with the signing of the Decree on "Measures to Ensure the Rapid Development of Tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan" by Shavkat Mirziyoev in 2016, the tourism industry has become a strategic sector in Uzbekistan. In his article, he stresses the importance of developing tourism infrastructure and argues that the development of tourism infrastructure in all regions of Uzbekistan of modern facilities, such as hotels, transport and logistics structures, engineering and communications infrastructure,

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/270512207_Development_Prospects_of_Uzbekistan's Tourism and Hospitality Industry by Utilizing the EU Experience](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/270512207_Development_Prospects_of_Uzbekistan's_Tourism_and_Hospitality_Industry_by_Utilizing_the_EU_Experience). Accessed on 12 December 2024.

³⁶ Azizova N.T. “Features of Tourism Development in Central Asian Countries.” Available at: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/features-of-tourism-development-in-central-asian-countries>. Accessed on 8 October 2024.

³⁷ Saliev, Firdavs, Soliev, Mukhammadkhon. “Economic Advancement of Tourism Industry in Uzbekistan.” Global Disclosure of Economics and Business, 2015. Available at: <https://mpa.ub.uni-muenchen.de/64826/>. Accessed on 18 December 2024.

attracting foreign investment for this purpose is also one of the main tasks and priorities to become a developed tourist destination.³⁸

The research by Amonbaev, Tursunov and Ruziev, entitled “Main Tendencies of Historical and Cultural Tourism Development in Uzbekistan”, published in the book entitled "Event Tourism in Asia", analyses the potential of Uzbek tourist destinations and their possible contribution to development.³⁹ They underline the fact that while many studies focus on Uzbekistan's historical and cultural monuments, infrastructure and geographical location as the potential for historical and cultural tourism, the uniqueness of their research based on the development of historical and cultural tourism in Uzbekistan offers a new approach to determining the tourism potential of countries to study the largest groups of incoming tourists by country based on a survey. Their research links the development of tourism in Uzbekistan with the awareness of Uzbekistan's tourist destinations among potential international visitors.

1.4. Methodology

This dissertation aims to discover the development of tourism through the developmental state tourism policy in Uzbekistan and its positive impact on the national economy, which would require a detailed analysis that has not been done so far. In analyzing the argument, this research mainly adopts a qualitative research approach. The qualitative approach is mainly used to explain the developmental state tourism policy observed under Mirziyoyev's presidency. In-depth analysis is the process of examining a problem or issue in great detail. The in-depth analysis of data collected from written texts and expressed opinions should provide a comprehensive answer to the primary research question of the thesis. However, the thesis also uses tourism statistics to interpret and understand the development of tourism in Uzbekistan.

³⁸ Khamidov Obidjon. “New Stage of Tourism Development in Uzbekistan: Actual Problems and Perspectives.” Available at: https://web.archive.org/web/20180424134448id_/http://www.worldscientificnews.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/WSN-863-2017-134-149.pdf. Accessed on 9 November 2024

³⁹ Amonboev Mukhammadsiddik, Tursunov Bobir, Ruziev Shohruxbek. “Main Tendencies of Historical and Cultural Tourism Development in Uzbekistan.” In book “*Event Tourism in Asian Countries: Challenges and Prospects*.” Edited by [Shruti Arora](#), [Anukrati Sharma](#). New York: Apple Academic Press, 2022.

The study will be descriptive, as the research questions are all "what" questions. To answer this question, all the instruments of domestic and international tourism policy in the Mirziyoyev era were analyzed using the method of documentary analysis. Documentary analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) documents. Like other analytical methods in qualitative research, document analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge.⁴⁰

The data for the qualitative research method is based on a review of academic books and articles in Russian and English. Primary sources such as laws, presidential decrees, government policy documents and official statements by the president or various senior officials are also used as sources of data. It also relies heavily on data from primary and secondary sources such as the extensive literature of academic books, journals, statements and writings. The research mainly includes books and articles on political economy that are directly related to a country's international tourism policy. In addition, the dissertation also includes books and articles on the economic policies of the Soviet Union, both in Russian and English. In order to reflect both Western and Russian interpretations, the study includes both English and Russian language resources.

During the data collection process, I concentrated more on primary sources, the most important of which are official documents such as government laws and decrees. The first set of primary sources consists of official documents issued after Mirziyoyev became president in 2016. Laws, presidential decrees and statements on Uzbekistan's tourism development policy are the primary sources. The research relies primarily on examining official documents and statements made by Mirziyoyev and other government ministers to understand the policy shift in tourism, and the nature of economic and tourism policy in Uzbekistan during the Mirziyoyev era.

⁴⁰ Bowen Glenn. "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method." Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/240807798_Document_Analysis_as_a_Qualitative_Research_Method. Accessed on 7 November 2024

During the preparation of the dissertation, I visited Uzbekistan two times. My first visit was in 2017 when I found an opportunity to talk with Uzbek high officials in the field of tourism. I was also the organizer and active participant of the I. Uzbekistan-Turkish Joint Tourism Commission which was held in Tashkent on April 24, 2017.⁴¹ During the same visit, I also had the opportunity to visit the cities of Samarkand and Bukhara, which are considered two of Uzbekistan's main tourist destinations. I had the chance to explore their tourism infrastructure and cultural tourism potential. I also revisited Uzbekistan in 2018 for a 6-day visit, where I saw the tourism potential of Tashkent, Bukhara and Samarkand. During these visits, in addition to attending and speaking at official meetings⁴² dedicated to Uzbekistan's tourism development, I had the opportunity to interact directly with senior Uzbek tourism officials, including the head of the State Tourism Agency. In addition, during the process of preparing my thesis and subsequently monitoring the implementation of tourism policy and the ultimate development of the Uzbek tourism industry, I had many unofficial discussions with Uzbek tourism officials and representatives of the private tourism industry in Uzbekistan.

1.5. Thesis Outline

This dissertation consists of six chapters. **Chapter I (Introduction)** provides general information on the importance of the tourism industry worldwide. The chapter discusses the general characteristics of Uzbekistan's economic and tourism policies. It also highlights the importance of tourism development for the Republic of Uzbekistan following the collapse of the Soviet Union. In addition to providing general information on the history of the region in which modern Uzbekistan is located, the chapter also presents research questions, literature review, and methodology.

⁴¹ “Türkiye ile Özbekistan Arasında Turizm Alanında İşbirliği.” (Cooperation between Türkiye and Uzbekistan in the sphere of Tourism) available at: <https://basin.ktb.gov.tr/TR-180948/turkiye-ile-ozbekistan-arasinda-turizm-alaninda-is-birligi.html>, accessed on 8 February 2025

⁴² “Türk İşadamları Özbekistan’da” (Turkish Businessmen are in Uzbekistan) available at: <https://avim.org.tr/tr/Bulten/TURK-IS-ADAMLARI-OZBEKISTAN-DA>, accessed on 10 January 2025.

Chapter 2 (Theoretical Framework: International Tourism Policies) provides general information on international tourism policy and its historical development. It begins with a brief overview of the historical development of the International Political Economy (IPE). Before moving on to international tourism policies, the chapter briefly presents the differences in IPE together with different IPE perceptions of different states, focusing concisely on American, British, Latin American, and Asian IPE theories, which would also profoundly impact the determination of countries' international tourism policies. Afterward, the chapter presents different types of tourism policies: modernization, neoliberalism, dependency, alternative tourism, and developmental state. The chapter aims to highlight the differences in international tourism policies, focusing on the role of states in shaping tourism policies and tourism development, especially in developing and less developed countries. Finally, the chapter analyses the contribution of tourism to national economies, highlighting development, poverty alleviation, and employment growth.

Chapter 3 (The Economy and Tourism Policies of Uzbekistan until the Mirziyoyev era) provides contextual information on the economy of Uzbekistan in the Soviet and post-Soviet eras. The chapter begins by outlining the general characteristics of the Soviet economy and the role assigned to Soviet Uzbekistan by the Soviet administration. It then highlights the features of tourism policy during the Soviet era and the role of the Uzbek SSR in the Soviet tourism system. The chapter then focuses briefly on the transition from a command to a market economy, highlighting the economic priorities of Islam Karimov, Uzbekistan's first president. The chapter reviews Karimov's economic policies, which can be described as protectionist and highly interventionist. This perception differed from that of most post-Soviet states, which adopted more liberal transitional economic policies. The chapter also analyses Karimov's tourism policy, which has remained limited as a result of his isolationist international policy, despite his efforts to improve the country's tourism industry.

Chapter 4 (Uzbekistan Economy during the Mirziyoyev era) The chapter examines the economic policies of Mirziyoyev, Uzbekistan's second president, which can be classified as a dramatic shift from Karimov's economic policies and have had

a huge impact on the development of Uzbekistan's economy and ultimately the tourism industry. When Mirziyoyev came to power in 2016, Uzbekistan abandoned its protectionist and import-substitution policies. Since then, the government has adopted a more liberal stance with a strong state presence. Since late 2016, Uzbekistan has embarked on comprehensive structural reforms aimed at revitalizing key sectors, liberalizing markets, and introducing market mechanisms into the economy. By establishing friendly relations with neighboring countries and economic partners, Mirziyoyev has sought to integrate Uzbekistan into the global world. This chapter focuses on the radical transformation of Uzbekistan's economy and the economic reforms undertaken by the country's second and current president, Shavkat Mirziyoyev.

Chapter 5 (Uzbekistan Tourism Policies during the Mirziyoyev era) is the core chapter of this thesis, where the primary data analysis is presented. This chapter provides an overview of the main tourism policies of Uzbekistan after 2016, when Mirziyoyev became President of the country. The chapter provides information and examples of tourism policies from a developmental state perspective. It also analyses the Uzbek state's leading role in tourism development and its relationship with the private sector to support it in the early years of tourism, when competition with the world's most popular international tourist destinations would be challenging. As a potentially popular tourist destination, Uzbekistan began to adopt a more liberal policy under the guidance and intervention of the state. Therefore, the main focus of this chapter will be on the tourism policy of the Mirziyoyev government. Special emphasis will be placed on the decrees of the President of Uzbekistan in favor of the development of tourism in the country, using the various instruments of tourism policy-making, such as visa policy, development of tourism and transport infrastructure, promotion, tourism education, and also bilateral and multilateral relations in the field of tourism, to make the country one of the leading tourist destinations. Some figures and statistical analyses on tourism show the impact of key tourism policies that enable the country to become a popular tourist destination, including developing tourism infrastructure, promoting different tourist destinations and products, visa policy, and improving air connectivity. The chapter also reviews

the implementation of government decrees in the sphere of tourism and practical solutions to the problems of tourism development.

Chapter 6 (Conclusion) analyses how the development of tourism would contribute to the economy of Uzbekistan and based on the statistical data, also aims to answer the research questions related to the development of tourism in Uzbekistan and its contribution to the national economy of the country.



CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: INTERNATIONAL TOURISM POLICIES

2.1. Introduction

Tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing industries in developed countries, as well as developing and less developed countries. For many countries, tourism is seen as a tool for development, as it plays an important role in stimulating economic activities. As a labor-intensive sector, tourism creates new employment opportunities and positively impacts the balance of payments, gross income, and production. As an employer, tourism creates opportunities for unskilled workers, women, and young people.

Tourism is seen as a sector that shifts labor from primary sectors, such as agriculture and manufacturing, to the service sectors. It is also considered to be the largest export segment for many countries. Given this, it is not surprising that scholars have extensively analyzed the impact of tourism, both domestically and internationally. However, when it comes to the process of theorizing political tourism, it can be concluded that the literature is insufficient compared to the literature on International Political Economy (IPE). Bianchi, a well-known scholar working on tourism policy, pointed out that

Tourism continues to be relatively neglected in the wider development studies literature despite its undoubted significance as an item of international trade. While there have been many studies which have sought to evaluate tourism's relative contribution to the economic development of different countries and regions (Bryden 1973; Cleverdon 1979), the political economy of tourism has yet to fully establish itself as a discrete field of enquiry.⁴³

⁴³ Bianchi Raoul V. "Towards a New Political Economy of Global Tourism". In book: *Tourism and Development: Concepts and Issues* (pp.287-331) Edition: 2nd. Chapter: 10. Publisher: Channel View Publications. Editors: R. Sharpley and David J. Telfer. p.1

Although international tourism has expanded and diversified as one of the world's leading economic sectors, the international political economy of tourism has not been widely studied in the literature, except for scholars such as Chin, Clancy, Bianchi, and Ferguson. It can also be argued that there is no consensus on conceptualizing international tourism policies. On the one hand, there is a tendency among scholars to associate international and domestic tourism policies with development. On the other hand, some scholars call the concept of international tourism policies, while others call it the international political economy of tourism. In our thesis, the main concept of theorizing the process of tourism policies will be International Tourism Policies. Tourism policy studies have been shaped by tourism development policies that contribute to economic growth and theoretical economic policy internationally and domestically. Even though tourism significantly contributes to national economies and world trade, theoretical research on tourism policy from an international political economy perspective is too limited.

Soon after the Second World War, international tourism was promoted by the industrialized states for the less developed and developing countries as a tool for providing economic development. Therefore, during the 1950s and 1960s, when international tourism policies were in place, the main focus was on development, and tourism was considered one of the important aspects of development studies. Consequently, the theory of international tourism policy was shaped around the development phenomenon. As is the case in IPE theorizing, the development process in tourism is also political and influenced by economic, socio-cultural, and political forces. Therefore, over time, theories and development frameworks such as modernization, dependency, neoliberalism, and alternative development have become the dominant theories of international tourism. The development frameworks provide a basis for understanding how tourism has developed and works as a development tool. It will also suggest that tourism has evolved within a trajectory of these dominant development theories, and it maps the conceptual changes from development predominantly concerned with economic growth and inequality to those concerned about social, human, and environmental issues.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Lewis Richard. "Theory of Tourism Development." Available at: https://www.academia.edu/16127877/Theory_of_Tourism_Development. Accessed on 2 August 2024

It can be argued that there is a link between the economic policies that are pursued by the countries and the tourism policies that are pursued in the same countries. Countries tend to reflect their preferred economic model in their tourism policies. In other words, the state's approach to political economy in some way shapes the tourism development policies implemented in these states. Countries with more liberal economic policies will not be keen on having solid institutions to deal with the tourism industry. On the other hand, states that play a crucial role in shaping economic policy tend to implement their tourism development policies through strong and state-directed institutions. Thus, it seems that the state's responses to the challenges of tourism are primarily consistent with the style of political economy. Prevailing paradigms of thought about political economy seem to influence strongly how states respond to tourism challenge.⁴⁵

In this chapter, I will focus on the main theories of international tourism and the developmental state, while also explaining the historical development of international tourism policies. In doing so, I will first review the primary international tourism policies promoted by the West, namely modernization and neoliberalism. I will focus on critical international tourism policies such as dependency/underdevelopment and alternative development, followed by developmental state policies and their implementation in the tourism industry. Finally, I will examine the contribution of international tourism flows to national economies.

However, before moving on to the theoretical framework of international tourism and its contribution to national economies, I will begin the chapter with a brief review of the theoretical perspectives of IPE to provide the theoretical underpinnings of the thesis from a broader perspective as IPE has a direct link to international tourism policy. Although the concept of tourism policy is the main theoretical debate of the research and this chapter, I will also provide a brief overview of the historical development and different perspectives of IPE, as I argue that different perceptions

⁴⁵ Webster Craig, Ivanov Stanislav, Illum Steven. (2009). "Political Economy and Tourism Policy: National Tourism Organizations and State Policy." SSRN Electronic Journal. 10.2139/ssrn.1372037. Doi:[10.2139/ssrn.1372037](https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1372037)

and theorizations of IPE have had a profound influence on the theorization of international tourism policy and its practical implementation.

2.2. International Political Economy (IPE)

IPE studies the power relations and socio-economic forces that shape the production of goods and services and the conflicts and inequalities resulting from these relations in an international domain. The roots of classical political economy are closely bound up with the tumultuous changes associated with the Industrial Revolution and the development of capitalism in Western Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁴⁶

Famous American political scientist Robert Gilpin defined IPE as “the reciprocal and dynamic interaction in international relations of the pursuit of wealth and pursuit of power.”⁴⁷ Perhaps what Gilpin meant by the pursuit of wealth was the role of markets and material gain in the context of economics. By the pursuit of power, he meant the role of the state and the avoidance of conflict, which is one of the main concerns of political scientists. As can be understood here, the main aim of IPE is to combine economics and politics in the context of international relations.

Although international politics and economics have been analyzed separately since the 17th century, there was no consensus on the description of IPE until it emerged as a separate discipline in 1970s. The global economic problems and the lack of economic development in the newly decolonized Third World countries encouraged academics and politicians to focus on the relationship between economics and international policymaking.

The origination of the IPE is linked with a couple of international incidents. These incidents triggered the birth of IPE. Among these incidents, the most striking was the remarkable recovery of the European and Japanese economies after World War II.

⁴⁶ Bianchi Raoul V. “The Political Economy of Tourism Development: A Critical Review.” *Annals of Tourism Research*, Volume 70, May 2018, Pages 88-102, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2017.08.005>

⁴⁷ Cohen Benjamin J, “International Political Economy: An Intellectual History. Chapter 1 The American School.” Princeton University Press. 2008. p.16

The decolonization process and the shifting conditions between the relations of recently decolonized countries and developed states were the first to recognize that this needed to happen. Hence, American IPE had a crucial role in the formation process of IPE or new understanding of IPE.

For the US administration, international politics should always serve the smooth functioning of the international economic system, from which the developed states benefit most, and IPE should also help to avoid conflicts and underpin the US leadership role in the international economy. By 1970, as the US leadership in the international economic system began to wane, politicians and scholars began to question the economic system, and two scholars came up with a new idea.

In 1970, the American scholars Keohane and Nye understood that economic management was already political rather than technical. They emphasized the fact that individuals' behavior is not rational, as economics claims, but also political. Their main argument was that economics and politics could not be separated. Consequently, they introduced two terms: complex interdependence and transnational relations. According to them, world politics has changed, and states are no longer the only actors in IPE. States may still be the central actors in international affairs. However, with the expansion of the global market, states no longer determine outcomes. Keohane and Nye never underestimated the role of states in IPE, but with the concept of complex interdependence, they drew attention to the impact of non-state actors in the new IPE. They underlined the fact that although states are the main actors, the relationship and interaction between non-state actors have a profound impact on the course of international and economic events.

States might still be central actors in international affairs, but with the expansion of the global marketplace, they could no longer claim sole authority to determine outcomes. The liberalization of trade and finance was widening the range of transnational relations adding new cross-border contacts, coalitions and interactions beyond those controlled by the foreign policy organs of government.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Cohen Benjamin J, "International Political Economy: An Intellectual History. Chapter 1 The American School." Princeton University Press. 2008, p.28

Another American approach to IPE is neo-realism. Gilpin, one of the main theorists of IPE and the supporter of neo-realism in IPE, sees the relationship between the state and the market as fundamental to any understanding of the issues involved in economic and political change and the ordering of human relationships. Neo-realists accept the importance of non-state actors, but still believe that states are the key actors in IPE. Gilpin underlines the importance of interactions between the economic actors in the world economy. Global political economy is the interaction of the market and such powerful actors as states, multinational firms, and international organizations.⁴⁹

The role and impact of large international corporations in the process of implementing international political economy is also a major focus of American IPE. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, globalization has been the main feature of the world economy. In the mid-1980s, multinational corporations (MNCs) and foreign direct investment (FDI) began to profoundly impact various aspects of the international economy. The increasing number of MNCs has led to the internationalization of services and manufacturing. Reduced tariffs and other barriers to international trade in developed countries also contributed to this process. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Cold War, which was the main threat to Western economic management, ended. Moreover, the desire of most post-Soviet and communist states to integrate their economies into the liberal world economy and to find ways to become members of international economic organizations contributed to the final triumph of the Western type of economy, liberalism, and capitalism.

The term globalization became popular in the second half of the 1980s in connection with the increase in direct investment by multinational companies. The fall in transport costs has also led to an increase in international trade. Globalization has also been brought about by global economic cooperation and new economic policies. Under American leadership, developed and developing countries have started reducing trade and investment barriers. As a result of these developments, many

⁴⁹ Cohen Benjamin J, "International Political Economy: An Intellectual History. Chapter 1 The American School." Princeton University Press. 2008, p.28

economists supported the idea that there was a shift from a state-dominated to a market-dominated economy. The collapse of the state-dominated Soviet economy also contributed to this process. The decline of the state is a sign of an open and globalized capitalist economy, characterized by unrestricted trade, financial flows, and the important role of multinational companies. As a result, most scholars have become convinced of the declining role of the state in the economy. However, the phenomenon of globalization and the diminishing role of states in economies would be among the main criticisms expressed by developing and less-developed countries.

The development of IPE in the UK had a different character than the IPE in the US. It can be stated there is no similarity between British and American IPE except the fact that both aimed at combining economics and politics in an international domain. Cohen notes, “Beyond an interest in marrying international economics and IR, there is no consensus at all on what, precisely, IPE is about.”⁵⁰ According to British perceptions, the understanding and construction of contemporary IPE, also referred to as orthodox IPE, reflects US political and economic priorities and concerns. In addition, the interpretation of issues and conflicts in orthodox IPE also tends to reflect US interests and values. As Robert Cox argued, “Theory is always for someone and for some purpose”. This eventually leads to an investigation into the conditions of knowledge production and the question of knowledge for whom and for what purpose.⁵¹ Multidisciplinary and loose disciplinarity played an important role in British IPE. This multidisciplinary has shaped norms of behavior, boundaries, and external relations. It has also led to an engagement with historical materialist approaches. Loose disciplinarity can be explained by the fact that British IPE does not confide in the structures of disciplinarity that are so influential in the US.

The development of IPE in Britain was achieved thanks to Susan Strange's efforts. It can be argued that Strange's impact on IPE is similar to that of Keohane and Nye in

⁵⁰ Cohen Benjamin J. “The Transatlantic Divide: Why American and British IPE are so Different”? Available at: https://www.polsci.ucsb.edu/sites/secure.lsit.ucsb.edu.poli.d7-3/files/sitefiles/people/cohen/recent/RRIP_A_228731_O.pdf. Accessed on 28 July 2024

⁵¹ Cohen Benjamin J. “The Transatlantic Divide: Why American and British IPE are so Different”? Available at: https://www.polsci.ucsb.edu/sites/secure.lsit.ucsb.edu.poli.d7-3/files/sitefiles/people/cohen/recent/RRIP_A_228731_O.pdf. Accessed on 28 July 2024

the US. Rather than developing a full theory of IPE, she aimed to develop a way of thinking and a framework for thinking. First, Strange, emphasized the importance of merging economics and international relations, afterwards, she supported the idea of multidisciplinary in IPE. According to Strange, it would be a problem if IPE were to remain under the protection of economics, international politics or international relations. A broader range of disciplines, from sociology and history to psychology and anthropology, even gender studies, is essential to studying and understanding IPE.⁵² In the 1990s, this inclusiveness became the focus of IPE in the UK and the main factor distinguishing IPE in the UK from IPE in the US. This inclusiveness meant crossing all traditional disciplinary boundaries, broadening the focus of analysis and opening up new existing areas of inquiry. In this sense, bridges should be built not only between international economics and IR, but also between other disciplines. Therefore, some of the British scholars promoted a different name than IPE: Global Political Economy.⁵³

In addition, British IPE has developed through the efforts of government advisers, former economics ministry officials, or even journalists, rather than academics as in the US. This provides an opportunity to develop a more problem-oriented rather than theory-driven quality. Furthermore, in contrast to American IPE, Marxism plays an important role in the British understanding of IPE. Marxism has had a more influential tradition in British social science than in the US. Its role in developing ideas in British IPE was more visible than in the USA, mainly because Marxism was seen as a Soviet type of belief in the USA, especially during the Cold War period.

Critical British IPE has made four main contributions to the IPE literature: imperialism, post-colonialism, the political economy of decline, and the state. Imperialism and decolonization were the main political preoccupations of Britain's foreign economic and political relations in the 20th century. Imperialism can be

⁵² Cohen Benjamin J. "The Transatlantic Divide: Why American and British IPE are so Different"? Available at: https://www.polsci.ucsb.edu/sites/secure.lsit.ucsb.edu/poli.d7-3/files/sitefiles/people/cohen/recent/RRIP_A_228731_O.pdf. Accessed on 28 July 2024

⁵³ Cohen Benjamin J. "The Transatlantic Divide: Why American and British IPE are so Different"? Available at: https://www.polsci.ucsb.edu/sites/secure.lsit.ucsb.edu/poli.d7-3/files/sitefiles/people/cohen/recent/RRIP_A_228731_O.pdf. Accessed on 28 July 2024

described as the efforts of the major controllers of industry to widen the channel for the flow of their surplus wealth by seeking foreign markets where they cannot sell at home. Throughout the 20th century, Britain struggled with the problems of losing an empire and finding a role for the British economy in this period. Excessive government spending overseas and excessive overseas investment, combined with high military spending, led to a process of decolonization. And this process became one of the main concerns of British IPE. British political and economic debates throughout the twentieth century grappled with losing an empire, finding a role, and the place of the British economy generally and sterling specifically within that process.⁵⁴

The interpretation and understanding of IPE in Latin America are linked to modernization theory and also the general IPE theory promoted by the US. Modernization theory, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and the development path imposed by developed countries on developing and less developed countries, including Latin American countries, have become the reason for the emergence of critical theory in IPE in Latin America. The main discussion and criticism in the literature on IPE in Latin American countries has emerged around the question of why Latin American countries have failed in their development path, although they have tried to follow the same path that had been recommended and implemented by developed countries before.

In the case of international political economy, the Latin American critical tradition revolved around two axes, namely structuralism and dependency. Although these two traditions are different from each other, the main feature that brought them together was the concept of underdevelopment.

From an evolutionary perspective, Latin American critical theorists showed that the region was not progressing along the developmental path that was expected to bring Latin American states closer to the developed ones. In other words, Maslow's

⁵⁴ Clift Ben. and Rosamond Ben. "Lineages of a British International Political Economy." In *Handbook of International Political Economy: IPE as a Global Conversation* edited by [Mark Blyth](#). London: Routledge, 2009. p. 103

hierarchy of needs or modernization theory promoted by Western scholars to developing countries has not brought prosperity and development and has kept the countries in a state of underdevelopment.

Structuralists focused on the world economic structure, the shortcomings of modernization theory, and why it failed. Structuralists have defined states as dominant (core or developed) and dominated (periphery or developing). They believe that the world's production mode always favors the core countries. The main reason for this is that the type of production in the core countries is heterogeneous. In contrast, the type of production in the peripheral countries is homogeneous, with agricultural production being the most common. According to them, different structural conditions always favor the core/developed countries. Palma explains the structuralist relationship as follows:

From the very beginning the Economic Commission for Latin American Countries' (ECLAC)⁵⁵ analysis was structuralist in the sense that it viewed the world economy as a system within which the center and periphery are intrinsically related and the most economic problems of the periphery, such as slow growth, stop-go macroeconomics, inflation, and unemployment, are associated with the specific economic structure that emerged from that interaction.⁵⁶

In addition to structuralism, dependency theory is one of Latin American states' most popular critical theories.⁵⁷ Latin American dependency theory is a political-economic thought developed from the ECLAC's structuralism shortly after World War II. Dependency theories emerged in the early 1960s as attempts radically transform

⁵⁵ ECLAC, which is headquartered in Santiago, Chile, is one of the five regional commissions of the United Nations. It was founded with the purpose of contributing to the economic development of Latin America, coordinating actions directed towards this end, and reinforcing economic ties among countries and with other nations of the world. The promotion of the region's social development was later included among its primary objectives.

⁵⁶ Palma Jose Gabriel. "Why did the Latin American Critical Tradition in the Social Sciences Become Practically Extinct? From Structural Adjustment to Ideological Adjustment." Available at: https://www.networkideas.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Latin_America.pdf. Accessed on 8 February 2025

⁵⁷ Dependency and underdevelopment as part of critical theory also play an important role in the international tourism policy discourse. Therefore, in the following sections, there will be more explanations for dependency and underdevelopment to international tourism policies, regardless of the region.

ECLAC-type-structuralists and Comintern-type Marxist thinking about the obstacles facing capitalist development in the periphery.⁵⁸

Notable scholars in this intellectual tradition include Raúl Prebisch, Fernando Cardoso, and Andre Gunder Frank, and dependency theory, as articulated by Latin Americanists, came to later influence the world-systems analysis promoted by Immanuel Wallerstein, Giovanni Arrighi, and Christopher Chase-Dunn.⁵⁹ According to them, it was the two sides of the same model. The reason there are developed countries is because there are underdeveloped countries. The reason there are underdeveloped countries is because the developed countries dominate them. They also argue that the underdevelopment experienced in Latin America results from the intervention of developed states rather than a lack of investment or development.

The proponents of dependency theory, known as *Depandistas* have almost the same ideas as the structuralists, but what distinguishes them from the structuralists is that they have proposed an immediate revolution rather than a different economic model. On the other hand, among the Latin American *Depandistas*, some scholars also advocate statist policies for the region's development. Prebisch and others thought that economic development could be achieved through a series of economic policy prescriptions that would encourage domestic industry. As Ramón Grosfoguel argues, this statist approach to development predates dependency theory by approximately a century in Latin America.⁶⁰

East Asian states' IPE perception is linked with developmental state policies. Economic rise and rapid industrialization of the East Asian countries, namely Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and China, after the Second World War, through the implementation

⁵⁸ Palma Jose Gabriel. "Why did the Latin American critical tradition in the social sciences become practically extinct? From structural adjustment to ideological adjustment." Available at: https://www.networkideas.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Latin_America.pdf. Accessed on 8 February 2025

⁵⁹ Schmidt Steven. "Latin American Dependency Theory." Available at: <https://www.globalsouthstudies.org/keyword-essay/latin-american-dependency-theory/>. Accessed on 29 July 2024

⁶⁰ Knutsson, Benjamin. "The Intellectual History of Development." In book *Tourism and Development*. Vol 2. *Tourism and Sustainable Development*. (pp.103–162), SAGE, Editors: Richard Sharple (2015)

of non-Western economic policies, has attracted the region's attention. They achieved this so-called rapid industrialization by pursuing state-directed, i.e., developmental state policies, which were contrary to the orthodox international economic theories proposed by the industrialized Western nations. Walden Bello points out that, if there is one theory or approach that might be said to be uniquely associated with the region, it is the theory of the developmental state. Indeed, one can say that theoretical innovation and empirical work in IPE in East Asia has been largely driven by the developmental state debate.⁶¹ The interpretation of IPE in Asian countries differs from that in Western countries. The word “international” in an East Asian context does not necessarily and exclusively refer to the kind of transnational economic relations and international interdependence originally envisaged in the American School of IPE associated with such scholars as Keohane, Nye, and Gilpin.⁶²

Developmental state economic policy refers to the statist economic policy in which industrial growth and states as the main economic actors are the key factors in the functioning of the economy. The implementation of statist economic policies is the characteristic treatment of it.

The concept of developmental state was first used in 1982 by Chalmers Johnson, who later became a professor of political science. He used the concept of developmental state in his book titled MITI⁶³ and Japanese Miracle. In the said book, he argued that the road that Japan chose for development was different from the West, and it cannot be understood with the help of Western-backed IPE theories or concepts. Later on, Johnson's characterization of Japan as a developmental state became the orthodox view.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Bello, Walden. “States and Markets, States versus Markets: The Developmental State Debate as the Distinctive East Asian Contribution to International Political Economy.” London: Routledge, 2009. p.180

⁶² Yeung Henry Wai-chung. “The Rise of East Asia: An Emerging Challenge to the Study of International Political Economy.” In Handbook of International Political Economy: IPE as a Global Conversation edited by [Mark Blyth](#). London: Routledge, p.205

⁶³ Japanese Ministry of International Trade and Industry

⁶⁴ Yeung Henry Wai-chung. “The Rise of East Asia: An Emerging Challenge to the Study of International Political Economy.” In Handbook of International Political Economy: IPE as a Global Conversation edited by [Mark Blyth](#). London: Routledge, p.181

The main feature of the developmental state economic model that challenges the Western understanding of IPE is the leading role of powerful states in the economy. When we say powerful state, we mean the state bureaucracy/elites as the main determinant of economic policy with a strategic plan to be followed by market actors. However, the market also plays a role where the state leads the market. The other important element of this economic model is to strategically classify some industries and support them until they reach a level where they can compete with international companies. The developmental state policy symbolises a solid cooperation between state actors and private companies, where the state plays a central role in the country's development process by preparing a strategic plan for the strategic sectors and the market forces accept the guidance of the state bureaucracy.

Export-oriented economic policies and protectionism are also key features of developmental state policies. In this sense, an export-oriented policy and support for infant industries in the early stages of production would help private enterprises to grow. Catching up with the West was the keyword in the implementation of developmental state policies. Here, in the case of Japan and other Asian countries, state-market cooperation plays an important role, with the state defining a strategic plan and applying it to the market. The market absorbs it, applies it and achieves the developmental state. However, the private sector is also involved in the process of formulating the strategic plan. Market forces also play an important role in the finalization of strategic plans. Here, in addition to the policy of supporting infant industries, there is also a protectionist tendency exerted by a powerful state mechanism. In Japan, for example, MITI was very keen to encourage the import of technology and advanced equipment. Nevertheless, Japan has generally been reluctant to open its market to FDI for fear of foreign manufacturing dominance. Like Korea, but unlike a vast majority of today's developing nations, postwar Japan did not welcome or rely on the domestic presence of foreign manufacturers as it wanted to rebuild an industrial base by Japanese firms alone.⁶⁵ The emergence of IPE was linked to the fact that rational choice theory in economics, which is based on the idea that individuals use rational calculations to make decisions and achieve

⁶⁵ Ohno Kenichi. "The History of Japanese Economic Development: Origins of Private Dynamism and Policy Competence." New York: Routledge, 2018 p. 144

outcomes consistent with their personal goals, was insufficient to understand the international economic system. IPE was first developed as a new phenomenon in the US, where the functioning of the liberal economic system has always been the basis of the international economic order. However, IPE has been analyzed and interpreted differently in other parts of the world. Latin America and East Asian states adopted a different type of IPE while criticizing American IPE perception for creating a dependency of less developed states on the developed ones and for creating a state of underdevelopment as the opposite of the aspirations of the developing states.

2.3. International Tourism Policies

As mentioned earlier, in addition to developmental state policies, I will also review primary theories of international tourism policies, such as modernization and neoliberalism, which are promoted by developed states towards developing countries, as well as dependency/underdevelopment and alternative tourism policies, which can be considered as critical theories against the Western theorization of international tourism. However, at the end of the 1950s, the development phenomenon played a crucial role in the promotion of international tourism in developing countries. It was promoted by the developed countries to the developing ones when decolonization was taking place and most of the Third World countries were demanding a role in the international economic system. During this period, tourism was seen as one of the main industries through which developing countries could achieve development. Therefore, before moving on to the theoretical framework of international tourism, I would like to briefly review the phenomenon of development, first in general and then in the context of tourism, as it has played a crucial role in the theorization of international tourism policy and also in the tourism policy-making process of developing countries, especially since the 1960s.

2.3.1. Development

Development can be described as the eradication of poverty and the creation of prosperity in a given society. The issues of development and poverty reduction became dominant in Western discourse at the end of the Second World War in

relation to developing and less developed countries. This discourse became more popular as developed countries began to consider how underdeveloped states could achieve the same level of growth as the industrialized Western countries. As mentioned earlier, the main concern was the smooth functioning of the international economy and the integration of the newly decolonized and developing states into the liberal economic system. The emergence of the Soviet threat soon after the Second World War also contributed to this process, and the US was at the forefront of this policy.

It can be argued that the inaugural speech of US President Truman in 1949 had a huge impact on development and marked the theorization of development. In his speech, Truman emphasized the importance of the development of less developed countries, stating “I believe that we should make available to peace-loving peoples the benefits of our store of technical knowledge in order to help them realize their aspirations for a better life. And, in cooperation with other nations, we should foster capital investment in areas needing development.”⁶⁶

The development itself was formulated by comparing the level of growth between developed and developing countries. Developing countries were also classified as third-world countries during this period. In this context, Smith identifies the Third World countries as follows:

The Third World will be defined as a group of countries which have colonial histories, and which are in the process of developing economically and socially from a status characterized by low incomes, dependence on agriculture, weakness in trading relations, social deprivation for large segments of society, and restricted political and civil liberties.⁶⁷

Development, in general, has a variety of explanations. Todaro and Smith stress that development can be seen as a multidimensional process that involves major changes

⁶⁶“Truman’s Inaugural Address.” January 20, 1949. Available at: <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/public-papers/19/inaugural-address>. Accessed on 5 January 2025

⁶⁷ Smith Brian C. “Understanding Third World Politics: Theories of Political Change and Development.” New York: Palgrave MacMillan. 2013 p.1

in economic growth and national institutions, as well as opportunities for all and individual aspirations, and the eradication of poverty at regional and national levels.⁶⁸ Andrew Heywood argues that West associates the development with a series of innovations in technology and organization that led to the Industrial Revolution.⁶⁹

Development as a phenomenon was seen as a Euro-American model that would bring prosperity to underdeveloped and developing countries only if they adopted the policies previously pursued by the developed countries. However, the relationship of development to wealth and prosperity and its link to globalization and neoliberalism has also been criticized by some development writers. Rochelle Spencer argues that recent shifts in development thinking stem from the dominant neoliberal ideology that guides the global economy, where we see that many things have been globalized, but not wealth and development in any pervasive sense.⁷⁰ On the other hand, the concept of developmental state or statism, which can be classified as a challenge to the Western understanding of development, can also play a crucial role in the development process. For many developmentalists, East Asian-style command capitalism was a mechanism for achieving economic sovereignty and a preference for managing rather than eliminating the market. It promised a faster and more efficient path to socialist development.⁷¹

The roots of development can be observed during the 18th and 19th centuries when Europe experienced the upswing of industrial capitalism, which contributed to the alleviation of poverty. Since then, development as a body of thought and a series of programmatic initiatives has taken different forms since its inception with highly divergent interests.⁷² As a result, development theories have shifted from economic

⁶⁸ Todaro Michael, Smith Stephen C. "Economic Development." Singapore: Pearson Education, 2003 p.116

⁶⁹ Heywood Andrew. "Global Politics." London: Red Globe Press, 2014, p.360

⁷⁰ Spencer Rochelle. "Development Tourism: Lessons from Cuba, Development and the Rise of Tourism as a Strategy." New York: Routledge, 2016. p.37

⁷¹ Bello Walden. "States and Markets, States versus Markets: The Developmental State Debate as the Distinctive East Asian Contribution to International Political Economy." London: Routledge, London, 2009, p.186

⁷² Spencer Rochelle. "Development Tourism: Lessons from Cuba, Development and the Rise of Tourism as a Strategy." New York: Routledge, 2016. p.36

measures such as GDP to other perceptions such as improved well-being and public health.

On the other hand, associating development policies with post-Soviet countries is challenging because their economic background is completely different from those of the non-Soviet, less developed, or developing countries. The post-colonial background is relatively complex when it comes to analyzing post-Soviet states in the context of Third World perceptions and development phenomenon, as these states have not experienced a post-colonial era. However, post-Soviet countries such as Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan are classified as lower middle-income countries and thus provide a good example of developing states and can be analyzed well in their terms in the context of development studies.

Let's now look at how tourism and international tourism policy have been linked to development, after which we can move on to reviewing the theoretical framework of mainstream tourism policy. The need to ensure the security and smooth functioning of the international economic system has made tourism one of the main sectors through which developing or less developed countries can achieve economic growth. Tourism entered the mainstream of development thinking in the context of debates in the 1950s and 1960s regarding the urgent need to promote economic development in the Third World.⁷³

The theoretical debate on tourism development was not analyzed separately from political economy in the 1950s. By the beginning of the 1960s, tourism development was considered as a separate field of development for developing countries. This coincides with discussions in the West about developing countries, especially during the decolonization process. Tourism became a focus of development thinking not until the 1950s and 1960s when the urgent need to promote economic development in Third World countries arose. In this sense, tourism became an important part of the development theories because international institutions and organizations encouraged the distribution of loans for the so-called Third World countries to make

⁷³ Bianchi Raoul V. "The Political Economy of Tourism Development: A Critical Review." [Annals of Tourism Research](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2017.08.005), Volume 70, May 2018, Pages 88-102, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2017.08.005>

the tourism industry an important instrument of economic development of the countries that do not have heavy industry.

In the post-World War II era, tourism was seen as one of the main sectors that would contribute to the economic development of Third World countries. In this regard, the Bretton Woods institutions, namely the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), played an important role by providing loans to countries to improve their tourism infrastructure. The emergence of supranational institutions and agencies after the Second World War has significantly impacted global development and international tourism. International organizations like the WB and IMF have had pervasive effects on the development of Third World Countries by imposing structural adjustment policies which force them to adjust their economies in order to secure further loans.⁷⁴

Regarding tourism development policies, we can see four different approaches, mainly developed by Western scholars. Modernization and neoliberalism theories were mainly used by Western scholars to promote tourism development in developing or underdeveloped societies. In contrast, dependency and alternative tourism development theories were formulated as critical approaches to the mainstream IPE policies promoted by the West, namely modernization and neoliberalism.

Modernization and neo-liberal theories tend to emphasize the Western development model and support the idea that development can only be achieved through Western values. On the contrary, dependency and alternative development theories challenge this approach because each state and society should follow its own development path. Dependency, sometimes referred to as underdevelopment theory, focuses on the unequal and exploitative relationship between developed and developing countries. In addition to the theories mentioned above, in the 1990s, we also saw the impact of alternative development theories in tourism, which took an

⁷⁴ Bianchi Raoul V. "The Political Economy of Tourism Development: A Critical Review." [Annals of Tourism Research](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2017.08.005), Volume 70, May 2018, Pages 88-102, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2017.08.005>

environmentalist approach to tourism policy and aimed to synchronize sustainability and environmentally friendly policies with development.

2.3.2. Modernization Theory

Modernization theory has its origins in classical evolutionary explanations of social change. Its intellectual roots are in the European evolutionists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: the French philosophers and founders of modern sociology Auguste Comte and Emile Durkheim; the British philosopher Herbert Spencer; and, of course, Karl Marx.⁷⁵ With the process of decolonization, developed countries began to engage in the development process of developing and underdeveloped countries. The theory itself became very dominant during the Cold War era, when the West, in search of an answer to communist ideology, sought ways for the social and economic development of poorer countries.

With the then US President Harry Truman's speech in 1949, the world's powerful countries began to refer to poor countries as Third World countries. According to the US, less developed countries should follow the path of the Western world if they want to be economically developed. In this sense, Truman's appropriation of the word underdevelopment symbolized the beginning of an era of American hegemony. The idea and practice of development gave global hegemony to a purely Western genealogy of history, robbing people of different cultures of the opportunity to define their social life.⁷⁶

Moreover, Western development scholars concluded that the market was the only reliable mechanism for development and that backward or underdeveloped nations should follow the principles of the market, i.e., Western type of development, and associate this process with the ideology of modernization. Andrew Heywood identifies modernization as follows: There is a single linear path to development,

⁷⁵ Smith Brian Clive "Understanding Third World Politics: Theories of Political Change and Development." USA: Indian University Press. 2003, p. 44

⁷⁶ Spencer Rochelle. "Development Tourism: Lessons from Cuba, Development and the Rise of Tourism as a Strategy." New York: Routledge, 2016, p.36

reflected in the transformation of western countries from traditional, pre-industrial, agrarian societies to modern, industrial, and mass consumption ones.⁷⁷ Holden also emphasizes the importance of following the path taken by Western societies. Modernization theory views socio-economic development as an evolutionary and linear path from a traditional society to a modern society, combining economic growth with political modernization and national benefits.⁷⁸

Modernization theorists believed that underdeveloped nations could only catch up with the West by copying the processes that the developed West had gone through. This view is also closely related to Rostow's concept of modern society. As one of the most influential approaches to modernization, Rostow's conceptualization of "economic stages of growth" has greatly impacted modernization theory. This model suggests that countries should go through a predefined set of five stages before becoming fully developed nations. According to this conceptualization, to become a developed society, any nation should start its journey from stage one, which refers to an agrarian society, and then gradually reach the fifth and final stage, which can be described as a society in which employment is very much based on service industries and the consumption of high-value goods produced overseas.⁷⁹ It is also worth noting that there is also a place for Rostow's theory of modernization in the context of the tourism service industry of the developing/less developed world. Andrew Holden describes this as follows:

A significant change in the world economy since Rostow constructed his five main stages of growth has been the growth in the global service industries in which tourism plays a significant part. Tourism is embedded into the contemporary age of mass consumption of developed countries which presents opportunities for less developed countries with the natural and cultural resources to develop an international tourism industry.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Heywood Andrew. "Global Politics." London: Red Globe Press, 2014, p.55

⁷⁸ Holden Andrew. "Tourism, Poverty and Development." New York: Routledge, p. 43

⁷⁹ Rostow, W. W. (2020) "The Stages of Economic Growth." Available at: <https://archive.org/details/dli.ernet.507775/page/22/mode/2up>. Accessed on 12 December 2024, p.6

⁸⁰ Holden Andrew. "Tourism, Poverty and Development." New York: Routledge, p.41

The application of modernization theory to the tourism industry is similar. Therefore, in tourism literature, modernization theory focuses on mass consumption, where tourism can be identified with large hotels with huge consumption facilities. In addition, it is also used for newly independent states to be the international tourist destination where people from different states come and visit. Modernization theory provided early intellectual cover to the ideological enterprise of opening up newly independent states in the 'Third World' to overseas tourism and capital investment as a means of promoting economic development.⁸¹

In the context of tourism modernization, development strategies have generated foreign capital, increased employment, and facilitated technology transfer. As modern society is focused on mass consumption, large-scale mass tourism coincided with mass consumption due to the development of large resorts around the world. Modernization also stimulates the socio-cultural changes resulting from economic growth, which would form the basis for further economic development. Like imperialism and colonialism tourism offered to a certain extent, improvements in health care and the supply of potable water, better infrastructure and sanitation and better housing and education.⁸²

Modernization theory was criticized by most scholars on the basis that the theory itself was too deterministic and ignored the uniqueness of the states and societies in which it was applied. It was seen as largely society-centered in its interpretation of the development process and thus neglected states' central role in shaping late development. The theory suggests that economic development and modernization of living standards should go hand in hand and that lifestyles and living standards should be measured against Euro-American models. However, such deterministic development controls and limits human interaction, not vice versa. Human agency rather than tradition controls the speed and severity of modernization and societies

⁸¹ Bianchi Raoul V. "The Political Economy of Tourism Development: A Critical Review." Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0160738317301287>. Accessed on 29 July 2024

⁸² Harrison David. "Development Theory and Tourism in Developing Countries: What has Theory Ever Done for Us"? *International Journal of Asia Pacific Studies*. 11 (S1), pp. 53-82. Available at: https://ijaps.usm.my/?page_id=2933. Accessed on 29 July 2024

undergoing this process arrive at forms of governance dictated by foreign, “pro-Western”, or abstract principles, leading to a decrease in the importance of desirable traditional and cultural beliefs.⁸³

In the 1980s, it became clear that the concept of modernization in the context of tourism did not work well for developing and less developed countries in most cases. Consequently, as was the case with IPE, postcolonial and neo-Marxist theorists began to criticize modernization theory for being at the core of the poor development and cultural impoverishment of developing and underdeveloped nations in the implantation of economic development policies, including tourism. Post-colonial neo-Marxist critics opposed modernization, saying that instead of encouraging development, relationships with the capitalistic West have the opposite effect, leading to poor economic growth with social and cultural impoverishment blamed on the inability to adopt capitalist models of production.⁸⁴

2.3.3. Dependency Theory

The critique of modernization theory has been conceptualized in an alternative view known as dependency theory. It can be argued that dependency theory challenged the claim of modernization and universality of development theory and offered new ways of explaining the causes of underdevelopment in the Third World.

In a radically alternative view to modernization theory, dependency theorists or *Depandinistas* argue that developing countries have external and internal political, institutional and economic structures that keep them in a dependent position relative to the developed countries.⁸⁵ The main aim of the *Depandinistas* was to explain the

⁸³ Mathieson Alister, Wall Geoffrey. “Tourism: Economic, Physical and Social Impacts.” London: Longman, 1982, p. 269

⁸⁴ Harrison David. “Development Theory and Tourism in Developing Countries: What has Theory Ever Done for Us”? International Journal of Asia Pacific Studies. 11 (S1), pp. 53-82. Available at: https://ijaps.usm.my/?page_id=2933 . Accessed on 29 July 2024

⁸⁵ Bianchi Raoul V. “The Political Economy of Tourism Development: A Critical Review.” Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0160738317301287>. Accessed on 29 July 2024

causes of underdevelopment in a holistic context based on the interaction of economic and social structures in an international environment.

Dependency theory thus began to influence development discourse by supporting the idea that throughout history, the West had become wealthy thanks to the flow from underdeveloped nations to developed ones. In other words, capital flows from the periphery (underdeveloped or developing countries) to the core (developed countries) helped the developed countries to become rich. Through analyzing the comparative underdevelopment of Latin America to the West, *Dependinistas* agreed that this occurred because of the operation of the capitalist system, within which a core of industrialized countries developed their economies through the exploitation of non-industrialized peripheral countries.⁸⁶

One of the well-known and leading dependency theorists, Andre Gunder Frank, claims that that is capitalism, both world and national, which produced underdevelopment in the past and which still generates underdevelopment in the present.⁸⁷ Consequently, the main emphasis is on analyzing the exploitative relations of developed and powerful states, namely USA, Western European Countries with developing and underdeveloped states of Africa, Asia and Latin America.⁸⁸ The development of underdevelopment' as being deliberate and a part of the same world capitalist system. Frank argued that the lack of development in Third World countries was because the Western nations deliberately aimed at underdevelopment and not because of its own inadequacies or a failure to develop a 'culture of enterprise'. He subsequently argued that industrial development in the periphery would only begin when it severed its ties with the capitalist First World.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Willis Katie. "Theories and Practices of Development." London: Routledge, 2005, p.77

⁸⁷ Frank Andre Gunder. "Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America: Historical Studies of Chile and Brazil." New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967 p.5

⁸⁸ Frank Andre Gunder. "The Development of Underdevelopment." Monthly Review, vol. 41, no. 2, June 1989. Available at: <https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?p=AONE&u=anon~14a20306&id=GALE%7CA7659725&v=2.1&it=r&sid=googleScholar&asid=6e1879d2>. Accessed on 23 June 2023

⁸⁹ Holden, Andrew. "Tourism, Poverty and Development." London and New York: Routledge, 2013, p.42

As is the case in postcolonial theory, dependency theorists believed that the relationship between dependency and exploitation could be traced back to the 17th century when the powerful empires colonized the continents of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. This also coincides with the Industrial Revolution, when the imperialist system forced the colonial state to produce and have expertise in one or at most two products. The production of cotton in India is a good example of this. An essential component of the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution in Britain was the importation of cotton from its Jewel in the Crown, a colony of India, which was then manufactured in England into clothes for return sale in the Indian market.⁹⁰

Milne also supports this concept as follows:

Dependency Theory suggests that because of historical unequal relationships between rich and poor countries, developing nations are kept in a state of underdevelopment. Development projects foster economic dependency of developing countries in three main ways, through (1) technology produced in developed countries: (2) reliance on foreign investment and creation of huge debts and (3) leakage of foreign aid revenues, where interest payments on foreign loans means money is routed back to developed countries.⁹¹

As in postcolonial conceptualization, for proponents of dependency theory in tourism, the core-periphery relationship plays an important role in describing the exploitative interaction between developed and developing countries. This explanation is also rooted in Wallerstein's popular World System Theory. Wallerstein argues that the modern world system is characterized by international labor between 'the core' and 'the periphery'. The core regions benefit from the concentration of capital in its most sophisticated forms. In contrast, the periphery regions depend on exporting raw materials to the core, although fundamental contradictions will ultimately lead to the demise of the world system.

World Systems theory usefully provides a means of differentiating between internal and external factors as explanations for underdevelopment, whereby

⁹⁰ IHolden, Andrew. "Tourism, Poverty and Development." London and New York: Routledge, 2013, p.43

⁹¹ Milne Simon, Ateljevic Irine. "Tourism, Economic Development and the Global-Local Nexus: Theory of Embracing Complexity." *Tourism Geographies*, 3, 369-393. 2001. doi.org/10.1080/146166800110070478

underdevelopment stems from the lack of incorporation of countries into the world system because countries are subject to unequal trade, not because of internal factors such as traditional values and culture inhibiting social change.⁹² This conceptualization can be linked to the tourism industry, especially in the tourist resorts where the (core) developed country makes the investment. In most cases, tourists come from the core country to the periphery, where the exploitative value of the tourism industry can be easily observed.

Opperman supports this idea as follows: Tourism is an industry like any other, used by developed countries to perpetuate the dependency of developing countries. Rather than reducing existing socio-economic regional disparities within developing countries, tourism reinforces them through its enclave structure and its orientation towards traditional structures.⁹³ Dependency theorists have, therefore, rejected the involvement of multinational corporations and supported small, preferably locally owned tourism enterprises in order to minimize the influence of powerful states and their corporations.

We can see the implementation of this concept in some of the world's best-known tourist destinations. In such cases, the control of large tour operators and multinational corporations over developing tourism destinations can be observed. In such circumstances, capital flow from the core to the periphery through the Western hotel chains is considered a common fact. In addition, Western tour operators, who have a monopoly on the sale of tour packages, can also dictate the prices of tour packages, ultimately minimizing the profit for locally owned tourism enterprises. Britton also argues that core countries' events and control mechanisms influence tourism development in peripheral countries. These controls both manage the movement of tourists from the core to the periphery and have power over the operation of hotels or even whole resorts. Small countries, or those for which

⁹² Spencer Rochelle. "Development Tourism: Lessons from Cuba, Development and the Rise of Tourism as a Strategy." New York: Routledge, 2016, p.55

⁹³ Oppermann Martin. (1993). "Tourism Space in Developing Countries. *Annals of Tourism Research*." 20(3), 535–556. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/1342147/Tourism_space_in_developing_countries. Accessed on 20 August 2024.

tourism is one of the main sources of income, are potentially affected by these peripheral-core relationships.⁹⁴

Neocolonial patterns of tourism development were seen to be particularly severe in small island states and the former plantation economies of the Caribbean and Pacific, in which tourism was routinely organized around segregated enclave resorts. David Harrison believes that there is a strong case for suggesting that elements, at least, of modernization theory and underdevelopment theory were recycled into neoliberalism and neo-statism.⁹⁵

Some critics of dependency theory also highlight the success of East Asian countries. According to this criticism, the economic success of East Asian countries, namely Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, contradicts the claim that developed countries keep developing countries underdeveloped. However, it is also worth noting that the statist policies of these countries have also played an important role in reaching the level of advanced economies. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the developmental state and statist economic policies of the East Asian states had no relation to the Western IPE theories, including modernization.

The unsuccessful implementation of modernization theory in developing or less developed states led to the emergence of economic policies in which the state plays a crucial role in development. Atul Kohli, a political scientist who mainly focuses on the state's role in the economy, also believes that state interventionist policies in developing countries are a consequence of implementing economic policies guided by modernization understanding. He points out that:

Modernization scholars worried about the prospects for stability and democracy in the developing world; dependency scholars examined why dependent political economies were not likely to replicate the dynamism

⁹⁴ Britton Stephen G., "Tourism, Dependency and Development: A Mode of Analysis." Development Studies Centre Occasional Paper 23. Available at: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Tourism%2C-dependency-and-development%3A-a-mode-of-Britton/051853d1113e035e7f94f7be2eb741cf8c22421b>. Accessed on 20 August 2024.

⁹⁵ Harrison David. "Development Theory and Tourism in Developing Countries: What has Theory Ever Done for Us"? International Journal of Asia Pacific Studies. 11 (S1), pp. 53-82. Available at: https://ijaps.usm.my/?page_id=2933. Accessed on 20 August 2024.

associated with early capitalism, and economic development specialists often argued that market imperfections so prevalent in the developing world necessitated state intervention and import substitution.⁹⁶

The arguments of modernization and neo-liberal development theories are challenged by the arguments of dependency and alternative development theories. Richard Lewis claims that popular and widespread modernization and neoliberal development theories have tended to assume that the Euro-American development model is the holy grail and have measured quality of life as a reflection of raised economic standards. Dependency theory highlights the damaging effects on poor countries and highlights how development carried out according to Western ideological diktats benefits the core at the expense of the peripheral countries of the South and its consequent negative effects on poor communities.⁹⁷

On the other hand, modernization theorists have also made criticisms against dependency theory. One of the main critiques raised by modernization against dependency theory is that the concepts of dependency theory are unclear, its ideas are too radical, and the underdevelopment status of developing or underdeveloped countries is not a case for developed states since developed states need developed economies for their investments and ongoing trade relations. Holden supports this idea as follows

Modernization theorists argue that multinationals and Western aid bring considerable benefits and the premise that the economically advanced countries keep other countries underdeveloped is wrong, as developed countries need other countries to economically develop as a source of new investment and new markets.⁹⁸

In addition, after receiving too much criticism from dependency theorists, developed Western countries designed new perceptions of the economic development of less

⁹⁶ Kohli Atul. "State Directed Development: Political Power and Industrialization in the Global Periphery." New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p.41

⁹⁷ Lewis, Richard. "Theory of Tourism Development." Available at: https://www.academia.edu/16127877/Theory_of_Tourism_Development. Accessed on 10 December 2025

⁹⁸ Holden, Andrew. "Tourism, Poverty and Development." London and New York: Routledge, 2013. p.43

developed or developing countries, which could also be seen as an acceptance of the unsuccessful implementation of modernization theory throughout the 1950s and 1980s which is labelled as neoliberalism.

2.3.4. Neoliberalism

In the 1950s and 1960s, in particular, aid was channeled into industrial development and projects to improve agricultural efficiency through the use of technology. There was also a focus on large-scale infrastructure projects, such as dam construction and road building.⁹⁹ However, during this period, the growth in developing countries was lower than expected. This created a dispute over classical Keynesian theories, which dominated the entire liberalist development approach during the post-war period.

John Maynard Keynes introduced his economic model, also known as Keynesian theory, in 1936. This concept became very influential in international development policy in the post-war period. In this theory, Keynes rejected the ideas of free markets and classical economics as the best way to achieve economic growth. According to his theory, governments would play a vital role in promoting economic growth and development could only be achieved through government control. This can only be done by the increase of government spending on education, unemployment benefits and infrastructure which in return would provide full employment and increase consumer demand.¹⁰⁰

In the 1970s, as poorer countries grew too slowly, doubts were raised about the role of government in providing development, and neoliberalism began to be discussed as a new approach to growth. The consensus of neo-liberal economists was that the control and interference of the state in economic development was causing inefficiency and resulting in growth at a slower rate than if resource allocation was left primarily to the market mechanism.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Willis Katie. "Theories and Practices of Development." London: Routledge, 2005, p.50

¹⁰⁰ "What is Keynesian Economic Theory." Available at: https://www.economicsonline.co.uk/managing_the_economy/what-is-keynesian-economic-theory.html/. Accessed on 8 May 2023

¹⁰¹ Holden Andrew. "Tourism, Poverty and Development." New York: Routledge p. 44

Neoliberalism is a free market political and economic theory which advocates free trade through competitive global markets. Its doctrine advocates that the economy must not be restricted by the state, that barriers to the free flow of trade and capital must be removed. De-regularization, privatization and market-based development are its characteristic features.¹⁰²

The central theme of neoliberalism, which challenges the Keynesian model of growth, is the idea that the state can achieve development if the economy is left alone. In other words, neoliberalism defines the market as good while the state is bad in achieving the level of development. Consequently, neoliberalism marks the decline of state intervention and the emphasis on increasing privatization, deregulation, and liberalization. It is also worth mentioning that international institutions would play an important role in providing development for poorer countries, and in this sense, in the neo-liberal theory, the international organizations and the private sector replace the states in the economy. One of the key components of this theory is to recognize the private sector as the active catalyst of economic development and to reduce the state's role by shrinking state bureaucracy and public and government expenditure.

During the triumph of neoliberalism, international institutions, namely the IMF and the World Bank, became responsible institutions for development policies. Also known as the Washington Consensus, these institutions had become the preferred option for rebuilding the economies of developing countries. Based on the orthodox development model of modernization and drawing on neoliberalism ideas, the essence of the Washington Consensus was to stabilize, privatize, and liberalize. As a Western concept, the main components of the neo-liberal concept were developed by the US and UK leaders during an economic conference in 1981. Andrew Holden underlines that:

Key drivers of neo-liberal policy were the World Bank, the USA and Britain, through the personas of President Ronald Reagan and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher respectively, the new direction being captured in Reagan's magic of

¹⁰² Hall, Micheal Hall. 2011. "Yes, Virginia, there is a Tourism Class: Why Class Still Matters in Tourism Analysis." In *Political Economy of Tourism: "A Critical Perspective"*, edited by Jan Mosedale, 111-125. Abingdon: Routledge, 2011.

the market speech at the 1981 North-South Conference in Mexico. The package of neo-liberal measures recommended by USA, Europe and the World Financial Institutions including the World Bank, IMF and World Trade Organization are referred to as Washington Consensus.¹⁰³

One of the main tools for implementing neo-liberal policies has been the use of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) adopted by underdeveloped or developing countries in return for financial support from the IMF and the World Bank. Attracting more foreign investment and changing the economy's structure by reducing the state's role and cutting government expenditure is at the core of SAPs. The SAPs also include privatization of state-owned enterprises and sometimes currency devaluation to stimulate exports. According to neo-liberal theory, removing restrictions on ownership and resources and introducing wage suppression in the public sector should make a country more attractive to foreign inward investment. This in return should lead to economic development and a comparative advantage in specialized economic sectors which should boost exports.¹⁰⁴

The implementation of SAPs in developing countries in the 1980s and 1990s had negative consequences for developing countries. These negative impacts resulted from policies such as cutting essential services in infrastructure development, health, and education. Relatively poorer people were also negatively affected by these policies. The practice of neoliberalism in developing countries by the IMF or the World Bank has been criticized for neglecting the state and necessities where such policies became influential. Harvey supports this idea as follows:

As evidence, because of Structural Adjustment Lending Programs or Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPS) governments had to embrace neoliberal doctrines resulting in the cutting back on government spending as mentioned before. Although SALPs have now been replaced by Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers these too bring changes to developing countries.¹⁰⁵

We can also observe the impacts of neoliberalism policies in the context of tourism. SAPs have encouraged less developed countries to develop their natural and cultural

¹⁰³ Holden Andrew. "Tourism, Poverty and Development." New York: Routledge, p. 45

¹⁰⁴ Holden Andrew. "Tourism, Poverty and Development." New York: Routledge, p. 45

¹⁰⁵ Harvey David. "A Brief Story of Neo Liberalism." New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, p.72

resources for tourism as a component of the neoliberalism emphasis on market-orientated growth and increased levels of exports, specifically in industries in which countries have a comparative advantage in world markets.¹⁰⁶

In this context, international tourism was seen as a new, previously neglected growth sector that could serve as a growth stimulus for developing countries. As a result, the IMF and the World Bank began to provide loans to developing countries to improve tourism infrastructure and services in developing countries. However, reducing the role of the state and government spending through structural adjustment programs has exacerbated Third World debt and impoverished the people living in these countries. For example, in Peru, where neoliberal policies have been implemented in the tourism sector, the economic welfare of the local population has been negatively affected by neoliberal policy. In this regard, because of the neoliberalist policies, state spending on the tourism industry was reduced drastically and the Tourism and Commerce Ministry's employees were cut from 2700 to 300, state owned hotels were privatized, and the government's tourism school set fees.¹⁰⁷

During the triumph of neoliberal policies, the impact of multinational companies on tourism in developing countries has increased, leading to a reduction in the influence of the state in the economy, which would normally lead to a flow of capital from the periphery to the core, resulting in more poverty for developing countries. Some of the criticisms of neoliberal policies have focused on the exploitative notion of the concept. Some scholars support the idea that neoliberal policies have helped the West exploit developing countries' local economies. Stabler supported this idea as follows: Multinational hotel chains acquire other hotel chains; airlines form global alliances, and cruise ships fly flags of convenience, and these private sector multinational tourism companies can exploit the less stringent labor and environmental policies in developing countries.¹⁰⁸ It is also argued that the West

¹⁰⁶ Holden, Andrew. "Tourism, Poverty and Development." New York: Routledge, p. 47

¹⁰⁷ Desforges Luke. "State Tourism Institutions and Neo-Liberal Development: A Case Study of Peru." *Tourism Geographies*, 2(2), 177–192., 2000. doi.org/10.1080/14616680050027888

¹⁰⁸ Stabler, Mike & Papatheodorou, Andreas & Sinclair, M. "The Economics of Tourism." London: Routledge, 2010 p. 102

creates the outcome of neoliberal policies such as globalism and development to exploit the vulnerable economies of developing/underdeveloped countries. Crush claims that development discourse is thus rooted in the rise of the West, in the history of capitalism, in modernity, and in the globalization of Western state institutions, disciplines, cultures and mechanisms of exploitation.¹⁰⁹

Such a feature of the unequal relationship between core and periphery can also be observed in the tourism investment process. Due to fierce competition among international destinations to attract foreign investment and eventually develop the local tourism industry, developing countries offer incentives to investors from developed countries. Ultimately, these incentives, such as tax concessions and various types of investment subsidies, may result in a profit capital flow from developing to developed countries. In other words, capital is taken from peripheral states and sent to core states.

In the case of tourism, in addition to the negative impact on the economy, neo-liberal policies and SAPs have also harmed the environment in developing countries. In this regard, the impact of the SAPs on Kenya's tourism industry and environment deserves attention. In Kenya, since political independence in 1950, all tourism facilities and assets have been owned by the government. The process of privatization of the tourism industry began in the country in the 1980s with the help SAPs, and the country's tourism infrastructure, such as accommodation facilities, transport companies, was taken over by the Kenyan elites, in partnership with international companies. In other words, a sector that was controlled by the state was quickly transferred to local and international companies. Dieke, a tourism researcher from Kenya, illustrated this process as follows: "This transfer of Kenya's tourism resources to foreign control, combined with increased levels of foreign inward investment, effectively shifted hegemonic control of the industry and the bulk of revenue earnings to outside the country."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Crush, Jonathan. "Power of Development." London: Routledge, 1995 p.4

¹¹⁰ Dieke, Peter. "Policies for Tourism Development in Kenya." *Annals of Tourism Research* [Volume 18, Issue 2](#), 1991, Pages 269-294, [doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383\(91\)90009-Z](https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383(91)90009-Z)

SAPs have harmed the environment of the country as well. Although the aim for tourism development was reached with the help of SAPs, this had a devastating influence on Kenya's natural life and environment. The World Bank Report issued on Kenya's tourism, namely "Wildlife in Tourism Project" in 1990, acknowledges the harmful consequences of the SAPs on Kenya's tourism. Whilst the report acknowledges the role of the development of wildlife tourism in improving foreign exchange earnings, it emphasizes that little attention had been given to environmental planning and management, leading to natural resource degradation and threatening the sustainability of both the environment and tourism.¹¹¹ It is also worth mentioning that the Kenyan government appealed World Bank for a support for a Protected Areas and Wildlife Services project to mitigate the environmental problems caused by tourism.¹¹²

Therefore, it can be said that the implementation of neo-liberal policies such as privatization, liberalization, deregulation, reduction in government spending and price stability, has not led to the development of developing or less developed countries. Implementing SAPs through neo-liberal policies has in most cases led to serious negative consequences for society, increasing rather than reducing poverty levels. The negative impact of neo-liberal policies on less developed countries has led to the emergence of a new concept in tourism called alternative and sustainable development. In addition, the diminishing role of the state in the development process of industries, including tourism, began to be questioned as it did not have positive consequences for national economies, and consequently, developmental state policies in the field of tourism began to be discussed more as an alternative for the development of less developed and developing countries.

2.3.5. Alternative and Sustainable Development

Alternative and sustainable development became popular in tourism literature in the early 2000s, with a strong focus on environmental and economic sustainability.

¹¹¹ Holden, Andrew. "Tourism, Poverty and Development." New York: Routledge, p. 47

¹¹² Holden, Andrew. "Tourism, Poverty and Development." New York: Routledge, p. 47

According to advocates of alternative and sustainable development, inequalities between developed and developing countries have increased rather than decreased, forcing thinkers to assess the consequences of neoliberalism. In addition, the fact that state-led economic development policies in East Asian countries and state-controlled economic strategies aimed at supporting infant industries became more evident, eventually leading to a questioning of the relationship between developed and developing countries.

There has been a subsequent re-evaluation of the usefulness and direction of SAPs, causing a stated refocusing of economic growth on reducing poverty and levels of inequality by supranational agencies.¹¹³ This perception, which focuses on the poor and developing states, is conceptualized with the Post-Washington Consensus¹¹⁴ incorporating a new poverty agenda.

To most people, the Washington Consensus represents a set of policies predicated upon a strong faith -- stronger than warranted either by economic theory or historical experience -- in unfettered markets and aimed at reducing or even minimizing the role of government.¹¹⁵ Suffice it to say that this development strategy completely undermines the success of the East Asian states, where states are actively involved in development policy.

¹¹³ Holden, Andrew. "Tourism, Poverty and Development." New York: Routledge, p. 48

¹¹⁴ The Washington Consensus, first introduced in 1989, has an excessive belief in market fundamentalism, and government has long been seen as the problem and markets as the solution. The Washington Consensus thus focused on policies - policies of privatization, liberalization and stability (which in practice meant price stability). The failure of Washington Consensus policies in developing countries and the success of East Asian states through state-directed economic policies led to the emergence of the post-Washington Consensus. According to the post-Washington Consensus, the development of a successful development strategy must involve the people of the developing world in a significant way. The second is that one-size-fits-all policies are doomed to failure. Policies that work in one country may not work in others. The contrast between the success of East Asian economies that did not follow the Washington Consensus and those that did has become increasingly clear. The question remains, however, to what extent the policies that worked so well in East Asia are transferable to other countries. The post-Washington consensus has also emphasized the role of the state in the economy of developing countries. Successful development requires not the minimal role assigned to the state by the Washington consensus, but a balanced role. The exact role may differ from country to country, depending on the level of development of market and public institutions.

¹¹⁵ Stiglitz, Joseph E. "Is there a Post-Washington Consensus?" "The Washington Consensus: Reconsidered Towards a New Global Governance edited by Narcís Serra and Joseph E. Stiglitz. Oxford University Press, p.41

If the success of East Asian states suggests the desirability of a larger role for government in successful development than was traditionally emphasized in the Washington Consensus policies, the failures in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America have reinforced the doubts about the Washington Consensus strategies.¹¹⁶ Thus, the Post-Washington Consensus acknowledges the failure of the Washington Consensus in understanding the economy and providing development in developing countries, claiming that the latter does not provide sufficient empirical information about developing countries and offers limited tools for developing countries. The important role of the state, especially in developing countries, has been neglected by neoliberal policies and its main instrument, the Washington Consensus. The successful East Asian countries have recognized the important role of the state in development. And the post-Washington Consensus is taking it forward from that point of view.

Alternative development thinkers began questioning neoliberal policies and calling for an alternative role in the development agenda. They accepted the idea that rapid liberalization, especially in a less developed/developing country with high unemployment, would not lead to economic growth. It could only lead to more unemployment. They have also focused on the state's role in successful East Asian countries. They have supported the idea that successful development requires not the minimal role assigned to the state by the Washington Consensus, but a balanced role. The exact role may differ from country to country, depending on the stage of development of market and public institutions. In every successful country, government plays a critical complementary role with markets and that development requires strengthening of both market and state institutions.¹¹⁷

Alternative development also criticizes the lack of involvement of local representatives in the decision-making process and advocates a more localized

¹¹⁶ Stiglitz, Joseph E. "Alternative Theories of Wage Determination and Unemployment in L.D.C.'s: The Labor Turnover Model", *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 88/2: 194-227 (May). Subsequently published in D. Lal (ed.) (1992), *Development Economics*, 1. Elgar, 288-321

¹¹⁷ Stiglitz, Joseph E. "Is there a Post-Washington Consensus Consensus"? "The Washington Consensus: Reconsidered Towards a New Global Governance edited by Narcis Serra and Joseph E. Stiglitz. Oxford University Press, p.54

decision-making process. Over the years, alternative development has been reinforced by and associated with virtually any form of criticism of mainstream developmentalism, such as anti-capitalism, green thinking, feminism, eco-feminism, democratization, new social movements, Buddhist economics, cultural critiques, and poststructuralist analysis of development discourse.¹¹⁸

It is no secret that the implementation of neo-liberal policies in tourism usually leads to mass tourism generated by MNEs. According to alternative development thinkers on tourism, mass tourism generated by developed countries is not considered as value added tourism for developing or less developed countries as it causes harm to the environment both physically and socially. As a result, individuals and communities become dependent on the income generated by such tourism, with potentially disastrous consequences in the event of global downturns or changes in destination popularity, which can lead to cutbacks by multinational corporations. No attention is given to the development of self-determination or self-sufficiency. In addition to this cultural decay, special inequality is also a consequence of mass tourism. For example, in Akumal, in the Mexican Caribbean, European and American businesses aided by the government have created special inequality by segregating Mestizo and Maya workers from spaces designated for tourist use.¹¹⁹

In support of the idea that Western groups benefit from economic development and poverty reduction in developing countries, alternative development focuses on people's basic needs, such as health, education, food, housing, and sustainability. In some cases, alternative development refers to any tourism that is not mass tourism. When it comes to development and policies aiming for development, alternative development theories also focus on environmental protection.

In response to the exploitative relationship between developed and developing countries, alternative development approaches emerged in the tourism development

¹¹⁸ Holden, Andrew. "Tourism, Poverty and Development." New York: Routledge, p. 49

¹¹⁹ Navarrete, David Manuel. "Entanglements of Power and Spatial Inequalities in Tourism in the Mexican Caribbean." Available at: https://www.desigualdades.net/Resources/Working_Paper/17_WP_Manuel-Navarrete_online.pdf. Accessed on 17 December 2024

literature. While the application of dependency theory to the international tourism system highlights aspects of the unequal economic relationship between developing and developed countries and the negative social and environmental impacts of international tourism relations on developing countries, it does not provide alternative solutions to these problems. An alternative paradigm in the context of tourism, also known as sustainable tourism development, seeks to find answers to these problems. The main concerns of sustainable tourism development include environmental degradation, gender equality, environmental protection, democracy, human rights, etc. Saarienen highlights three main traditions of sustainable development as follows:

The resource-based tradition is primarily focused on the conservation of natural resources and mitigation of negative environmental impacts arising from tourism. The 'community-based tradition' embeds small-scale and participatory approaches that epitomize a more radical interpretation of the alternative development paradigm. The third tradition of tourism first emphasizes the sustainability of tourism industry.¹²⁰

As can be understood, the three traditions present ambiguity in their approach to tourism in the context of environmental protection, development, and business objectives. Mowfort and Munt claim if sustainable tourism remains a "buzzword" which can be so widely interpreted that people of different outlooks on a given issue can use it to support their cause, then it will suffer the same distortions to which older-established words such as freedom and democracy are subjected.¹²¹

Environmental protection also plays an important role in understanding alternative tourism supporters. By the end of the 1990s, with the increase of environmental concerns, environmentalists were focusing on the sustainability of development, a concept that came from the late 19th century Conservation Movement.¹²²

¹²⁰ Saarienen, Jarkko. "Traditions of Sustainability in Tourism Studies." [Annals of Tourism Research Volume 33, Issue 4](#), October 2006, Pages 1121-1140. doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2006.06.007

¹²¹ Mowforth Martin, Munt Ian. "Tourism and Sustainability: Development, Globalization and New Tourism in the Third World." London and New York: Routledge, 2016, p.118

¹²² Conservation Movement refers to the initiative which was adopted by federal and state governments in US by the 19th century, including variety of programs to preserve forests and educate the public about the need for improved forest management practices.

Sensitivity to the environment and sustainability has increased over time, and this movement has positioned itself as sustainable development in the field of tourism. Moving away from mass tourism would also bring about environmentally oriented conditions where sustainability is one of the main focuses. Environmentally conscious tourists abhor social and ecological damage. The 'green movement' arguments for soft and human tourism and the 'green consumer' began to raise environmental issues in tourism.¹²³

2.3.6. Developmental State

After the Second World War, the Western industrialized countries were deeply involved in studying the economic development of developing countries and how to integrate them into the liberal world economy so that the international economy would continue smoothly functioning. These efforts have given rise to several theories, namely modernization, dependency-underdevelopment, neo-Marxism, and neo-statism. It is also a fact that the statist view of the economy and the central role of states in economic policymaking has been neglected by the modernization and neoliberal theorists which are backed by the Western industrialized countries.

For most scholars, however, the catching-up of the industrialized countries would not be possible without the active role of the state in the economy. Chowdhury points out that the centrality of the state has re-emerged in comparative politics since the late 1970s, largely as a reaction to the neglect of the state within structural functionalist and Marxist paradigms. The resurgence of interest in the state, termed here 'neo-statism', was typically expressed in such titles as *Bringing the State Back In*, *Taking the State Seriously*.¹²⁴

The guiding role of the state in an economy has been described in various ways. State capitalism was one of the most commonly used terms to describe the important

¹²³ Hall, C. Michael. "Yes, Virginia, there is a Tourism Class: Why Class still Matters in Tourism Analysis." In *Political Economy of Tourism: A Critical Perspective*, edited by Jan Mosedale, 111-125. Abingdon: Routledge, 2011, p.115

¹²⁴ Chowdhury, Supriya Roy. "Neo-statism in Third World studies: a Critique." *Third World Quarterly*, Vol 20, No 6, pp 1089± 1107, 1999. Available at: <https://library.fes.de/libalt/journals/swetsfulltext/6713240.pdf>. Accessed on 20 September 2024.

role of the state in the economy. The term state capitalism has also been identified in different ways. For instance, Trotskyites used it to highlight the tendency of the Soviet Union under Stalin to use its control productive power to oppress the working class in a manner similar to capitalist societies.¹²⁵

However, in the current use, state capitalism is used to describe capitalist economies where a powerful state plays a guiding and directing role in the economy. In addition, the successful implementation of state capitalist policies has mostly been carried out by Asian countries in general, and Japan, in particular, is called a developmental state. Atul Kohli calls it state-led development when he refers to economic policies in which states are directly involved in the economic development process.¹²⁶

The term statism first appeared as such in France around 1880 to describe political doctrines that called for an expansion of the role and responsibilities of the state in all areas of the economy, civil society, and society in general. The word was also used in Switzerland in the 1890s in the struggle to resist a proposed expansion of federal powers at the expense of the cantons, especially in the economic and financial domains.¹²⁷

Statism has different perceptions according to different types of ideologies. Communist ideology sees statism as an instrument of state domination over social formation. Bob Jessop identifies statist economic policy as the dominance of the state's interests and state managers over those of all economic classes and members of civil society. Such an extreme form of statism would mean, in particular, that the state expands its power and increases its autonomy in relation not only to subordinate classes but also, and crucially, to the dominant classes.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Heywood Andrew. "Global Politics." London: Red Globe Press, 2014, p.185

¹²⁶ Kohli Atul. "State Directed Development: Political Power and Industrialization in the Global Periphery." New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p.32

¹²⁷ Jessop, Bob. "Statism." Available at: <https://www.academia.edu/16356044/Statism>. Accessed on 20 December 2024

¹²⁸ Jessop, Bob. "Statism." Available at: <https://www.academia.edu/16356044/Statism>. Accessed on 20 December 2024

Max Horkheimer regarded statism as a variety of the authoritarian state: Integral statism or state socialism is the most consistent form of the authoritarian state, which has freed itself from any dependence on private capital.¹²⁹ He saw the Soviet Union as an example of that. Peripheral capitalism poses the issue of statism in more extreme form in so far as statism is assimilated to the developmental state (e.g., Atatürk's Turkey, Lee Kwan-Yiu's Singapore). In addition to these ostensibly 'normal' forms of developmental statism, there are also exceptional 'developmental' states.¹³⁰ (e.g., the South Korean and Taiwanese developmental states with their national security regimes)

Like its predecessor, developmental state theory also emerged as a reaction to modernization's denial of the state's role in developing countries' development. It can also be argued that the concept became popular thanks to the so-called East Asian economic miracles. In other words, the general conception of statism is based on East Asian economic success, which mainly focuses on the state's role not only as an instrument to create the conditions for a free market but also to direct and plan the local industry and economy actively. Therefore, the developmental state approach basically emphasises the role of the state in actively directing, prioritising and planning investments as well as creating favourable conditions for the private sector to operate. Consequently, for the developmental state economic theory, the role of the state, especially in developing countries, is crucial because developing countries compete with developed countries and need direction and protection, especially for their industries, which are classified as infants compared to those in developed countries.

The developmental state approach sees the state as an economic actor, especially in developing countries. State intervention can also be described as aimed at promoting and prioritizing industrialization. Thus, the main argument of the developmental state is to ensure development through industrialization and state intervention. Since

¹²⁹ Horkheimer, Max. "The Authoritarian State." Available at <https://cominsitu.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/authoritarian-state-horkheimer1973.pdf>. Accessed on 21 August 2024

¹³⁰ Jessop, Bob. "Statism." Available at: <https://www.academia.edu/16356044/Statism>. Accessed on 22 December 2024

economic growth is an important element of development and since developing countries need policies different from those of developed countries to compete with them, policies such as protectionism and providing incentives to infant sectors have become crucial for developing countries. Kohli refers to developing countries as late industrialisers. According to him, the preponderance of the evidence indicates that late-late industrialization has always commenced under protection conditions. He also argues that state intervention aimed at boosting investor profitability is strongly associated with rapid industrialization.¹³¹

State intervention does not mean the presence of state-owned enterprises in an economy. On the contrary, it means close cooperation between the state and the private sector in development. This cooperation is particularly important for developing countries as their late-industrializing economies and infant sectors must compete with those of developed countries. The automobile industry in South Korea and Japan is a good example of this cooperation, where the state directed the private sector and even adopted protectionist policies in the early years of production. Cooperation between the state and the private sector is also important in minimizing corruption in favor of bureaucratic elites.

The developmental state policy promotes public-private partnerships and creates a suitable joint-project environment. It involves a market-confirming but state-sponsored approach to economic and social restructuring, with the state seeking to guide market forces in support of a national economic strategy. This guidance depends heavily on the state's deployment of its own powers of imperative coordination, its own economic resources and activities, and its own knowledge bases and organizational intelligence.¹³²

Since the 20th century, several states have adopted a statist development policy. It is worth noting that few of these states have been successful in their developmental

¹³¹ Kohli Atul. "State Directed Development: Political Power and Industrialization in the Global Periphery." New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p.34

¹³² Kohli Atul. "State Directed Development: Political Power and Industrialization in the Global Periphery." New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p.35

efforts. Why have state-led development efforts been more successful in some parts of the world than others? Atul Kohli, believes that state led economic policies are more successful in the states which can be classified as late developers. This is because state intervention supporting investor profits has proved to be a precondition for the industry to emerge and flourish among late-late developers. As per him, the preponderance of the evidence indicates that late-late industrialization has always commenced under conditions of protection.¹³³ The role of the state and state intervention is crucial in state-led development policies. In this regard, Lockwood argues that whatever the dominant ideology, it is irrelevant and useless if the state itself is not committed to the welfare of its people.¹³⁴

The developmental state has never been a popular approach to studying tourism development theories in developing countries. Tourism development theories have been developed along Western lines and have been analyzed through the lens of Western ideologies. State-led development theories have often been classified as challenging to Western development ideologies such as modernization and liberalism. Raul Bianchi argues that the customary approach to the analysis of state involvement in tourism has been either to neglect the inherently political nature of tourism policy and development altogether or, indeed, to attribute many of the failures of early tourism development initiatives in developing countries, to intrinsic shortcomings allegedly associated with state-led-development.¹³⁵

However, some countries have developed relatively sustainable tourism through statist economic policies. The South Antalya Development Project and the Belek Project implemented by the Government of Türkiye are examples of successful state-led tourism development policies. The Tourism Promotion Law enacted by the Turkish government, which provides subsidies for investment in accommodation facilities, the construction of hotels by local investors through public-private

¹³³ Kohli Atul. "State Directed Development: Political Power and Industrialization in the Global Periphery." New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p.35

¹³⁴ Lockwood, William W. "The State and Economic Enterprise in Japan." Princeton University Press, 1965, p.244

¹³⁵ Bianchi Raoul V. "The Political Economy of Tourism Development: A Critical Review." [Annals of Tourism Research](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2017.08.005), Volume 70, May 2018, Pages 88-102. doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2017.08.005

partnerships, and finally, the implementation of aggressive promotional campaigns through the state budget, have all contributed to the development of the Belek region into a world-renowned luxury tourist destination. Today, Belek's luxury hotels account for the largest share of the country's tourism revenues. The tourism development policies of Mexico and some Middle Eastern countries can also be linked to neo-statist theory. Clancy Martin links tourism development in Mexico to neo-statist policies. He argues that tourism development in Mexico adopts an explicitly statist approach to explain not only the economic circumstances leading to the adoption of tourism as an export-oriented development strategy but also the manner in which the state actively intervened to overcome resistance among the sections of the national capitalist classes to invest in the new tourism growth poles on Mexican littoral, supplemented by public outlays on infrastructure.¹³⁶

A similar conclusion can be made for developing the tourism industry in Egypt. Steiner and Richer's work demonstrate how the state-managed liberalization of Egypt's tourism economy was uniquely shaped by the neo-patrimonial characteristics of the Egyptian state and the associated structures of the domestic patronage system.¹³⁷ Cuba can also be seen as a country with a protectionist, perhaps statist, tourism policy. In Cuba, the government controlled practically the entire economy, permitting private entrepreneurs in limited industries. It heavily subsidized virtually all staples and commodities, and its currency was not convertible for long.¹³⁸

Apart from the above-mentioned examples, few works analyze developmental state policies from the point of view of tourism development. Moreover, no similar work has been done on tourism development policies for post-Soviet states, including Central Asian ones. Thus, Uzbekistan in the Mirziyoyev era set a good example as a

¹³⁶ Clancy, Michael. Tourism and Development - Evidence from Mexico. *Annals of Tourism Research*. 26. 1-20. 10.1016/S0160-7383(98)00046-2.

¹³⁷ Richter Thomas, Steiner Christian. "Politics, Economics and Tourism Development in Egypt: Insights into the Sectoral Transformations of a Neo-Patrimonial Rentier State." Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/248949975_Politics_Economics_and_Tourism_Development_in_Egypt_Insights_into_the_Sectoral_Transformations_of_a_Neo-Patrimonial_Rentier_State. Accessed on 8 January 2025

¹³⁸ Spencer Rochelle. "Development Tourism: Lessons from Cuba, Development and the Rise of Tourism as a Strategy." New York: Routledge, 2016, p. 37

country that chose to develop its tourism infrastructure and tourism revenues with the help of developmental state policies.

2.4. Tourism and Its Economic Contribution

Tourism has been recognized as an important industry for the global economy. It is also known as an industry that contributes to the national economies and is a great tool for developing less developed or developing countries. In the initial period, tourism as a tool for economic growth has become much more widespread in developed countries. Although the importance of the tourism sector to national economies was recognized before the mid-twentieth century, it was often ignored in global growth and development studies until the 1950s, when developed countries began to suggest tourism as one of the development paths for less developed or developing countries. And since the 1950s, tourism has become an important industry for development studies. Particularly with the availability and spread of aviation, tourism has become one of the most important economic instruments of the global economy. Eventually, most developing countries have started implementing tourism policies to benefit from international tourism revenues. Today, the business volume of tourism equals or even surpasses that of oil exports, food products or automobiles. Tourism has become one of the major players in international commerce and represents, at the same time, one of the main income sources for many developing countries. This growth goes hand in hand with increasing diversification and competition among destinations.¹³⁹

Tourism has many definitions. It can be defined as the activities of people travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for no more than one year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to an activity remunerated from the place visited.¹⁴⁰ This definition focuses on the importance of traveling to another country to not earn money from the place the traveler is visiting. The United Nations

¹³⁹ “Tourism-an Economic and Social Phenomenon.” Available at: <https://www.unwto.org/why-tourism>. Accessed on 24 October 2024

¹⁴⁰ Mitchell Jonathan, Ashley Caroline. “Tourism and Poverty Reduction: Pathways to Prosperity.” London: Earthscan, 2010, p.8

World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the United Nations agency that promotes tourism worldwide, describes tourism as follows:

Tourism is a social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes. These people are called visitors (which may be either tourists or excursionists; residents or non-residents) and tourism has to do with their activities, some of which involve tourism expenditure.¹⁴¹

Tourism has a direct or indirect relationship with more than fifty different industries and one of the most important definitions of tourism underlines the different segments that the tourism industry is linked to. Tourism is a service industry comprising a number of tangible and intangible components. The tangible elements include transport systems - air, rail, road, water, and now, space; hospitality services, accommodation, food and beverages, tours, and souvenirs; and related services such as banking, insurance, safety and security. The intangible elements include rest and relaxation, culture, escape, adventure, and new and different experiences.¹⁴²

2.4.1. The Economic Contribution of Tourism

Tourism is a major industry for many countries worldwide and plays an important role in their development. Since the 1980s, many developing countries have opened their destinations to becoming one of the world's preferred tourist destinations. Tourism as a source of income plays a particularly important and unique role for developing and less developed countries. As an employment-generating sector, the tourism industry helps developing countries to create new employment opportunities not only for their educated and trained people but also for their less educated population. Moreover, the tourism sector itself has been proliferating since the 2000s, with both the number of international visitors and the amount of international tourism receipts increasing significantly, with the exception of the period 2020-2022,

¹⁴¹ "Glossary of Tourism Terms." Available at <https://www.unwto.org/glossary-tourism-terms#>. Accessed on 23 October 2024

¹⁴² "Tourism Resources of India." Available at: <https://uou.ac.in/sites/default/files/slm/ETS-102.pdf>. Accessed on 21 October 2024.

when the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was still influencing the tourism industry worldwide.

International tourism receipts are expenditures by international inbound visitors, including payments to national carriers for international transport. These receipts include any other prepayment made for goods or services received in the destination country.¹⁴³ In this regard, international tourism receipts reached USD 1.4 trillion in 2023, according to preliminary estimates, about 93% of the USD 1.5 trillion earned by destinations in 2019.¹⁴⁴ Preliminary estimates on the economic contribution of tourism measured in tourism direct gross domestic product (TDGPD) point to USD 3.3 trillion in 2023 or 3% of global GDP.¹⁴⁵

GDP is the total value of all goods and services produced in a country in a year. It is considered an important indicator of a country's economic strength, and a positive change in GDP is a sign of economic growth. In 2023, the contribution of travel and tourism to global GDP was US\$ 9.9 trillion. This figure is forecast to reach an estimated US\$11.1 trillion in 2024. In 2034, the contribution of travel and tourism to global GDP is expected to reach US\$16 trillion.¹⁴⁶ The number of international visitors is also set to increase in 2024. An estimated 1.4 billion international tourists (overnight visitors) were recorded around the world in 2024, an increase of 11% over 2023, or 140 million more.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ “Metadata Glossary.” available at: <https://databank.worldbank.org/metadataglossary/world-development-indicators/series/ST.INT.RCPT.XP.ZS#>, accessed on 20 October 2024

¹⁴⁴ “International Tourism to Reach Pre-pandemic Levels.” Available at: <https://www.unwto.org/news/international-tourism-to-reach-pre-pandemic-levels-in-2024#>. Accessed on 20 October 2024

¹⁴⁵ “International Tourism to Reach Pre-pandemic Levels.” Available at: <https://www.unwto.org/news/international-tourism-to-reach-pre-pandemic-levels-in-2024#>. Accessed on 20 October 2024

¹⁴⁶ “Travel and Tourism Sector to Break All Records – WTTC.” Available at: <https://www.tourismupdate.co.za/article/travel-and-tourism-sector-break-all-records-wttc?page=74#:~:text=Travel%20and%20tourism%20ten%20years%20from%20now&text=By%202034%2C%20the%20sector%20will,for%20449%20million%20people%20worldwide>. Accessed on 15th of October 2024

¹⁴⁷ “World Tourism Barometer.” Available at: [https://www.unwto.org/un-tourism-world-tourism-barometer-data#:~:text=An%20estimated%201.4%20billion%20international%20tourists%20\(overnight%20visitors\)%20were%20recorded,2023%2C%20or%20140%20million%20more](https://www.unwto.org/un-tourism-world-tourism-barometer-data#:~:text=An%20estimated%201.4%20billion%20international%20tourists%20(overnight%20visitors)%20were%20recorded,2023%2C%20or%20140%20million%20more). Accessed on 5 April 2025.

As a relatively labor-intensive sector, tourism creates jobs and helps alleviate employment problems in developing countries. This is also one of the main reasons why comparatively populous countries tend to be more aggressive in developing their tourism infrastructure and attracting foreign tourists to their countries. The UNWTO has recognized tourism as an effective way to help developing countries achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and increase their share in the global economy. In this part of the chapter, I will review the main contributions of the tourism sector to national economies. These can be categorized as follows:

1. Stimulation of local production and output
2. Creation of new employment opportunities
3. Generation of foreign exchange earnings
4. Increased government revenues
5. Regional development.
6. Poverty alleviation

2.4.2. Stimulation of Local Production and Output

Suffice it to say that tourism spending has not only a direct impact on businesses from which tourists purchase products or services but also several indirect impacts on businesses in their supply chain. The tourism industry is closely linked to a wide range of other industries. It can be argued that the tourism industry has direct or indirect links with more than 50 different sectors. Due to the fragmented nature of the industry, it can be not easy to measure the exact contribution of tourism to national economies. Travelers also contribute to non-travel sectors such as retail, recreation, entertainment, etc., making the impact of tourism expenditures higher than estimated.

Tourism, especially international tourism, increases the demand for goods and services in a given destination. In fact, increased demand stimulates the economy by creating new jobs in various sectors, from hospitality to any sector related to the tourism industry, and this would ultimately bring more revenue and economic growth to the given destination. Tourism expenditure can boost local primary

production (minerals, agriculture, fisheries, forestry products, etc.), secondary (manufactured goods), and tertiary industry (services) as tourists add to the existing demand for such items. It can be argued that there are three different ways in which tourism contributes to the production of services and goods and, ultimately, to the national economy of destinations. The expenditure generated by the tourism industry can have direct, indirect and induced effects on the production of goods and services in the destination.

2.4.2.1. Direct Effects

The direct effects of tourist expenditure have fallen on the suppliers both within and outside the tourist industry, which sell goods and services directly to the tour.¹⁴⁸ In the tourism industry, some jobs are directly related to tourism spending. For instance, when a tourist travels to Bukhara, the money that they spend directly on hotels, meals, tour guides, and museum tickets can be classified as direct effects created by the tourism industry. In addition to that, direct effects include labor income and other forms of earnings from the tourism sector.¹⁴⁹ Non-financial impacts of tourism on people's livelihoods can also be considered as direct impacts of tourism, even if they are not economically related. Examples of such impacts include reduced access to beaches for local people or the destruction of fishing opportunities for fishermen due to the development of tourism infrastructure.

2.4.2.2. Indirect Effects

Indirect effects are the revenues of sectors other than tourism that the tourism sector generates. The indirect effects of tourism spending affect almost every sector of the economy to some extent. Indirect effects of tourism include spending by the tourism industry on goods and services produced by other industries. And the monetary relationship between the various sectors creates a multilateral connection, also

¹⁴⁸ Dwyer Larry, Forsyth Peter, Dwyer Wayne. "Tourism Economics and Policy." Bristol: View Publications. 2020. p. 198

¹⁴⁹ Mitchell Jonathan, Ashley Caroline. "Tourism and Poverty Reduction: Pathways to Prosperity." London: Earthscan, 2010, p.22

known as the chain effect. For example, hotels and restaurants purchase carpets, linen, pool chemicals, and computers from suppliers who purchase fuel, stationery, power, furnishings, etc. from other firms, who purchase their inputs from other firms, and so on. This indirect expenditure creates a chain effect, generating further income for other businesses, households, and the governments.¹⁵⁰ And as the tourism industry develops, so does the chain effect that generates further income for the economy outside of tourism.

2.4.2.3. Induced Effects

Induced effects can best be described as spending on the local economy by people working in the tourism industry. For example, wage and salary earners and firm owners will pay rent, but groceries, theatre tickets, CDs, etc. This, in turn, sets off a process of successive rounds of purchases by intermediate firms, plus further consumption, adding to GDP and employment.¹⁵¹ These three different effects on tourism income are known as tourism multiplier effects. Multiplier effects can be achieved by intensively dovetailing tourism with neighboring sectors such as agriculture or crafts, thus boosting the local economy. This also leads to tourism-induced impacts on employment and income-generation.¹⁵²

Suffice it to say that the extent to which local products and services are stimulated depends on the strength of the business links between tourism and other sectors. It is argued that non-tourism sectors, also called indirect effects, provide more opportunities for the population regarding earnings. In this regard Lejarraga and Walkenhorst state:

With the exception of wages, most of the income generated through direct effects within the tourism economy goes to the hotel and restaurant owners,

¹⁵⁰ Dwyer Larry, Forsyth Peter, Dwyer Wayne. "Tourism Economics and Policy." Bristol: View Publications. 2020. p. 198

¹⁵¹ Dwyer Larry, Forsyth Peter, Dwyer Wayne. "Tourism Economics and Policy." Bristol: View Publications. 2020. p. 99

¹⁵² "The Tourism Value Chain: Analysis and Practical Approaches for Development Cooperation Projects." Available at: https://www.switch-asia.eu/site/assets/files/2460/giz_tourism_value_chains_en.pdf. Accessed on 20 October 2024

namely local or international elites. By contrast, the income generated through indirect effects trickles down to the lower income layer of the economy. Since most of the industries that supply the tourism economy are non-high tech and labor intensive, the majority of backward linkages are forged by smaller unskilled workers.¹⁵³

2.4.3. Creation of new employment opportunities

As a labor-intensive sector, tourism has always been a major source of employment. Countries with relatively large populations tend to invest in tourism development as it creates new employment opportunities for the population. Tourism creates jobs not only in the sector itself but also in other sectors through its relationship with other sectors, which is also referred to as a "complex value chain." Suffice it to say that the more suppliers there are at the various levels of the complex value chain, the more revenue will be generated for the destination and, ultimately, the more jobs will be created in the context of the complex value chain, which will eventually contribute to economic development in that particular destination. As in the case of monetary stimulation, employment in tourism can be divided into three different categories: direct employment, indirect employment, and induced employment. As can be easily understood, direct employment refers to creating jobs in tourism facilities as a result of tourist consumption. It includes all jobs where workers are involved in producing direct tourism products.

Indirect employment comprises all jobs where the workers are engaged in producing indirect tourism output through the supply of goods and services required as inputs to production by tourism-related businesses (e.g. workers producing pool chemicals, in carpet manufacturing, farming and delivering fuel to airlines.)¹⁵⁴ Finally, employment created as a result of induced tourism expenditure, i.e. expenditure by employees working in the tourism industry, can be described as induced tourism employment.

¹⁵³ [Lejarranga Iza](#), [Walkenhorst Peter](#). "On Linkages and Leakages: Measuring the Secondary Effects of Tourism." Available at: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/90e5f1b8-ffdc-5d2e-be69-5fe20cb95fb4>. Accessed on 24 October 2024.

¹⁵⁴ Dwyer Larry, Forsyth Peter, Dwyer Wayne. "Tourism Economics and Policy." Bristol: View Publications. 2020. p. 201

Employment in tourism has several characteristics. On the one hand, the tourism industry makes a significant contribution to the unemployment problem, as it also tends to employ relatively more women and young people than other sectors, but on the other hand, it has some challenges, such as seasonality. The employment of women and the relatively younger generation plays a crucial role in the tourism industry. Females represent 60-70 percent of the labor force in the sector and half of the work force in the industry is under 25.¹⁵⁵

There are also some opportunities in tourism for the unskilled or less educated to become employed. Employment in the hospitality sector is often regarded as the main contribution of the benefits of tourism to less skilled households.¹⁵⁶ In addition, most of the income generated by employment in tourism remains in the destination where the labor force is employed. Tourism creates local jobs that cannot be transferred abroad and offers employment to people with different qualifications, particularly including disadvantaged population groups such as women.¹⁵⁷

However, it can also be argued that seasonality has some negative impacts on tourism employment and needs to be addressed in order to reap the benefits of tourism development. As a fundamental tourism characteristic, seasonality is recognized as a factor affecting all aspects of contemporary hospitality industries. Seasonality dramatically influences industry employment, leading to widespread seasonal employment, underemployment, and unemployment.¹⁵⁸ Therefore, government efforts and possible incentives for reducing the seasonal unemployment in the tourism industry would contribute to the reduction of the seasonality effect on employment in the tourism sector.

¹⁵⁵ Dwyer Larry, Forsyth Peter, Dwyer Wayne. "Tourism Economics and Policy." Bristol: View Publications. 2020. p.202

¹⁵⁶ Mitchell Jonathan, Ashley Caroline. "Tourism and Poverty Reduction: Pathways to Prosperity." London: Earthscan, 2010, p.34

¹⁵⁷ "The Tourism Value Chain: Analysis and Practical Approaches for Development Cooperation Projects." Available at: https://www.switch-asia.eu/site/assets/files/2460/giz_tourism_value_chains_en.pdf. Accessed on 22 October 2024

¹⁵⁸ Jolliffe Lee, Farnsworth Regana. "Seasonality in Tourism Employment: Human Resource Challenges." *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 15(6):312-316, Doi:[10.1108/09596110310488140](https://doi.org/10.1108/09596110310488140)

2.4.4. Generation of foreign exchange earnings

Inbound tourism is a type of tourism that covers the activities of international visitors, i.e., non-residents traveling to a given destination outside their usual environment and staying there for no more than one year for leisure, business, or other purposes. Inbound tourism plays the main role in generating foreign exchange earnings, also known as international receipts, which also contribute to countries' export growth. As a result, inbound tourism is an important export earner for countries and contributes to their economies. Not surprisingly, the countries that earn the most from international tourism are among the most developed. On the side of international tourism receipts, the ranking is led by the United States, earning \$176 billion in 2023, followed by Spain (\$92 billion), the United Kingdom (\$74 billion), France (\$69 billion) and Italy (\$56 billion).¹⁵⁹

Developing and less developed countries have also designed their infrastructure and economies to take advantage of international tourism and to benefit from international tourism revenues. International tourism receipts are crucial, especially for developing and less developed countries. It is particularly important to the world's 47 less developed countries, ranking among the top three sources of export earnings for nearly half of all less developed countries. Developing countries, in aggregate, derive over 43 percent of their total services trade revenue from tourism exports, with the LDCs deriving more than 70 percent.¹⁶⁰

2.4.5. Increasing Government Revenues

Tourism contributes to government revenues as a mode of economic development and diversification. Tax revenue from the tourism industry is one of the most important ways governments raise revenue. A well-designed system of tourism

¹⁵⁹“International Tourism to Reach Pre-pandemic Levels.” Available at: <https://www.unwto.org/news/international-tourism-to-reach-pre-pandemic-levels-in-2024#>. Accessed on 23 October 2024

¹⁶⁰ Dwyer Larry, Forsyth Peter, Dwyer Wayne. “Tourism Economics and Policy.” Bristol: View Publications. 2020. p. 203

taxation can benefit the inhabitants of tourist destinations in a number of ways, including through increased economic welfare.

In tourism, taxes apply to a variety of goods and services associated with production and consumption in tourism characteristics and connected activities.¹⁶¹ It can be argued that tax revenue from tourism is an important source of income not only at the national level but also at the local level. Revenue from tourism can also be used by governments to increase international tourist flows through promotional campaigns and to develop tourism infrastructure. It can also be used to help finance poverty alleviation programs by governments. In addition, tourism-related tax revenues can and do help to finance general community improvements and services used by all residents.¹⁶² Popular tourism destinations apply different kinds of tax systems for international visitors who visit their destination. While France, which is among the top three visited tourism destinations worldwide, collects tourist tax according to the standard of the hotel and the municipality where the destinations visited and calculated from 0.75 euros to 15 euros for daily accommodation and used for the development of tourism infrastructure,¹⁶³ whereas Türkiye applies two percent tax on the revenue of the accommodation facilities and used within the general budget.

2.4.6. Regional Development

As mentioned in the third chapter, tourism development can be a significant driver of regional development and employment, not only in the larger cities of a given country but also in backward and remote areas of the destination. Tourism has significant potential to influence different dimensions of regional development as a multifaceted economic activity. The tourism industry has direct and indirect links

¹⁶¹ Dwyer Larry, Forsyth Peter, Dwyer Wayne. "Tourism Economics and Policy." Bristol: View Publications. 2020. p. 204

¹⁶² Jolliffe Lee, Farnsworth Regana. "Seasonality in Tourism Employment: Human Resource Challenges." *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 15(6):312-316, Doi:[10.1108/09596110310488140](https://doi.org/10.1108/09596110310488140)

¹⁶³ "Avrupa'nın Popüler Destinasyonlarında Turizm Vergileri Artırılıyor." (Tourism Taxes Are Increased in Europe's Popular Destinations) Available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/avrupanin-populer-destinasyonlarinda-turizm-vergileri-artiriliyor/3111117#>. Accessed on 22 October 2024.

with more than fifty sectors through the supply chain. In addition, with the help of different economic activities available in the peripheral regions of a country, such as the production of handicrafts or artworks for sale to tourists, tourism movements can contribute to the economic growth of that particular region. Some countries are positioning the tourism industry as a source of growth for their underdeveloped regions. Where regional imbalances exist, tourism is seen as a way to generate jobs and create new income.

Governments have purposely targeted specific underdeveloped regions or regions with high unemployment and have created policies to disburse tourists to these regions.¹⁶⁴ As discussed, dependency is a challenge, especially for regional development in the field of tourism. One type of dependency is linked to tourism as an export market. Tourism flows are very sensitive to economic, political, and natural phenomena.¹⁶⁵

Tourism destinations, especially emerging ones, are very sensitive to any crisis or sudden change in demand from their source tourism markets. Any changes in the developed countries, from which destinations mostly receive visitors and which play a crucial role in their tourism receipts, could deter tourism flows to the destinations. Therefore, while avoiding such crises is difficult, the best way to manage them is to diversify tourism markets and products and avoid overdependence on one particular region, country, or type of tourism.

A prominent example is the ban on charter flights to Turkey by the Putin government in 2015, which made the flow of Russian tourists almost impossible after the downing of a Russian warplane by Turkish forces.¹⁶⁶ As a result of this, Antalya, a destination heavily dependent on Russian and Russian-speaking visitors, suffered from this and searched for tools for diversifying tourism source markets.

¹⁶⁴ Mihalic, Tanja. "Tourism and Economic Development Issues." In book "Tourism and Development: Concept and Issues." Edited by Sharpley Richard and Telfer J. David. Bristol: Channel View Publications, 2002, p. 102

¹⁶⁵ Dwyer Larry, Forsyth Peter, Dwyer Wayne. "Tourism Economics and Policy." Bristol: View Publications. 2020, p. 204

¹⁶⁶ "Vladimir Putin Zapretit Charterny Reisy v Turtsiyu." (Vladimir Putin Banned Charter Flights to Türkiye) Available at: <https://www.tourbus.ru/news/9819.html>. Accessed on 23 October 2024

Another type of dependence on tourism growth is the dependence on international tourism flows for a single destination. Strengthening domestic tourism can be a cushion for the potential crisis that may affect the development of that particular region. To avoid overdependence on the international tourism market and related problems, destinations can consider tapping the potential of domestic tourism. In addition, an expanding domestic tourism industry helps redistribute the national income, thus reducing interregional gaps in the level of economic development and contributing the social equality.¹⁶⁷

2.4.7. Poverty Alleviation

Poverty alleviation has become an important item on the tourism agenda. The UNWTO has identified poverty alleviation and climate change as a global challenge for the tourism industry. Tourism has been identified as a strategy to overcome poverty partly because tourism is a significant or growing economic sector in most developing countries with high levels of poverty.¹⁶⁸ The tourism industry, by its nature, is probably one of the most globalized industries, often characterized by relatively well-off ‘northern’ tourists traveling to exotic and less developed countries in the ‘south’- accentuating the inequality between countries and possibly contributing to increasing the gap between the ‘rich’ and the ‘poor’.¹⁶⁹

In fact, all the articles mentioned above in the chapter on the economic contribution of tourism have focused more or less on the poverty alleviation role that tourism development plays for destinations. In this context, the contribution of tourism to employment generation and also to development is seen as the main component of poverty reduction in a given destination.

¹⁶⁷ Dwyer Larry, Forsyth Peter, Dwyer Wayne. “Tourism Economics and Policy.” Bristol: View Publications. 2020. p.20

¹⁶⁸ Scheyvens, Regina. “Pro-Poor Tourism: Is There Value Beyond the Rhetoric?” *Tourism Recreation Research*, 34(2), 191–196. doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2009.11081590.

¹⁶⁹ Meyer, Dorothea. “Pro-poor Tourism – Can Tourism Contribute to Poverty Reduction in Less Economically Developed Countries?” Available at: <https://www.cabidigitallibrary.org/doi/pdf/10.5555/20103348693>. Accessed on 24 October 2024

However, in the case of poverty alleviation through tourism, the debates evolved around the relationship of dependency that tourism created between developed and developing countries when developing country destinations were visited by Western visitors. In addition to this, it has been argued that throughout history, tourism has developed as an industry from which the developed countries have benefited the most. In fact, the most visited destinations have always been the developed countries. The fact that the vast majority of international tourists continue to visit Western countries, and Europe in particular, leads Hall to the conclusion that “the potential of tourism to contribute to the economic development of the developing countries...would appear to be questionable unless there are massive shifts in flows of international arrivals.”¹⁷⁰

In 2023, of the 1.3 billion international visitors, Europe received 707 million, while the Asia-Pacific region, home to almost half of the world's population, received only 237 million. The Americas, the Middle East, and Africa received 200 million, 93 million, and 66 million international visitors, respectively.¹⁷¹ Suffice it to say that the African region, which includes more than 30 least-developed countries, received the lowest number of international visitors in 2023.¹⁷²

2.5. Conclusion

Tourism plays an important role in achieving economic growth for developing and less developed countries. If successfully managed and designed to attract international visitors, tourism would serve to reduce poverty for a state, regardless of the region in which the destination is located. Attracting international visitors would generate direct income for the host destination and eventually lead to creating

¹⁷⁰ Hall, Michael Colin. “Pro-Poor Tourism: Do Tourism Exchanges Benefit Primarily the Countries of the South?” *Current Issues in Tourism*, June 2007, 10(2):111-118, Doi:[10.1080/13683500708668426](https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500708668426)

¹⁷¹ “Number of International Tourist Arrivals Worldwide from 2005 to 2024, by Region.” Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/186743/international-tourist-arrivals-worldwide-by-region-since-2010/>. Accessed on 25 October 2024

¹⁷² “International Tourism to Reach Pre-Pandemic Levels in 2024.” Available at: <https://www.unwto.org/news/international-tourism-to-reach-pre-pandemic-levels-in-2024>. Accessed on 25 October 2024

specific jobs in the tourism industry, as well as stimulating the domestic economy and investment. Here, accessibility is crucial in benefiting from tourism, especially for developing countries. When accessibility is established, the tourism industry is able to bring customers to these central or peripheral places of consumption and thus generate direct revenue.¹⁷³

In the 1960s, tourism began to be offered to developing countries as a tool for development. The developed states recommended the less developed states to follow the same path that the western states had followed in order to reach a certain level of development. However, by that time, it was understood that the tourism policies recommended by the West, such as modernization and neoliberalism, could not contribute to the development of developing countries; on the contrary, such tourism policies would mostly contribute to the dependency situation of the developing countries on the developed ones. Over time, the state's role in tourism has become crucial in transforming a country into a tourist destination where a significant number of international visitors could visit and contribute to the national economy.

For most developing countries, tourism is considered an infant industry, competing with the world's most popular tourist destinations, which have held this position for decades and are mostly economically developed countries. Therefore, guiding and supporting the development of an industry in its early years, when it competes with developed countries, as one of the main strategic essentials of developmental state policies, also plays an important role in tourism development policies for any infant destination. State-led tourism policies would contribute to the process of the development of tourism and eventually to the alleviation of poverty, especially in the developing states and their tourism destinations.

¹⁷³ Dehoorne Olivier, Tatar Corine, Theng Sopheap. "Tourism and Poverty: Open the Range of Possibilities." Available at: <https://journals.openedition.org/etudescaribeennes/31807#quotation>. Accessed on 20 October 2024.

CHAPTER 3

THE ECONOMY AND TOURISM POLICIES OF UZBEKISTAN UNTIL THE MIRZIYOYEV ERA

3.1. Introduction

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the newly established states found themselves in a challenging period of political, economic, and social transition, albeit at different levels. For those with relatively better economic and political conditions, the impact of the dissolution was not very significant. However, those states that were more complexly integrated into the Soviet economic system experienced more problems in the initial years of their independence than others. For example, the Baltic states, which had a longer period of independent statehood, could adapt quickly to being independent states. In contrast, the Central Asian countries, which didn't have a history of independent, modern statehood, found it difficult to adapt to the new circumstances. Among the Soviet Republics, the Baltic States were independent as late as 1940, and they were never reconciled to their status as a part of the USSR.¹⁷⁴

The Central Asian states became independent after over a hundred years under the patronage of Tsarist Russia and then the Soviet Union. Until then, none of the Central Asian states had experienced independent statehood. It is worth mentioning that the Central Asian states did not favor the dissolution of the Union. In a referendum held in 1991 to decide on the future of the Soviet Union, a large majority of people living in the Central Asian countries voted for the continuation of the Soviet Union.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ Donaldson Robert N., Nadkarni Vidya. "The Foreign Policy of Russia. Changing Systems, Enduring Interests." New York: Routledge, 2018, p.130

¹⁷⁵ Djalili Mohammad Reza, Kellner Thierry. "Yeni Orta Asya Jeopolitigi: SSCB'nin bitiminden 11 Eylöl Sonrasına." (New Geopolitics of Central Asia: From the End of the USSR to Post 9/11) Istanbul: Bilge Kültür Sanat, 2009, p. 48

In the period after the Second World War many colonized countries' independence resulted from a long struggle; moreover, the colonized states had been waiting for their independence for so many years. The same cannot be said for the post-Soviet states in general and the Central Asian states in particular. Thus, the post-Soviet states achieved independence without demanding it, and it can also be argued that the Central Asian states and their Soviet leaders were not even aware that independence was imminent. Irina Zvyagelskaya, a professor at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, argues that "nobody in the Soviet Union had any idea that a great state like the Soviet Union would soon come to an end and that independence would be the only alternative for those who had fought for it and for those who had tried to keep it as it was by reforming the Union treaty."¹⁷⁶

It was clear that among those who did not see the collapse of the Soviet Union and the achievement of independence were the locals and high officials of the Central Asian states. With independence, the new leaders of the independent Central Asian states became those who had ruled the countries during the final years of the Soviet Union. All the new presidents of the Central Asian states were born, educated, and served in the Soviet system and culture without any experience of a free market economy, which would also make the transition process difficult for them. This difficulty was felt first and foremost in the economies of the newly independent Central Asian states.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the Central Asian states, were the poorest socialist republics in the Union. The Central Asian economies had their own peculiarities, which made their economies relatively weak during the Soviet period. Among the reasons for the aforementioned economic backwardness of the regions, we can consider the reforms carried out during the Soviet Union, which came to the Central Asian countries relatively late, and the content of these reforms was also relatively limited, as well as the lack of experience in economic management. As a result, the Central Asian countries faced economic difficulties and uncertainties with the collapse. These economic problems became the main concern of Uzbekistan, the

¹⁷⁶ Zvyagelskaya Irina. "Stanovlenie Gosudarstv Tsentral'noi Azii: Politicheskie Protssesy." (The Formation of Central Asian Republics: Political Process) Moscow: Aspect Press, 2009, p. 39

most populous of the Central Asian states, which eventually paved the way for the state-directed economic and tourism policies in the country after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

In this chapter, I will analyze the political economy of Uzbekistan in the post-Soviet era. First, I will review the Uzbek economy and the important role of Moscow in managing the economies of the periphery, including Uzbekistan, during the Soviet period. I will then examine the economic policies of the Uzbek government in the post-Soviet period. As is well known, there are two different approaches to the transition from a centrally planned economy to a liberal one based on market principles: shock therapy and gradualism. Karimov, the former Soviet bureaucrat who became Uzbekistan's first president, chose gradualism for his country. Since economic choices in the transition period are crucial for the economies of post-Soviet states, I will also briefly analyze Uzbekistan's economic policy in the context of gradualism during the Karimov era, followed by the period of Shavkat Mirziyoyev, who succeeded Karimov after his sudden death. I will review Mirziyoyev's attempts to liberalize the economy and diversify Uzbekistan's economy together with his attempts to improve its foreign relations with those countries that have potential for economic partnership and economic growth. In addition, in this chapter, I will briefly review the tourism policies implemented by the Soviet Union and the role that tourism played in Uzbekistan during the Soviet era. Furthermore, before moving on to the section where I will analyze Mirziyoyev's tourism policies in detail, I will also review Uzbekistan's tourism policies pursued by Islam Karimov until his sudden death in 2016.

3.2. The Soviet Economic System

In 1922, a new political entity called the Soviet Union or USSR was formed in the Eurasian region, encompassing the countries and peoples of an area stretching from Moldova to Central Asia. As a result of the first event, a whole group of countries was brought into the orbit of the formally dominant socialist political ideology and the production method based on administrative state planning.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ Gevorkyan, Aleksandr V. "Transition Economies: Transformation, Development, and Society in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union." New York: Routledge, 2018, p.9

The Soviet economy was considered a command economy based on two main principles: central planning and specialization. According to these principles, each republic in the union was supposed to follow the center's guidance to fulfil the role the center designed for that particular region and republic. Most of the time, these plans did not meet the needs of the region and caused some conflicts between the regions and Moscow. The most important enterprises throughout the USSR were subordinated to the Central Planning Agency *Gosplan*.¹⁷⁸

During the Soviet period, all regional investment and development plans were prepared by *Gosplan*, based in Moscow. These plans were usually developed according to the needs of the Union as a whole rather than the needs of the republics in which they were implemented. There was strong economic integration between the republics within the Soviet Union. Each Soviet republic had specialized sectors and industries, all representing and supporting the Union's interests as a whole. Self-sufficiency has always been at the heart of the Soviet economic system. Since the beginning of the Union, great efforts have been made to enable the country to be self-sufficient, and it was the most crucial phenomenon for the USSR during both Lenin's and Stalin's administrations. Pomfret, an American scholar on the Soviet economic system, argues that "the Soviet economy was characterized by a high degree of self-sufficiency."¹⁷⁹

The Soviet leadership sought to adapt to the Western experience of industrialization, which it believed would lead to self-sufficiency in the short term. In the early years of the Stalin era, experts invited from Germany, the US, England, France, and Italy played a crucial role in the USSR's successful industrialization. With the help of foreign technology and machinery purchased with gold, new factories, and power plants were built. According to some analysts, the Soviet technical purchases accounted for 1/3 of the world's total imports in 1931 and almost half in 1932.¹⁸⁰ In

¹⁷⁸ Spechler, Martin C. "The Political Economy of Reform in Central Asia: Uzbekistan under Authoritarianism." London and New York: Routledge, 2008, p. 24

¹⁷⁹ Pomfret, Richard. "The Central Asian Economies Since Independence." New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006, p.1

¹⁸⁰ Anisimov, Evgeniy. "Īstroiya Rossii ot Ryurika do Medvedeva: Ludi, Sobitiya, Daty (The History of Russia from Ryurik to Medvedev: People, Incidents and Dates) Saint Petersburg: Īzdatel'stvo Piter, 2011, p.420

1931 the USSR began to produce its own cars and equipment. In the same year, when the world was experiencing the Great Depression, and production was declining worldwide, the USSR was the second country in the world in terms of the number of cars produced.¹⁸¹

In the early years of the Union, in addition to the efforts to industrialize and modernize production facilities, Moscow paid great attention to the efficient management of the Soviet Union's agricultural sector. In December 1927, the All-Union Congress of the Bolshevik Communist Party adopted a five-year plan for the development of agriculture in the Union for 1928-1933. In accordance with this decision, *Gosplan* carried out a great deal of work in which all the annual outputs and controls were realized.¹⁸²

The centralized five-year plans always played a crucial role in the Soviet Union's economic planning process. However, the centralized decision-making process negatively impacted the Central Asian countries, which were in greater need of economic support and subsidies than other republics in the Union. The Central Asian republics shared with the rest of the USSR the general inefficiencies of central planning, and the drawbacks of poor quality and obsolescence in industry and lack of concern for environmental costs.¹⁸³

All Soviet Republics had a role to play in the Soviet economic system. It can be argued that there was strong economic integration between the republics, although all republics had different development and economic growth levels. In other words, the republics integrated into the unified network of the Soviet economy through specialization and division of labor. The Central Asian region was planned as a single entity, or perhaps more accurately as part of the single entity that had been the

¹⁸¹ Maslov Dmitry, Lazareva Lubov, Suhanova Natalya. "Prichiny Raspada SSSR: Voprosy Metodologii Issledovaniya." (Reasons of the Dissolution of USSR: Questions of Methodological Research) Moscow: Rosspen, 2022, p. 48

¹⁸² Maslov Dmitry, Lazareva Lubov, Suhanova Natalya. "Prichiny Raspada SSSR: Voprosy Metodologii Issledovaniya." (Reasons of the Dissolution of USSR: Questions of Methodological Research) Moscow: Rosspen, 2022, p. 45

¹⁸³ Pomfret, Richard. "The Economies of Central Asia." New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1995, p.29

Soviet economy.¹⁸⁴ Uzbekistan was no exception, having its own functioning in the Soviet economic system and trying to meet the demands of Gosplan, regardless of whether the plans were rational or profitable for the Soviet Uzbek Republic during the Soviet period.

3.3. Uzbekistan's Economy During the Soviet Era

Uzbekistan experienced economic growth during the Soviet period thanks to investments and the development of various industrial sectors. As mentioned above, cotton became the main specialization of Uzbekistan during the Soviet period. Although by 1990, Uzbekistan's main specialization was cotton, the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic (Uzbek SSR) produced and traded other products during the Soviet period. With the help of Soviet specialization policy in the economy, various types of facilities were established in the Uzbek SSR to produce different types of products, namely agricultural goods such as grain, fruit, vegetables, and silk cocoons. In addition, due to the Soviet Union's industrialization policy, Uzbekistan became a republic producing and exporting natural gas, minerals, oil, and gold. The other main industrial sector of Soviet Uzbekistan was the production of automobiles and their equipment. After the Second World War, Uzbekistan became one of the main exporters of automotive products in the Soviet Union.

On the other hand, the implementation of and adherence to Soviet economic policies had negative consequences for the Uzbek SSR. An example of this is the over-expansion of irrigated land for the production of cotton. Another negative effect of the Soviet economic policies on the Uzbek economy was that the republic had to export most of its goods to other Soviet republics at relatively low prices. This became a challenge for the independent Uzbek economy, especially after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. We will now take a closer look at the process of economic development and at the main economic activities in Uzbekistan during the Soviet period.

¹⁸⁴ Pomfret, Richard. "The Central Asian Economies Since Independence." New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006, p.1

Uzbekistan had its unique role in the Soviet economic system based on the policy of specialization. During the Soviet era, the Uzbek SSR was fully integrated into the Soviet economic system with its unique role in the Soviet economy. As part of the Soviet Union's common economic policy, the center nationalized all of Uzbekistan's economic assets. Spechler argues that in Uzbekistan, as everywhere else within the USSR, agricultural land and forests, mineral wealth and important industrial assets were nationalized and exploited for all-Soviet purposes.¹⁸⁵

In most Russian academic sources, however, integrating Central Asian and Uzbek economies into the Soviet economic system is seen as a successful implementation of command and planned economy. Vladimir Paramonov, a Russian political analyst, argues that the integration of Uzbekistan into the Soviet economic system resulted in Uzbekistan becoming a developed economy where industrialization and agriculture played a crucial role in the country's economy.¹⁸⁶ On the other hand, Pomfret takes a middle ground, arguing that it is not easy to say whether the Soviet economic legacy has been beneficial for the Central Asian countries in general and Uzbekistan in particular. He argues that the assessment depends on the counterfactual of what their history would have been if they had remained outside the USSR and on which countries they are compared to Central Asian countries remained poorer than other Soviet republics but better off than their southern neighbors in Afghanistan and better off than British India.¹⁸⁷

Agriculture has always been the main occupation of the Uzbek people even before the Soviet period. Within the framework of specialization, Uzbekistan was classified by the Soviet Union as one of the main cotton producers not only in the region but also in the world. It can be argued that cotton production was already a phenomenon in the region during the Tsarist era, thanks to the suitability of the land for

¹⁸⁵ Spechler, Martin C. "The Political Economy of Reform in Central Asia: Uzbekistan under Authoritarianism." London and New York: Routledge, 2008, p. 26

¹⁸⁶ Paramonov Vladimir., Stokov Aleksey. "Raspad SSSR i ego Posledstviya dlya Uzbekistana: Ekonomika i Sotsial'naya Sfera." (The Dissolution of USSR and its Consequences for Uzbekistan: Economy and Social Environment) Available at: https://ceasia.net/wp-content/uploads/pdf/raspad_ussr_uz_russian_april2006.pdf. Accessed on 30 August 2024

¹⁸⁷ Pomfret, Richard. "The Economies of Central Asia." New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1995, p.39

agriculture. Martin Spechler claims that cotton was and remains, the most important cash crop in Uzbekistan and of its immediate neighbors, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. The expansion in cotton acreage which began in Tsarist times, continued during the Soviet period.¹⁸⁸

It can be said that cotton production was the main economic activity of the Uzbek SSR. Cotton farming accounted for 50 percent of Uzbekistan's total agricultural production, and the cotton industry accounted for 50 percent of the country's total industrial production of the country.¹⁸⁹

As mentioned above, one of the main goals of the Soviet economic system was to achieve a level of self-sufficiency in the economy. The cotton cultivation policy was designed to meet all the needs of the Union for cotton as a raw material. It was also designed to ensure that the Soviet Union could easily supply cotton to other communist countries without any problems. As a result of the Soviet economic policies, in 1990, Uzbekistan produced 1,637 tons of fiber. 70 percent of it was exported to the other republics of the Union.¹⁹⁰ In the same year, Uzbekistan became the fourth-largest cotton producer in the world and the second-largest exporter.¹⁹¹

However, being the largest producer of cotton in the Soviet Union did not help the country's textile industry to flourish. Very little of the production was processed within the republic, while most of the output was sent to other Union republics at subsidized prices. Then this processed cotton was turned into clothing and sent back to Uzbekistan.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ Spechler, Martin C. "The Political Economy of Reform in Central Asia: Uzbekistan under Authoritarianism." London and New York: Routledge, 2008, p. 19

¹⁸⁹ Paramonov Vladimir., Stokov Aleksey. "Raspad SSSR i ego Posledstviya dlya Uzbekistana: Ekonomika i Sotsial'naya Sfera." (The Dissolution of USSR and its Consequences for Uzbekistan: Economy and Social Environment) Available at: https://ceasia.net/wp-content/uploads/pdf/raspad_ussr_uz_russian_april2006.pdf, accessed on 30 August 2024

¹⁹⁰ "Uzbekskaya Sovetskaya Sotsial'cheskaya Respublika." (Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic) available at: <https://www.booksite.ru/fulltext/1/001/008/113/685.htm>. Accessed on 30 August 2024

¹⁹¹ Spechler, Martin C. "The Political Economy of Reform in Central Asia: Uzbekistan under Authoritarianism." London and New York: Routledge, 2008, p. 20

¹⁹² Somuncuoğlu Anar. "Kazakistan ve Özbekistan Ekonomileri Geçiş ve Büyüme Stratejileri." (Strategies of Transition and Development of Kazakh and Uzbek Economies) Ankara: ASAM, 2001, p.48

In addition to cotton, other important agricultural products include fruit, vegetables, and silk cocoons. The production and export of fruits and vegetables played an important role in the Uzbek economy during the Soviet period. The production of fruits and vegetables accounted for 20 percent of the total agricultural output of the USSR. By 1990, the total production of fruits and vegetables had reached the level of 5.1 million tons annually, of which 24 percent was exported to Soviet republics including Russia, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia.¹⁹³ In addition to that, 70 percent of silk production was exported to other Soviet Republics, including Russia and Ukraine.

The other major primary product of the Uzbek SSR is natural gas. During the Soviet period, natural gas was discovered on Uzbek territory at Gazli, near the city of Bukhara.¹⁹⁴ By providing the necessary equipment, Uzbekistan's contribution to the Soviet gas supply, especially in the post-war period, was remarkable. In 1990, 41 billion cubic meters of gas were produced in the USSR, 10 per cent of which was sent to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.¹⁹⁵ Gold was also one of the main economic activities of the Uzbek SSR. The republic was the second-largest producer of gold during the Soviet era.¹⁹⁶

During the Soviet period, Uzbekistan also developed an automobile and aircraft industry. The fact that the Chkalov aircraft factory was transferred from Russia to Tashkent during the war helped Uzbekistan to develop its aircraft technology and

¹⁹³ Paramonov Vladimir, Stokov Aleksey. "Raspad SSSR i ego Posledstviya dlya Uzbekistana: Ekonomika i Sotsial'naya Sfera." (The Dissolution of USSR and its Consequences for Uzbekistan: Economy and Social Environment) Available at: https://ceasia.net/wp-content/uploads/pdf/raspad_ussr_uz_russian_april2006.pdf. accessed on 30 August 2024

¹⁹⁴ Spechler, Martin C. "The Political Economy of Reform in Central Asia: Uzbekistan under Authoritarianism." London and New York: Routledge, 2008, p. 21

¹⁹⁵ Paramonov Vladimir, Stokov Aleksey. "Raspad SSSR i ego Posledstviya dlya Uzbekistana: Ekonomika i Sotsial'naya Sfera." (The Dissolution of USSR and its Consequences for Uzbekistan: Economy and Social Environment) Available at: https://ceasia.net/wp-content/uploads/pdf/raspad_ussr_uz_russian_april2006.pdf. accessed on 30 August 2024

¹⁹⁶ Paramonov Vladimir, Stokov Aleksey. "Raspad SSSR i ego Posledstviya dlya Uzbekistana: Ekonomika i Sotsial'naya Sfera." (The Dissolution of USSR and its Consequences for Uzbekistan: Economy and Social Environment) Available at: https://ceasia.net/wp-content/uploads/pdf/raspad_ussr_uz_russian_april2006.pdf. accessed on 30 August 2024

production.¹⁹⁷ The USSR's first auto parts equipment factory was established before World War II. After the war, bus and truck factories were also developed in the republic.¹⁹⁸ As a result of the investments made in the automotive industry, the volume of vehicle production in the Uzbek SSR was remarkable.

In 1990, the number of vehicles and equipment produced in Uzbekistan was 23,000 tractors, 37,000 tractors and car trailers, 5,3,000 cotton harvesters, 142,000 electric motors and 9,000 power transformers.¹⁹⁹ Since the specialization policy of the Soviet Union forced the states to export their production to the other Soviet republics or friendly states at affordable prices, and since this was also the case with the other production materials of the Uzbek SSR, such as cotton or cotton materials, the majority of the automobile production was exported to the other Soviet republics at prices below the world market prices. In this context, 80 percent of Uzbekistan's automotive production (estimated at about 1.3 billion dollars) was sent to other republics of the Soviet Union, mainly to Russia and other Central Asian republics. In 1990, the amount of export of industrial products produced on the territory of Uzbekistan reached 1.6 billion dollars, of which 300 million dollars were exported to the communist states outside the Soviet Union.²⁰⁰

As a result of the industrialization policy, Uzbekistan has had a huge annual growth rate in industrial production. The graph below shows the growth rate of the USSR according to five-year plans.²⁰¹ As can be seen, the growth rate was relatively higher in the early years of the Union and also in the post-war period. On the other hand, the

¹⁹⁷“Aircraft Plant 'Chkalov' 84 Tashkent, USSR.” Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp78t05439a000100340015-1>. Accessed on 28 August 2024

¹⁹⁸ Paramonov Vladimir, Stokov Aleksey. “Raspad SSSR i ego Posledstviya dlya Uzbekistana: Ekonomika i Sotsial'naya Sfera.”(The Dissolution of USSR and its Consequences for Uzbekistan: Economy and Social Environment) Available at: https://ceasia.net/wp-content/uploads/pdf/raspad_ussr_uz_russian_april2006.pdf. accessed on 30 August 2024

¹⁹⁹ Paramonov Vladimir, Stokov Aleksey. “Raspad SSSR i ego Posledstviya dlya Uzbekistana: Ekonomika i Sotsial'naya Sfera.”(The Dissolution of USSR and its Consequences for Uzbekistan: Economy and Social Environment) Available at: https://ceasia.net/wp-content/uploads/pdf/raspad_ussr_uz_russian_april2006.pdf. accessed on 30 August 2024

²⁰⁰ Ibid., accessed on 30 August 2024

²⁰¹ Rumer Boris Z. “Soviet Central Asia: A Tragic Experiment.” Boston: Routledge, 1989, p.54

fact that the economic structure began to deteriorate in the mid-1970s can also be seen as one of the reasons for the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Table 1. Uzbekistan's Annual Growth Rate of Industrial Production during the Soviet Period

1928-1932 (1 st Five-Year Plan)	9.4
1933-1937 (2 nd Five-Year Plan)	19.3
1938-1941 (3 rd Five-Year Plan)	9.4
1946-1950 (4 th Five-Year Plan)	11.4
1951-1955 (5 th Five-Year Plan)	10.0
1956-1958 (6 th Five-Year Plan)	6.0
1959-1965 (7 th Five-Year Plan)	8.7
1966-1970 (8 th Five-Year Plan)	6.3
1971-1975 (9 th Five-Year Plan)	8.6
1976-1980 (10 th Five-Year Plan)	4.9
1981-1985 (11 th Five-Year Plan)	4.7

Although there was a massive development in the level of industrialization of Uzbekistan during the Soviet era, it can also be argued that Uzbekistan never had economic independence within the Soviet economic system. The Soviet planned economic system was supposed to determine not only all financial resources but also the structure, production, and way of export production. Under these circumstances, the Uzbek SSR could only sell most of its products within the Union at fixed prices. A small part of the goods was sent to other communist countries of Eastern Europe. It can also be said that 60 percent of Uzbekistan's trade volume was with Russia, and 25 percent was organized with the other Soviet republics.²⁰² On the other hand, the center also subsidized the republic during the Soviet era. We can see a large deficit if we look at Uzbekistan's foreign trade figures for 1990. According to the figures for 1990, the worth of goods exported by Uzbekistan was about 12 billion USD, while

²⁰² Paramonov Vladimir, Stokov Aleksey. "Raspad SSSR i ego Posledstviya dlya Uzbekistana: Ekonomika i Sotsial'naya Sfera." (The Dissolution of USSR and its Consequences for Uzbekistan: Economy and Social Environment) Available at: https://ceasia.net/wp-content/uploads/pdf/raspad_ussr_uz_russian_april2006.pdf, accessed on 30 August 2024

imports amounted to about 19 billion USD.²⁰³ To cover this deficit, Uzbekistan relied on financial assistance from Moscow. According to World Bank calculations, transfers from the center to cover the deficit amounted to 19,4 percent of the Uzbek GDP in 1990.²⁰⁴

One of the main problems of the Uzbek economy in the Soviet era was the fact that most of the production was either raw materials or semi-finished goods, most of which were sent to other republics for processing. This is also reflected in the foreign trade figures. About 65 percent of Uzbekistan's exports during the Soviet era consisted of raw materials, semi-finished goods, such as cotton yarn and fiber, and agricultural raw materials. Finished goods such as cars, equipment, and chemical products accounted for 23 percent of exports. On the other hand, the situation for imports was almost the opposite. Imports of finished goods accounted for about 73 percent, while imports of raw materials and semi-finished goods accounted for about 22 percent.²⁰⁵

As a result of the general Soviet economic policy, the profit from the processing of raw materials produced in the USSR remained outside the Republic of Uzbekistan. The amount of imports exceeded the amount of exports, as a result of which the budget of the USSR had to be subsidized regularly. In particular, the fact that the Uzbek Republic was largely integrated into the Soviet economic system and also the fact that the Republic needed regular subsidization from the general budget of the Union aggravated the transition period for the independent Uzbek Republic. Perhaps this situation had a profound impact on the choice of transitional economic policy that independent Uzbekistan would pursue after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.

²⁰³ Paramonov Vladimir, Stokov Aleksey. "Raspad SSSR i ego Posledstviya dlya Uzbekistana: Ekonomika i Sotsial'naya Sfera." (The Dissolution of USSR and its Consequences for Uzbekistan: Economy and Social Environment) Available at: https://ceasia.net/wp-content/uploads/pdf/raspad_ussr_uz_russian_april2006.pdf, accessed on 30 August 2024

²⁰⁴ "World Bank, Uzbekistan: An Agenda for Economic Reform." Available at https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/142781468127495966/pdf/multi0page.pdf?_gl=1*19ucpa7*_gcl_au*MTE2NjcwNzM0OC4xNzI1NDQwMDQ3. Accessed on 30 August 2024

²⁰⁵ Paramonov Vladimir, Stokov Aleksey. "Raspad SSSR i ego Posledstviya dlya Uzbekistana: Ekonomika i Sotsial'naya Sfera." (The Dissolution of USSR and its Consequences for Uzbekistan: Economy and Social Environment) Available at: https://ceasia.net/wp-content/uploads/pdf/raspad_ussr_uz_russian_april2006.pdf, accessed on 30 August 2024

The situation in the tourism industry was also very similar to the economic conditions in the Soviet Union. In the following section, I will review tourism in Uzbekistan during the Soviet Union by briefly analyzing the general tourism environment of the Soviet Union.

3.4. Tourism in Uzbekistan During the Soviet Period

Uzbekistan has always been an attractive tourist destination due to its location at the crossroads of ancient trade routes. Since the 1st century, the territories of today's Uzbekistan have been the host of different civilizations and religions, which makes it distinctive in terms of cultural heritage. Consequently, the country has unique tourism potential thanks to its historical and cultural heritage dating back to ancient times. Uzbekistan has been in the spotlight since the beginning of the global tourism movement. However, being part of the Soviet system for around 70 years had a negative impact on Uzbekistan's tourism development and industry, as during the Soviet era, international tourism was mainly used as a tool to promote the unique Soviet economic and political system.

In the early years of the Soviet Union, tourism was not seen as a means of generating revenue. The main focus was on introducing and promoting Soviet ideology. Therefore, during the initial years of the Union, the Soviet administration had to use its own resources to invite foreign delegates to the Soviet Union. In the 1920s and 30s, many foreign delegations came to the Soviet Union, most of whose members belonged to communist organizations or were class brothers. As the organizers of such trips noted, they came to the USSR out of "social curiosity" and were primarily interested not in natural beauty and cultural heritage but in the realities of socialism.²⁰⁶

By the end of 1920s, during the Stalin's industrialization period, the necessity for rapid industrialization led to the need for international currency. And this currency would come with the help of international tourist flows. The administration needed

²⁰⁶ Berezovaya, Lidiya. "Inturist: U Īstokov Īnostronnogo Turizma v SSSR." (Intourist: The Origins of International Tourism in USSR) Available at: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/inturist-u-istokov-inostrannogo-turizma-v-sssr>. Accessed on 30 August 2024

an institution to manage and organize the international flow of tourists from other countries to the Soviet Union, meaning that tourism was seen as a revenue-generating sector for the first time. There was a need for a government agency responsible for this. Therefore, in 1929, *Intourist* was established by the Soviet administration.

According to this regulation, *Intourist* was the exclusive organization dealing with foreigners visiting the USSR. The organization's main tasks were attracting foreign tourists and visitors to the USSR tourist market, selling all kinds of transport tickets to foreigners, providing accommodation for them, and organizing the sale of souvenirs and other artistic materials to foreigners.²⁰⁷

All international tourist movements to the Soviet Union, including Central Asia and Uzbekistan, were organized by *Intourist*. In this process, *Intourist* acted as the main trade organization in the Soviet Union, and its branches were established in different republics. After World War II, the Soviet administration paid special attention to international tourism and international tourist flow. On August 8, 1955, by order of the Ministry of International Trade of the USSR, a new regulation of *Intourist* was adopted, which, unlike the 1929 regulation, opened a highway for developing any tourism in the Soviet Union and beyond.²⁰⁸

The international tourism movement began in Uzbekistan after the end of the Second World War. Cultural tourism and Uzbek cultural tourism were the main attractions in the 1950s. The Uzbek SSR aimed to attract international visitors and, for this purpose, tried to develop friendly and good relations with other countries. During the 1950s, owing to rich historical and cultural heritage, Uzbekistan became one of the main tourist attractions of the Soviet Union and started to receive international visitors. According to records in archive documents, for its content and essence, visits of foreigners to Uzbekistan were classified into the following trends:

²⁰⁷ Ersöz, Hasan Deniz. "Tourism in Russia: From Tsarist to Post-Soviet Period," M.S. - Master of Science, Middle East Technical University, 2012.

²⁰⁸ Narzullaevich, Ernazarov Faizullo. "Tourism Policy of Uzbekistan in 1945-1991." Western European Journal of Historical Events and Social Science Volume 2, Issue 11, November 2024, available at: <https://westerneuropeanstudies.com/index.php/4/article/view/1697>

diplomatic purposes, traveler tourism, and other international political-social and cultural ties.²⁰⁹

In the 1950s, the main goal of tourist organizations was to familiarize visitors to Uzbekistan from other countries with the great successes of Soviet national policy and the great achievements of the Uzbek people in building socialism. In addition to presenting the cultural wealth and heritage of the Uzbek SSR, the main aim was to highlight the success of socialism in the economic and social life of the Uzbek people. Narzullaevich claims that:

Their main task is not to show tourist objects in the cities of Samarkand, Tashkent, and Bukhara but to acquaint them with the population's way of life and to demonstrate the achievements made in industry and agriculture. Of course, it can be said that this is a propaganda tool created to increase the political importance of socialism in international relations. By this time, Uzbekistan had become one of the most important parts of the international tourism system of the former Union, in which the reception of a large number of tourists, mainly from Asian and African countries, was carried out on a large scale.²¹⁰

Although most of the international visitors combined the other destinations of the Soviet Union, such as Moscow, Petersburg, Kazan or the Caucasus region, with Uzbekistan, some of the international visitors, mostly the Asian ones deliberately came to Uzbekistan to experience the history and culture of the Uzbek SSR. For instance, 1,113 tourists visited Uzbekistan in 1956. According to a report by B. Saidov, Deputy Chairman of Uzbekistan Society for Cultural Relations with foreign countries, in 1957, most visitors to Uzbekistan were from Asian region countries. While over 60 of 150 tourists in 1956 were from Asian countries, in 1957, over 100 people visited Uzbekistan.²¹¹

²⁰⁹ Ernazarov Dilmurad. "International Tourism in Cultural Relationships of Uzbekistan (In the case study of Asian Countries in 1945-1991)." Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325258659_International_tourism_in_cultural_relationships_of_Uzbekistan_in_case_study_of_Asian_countries_in_1945-1991. Accessed on 20 August 2024

²¹⁰ Narzullaevich, Ernazarov Faizullo. "Tourism Policy of Uzbekistan in 1945-1991." Western European Journal of Historical Events and Social Science Volume 2, Issue 11, November 2024. Available at: <https://westerneuropianstudies.com/index.php/4/article/view/1697>

²¹¹ Narzullaevich, Ernazarov Faizullo. "Tourism Policy of Uzbekistan in 1945-1991." Western European Journal of Historical Events and Social Science Volume 2, Issue 11, November 2024. Available at: <https://westerneuropianstudies.com/index.php/4/article/view/1697>

One of the most important tools for the growth of international tourist flows is the establishment of good and friendly relations with other countries which have potential as a source tourism market. According to the Constitution of the former Union, the republics of the Soviet Union, including Uzbekistan, had the right to establish and develop international relations with other countries as Uzbekistan was a sovereign republic. Section II of the Constitution of the Uzbek SSR, adopted in 1978, stipulates the development of friendship and cooperation with the peoples of other countries and the need to contribute to the strengthening of peace in the world.²¹²

However, this article could not be implemented because, as a part of the Soviet Union, Uzbekistan could not establish direct international relations independently. Any contact with the outside world could only be made with Moscow's permission, which negatively affected the number of international visitors coming to Uzbekistan for tourist purposes. In other words, the Soviet system and administration restricted these countries and allowed Uzbekistan to have good relations only with the politically friendly ones. This harmed Uzbekistan tourism development during the Soviet era.

In addition to that tourism infrastructure and service quality were low due to the lack of an overall tourism policy in the region. As a result, the expectations of international visitors to the Uzbek SSR were unmet. This would be one of the main issues that independent Uzbekistan had to deal with when the tourism development policies became one of the main priorities of the Mirziyoyev management. It should also be noted that the restoration level of historical monuments in the territory of Uzbekistan did not meet the requirements. The issue was about the extreme requirement for major capital repairs of historical architectural sites in Bukhara, Samarqand, and Fergana oblasts.²¹³

²¹² Narzullaevich, Ernazarov Faizullo. "Tourism Policy of Uzbekistan in 1945-1991." *Western European Journal of Historical Events and Social Science* Volume 2, Issue 11, November 2024. Available at: <https://westerneuropianstudies.com/index.php/4/article/view/1697>

²¹³ Ernazarov Dilmurad. "International Tourism in Cultural Relationships of Uzbekistan (In the case study of Asian Countries in 1945-1991)." Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325258659_International_tourism_in_cultural_relationships_of_Uzbekistan_in_case_study_of_Aasian_countries_in_1945-1991. Accessed on 20 August 2024

By the 1970s, the Uzbek SSR had become a popular tourist destination not only among the Central Asian republics but also in the Soviet Union as a whole. Tashkent, Bukhara, Samarkand, and Khiva became increasingly popular among the Soviet and foreign visitors. Further, among the Central Asian republics, Uzbekistan was considered the crown jewel. The 1980 edition of Fodor's²¹⁴ Soviet Union devotes half the chapter on Central Asian Republics to Uzbekistan, especially the ancient cities of Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva.²¹⁵ Within the Soviet Union itself, Uzbekistan took fourth place for hosting tourists after Russia, Ukraine, and Georgia. This gives evidence of constant growth in the interest in the culture of Uzbekistan among the Soviet republics.²¹⁶

Uzbekistan's increasing popularity as a tourist destination has also led to an enhancement in investment in the field of tourism. Between 1971-1975, "Uzbekistan" and "Intourist" Hotels were built in Tashkent for 930 people, the "Samarqand" Hotel was built in Samarqand for 368 beds, and the "Bukhara" Hotel was built in Bukhara for 378 beds.²¹⁷ In parallel with hotel investment, alternative tourism segments and routes have been created for the Uzbek SSR. Thanks to all these efforts to develop tourism, the tourism industry in the Uzbek SSR was relatively better than in other Central Asian countries. It was also in better condition than most of the Soviet republics. The development of tourism infrastructure in the Uzbek SSR was also reflected in the number of international tourists visiting Uzbekistan between 1970 and 1990.²¹⁸

²¹⁴ Fodor's is a publisher of English-language travel guides and online tourism information. It was founded by Hungarian-born Eugene Fodor, who produced his first guide in 1936 to improve on the existing directory-style guides by incorporating practical advice.

²¹⁵ Werner, Cyntia. "The New Silk Road: Mediators and Tourism Development in Central Asia." *Ethnology*, Spring, 2003, Vol. 42, No. 2. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3773779>. Accessed on 25 November 2024.

²¹⁶ Werner, Cyntia. "The New Silk Road: Mediators and Tourism Development in Central Asia." *Ethnology*, Spring, 2003, Vol. 42, No. 2. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3773779>. Accessed on 25 November 2024.

²¹⁷ Werner, Cyntia. "The New Silk Road: Mediators and Tourism Development in Central Asia." *Ethnology*, Spring, 2003, Vol. 42, No. 2. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3773779>. Accessed on 25 November 2024.

²¹⁸ Juliboyogli, Oybek. "Razvitie Turizma v Uzbekistane: Proshloe i Nastoyoshee." (The Development of Tourism in Uzbekistan: The Past and the Present) Akademik Tarih ve Düşünce

Table 2. Number of international visitors to Uzbekistan between 1970 and 1990

Years	Number of International Visitors
1970	165 787
1975	222 290
1980	287 771
1985	329 636
1990	455 594

The period between the end of the Second World War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union can be characterized by the Cold War and the ideological struggle between capitalist and socialist states. Therefore, the Soviet administration decided to use tourism as one of the main tools to promote Soviet ideology and show the success of the communist system. Most of the decisions taken and policies implemented in the field of tourism were planned according to this propagandistic approach. However, as one of the richest republics of the Soviet Union in terms of cultural heritage and wealth, Uzbekistan has attracted attention not only as a Soviet destination but also as an international tourist destination to be visited by international visitors. It can also be stated that the tourism infrastructure was relatively better in Uzbekistan on the eve of dissolution. After the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991, each newly independent Central Asian state began to chart a separate path of tourism development. With its tourism infrastructure and architectural wonders, Uzbekistan has maintained its position as the leading tourist destination in Central Asia.²¹⁹

3.5. The Economy of Uzbekistan in the Post-Soviet Era

3.5.1. Transition Period

In 1970, economic indicators in the Soviet Union began to deteriorate. This had a particularly negative impact on the economies of the Central Asian countries, which

Dergisi, (The Journal of Academic History and Idea). Available at: <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/atdd/issue/46797/588234>. Accessed on 25 November 2024.

²¹⁹ Werner Cyntia. "The New Silk Road: Mediators and Tourism Development in Central Asia." *Ethnology*, Spring, 2003, Vol. 42, No. 2. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3773779>. Accessed on 25 November 2024.

were among the most economically backward republics of the USSR. As a result of economic deterioration and social uprisings on December 8, 1991, the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, and Belorussia signed the document on the liquidation of the USSR. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Uzbekistan, like the other Central Asian countries, operated as an independent political and economic state for the first time in its history. This posed the greatest challenge in the transition from a command economy to a market economy and the creation of a nation-state policy. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the Uzbek population were among the poorest in terms of GDP. It can also be argued that the countries that suffered economically from the collapse of the Soviet Union were those that were more integrated into the Soviet economic system. In this context, the policy of specialization in the Soviet economy made the Central Asian states in general, and Uzbekistan in particular, among the countries that suffered the most, as they mainly produced raw materials and semi-finished products for the Soviet economic system. These materials were exported to other Soviet republics at subsidized prices which also made it difficult for post-Soviet countries to adapt to the general rules of the liberal economy.

In addition, as mentioned above, Uzbekistan received transfers from the central budget of the Soviet Union to cover the deficit in its budget. It was as if Uzbekistan was isolated from the world economy and also forced to export raw materials and semi-finished products to the European side of the Soviet Union at subsidized prices. In this context Pomfret argues:

Within the Soviet Union there had been substantial net interrepublic flows, from which all of the Central Asian Republics had benefited. Cessation of subsidies would lead to reduction in national expenditure. Second the shift from trading at artificial prices to world prices changed the former Soviet Republic's term of trade.²²⁰

As Pomfret also mentioned, one of the biggest problems facing independent Uzbekistan was the fact that its economy was heavily dependent on intra-regional trade between the republics of the Soviet Union and had a low level of competitiveness. In other words, there was no real demand for some of the products

²²⁰ Pomfret, Richard. "The Economies of Central Asia." New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1995, p.43

produced in Uzbekistan during the Soviet era. On the other hand, it can be argued that at the time of independence, Uzbekistan's economy was the most diversified among the newly independent Central Asian states. However, competitive goods consisted mainly of raw materials and semi-processed goods, which are mainly "produced" by sheer natural conditions and actually constitute the wealth of the entire nation.²²¹

After the collapse of the USSR, as the post-Soviet states began the process of transforming their economies from command to market one, debates began among scholars and policymakers about which path to take. Initially, the discussions centered on the transformation of the economies of the post-communist states of Eastern Europe, and then, with the dissolution of the USSR, expanded to include the post-Soviet states. There are two ways of transforming centrally planned economies to market-based ones, namely shock therapy and gradualism.

Shock therapy, also known as "cold turkey" or "big bang", involves the rapid and decisive implementation of economic reforms in a relatively short period. Its main differences from gradualism are the duration of the implementation of the reforms, the scope of the reforms, and the way they are implemented. Gevorkyan describes the main features of shock therapy as follows:

The term "shock therapy" was brought back in the post-socialist transformation context. It described the effect of a rapid economic reform process: a quick robust tackle that throws a system out of balance, forcing the economy to proceed along a prescribed path. In the process, the legacy socio-economic framework is completely destroyed and it is hoped that a new system, based on private entrepreneurial activity, will spring up fast, pulling the rest of the economy up via a trickle-down effect.²²²

Scholars who support shock therapy focus on the duration of the reforms. Their main concern is to make the transition as quickly as possible so that the old (Soviet or communist) and free market features do not coexist in the same economy. Although

²²¹ Rumer Boris Z. "Soviet Central Asia: A Tragic Experiment." London: Routledge, 1989, p.105

²²² Gevorkyan, Aleksandr V. "Transition Economies: Transformation, Development, and Society in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union." New York: Routledge, 2018, p.11

this immediate change and rapid reform would initially bring higher inflation and unemployment, conditions would eventually improve, and economic growth would be systematically maintained with the help of efficient implementation of a liberal economy, considered the main problem of the Soviet economic system. Lavigne argues that the choice of shock therapy is also linked to the denial of the past, which, in our case, is the Soviet legacy. She claims that big bang or cold turkey programs express an intellectual and political commitment to a monetarist, neo-classical vision and willingness to make radical breaks. The Big Bang is a kind of insurance against any temptation to look for a third way.²²³

Gradualism, which is the alternative approach to shock therapy, argues that reforms should be carried out slowly so that the negative effects of liberalization would fade away. Gradualism aims to achieve the same results as shock therapy. However, gradualism involves the gradual adjustment of various aspects of the economy over a long period. For most scholars, gradualism is represented by the developed economies of Asia, where the state guides and directs the private sector in a liberal economy. Gradualism aims to reduce the negative effects of the transition period, which would lower the population's living standards by spreading the reforms over time. Gradualists believe that while shock therapy may be successful for some states, it is clear that it is not suitable for all countries. They argue that the state's economic heritage and conditions must be considered before choosing between shock therapy and gradualism in transition economies. Lavigne argues that there is no theory of gradualism. In her view, gradualism consists of recommendations to cushion the initial shocks of the transition period when there has been an overshoot.²²⁴

3.5.2. Uzbekistan Economy during the Karimov era (1991-2016)

I will now move on to the sub-section focusing on Uzbekistan's economy during independence. Before focusing on the Uzbek economy during the Karimov era, I

²²³ Lavigne, Marie. "The Economics of Transition: From Socialist Economy to Market Economy." London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999, p.118

²²⁴ Lavigne, Marie. "The Economics of Transition: From Socialist Economy to Market Economy." London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999, p.118

would like to review Uzbekistan's transition experience and the influence of Karimov's policy choices on Uzbekistan's transition path.

Uzbekistan's transition experience was unique compared to the path taken by most post-Soviet states after the collapse of the Union. Islam Karimov, a Soviet-trained economist and member of Uzbekistan's Central Planning Committee, profoundly influenced the economic transition process of the independent Uzbekistan. As discussed above, there are two main transition policies, namely shock therapy and gradualism, especially regarding the economic transition of post-Soviet countries. As the dissolution of the USSR heralded the triumph of liberalism over command economies, the Western economies, through their institutions, recommended neoliberal policies for the transition economies and positioned these policies as a condition for the financial aid and technical know-how they provided to the post-communist and Soviet states. While most transition economies followed the reform policy packages promoted by international financial institutions, Uzbekistan stubbornly insisted on choosing its own model of gradual development.

Especially since the 2000s, the implementation of various industrialization policies and the active guiding role of the state in this process have become crucial for the development literature. The state is accepted here as a body that accelerates, guides, and, where necessary, incentivizes the industrial development phase. The question is: what strategy should the developing or less developed countries adopt? Should they focus on and develop the industries in which they have a comparative advantage, usually related to their cheaper labor or proximity to their markets? Or should they ignore their comparative advantages and invest in industries where developed countries would be their main competitors? However, independent Uzbekistan hasn't focused on industries with a comparative advantage - cheap labor, proximity and easy access, especially for cotton production - instead preferring to invest in capital-intensive industries. In this context, Ruziev argues that Uzbekistan's version of industrial policy can generally be defined as "disregarding comparative advantage." With an abundant supply of well-educated cheap labour and one of the largest producers and exporters of raw cotton, one might Uzbekistan had in the world, one would expect the country to focus on developing its light industry first. But as the

country worked to achieve its survivalist political goals in the 1990s, the authorities decided early on to invest in capital-intensive industries instead.²²⁵ And this process was largely influenced by Islam Karimov's personality and his Soviet-era educational and professional background.

Having spent his professional life working with the Soviet economic system, first as an engineer and then as an economist and planner, Karimov was aware of the weaknesses and strengths of the Soviet economic system. In the words of President I. A. Karimov:

For many decades, the republic has made decisions and carried out campaigns for which the scenario had been written in remote Moscow. The real interests of Uzbekistan, its specific conditions, and its potential were simply ignored. The result was a disjointed, one-sided, commodity-based economic structure. The republic was forced to export not only various types of raw materials, fuels, and energy sources, equipment, and machinery but also vital foodstuffs and consumer goods. The technological level of enterprises and the production quality do not correspond to the principles of modern production organization or the tough demands of global competition. Technological equipment in virtually all sectors is physically worn out, obsolete and in urgent need of repair.²²⁶

Islam Karimov was a Soviet bureaucrat whose main expertise was production and economics. He served in senior positions in the USSR, which enabled him to see and understand the nature of the Soviet economic system, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the Uzbek economy. Most likely, his experience first as an engineer and later as an economist in the USSR and the Soviet Republic of Uzbekistan made him favor the strategies of gradual development and self-reliance. He was born in the city of Samarkand on 30 January 1938 in his early career years, he worked as an engineer in the USSR. In 1973, he completed his economic education by defending his doctoral thesis on “Sectoral Structure of Industry in the Uzbek SSR and The Main Directions of its Improvement.” After serving in various positions in the Uzbek SSR,

²²⁵ Ruziev, Kobil. “Uzbekistan Development Experiment: An Assessment of Karimov’s Peculiar Economic Legacy.” *Europe-Asia Studies* 73(4):1-27, 2021, Doi: [10.1080/09668136.2021.1919602](https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2021.1919602)

²²⁶ Karimov, İslam. “Uzbekistan Svoi Put Obnovleniya i Progressa.” (Uzbekistan: Its Path of Regeneration and Progress) Available at: <https://library.ttiame.uz/ru/resources/01HMG78B0TH9WF30R1P0WYQ68G>. Accessed on 4 September 2024

Karimov was elected First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan on 23 June 1989. On 24 March 1990, Karimov was elected the first President of the Republic of Uzbekistan at a meeting of the Supreme Soviet of Uzbekistan, despite the objections of Mikhail Gorbachev, President of the USSR.²²⁷

As noted above, Uzbekistan's economic reform program differed from most former Soviet states. Karimov positioned gradual development, the role of the state in the economy and self-reliance, a feature of the Soviet system, as the key priorities for independent Uzbekistan in the early years of transition. Perhaps one of the main goals of the Karimov government has been to develop and diversify exports, increasing the share of manufactured goods, in order to achieve stable economic growth, which was not the case during the Soviet period. Assessing the overall situation on the ground, Karimov's government decided that it needed a strong government that would play a proactive role in addressing the immediate economic and political challenges, including the creation of a strong safety net to protect the country's poor and a strong state apparatus to prevent any potential civil unrest.²²⁸

As he has said many times, the transition process should be unique to Uzbekistan and its people, and the focus should be on self-sufficiency and the protection of the most vulnerable. He argues that the transition to a market economy takes into account our national-historical way of life, customs and traditions, and the way people think.²²⁹ According to Karimov, an independent Uzbekistan should consider the quality of life of the Uzbek people during the transition period. The transition process should not have a negative impact on the Uzbek population. He argues that the needs of the most vulnerable sections of the population will be a priority in transitioning to a market economy.²³⁰

²²⁷ More information about Karimov's life can be found at <https://islomkarimov.uz/ru/page/tarjimai-hol>.

²²⁸ Ruziev, Kobil. "Uzbekistan Development Experiment: An Assessment of Karimov's Peculiar Economic Legacy." *Europe-Asia Studies* 73(4):1-27, 2021, Doi:[10.1080/09668136.2021.1919602](https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2021.1919602)

²²⁹ Karimov, Islam. "Put k Nezavisomosti: Problemy i Plany. (Road to Independency: Problems and Plans) Tashkent: Izdatel'stvo Uzbekiston, (Uzbekistan Publishing) 1996, p.10

²³⁰ Karimov, Islam. "Put k Nezavisomosti: Problemy i Plany. (Road to Independency: Problems and Plans) Tashkent: Izdatel'stvo Uzbekiston, (Uzbekistan Publishing) 1996, p.10

In his book, published after the collapse of the USSR, Karimov described Uzbekistan's unique path to transition to a market economy and laid down five principles for an independent Uzbek economy, which were strictly adhered to until his death.

- 1) The de-ideologization of the economy is a must. The economy should be above politics and should be the basis of politics.
- 2) The state should be the main reformer during the transition period. The state should take the initiative, considering the interests of all the people, determine the leading priorities of economic development and consistently formulate and implement the policies that would bring fundamental changes in the economy, the social sphere and the socio-political life of our sovereign state.
- 3) The whole transition process and its progress should be based on a legal basis.
- 4) The transition to a market economy should be accompanied by strong measures to protect the social level of the people. This should be done considering the real demographic situation and the current standard of living of the population.
- 5) The formation of new economic and market relations should be balanced, well-considered, and gradual (step-by-step).²³¹

As can be seen from the above five principles, Uzbekistan has followed its path, which is closer to the gradualist approach in its transition policy. The fact that the state has a large population, the majority of which lives in the rural areas, self-sufficiency, the role of the state, and the subsidization of strategic sectors/industries form the basis of Uzbekistan's unique approach to transition, which some scholars have dubbed the “Uzbek path.”

At the time of independence, Karimov's first priority was to maintain the self-sufficiency of the Uzbek economy. In the last year of the Soviet Union, the Uzbek Republic relied on imports from the other Soviet republics. By 1988, all necessary

²³¹ Karimov, Islam. “Uzbekistan po Puti Uglubleniye Ekonomicheskikh Reform.” (Uzbekistan, On the Road for Deepening the Economic Reforms) Tashkent: Izdatal'stvo Uzbekiston, (Uzbekistan Publishing) 1995, p.9

inputs, including electricity, machinery, food, and energy, were imported from other Soviet republics, and by the time of independence, almost 40 percent of the workforce was employed in agriculture.²³² As a result of Uzbekistan's role in the Soviet economic system, most of Uzbekistan's land was used for cotton production. As mentioned above, the population of Uzbekistan was one of the poorest of all the Soviet republics. In 1989, Uzbekistan was the second poorest republic, with nearly 44 percent of the population living on less than 75 rubles a month, the official poverty line threshold at the time.²³³

Diversifying agricultural production has become one of the main goals of the Karimov government, which wants to achieve self-sufficiency. The only way to achieve this is to convert monoculture cotton land into diverse areas where cereals and other products can be grown. Between 1991 and 2000, the area under cotton was reduced by more than 400,000 hectares, while the area under cereals increased by 1 million and 1.6 million hectares. As a result, in 1998, grain production reached 4.2 million tons.²³⁴

Independent Uzbekistan was also heavily dependent on oil and natural gas imports. In 1990, Uzbekistan produced only 30 percent of the crude oil that the country needed. As a result of investment in the sector, oil and gas production in the country increased dramatically. In 1996, crude oil production reached 7.8 million tons, and by 1998 Uzbekistan had become an oil-exporting country.²³⁵ The share of the agricultural investment in the country's GDP increased accordingly. In 2000,

²³² Sakal, Halil Burak. "A Quarter-Century Pursuit of Independence: Politics of Trade, Energy and Economic Development in Uzbekistan." *Perceptions, Journal of International Affairs*. Available at: <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/perception/issue/48954/624522>. Accessed on 15 December 2024.

²³³ Sakal, Halil Burak. "A Quarter-Century Pursuit of Independence: Politics of Trade, Energy and Economic Development in Uzbekistan." *Perceptions, Journal of International Affairs*. Available at: <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/perception/issue/48954/624522>. Accessed on 15 December 2024.

²³⁴ Akramov, E. "Ekonomicheskie Reformy v Respublike Uzbekistan." (The Economic Reforms in the Republic of Uzbekistan.) Available at <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/575400>. Accessed on 14 September 2024

²³⁵ Akramov, E. "Ekonomicheskie Reformy v Respublike Uzbekistan." (The Economic Reforms in the Republic of Uzbekistan.) Available at <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/575400>. Accessed on 14 September 2024

agricultural investment accounted for 7 percent of GDP, up from 3.6 percent in 1991.²³⁶

The Karimov government over-invested in industries that were considered strategic for achieving self-sufficiency. State intervention is also used as a tool to implement this economic policy. We see the same pattern of state intervention policy about foreign trade. Therefore, it can be argued that Uzbekistan's foreign trade policy during the Karimov era has many similarities with the Soviet one, as state control over foreign trade was used as a tool to implement the state's basic economic policies of gradual development and import substitution. One of the main tools of import substitution policy is to enable your industry to produce imported products. Therefore, the increase in imports of machinery and equipment is also noteworthy. Rumer Boris argues that there has also been a sharp increase in the imports of machinery and equipment (which accounted for more than a third of all imports), reflecting the state's industrial policy of upgrading and modernizing industry through state investment (with more than 70 percent of the imports coming from OECD countries).²³⁷

The automotive industry is perhaps the best example of Uzbekistan's industrial and import substitution policy. Like most sectors, the Uzbek government has established a state body to guide and direct investment and strategy in the automotive industry. The government's industrial strategy for the sector is implemented through *Uzavtosanoat* (Uzbekistan Automotive Industry), a state-owned umbrella organization that controls all major automotive projects in the country.²³⁸

Attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) has been a key priority for the Karimov government. In order to maintain the presence of international companies in

²³⁶ Akramov, E. "Ekonomicheskie Reformy v Respublike Uzbekistan." (The Economic Reforms in the Republic of Uzbekistan.) Available at <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/575400>. Accessed on 14 September 2024

²³⁷ Rumer, Boris Z. "Soviet Central Asia: A Tragic Experiment." Boston: Routledge, 1989, p.212

²³⁸ Bendini, Roberto. "Uzbekistan: Selected Trade and Economic Issues." Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/briefing_note/join/2013/491518/EXPO-INTA_SP\(2013\)491518_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/briefing_note/join/2013/491518/EXPO-INTA_SP(2013)491518_EN.pdf). Accessed on 17 September 2024

Uzbekistan, the government introduced a number of liberal laws that would create better conditions for international investment. In this context, Spechler supports the idea that a number of fairly liberal laws have been passed to encourage direct investment, including free repatriation of profits and a five-year tax holiday.²³⁹

As a result of the FDI policy, the country began to produce cars and buses in partnership with international companies. Uzbekistan is the only country in Central Asia that produces motor vehicles on a large scale. General Motors and Daewoo are the two (related) companies that have opened car production facilities in the country. While cars produced in Uzbekistan are largely intended to meet domestic demand, they are increasingly being exported to Russia and other Central Asian countries.²⁴⁰

Like state development policies in Asia, the state established joint venture projects through government decrees. In this context, UzAuto Motors was originally established by government decree in November 1992 as a joint venture with a Korean manufacturer Daewoo Motors, in Asaka, a small town in the Andijon region.²⁴¹ A similar joint venture was set up with the Turkish Koç group to produce buses.

It can be argued that during the initial years of independence, Uzbekistan was reluctant to undertake most of the reforms that would allow a faster transition to a liberal economy and also pursued protectionist and import substitution policies in their economy. However, the country's economic performance was better than other post-Soviet states. Many scholars have referred to this phenomenon as the "Uzbek puzzle" because this performance was achieved against the general liberal policies advocated by Western economic institutions. In other words, as a result of the

²³⁹ Spechler, Martin C. "The Political Economy of Reform in Central Asia: Uzbekistan under Authoritarianism." London and New York: Routledge, 2008, p. 37

²⁴⁰ Bendini, Roberto. "Uzbekistan: Selected Trade and Economic Issues." Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/briefing_note/join/2013/491518/EXPO-INTA_SP\(2013\)491518_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/briefing_note/join/2013/491518/EXPO-INTA_SP(2013)491518_EN.pdf). Accessed on 17 September 2024

²⁴¹ Bendini, Roberto. "Uzbekistan: Selected Trade and Economic Issues." Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/briefing_note/join/2013/491518/EXPO-INTA_SP\(2013\)491518_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/briefing_note/join/2013/491518/EXPO-INTA_SP(2013)491518_EN.pdf). Accessed on 17 September 2024

government interventionist and gradualist development policies pursued following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, independent Uzbekistan did not suffer the shocks of the transition from the Soviet economy.

Uzbekistan had an annual growth rate of 4 percent in 1993-2003, which was better than most of the post-Soviet states. One interpretation of these results is simply that Uzbekistan's production performance should be attributed to favourable initial conditions rather than policies. An alternative interpretation is that Uzbekistan's policy of subsidizing the formal industrial sector was relatively successful in mitigating the output decline, given the initial low level of industrialization, because it could be financed by export earnings from agriculture and because of the availability of domestic energy. In this view, the combination of a go-slow policy and favourable initial conditions produced a result that eluded other former communist countries that tried similar approaches but ran into financing constraints much earlier.²⁴²

In early 2000, after independent Uzbekistan had achieved a degree of stability in the national economy, the Karimov government opted for a more liberal policy in the international political economy. The success of the survival phase led the Karimov government to set a better growth target for the 2000s. The Uzbek authorities expressed their willingness to carry out the economic reforms they had been reluctant to undertake before 2000. The change in the currency regime was the first step toward liberal reforms. After this reform, the state bureaucracy no longer controlled international money transfers. In October 2003, the Uzbek authorities reached an agreement with the IMF that required the removal of restrictions on international transactions. In June 2003, the government committed to removing the restrictions on foreign exchange availability for current-account transactions by the end of 2003.²⁴³ However, this could not be done efficiently because of some concerns that it would harm the lives of the population.

²⁴² Akramov, E. "Ekonomicheskie Reformy v Respublike Uzbekistan." (The Economic Reforms in the Republic of Uzbekistan." Available at <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/575400>. Accessed on 14 September 2024

²⁴³ Pomfret Richard. "The Central Asian Economies Since Independence." London: Princeton University Press, 2006, p.35

During this period, intending to strengthen its political and economic independence, Uzbekistan became a member of GUAM, known as the Organization of Democracy and Economic Union, whose members were Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova. The rapprochement with the West began under the banner of fighting against terrorism. After 9/11, Uzbekistan accepted the role of a key state for the U.S. in its operations in Afghanistan, allowing the U.S. to use its Karshi-Khanabad air base during the operations against the Taliban in Afghanistan.²⁴⁴ In addition, Uzbekistan began to receive economic and military aid from the United States. This aid reached 210 million USD in 2004 when relations were at their peak, but with the Andijan incident, which will be discussed further, political and economic ties with the USA ceased.²⁴⁵

The decline of Russia's share in the trade structure also coincides with this period. By the end of the 1990s, about a third to a quarter of all Uzbek exports went to Russia. By mid-2002, this share fell to as low as 17 percent and rose only slightly above 25 percent throughout the decade.²⁴⁶ China and Turkey's share of Uzbekistan's foreign trade pie has increased.

The 2005 Andijan incident, in which hundreds of people were killed by Uzbek security forces, dramatically changed Karimov's attitude toward the West and Western institutions. On the one hand, Karimov suspected Western involvement in the incident; on the other hand, both the European Union and the United States condemned the Karimov government's excessive use of force against the protestors and decided to impose sanctions on Uzbekistan.²⁴⁷ As a result of the Andijan incident, Uzbekistan's relations with Moscow and Beijing became closer. Uzbekistan

²⁴⁴“Uzbekistan Zaskuchal po Nato.” (Uzbekistan has Missed NATO) Available at: https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2008/03/05_a_2658504.shtml. Accessed on 30 September 2024

²⁴⁵ For more information about US aid to Uzbekistan, A Timeline of U.S. Military Aid Cooperation with Uzbekistan. Available at: https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/uploads/b8284dea-45ff-443c-baff-01a36c82bfe6/OPS-No-2-20101015_0.pdf, accessed on 5 August 2024

²⁴⁶ Sakal, Halil Burak. “A Quarter-Century Pursuit of Independence: Politics of Trade, Energy and Economic Development in Uzbekistan.” *Perceptions, Journal of International Affairs*. Available at: <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/perception/issue/48954/624522>. Accessed on 15 December 2024.

²⁴⁷ “İtogi Deyatelnosti İslama Karimova na Postu Prezidenta Uzbekistana.” (The Results of the Activities of Islam Karimov as the President of Uzbekistan) Available at: <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/3588357>. Accessed on 30 September 2024

asked the US to leave the base in Karshi-Khanabad. Furthermore, in 2012, the Uzbek parliament passed a law banning all foreign military bases, and Uzbekistan revoked the tax privileges of the US gold mining company Zarafshan Newmont.²⁴⁸ In addition, Uzbekistan became a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), designed as a Eurasian NATO by the Russian leadership.²⁴⁹ They also left GUAM, which was recognized as an anti-Russian organization. However, due to the concept of military neutrality, in 2012, Uzbekistan withdrew from the membership of CSTO.²⁵⁰

Suffice it to say that during his rule, Karimov, on the one hand, prioritized independence in international relations by not giving space to major international players such as Russia, China, and the USA and, on the other hand, tried to avoid isolation from the international arena and the international economy. However, after the Andijan events, Uzbekistan isolated itself from the international economic system and began to adopt a more protectionist economic policy, which had a negative impact not only on the economy but also on international tourism flows to Uzbekistan and, ultimately, on the development of tourism policies and infrastructure. In the following section, I will discuss Karimov's tourism policy and tourism in Uzbekistan in the post-Soviet period.

3.6. Tourism During the Karimov Era

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Uzbekistan became a sovereign state and began to implement economic reforms, including in the tourism industry. As mentioned earlier, during the last 20 years of the Soviet Union, Uzbekistan was already one of the most popular tourist destinations in the Soviet Union. It had

²⁴⁸ Sakal, Halil Burak. "A Quarter-Century Pursuit of Independence: Politics of Trade, Energy and Economic Development in Uzbekistan." *Perceptions, Journal of International Affairs*. Available at: <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/perception/issue/48954/624522>. Accessed on 15 December 2024.

²⁴⁹ İtogi Deyatelnosti İslama Karimova na Postu Prezidenta Uzbekistana." (The Results of the Activities of Islam Karimov as the President of Uzbekistan) Available at: <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/3588357>. Accessed on 30 September 2024.

²⁵⁰ "Is Uzbekistan on the Verge of Rejoining the CSTO?" Available at: <https://jamestown.org/program/is-uzbekistan-on-the-verge-of-rejoining-the-csto/>. Accessed on 30 September 2024

begun to attract visitors, including foreigners, to the country. As noted above, Uzbekistan's economy depended heavily on agriculture, which also played an important role in employment during the Soviet period. On the other hand, the contribution of the industry and the services sector to employment was relatively small. As the most populous Central Asian country, Uzbekistan's first president, Islam Karimov, therefore, turned his attention to the service and tourism sectors, as tourism is considered to be a sector that generates employment. The long-standing tradition of international tourism to Uzbekistan during the Soviet period obviously provides a strong starting point for the development of this sector of the economy.²⁵¹

During the Soviet era, all types of tourism activities in Uzbekistan were centrally managed from Moscow, and relations with foreign tourism organizations and bodies were conducted through *Intourist*, which had offices throughout the Soviet Union. In this regard, one of the first steps taken by the Karimov administration in the field of tourism was the creation of a government body responsible for tourism in Uzbekistan, from infrastructure development to the promotion of destinations and tourism products. The national company *Uzbektourism* was established by the Presidential Decree in 1992. *Uzbektourism* was responsible for developing a national model for tourism development, including coordinating tourist organizations, training, and encouraging investment in creating a material and technical base and sectoral infrastructure.²⁵² According to Airey and Shackley *Uzbektourism* was formed from the amalgamation of four components of former Soviet organizations namely, the operating incoming in tourism Uzbekistan, organization, *Intourist*, the sports travel organization, *Sputnik*, the trade union owned hotels and a state travel organization, *Sayokh Intur*.²⁵³

²⁵¹ Airey David, Shackley Myra. "Tourism Development in Uzbekistan." *Tourism Management* Vol. 18, No. 4, pp. 199-208, 1997. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S026151779700006X>. Accessed on 15 June 2024.

²⁵² "Tourism Development in Uzbekistan- Challenges and Opportunities, Special Policy Brief by Caspian Policy Center." Available at: <https://www.caspianpolicy.org/research/report/special-policy-brief-tourism-development-in-uzbekistan-challenges-and-opportunities-9656>. Accessed on 1 October 2024

²⁵³ Airey David, Shackley Myra. "Tourism Development in Uzbekistan." *Tourism Management* Vol. 18, No. 4, pp. 199-208, 1997. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S026151779700006X>. Accessed on 15 June 2024.

According to this decree, the national company *Uzbekturizm*, which was set up to implement Uzbekistan's unified tourism policy, would be responsible for the following areas:

- Development of tourism infrastructure in the country
- Creation of legal, economic, and organizational bases and conditions for developing all types of tourism.
- Restoration of historical architectural objects for tourist use
- Introducing new types of tourist routes and services in demand on the world market;
- Training and retraining personnel for the tourism industry.
- Certification and licensing of tourism enterprises and monitoring of their activities.
- Carrying out foreign economic activities.
- promoting the Republic's enormous potential in tourism through its own representative offices and bureaus abroad.²⁵⁴

Amonbaev, Tursunov, and Ruziev point out that the creation of its own organizational and economic mechanism of the tourism industry began with the creation of the national company “*Uzbektourism*.” The national company has become the main coordinating body in the territory of the Republic of Uzbekistan, forming a single-state policy in the field of tourism.²⁵⁵

Air transport, seen as the main catalyst for the international tourism movement, was also organized from Moscow via state carrier Aeroflot during the Soviet era, as Uzbekistan didn't have a national airline. As with most of the Uzbek SSR's economic activities, Uzbekistan relied on Moscow and Aeroflot's connectivity to host international visitors, particularly from Europe and the US, during the Soviet period.

²⁵⁴ “Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan, Ob Obrazovanii Natsional’noy Kompanii Uzbekturizm.” (The Decree of the President of Uzbekistan, On the Formation of the National Company Uzbekturizm) dated 27.07.1992 No UP 447. Available at: <https://lex.uz/docs/223882>. Accessed on 1 October 2024

²⁵⁵ Amonboev Mukhammadsiddik, Tursunov Bobir, Ruziev Shohruxbek. “Main Tendencies of Historical and Cultural Tourism Development in Uzbekistan.” In the book “*Event Tourism in Asian Countries: Challenges and Prospects*.” Edited by [Shruti Arora](#) and [Anukrati Sharma](#). New York: Apple Academic Press, 2022.p.12

In this regard, Airey and Schackley, in an article written in 1997, point out the importance of Aeroflot in Uzbek tourism during the Soviet period as follows:

Many Uzbek- tourism officials (eg pers.comm) Danilov, commented that before the disintegration of the Soviet Union international arrivals from Europe and America were considerably greater than today, due to easier air access (via Aeroflot routings through Moscow) and perceived internal stability. The task for today's *Uzbektourism* seems not to be to create a market where none existed before, but rather to recapture one which has shrunk.²⁵⁶

One of Karimov's best policies in the field of tourism was to invest in creating a national airline, as national flag carriers play a crucial role in implementing international tourism policies for a particular country. In this regard, Pomfret argues that, just after the dissolution of one of the main tourism development policy tools Uzbekistan invested a lot into the aviation sector and tried to position Uzbekistan as the transport hub for the Central Asian region and CIS countries. When the Aeroflot fleet was shared out after the dismemberment of the USSR, Uzbekistan utilized its share of the planes most positively to earn hard currency.²⁵⁷

Therefore, the creation of *Uzbektourism* was followed by the establishment of Uzbek Airways, the country's national airline. It was established by presidential decree on 28 January 1992. On June 16, 1993, the first A310 aircraft of Western manufacture, acquired using financial leasing, appeared in the national airline fleet.²⁵⁸ Furthermore, the modernization and expansion of the airports have gone hand in hand during this period. Uzbekistan has modernized its airport, air fleet, railways, and highways. Some major projects have been implemented, and Tashkent airport has been modernized. Regional airports have been modernized.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁶ Airey David, Shackle Myra. "Tourism Development in Uzbekistan." *Tourism Management* Vol. 18, No. 4, pp. 199-208, 1997. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S026151779700006X>. Accessed on 15 June 2024.

²⁵⁷ Pomfret, Richard. "The Economies of Central Asia." New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1995, p.43

²⁵⁸ Sagdiev Tulkun, Abdujabbarov N. "Zarozhdenie Aviatsii v Uzbekistane." (The Birth of Aviation in Uzbekistan) Available at: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/zarozhdenie-aviatsii-v-uzbekistane/viewer>. Accessed on 1 October 2024

²⁵⁹ Amonboev Mukhammadsiddik, Tursunov Bobir, Ruziev Shohruxbek. "Main Tendencies of Historical and Cultural Tourism Development in Uzbekistan." In the book "*Event Tourism in Asian*

Before independence, all international tourism to Uzbekistan was conducted through Moscow. This meant that contact with the global tourism market was through Moscow-based organizations, notably *Intourist*, transport links were all through Moscow, on the state carrier Aeroflot, and all financial information was coordinated in Moscow.

After the creation of the state responsible organ for tourism, *Uzbekturizm* and the national airline, which would help implement the strategies defined by *Uzbekturizm*, Uzbekistan began to work on establishing networks with international tourism institutions and professionals, which had been conducted by Moscow during the Soviet era. Therefore, the Karimov administration and *Uzbekturizm* took some steps to increase Uzbekistan's visibility in the international environment and sought cooperation with international organizations. In 1993, Uzbekistan became a World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) member and actively promoted Uzbekistan as a tourist destination. Recognizing Uzbekistan's contribution to the development of this sector, the member states of this international organization have repeatedly elected the Republic of Uzbekistan to the governing body of this organization—the Executive Council.²⁶⁰ As part of its cooperation with the UNWTO, the Samarkand Declaration on Silk Road Tourism²⁶¹ was adopted by 19 countries. This was followed by the signing of the Khiva Declaration on Tourism and Preservation of Cultural Heritage²⁶² in 1999 and also signing of the Bukhara Declaration on Silk Road Tourism²⁶³ in 2002, which contributed to the process of international

Countries: Challenges and Prospects.” Edited by [Shruti Arora](#), and [Anukrati Sharma](#). New York: Apple Academic Press, 2022, p.13

²⁶⁰ Amonboev Mukhammadsiddik, Tursunov Bobir, Ruziev Shohruxbek. “Main Tendencies of Historical and Cultural Tourism Development in Uzbekistan.” In the book “*Event Tourism in Asian Countries: Challenges and Prospects.*” Edited by [Shruti Arora](#), [Anukrati Sharma](#). New York: Apple Academic Press, 2022, p.13

²⁶¹ Adopted by the 19 countries participating in the First International Silk Road Meeting in Samarkand, which aims to promote the Silk Road destinations and tourism products, the Declaration was signed under the auspices of the President of Uzbekistan and former Secretary-General of the WTO.

²⁶² The Khiva Declaration, supported by UNWTO, UNESCO, and the Council of Europe, calls upon Central Asian countries to preserve their cultural and natural heritage. The document stresses the importance of culture in guaranteeing peace, prosperity, and understanding between cultures.

²⁶³ The Bukhara Declaration stresses sustainable tourism's benefits and outlines steps to stimulate cultural and ecological tourism to Silk Road destinations. Additional issues include inviting local and

recognition of Uzbekistan as a tourist destination and strengthened its position as the most important destination along the historical Silk Road.

In addition, the UNWTO Regional Office for the Coordination of the Development of Tourism on the Silk Road was established in Samarkand in 2004.²⁶⁴ This office's main function was not limited to developing Silk Road tourism in Uzbekistan. One of its main goals is to increase the visibility and information about the Silk Road worldwide.

The Karimov government also focused on creating a legal basis for tourism activities in the country. Supplementing this, a regulatory framework for tourism was adopted on August 20, 1999, based on the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan.²⁶⁵ In the first article, the aim of the Law on Tourism is explained as follows: The aim of this law is to regulate the tourism industry, develop the market of tourism services, and provide the legal rights and interests of tourists and tourism activities.²⁶⁶

In 1999, Karimov signed a decree entitled “State Development Program of Tourism Development in Uzbekistan until 2005”. This decree included articles on the training of tourism employees, the placement of tourism counsellors in some of Uzbekistan's embassies, and the exemption from customs duties on the import of technical and hotel equipment and vehicles for tourism purposes, regardless of the form of ownership of the tourist organization, for a period of three years.²⁶⁷

international stakeholders to invest in Silk Road tourism and endorsing Uzbekistan’s offer to host a Silk Road Support Office in Samarkand.

²⁶⁴ Juliboyogli, Oybek. “Razvitie Turizma v Uzbekistane: Proshloe i Nastoyoshee.” (The Development of Tourism in Uzbekistan: The Past and the Present) Akademik Tarih ve Düşünce Dergisi, (The Journal of Academic History and Idea). Available at: <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/atdd/issue/46797/588234>. Accessed on 25 November 2024.

²⁶⁵ “Tourism Development in Uzbekistan- Challenges and Opportunities, Special Policy Brief by Caspian Policy Center.” Available at: <https://www.caspianpolicy.org/research/report/special-policy-brief-tourism-development-in-uzbekistan-challenges-and-opportunities-9656>. Accessed on 1 October 2024

²⁶⁶ “Zakon Respubliki Uzbekistan o Turizme.” (The Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Tourism) dated 20.08.1999, No 830-I. Available at: <https://lex.uz/docs/75372>. Accessed on 5 October 2024.

²⁶⁷ “Ukaz Respubliki Uzbekistan, O Gosudartstvennoi Programme Razvitiya Turizma v Uzbekistane na Period do 2005 Godu.” (Decree of President of Uzbekistan "On National Program of Tourism

Enterprises engaged in tourism in Uzbekistan have received benefits, the licensing of tourism activities has been liberalized and facilitated in order to stimulate tourism activity. Companies providing tourist and excursion services are exempt from VAT. At a certain stage, there was a significant increase in tourism activity, and by 2009, the annual inflow of tourism amounted to 1 million. The number of tourists has stabilized.²⁶⁸

In addition to this decree, Karimov signed numerous decrees for the development of the tourism industry in Uzbekistan. The most important ones are shown below:

- Presidential Decree on measures to increase Uzbekistan's activity in reviving the Silk Road and international tourism in Uzbekistan, signed in 1995.
- Presidential Decree on training qualified personnel in the field of tourism in Uzbekistan, signed in 1999.
- Presidential Decree on accelerating the development of the tourism services sector in Uzbekistan in 2006-2010, signed in 2006.
- Presidential decree on additional measures for accelerating the development of the tourism services sector in Uzbekistan until 2010, signed in 2007.
- Presidential decree, signed in 2012, about the program to develop the service in the Republic of Uzbekistan from 2012 to 2016.

As can be seen from the decrees' content, the main focus during the Karimov era was on training employees in the tourism industry. Tourism investment and the promotion of Uzbekistan's tourist destinations and products, also key features of tourism policy, were largely ignored during the Karimov period.

Suffice it to say that the Karimov government did not take the necessary steps to promote the project. This may have been due to a lack of material resources or to the fact that promotion policies were not among the priorities of the Karimov

Development in Uzbekistan until 2005) dated 15.04.1999, No UP-2286. Available at: <https://lex.uz/docs/213703>. Accessed on 6 October 2024.

²⁶⁸ Amonboev Mukhammadsiddik, Tursunov Bobir, Ruziev Shohruxbek. "Main Tendencies of Historical and Cultural Tourism Development in Uzbekistan." In the book "Event Tourism in Asian Countries: Challenges and Prospects." Edited by [Shruti Arora](#) and [Anukrati Sharma](#). New York: Apple Academic Press, 2022, p.18

administration. Although tourism counsellors have been assigned to Uzbek embassies in potential tourism source markets, the number of promotional activities in these states has been limited. However, Uzbekistan has hosted an annual exhibition, which allows for increased cooperation in the field of inbound and outbound tourism. Since 1995, the Tashkent International Tourism Fair has been held annually. This forum is a good platform for constructive dialogue between partners working in this field. The exhibition allows local and foreign tour operators to promote their products and services at the beginning of the new season, and to conclude contracts with major customers.²⁶⁹

In addition, the country's national tourism body, *Uzbekturizm*, began to participate in tourism fairs in countries representing potential source tourism markets for Uzbekistan. The single National Stand, called “Uzbekistan”, represents, beginning from 2013, the Republic’s tourist potential at various international exhibitions and fairs. The results of participation in the following large-scale tourist events confirm the correctness of a given strategy: Fitur (Madrid, Spain), Emitt (Istanbul, Türkiye), Balttour (Riga, Latvia), ITB (Berlin, Germany), MITT (Moscow, Russia), TopResa (Paris, France), JATA (Tokyo, Japan), TTG (Rimini, Italy), WTM (London, the UK).²⁷⁰

Hamidov, points out the problems with Uzbekistan's promotional policy as follows:

Uzbekistan is far behind in attracting a relatively larger number of foreign tourists, mainly due to inadequate and ineffective promotional strategies of the industry, lack of sufficient funds, low quality of promotional materials and their improper distribution, and the perceived negative image of Uzbekistan by potential tourists.²⁷¹

²⁶⁹ Amonboev Mukhammadsiddik, Tursunov Bobir, Ruziev Shohruxbek. “Main Tendencies of Historical and Cultural Tourism Development in Uzbekistan.” In the book “Event Tourism in Asian Countries: Challenges and Prospects.” Edited by [Shruti Arora](#) and [Anukrati Sharma](#). New York: Apple Academic Press, 2022, p.15

²⁷⁰ Saliev, Firdavs, Soliev, Mukhammadkhon. “Economic Advancement of Tourism Industry in Uzbekistan.” *Global Disclosure of Economics and Business*, June 2015. Available at: <https://mpira.ub.uni-muenchen.de/64826/>. Accessed on 18 December 2024.

²⁷¹ Hamidov Obidjon. “Rol Turizma v Obespechenie Sozialno-Ekonomicheskogo Razvitiya. (The Role of Tourism in Socio-economic Development) In the Article “Overview of Uzbekistan Tourism

He also stresses the importance of cooperation with the private sector and government bodies, and continues,

In addition, tour operating firms need to give proper attention in developing the promotional materials and special care is required to incorporate the factors affecting the choice of potential tourists. Without effective and sufficient promotional activities from both the public and private sectors, emerging tourism as a major contributor to the national economy is not possible.²⁷²

Uzbekistan inherited a low level of tourism infrastructure from the Soviet Union. Where tourism infrastructure is concerned, the focus is on tourism services, including transport, accommodation, and tourist facilities. This includes the development of new hotels, airports, and tourist services, including any services starting from airport welcoming to housekeeping. In addition, as another feature of the Soviet legacy in the field of tourism, government-owned tourism enterprises constituted the majority of tourism enterprises during the independence year.

Developing tourism infrastructure was considered essential and crucial for any destination to become an international tourist destination. Therefore, although Karimov did not favor rapid privatization and shock therapy during the initial years of independence, some state-owned tourism enterprises were privatized. From 1995 to 1997, the privatization of tourism enterprises took place. According to Isomov and Tadjibayev, by the beginning of 1996, nearly 90% of the state-owned tourism enterprises were privatized.²⁷³ Most of these companies will likely be buses, travel

Industry, written by Safaeva S.R., Tarikulov. M Available at: https://iqtisodiyot.tsue.uz/sites/default/files/maqolalar/21_S_Safayeva_M_Tarikulov_0.pdf. Accessed on 10 January 2025.

²⁷² Hamidov Obidjon. “Rol Turizma v Obespechenie Sozialno-Ekonomicheskogo Razvitiya. (The Role of Tourism in Socio-economic Development) In the Article “Overview of Uzbekistan Tourism Industry, written by Safaeva S.R., Tarikulov. M Available at: https://iqtisodiyot.tsue.uz/sites/default/files/maqolalar/21_S_Safayeva_M_Tarikulov_0.pdf. Accessed on 10 January 2025.

²⁷³ Isomov Bekmurot, Tajibayev Maksud. “Etapy Formirovaniya i Perspektivy Razvitiya Infrastruktury Turizma v Uzbekistane.” (The Stages of Formation and Perspectives of the Development of Tourism Infrastructure) Available at: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/etapy-formirovaniya-i-perspektivy-razvitiya-infrastruktury-turizma-v-uzbekistane>. Accessed on 20 October 2024.

agencies, and small tourism businesses as the privatization process of state-owned tourism facilities in Uzbekistan continues under Mirziyoyev's presidency by 2024.

Karimov's government also tried to attract foreign investors and funds to improve tourism infrastructure. For example, a program of tourism development in the Khorezm region for 2013 and 2015 provided to attract foreign investments and grants equal to U.S. \$ 15.4 million for the restoration of historical and cultural monuments, construction of hotels, restaurants, and roadside infrastructure services for tourists, trade and entertainment centers, training, etc.²⁷⁴ These efforts were not enough to improve the tourism infrastructure in a destination like Uzbekistan, where thousands of historical and cultural monuments needed to be taken care of.

Visas have always been an obstacle for those wishing to visit a post-Soviet state, as any kind of international visit was initially considered an act of espionage in Soviet legacy. In the early years of independence, obtaining a visa for Uzbekistan was a difficult and expensive process. Foreign visitors had to obtain separate visas for cities like Bukhara and Samarkand. The Karimov government eased the process of obtaining visas as they were an obstacle to the flow of international tourists. Horak explains this process as follows:

Uzbekistan was the first country in Central Asia to consolidate its embassies and brought relatively clear rules issuance of visas, something which was rare in the 1990s. In addition, a relatively effective system was introduced in which travel agencies arranged an invitation for a fee and, upon doing so, were able to send the applicable consular section of the pertinent embassy. The tourist thus only required a single visit to the consulate and a visa was normally issued on the spot. List of countries whose citizens could receive short-term tourist visas without letters of invitation was released in 2009 only. Nevertheless, Uzbekistan's visa policy thus remains stable and its tourism trades primarily on attractive locations, which make travelers to the region not want to miss visiting Uzbekistan, despite some problems processing the visa.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁴ Saliev, Firdavs, Soliev, Mukhammadkhon. "Economic Advancement of Tourism Industry in Uzbekistan." *Global Disclosure of Economics and Business*, June 2015. Available at: <https://mpira.ub.uni-muenchen.de/64826/>. Accessed on 18 December 2024.

²⁷⁵ Horak Slavomir. "Visa Regimes and Regulatory Documents as an Obstacle for Tourism Development in Central Asia." In book *"Tourism in Central Asia."* Edited by Kantarci Kemal, Uysal Muzaffer and Magnini Vincent. New York: Apple Academic Press, p. 245

In addition, Uzbekistan had free visa agreements with most post-Soviet countries during this period. However, there were still difficulties and obstacles, especially for ordinary international tourists. Strict border controls, even at airports, which could take hours, were common for international visitors, especially non-CIS citizens. As noted before, the events of Andijan had completely changed Karimov's perception of security, which ultimately negatively impacted visa regulations and how international tourism was viewed. This can be illustrated by the fact that all international citizens visiting Uzbekistan must register at a local police station after spending three days in Uzbekistan. Ultimately, this forced most international tourists not to spend more than three days in Uzbekistan if it did not completely force them to not come to the destination.

Although the Karimov government has made enormous efforts to develop the legal basis for tourism and to increase Uzbekistan's role in international institutions through various activities, the lack of material resources has prevented crucial investment in tourism. As a result, the government's role in guiding the private sector has diminished, and Uzbekistan has failed to realize its potential as one of the world's most attractive cultural tourism destinations.

As noted above, nearly half a million foreigners visited Uzbekistan in 1990. However, the first years of independence saw a decline in the number of international arrivals. In 1995, the number of arrivals was around 250,000; in 2000, it rose to 302,000; and in 2005, it dropped to 242,000.²⁷⁶

International tourism has boomed since 2000. In 2000, there were 680 million international tourists worldwide. By 2011, however, this number had exceeded one billion.²⁷⁷ Although the number of international visitors to the country increased, Uzbekistan did not realize its potential as a tourist destination during these years. In

²⁷⁶ "Uzbekistan Tourism Statistics." Available at: <https://www.macrotrends.net/global-metrics/countries/UZB/uzbekistan/tourism-statistics>. Accessed on 21 October 2024

²⁷⁷ "Number of International Tourist Arrivals Worldwide from 1950 to 2024." Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/209334/total-number-of-international-tourist-arrivals/>. Accessed on 21 October 2024

this regard, the number of international visitors to Uzbekistan from 2008 until the death of Karimov is shown below.²⁷⁸

Table 3. The Number of International Visitors to Uzbekistan (2008-2016)

Year	Number of International Arrivals
2008	1,07 million
2009	1,22 million
2010	975 thousand
2011	1,39 million
2012	1,9 million
2013	1,97 million
2014	1,86 million
2015	1,92 million
2016	2,03 million

Uzbekistan's revenues from international tourism also fell far short of expectations during the Karimov era. The graph below shows the country's tourism receipts and their share of the GDP.²⁷⁹

Table 4. Uzbekistan's Tourism Revenue, GDP, and Tourism Share in GDP (1996-2016)

Year	Tourism Revenue	GDP	Tourism Share in GDP (%)
1996	\$15 million	\$13.95 Billion	0.11%
2000	\$63 million	\$13.76 Billion	0.46%
2004	\$57 million	\$12.03 Billion	0.47%
2005-	Between 2005-2013	Data not made available	N/A
2014	\$660 million	\$80.85 Billion	0.82%
2015	\$688 million	\$86.2 Billion	0.80%
2016	\$579 million	\$86.14 Billion	0.67%

²⁷⁸ "Uzbekistan Tourism Statistics." Available at: <https://www.macrotrends.net/global-metrics/countries/UZB/uzbekistan/tourism-statistics>. Accessed on 21 October 2024

²⁷⁹ "Uzbekistan Tourism Industry Statistics." Available at: <https://tourcentralasia.com/uzbekistan/uzbekistan-tourism-industry-statistics/>. Accessed on 21 October 2024

There is a tendency to divide the history of post-Soviet Uzbekistan into two parts, the Karimov period and the Mirziyoyev period, among most scholars and experts on Uzbekistan. During the presidency of first president Islam Karimov, the country was largely closed to the outside world, heavily authoritarian, less transparent, and had issues with freedom of speech.²⁸⁰ However, the second part, which was started by Mirziyoyev's presidency, represents a totally opposite stance. This term, posing himself as the founder of "New Uzbekistan", improved relations with neighboring countries, paved the way to free speech and transparency, and gradually opened up to the outside world.²⁸¹

As one of the world's largest and most diverse service industries and a major contributor to consumption, infrastructure development, and GDP, tourism has direct and indirect links with different sectors, and international tourism flows to a country are influenced by various factors.

In addition to ease of access and a high level of infrastructure and services, the political and economic stability of a country, its relations with neighboring countries and potential tourism source markets, and finally, the image of the destination as an affordable place to visit and a democratic and free country, play a crucial role in increasing tourism demand, i.e. the number of international visitors to that country.

Uzbekistan's image has always been that of a country ruled by an iron hand during the Karimov era, and international relations with most of its neighboring and economically stronger countries deteriorated after the Andijan events. This negative image, the deterioration in foreign relations, and the low quality of infrastructure and services have prevented Uzbekistan from exploiting its potential as an international tourist destination and contributed to the low international tourist

²⁸⁰ Babaev Shahboz, Johnson Tony, Almeida Paulo. "Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction in Uzbekistan: Achievements and Challenges." *International Journal of Advanced Research in Economics and Finance*, Vol. 6, No. 4, 16-26. Doi:[10.55057/ijaref.2024.6.4.2](https://doi.org/10.55057/ijaref.2024.6.4.2), 2024

²⁸¹ Babaev Shahboz, Johnson Tony, Almeida Paulo. "Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction in Uzbekistan: Achievements and Challenges." *International Journal of Advanced Research in Economics and Finance*, Vol. 6, No. 4, 16-26. Doi:[10.55057/ijaref.2024.6.4.2](https://doi.org/10.55057/ijaref.2024.6.4.2), 2024

flows to Uzbekistan during the Karimov era. As a result, the number of international visitors to Uzbekistan and the revenue from tourism remained very low during the period of the Karimov government.

Islam Karimov died of an unexpected brain hemorrhage at the age of 78 in September 2016, shortly after being re-elected in the May 2015 presidential elections. Thanks to its economic policies, the country enjoyed an extraordinary average annual growth rate of more than 8 percent between 2004 and 2016.²⁸² In addition to that per capita GDP increased 3.3 times, from 651 to 2.132 USD. According to Karimov, in comparison with 1990, the state economy grew 5.5 times, and per capita GDP grew by 9 times. And the average life expectancy increased from 67 to 73 years.²⁸³

3.7. Conclusion

Uzbekistan has been a repository for cotton and various agricultural products since Tsarist Russia's interest in Central Asia began in the 19th century. Even before that, the territory of today's Uzbekistan was part of the Great Silk Road, which was the center of trade throughout the centuries.

During the Soviet era, the Uzbek economy was one of the main parts of the Soviet economy, where specialization was used as the main tool for implementing the state-planned Soviet economic system. During this period, Uzbekistan was given the role of a major producer of agricultural products in general and cotton in particular by the Soviets. As the Second World War spread to the European parts of the Soviet Union, some of the large industrial production facilities were evacuated to Soviet Uzbekistan, which would eventually contribute to the Soviet Uzbek economy. The experience that Uzbekistan gained from this would also eventually help Uzbekistan

²⁸² Ruziev, Kobil. "Uzbekistan Development Experiment: An Assessment of Karimov's Peculiar Economic Legacy." *Europe-Asia Studies* 73(4):1-27, 2021, Doi: [10.1080/09668136.2021.1919602](https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2021.1919602).

²⁸³ "Itogi Deyatelnosti Islama Karimova na Postu Prezidenta Uzbekistana." (The Results of the Activities of Islam Karimov as the President of Uzbekistan) Available at: <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/3588357>. Accessed on 30 September 2024

to be less affected by the consequences of the transition to a liberal economy with the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

During the Soviet era, tourism served as one of the main propaganda tools of Soviet ideology rather than as an economic sector. During this period, Uzbekistan stood out as one of the leading tourist attractions for foreigners wishing to visit the Soviet Union.

With the dissolution, the newly independent Uzbekistan had two options for transforming its economy into a market economy. Uzbekistan's first president, Islam Karimov, who was also an economist during the Soviet era, opted for a gradualist approach to transition rather than shock therapy, seeking to protect the Uzbek nation, the most populous in Central Asia, from the negative effects of an immediate shift to a liberal economy through the sudden change due to shock therapy. His unique approach to the transition economy, which can be explained as supporting the influential role of the state in the economy while advocating the importance of a market-based economy, has been dubbed the "Uzbek Path" by some scholars. However, this controversial approach to the transition economics brought success to Uzbekistan, and by the 2000s, Uzbekistan had become one of the most economically stable countries in the post-Soviet space. This success surprised some Western scholars. As economic figures continued to be positive, the last year of Karimov's rule represented Uzbekistan isolated from the international economic system.

During his time in office, Karimov took concrete steps to develop the country's tourism industry. The establishment of Uzbek airlines, the creation of *Uzbekturizm*, the state committee that will implement the country's tourism policy, and the development of relations with the UNWTO all took place under Karimov. However, the development of tourism infrastructure and tourism promotion were not sufficiently addressed during this period.

CHAPTER 4

UZBEKISTAN'S ECONOMY DURING THE MIRZIYOYEV ERA

4.1. Introduction

From the collapse of the Soviet Union until 2016, Karimov's government policies emphasized a statist model, which can be explained by heavy economic intervention, import substitution, and protectionist policies. Uzbekistan's economy was one of the fastest growing among the post-Soviet states until the beginning of 2010, with an average growth rate of 7 percent per year, as a result of Karimov government's economic policies. From 2011 to 2016, real growth averaged 7 percent per year, while the unemployment rate averaged 5 percent. Consumer inflation, while moderately high at 10 to 12 percent, was declining.²⁸⁴ In 2012, however, the growth rate declined. The volume of foreign trade, which was USD 25 billion in 2012, fell and was estimated at about USD 19 billion in 2016, and GDP growth also declined from 8.2 percent in 2012 to 6 percent in 2016.²⁸⁵

Triggered by the Andijan incident, which took place in 2005, Uzbekistan became more concerned about security issues and more isolated from its trading partners, especially those in Central Asia. In its last years, the Karimov government reduced the areas of cooperation mainly with post-Soviet states, which negatively impacted trade volume between these states. The share of the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan in Uzbekistan's exports of goods fell from 40.1 percent in 2012 to 21.1

²⁸⁴ Lin Justin Yifu, Yu Jia, Nomozov Shakhzod. "Uzbekistan Before and After the 2016 Socio-Economic Reforms." In the book "*New Uzbekistan: The Third Renaissance*." Edited by Mirkasimov, Bakhrom and Pomfret, Richard. New York: Routledge, 2024, p.28

²⁸⁵ Borisov Denis. "Vneshnyaya Politika Uzbekistana pri Sh. Mirziyoyeva: Strategiya i Praktika." (Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy under Sh. Mirziyoyev: Strategies and Practices) Available at: <https://tempusetmemoria.ru/article/view/3957>. Accessed on 2 October 2024

percent in 2016.²⁸⁶ It can be argued that Islam Karimov prioritized a more security-oriented policy in the early 2010s, isolating Uzbekistan from its trade and political partners. Karimov focused more on signing security and military agreements with other states in his final years. He pursued a more realistic and independent policy, distancing himself from countries such as the US, China, and the Russian Federation.

It can be claimed that Karimov's security-oriented policy also had a negative impact on the development of tourism in Uzbekistan, which was one of the most popular tourist destinations among the Soviet states. As a result, Uzbekistan was unable to realize its tourism potential during the Karimov era, and the number of international visitors and, ultimately, the development of tourism in the country did not reach a satisfactory level during this period.

It was in this context that the sudden death of Islam Karimov in September 2016 forced Uzbekistan to change its leadership for the first time since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Under Uzbekistan's constitution, the head of the Senate, Nigmatilla Yoldashev, was supposed to become president. Still, he withdrew due to inexperience and recommended Mirziyoyev, who has been prime minister since 2003, for the presidency for the sake of stability and continuity.²⁸⁷ In December 2016, Mirziyoyev became the second president of Uzbekistan after winning 88% of the vote in an election in which four candidates participated.²⁸⁸ Mirziyoyev spent his entire life studying and working in Uzbekistan.

Shavkat Mirziyoyev was born on 24 July 1957 in the Uzbek SSR, the son of a doctor. He graduated as a mechanical engineer from the Tashkent Institute of Irrigation and Agricultural Mechanization in 1981. In 1990, he was elected a deputy

²⁸⁶ Borisov Denis. "Vneshnyaya Politika Uzbekistana pri Sh. Mirziyoyeva: Strategiya i Praktika." (Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy under Sh. Mirziyoyev: Strategies and Practices) Available at: <https://tempusetmemoria.ru/article/view/3957>. Accessed on 2 October 2024

²⁸⁷ Köksal Pınar. "Özbekistan'da Başkan Şevket Mirziyoyev Dönemi." ((The era of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev in Uzbekistan) Avrasya Dünyası, Sayı 7, Ekim 2020. (Eurasian World, No:7, October 2020) Available at: <https://avim.org.tr/en/Dergi/Avrasya-Dunyasi-Eurasian-World-1/7/pdf>. Accessed on 15 July 2024.

²⁸⁸ "Election Guide." Available at: <https://www.electionguide.org/elections/id/2994/>. Accessed on 20 March 2025

of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic and served as Chairman of the Mandate Commission. Between 1992 and 2003, he served as the mayor of various districts and cities, including Samarkand. With the decision of the Uzbek parliament, Mirziyoyev served as the Prime Minister of the Republic of Uzbekistan for four terms between 2003-2015 years. On 8 September 2016, based on a joint resolution of the Legislative Chamber and the Senate of the Parliament of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Mirziyoyev, was temporarily entrusted with the duties and powers of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. According to the results of the presidential election held on 4 December 2016, he was elected President of the Republic of Uzbekistan. He officially took office on 14 December 2016. On 24 October 2021, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev was re-elected for a second five-year term with 80.1% of the vote.²⁸⁹

4.2. Economic Developments during the Mirziyoyev Era

On the economic front, the first and foremost goal of Mirziyoyev's leadership has been to liberalize the economy. However, the government's role in guiding and directing investment and the private sector cannot be neglected here. In addition, Mirziyoyev's government has put forward some strategies to guide the private sector and stimulate economic growth, as is the case in developed states such as Japan and China. Some scholars have also linked the economic policies of the Mirziyoyev era to the developmental state, which is the case in most East Asian countries. In this regard, Dadabaev argues:

In particular, Mirziyoyev envisions a developmental type of government which further implies foreign policy necessary for a developmental state. The features of such government represent attempts to rationalize the industrial structure (e.g., by facilitating cooperation between producers for the sake of strengthening their competitiveness, and by introducing the best techniques throughout all enterprises which do not yet follow a new structure); redistribute resources (e.g., low rate credits, preferences, and coordinated industrial investments); create industrial zones and preferences; and attract investments into such sectors and zones.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁹ “Biyografiya.” (Biography) Available at: https://president.uz/ru/pages/view/biography?menu_id=10. Accessed on 20 March 2025

²⁹⁰ Dadabayev, Timur. “Developmental State and Foreign Policy in Post-Kerimov Uzbekistan.” The SAGE Handbook of Asian Foreign Policy, Editor in Takahashi Inoguchi, 2019, SAGE, ss. 641-656.

It can be argued that one of the main goals of the Karimov era, reducing imports and increasing exports, is also one of the main priorities of the Mirziyoyev administration. However, increasing the industry share in Uzbekistan's GDP²⁹¹ was one of the main goals of the new period. In addition, Mirziyoyev has prioritized increasing the participation of the private sector in Uzbekistan's GDP, ultimately reducing the state's role in GDP production. In this context, Mirziyoyev's government has issued several presidential decrees to stimulate Uzbekistan's economic transformation.

First and foremost, among the decrees signed by Mirziyoyev is the “Decree on the Development Strategy of Uzbekistan”. Published and signed by the new President of Uzbekistan in February 2017, the "Development Strategy for 2017-2021", which aims to expand industry, diversify Uzbekistan's economy, and increase the share of the private sector, can be seen as an example of Mirziyoyev's first step towards realizing the dramatic change in the political and economic life of the Uzbek people. The strategy targeted changes in five main areas, as shown below.

- Improvement of state and social structures
- Ensuring the rules of law and reforming the judicial and legal systems
- Economic development and liberalization
- Development of the social sphere by creating new jobs
- Ensuring security, inter-ethnic harmony, and religious tolerance, implementation of balanced, mutually beneficial, and constructive foreign policy.²⁹²

The liberalization of the economy, the improvement of the judicial system with an anti-corruption policy, the strengthening of the rule of law, and the protection of the rights and freedoms of citizens can be seen as the main idea of the strategy. The decree also emphasizes the importance of modernizing and intensively developing agriculture, which together with forestry and fisheries accounts for about 20 percent

²⁹¹ Industry's share of GDP will be 30.5 percent in 2018, reaching 33.9 percent and 33.4 percent in 2021 and 2022 respectively.

²⁹² “Strategiya Deystviy po Dal’neyshemu Razvitiyu Respubliki Uzbekistan: 2017-2021.” (Strategy of Actions on Five Priority Directions of Development of Uzbekistan for 2017-2021) Available at: <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2017/02/07/strategy/>. Accessed on 2 October 2024

of the country's GDP, strengthening the protection of rights and the priority role of private property, and encouraging the development of small businesses and private entrepreneurship.

It also recognizes the importance of the tourism industry as a labor-intensive sector, particularly for provinces and districts where the majority of the population is relatively low-income, and declares that socio-economic development, job creation, and income enhancement for the people of the provinces and districts should be achieved through the improvement of the tourism industry. The decree broadly confirms that the new government remains committed to facilitating the rapid industrialization of the economy, which is also in line with its announcement to implement new investment projects worth approximately 40 billion USD in the energy, chemical, and pharmaceutical sectors for the period 2019-2024.²⁹³

By 2017 the Mirziyoyev government began to implement policies in favor of economic development, creating favorable conditions for the private sector, including foreign investment. These policies included the creation of new industrial zones, tax and economic incentives for foreign investments, and easing of the visa requirements. In addition, the government is introducing market-oriented reforms to make the economy more attractive and competitive for all sectors. The multiple exchange rate regime²⁹⁴ of the Karimov era ended in 2017. In its first major macroeconomic reform, on September 5, 2017, Uzbekistan unified exchange rates and liberalized access to foreign exchange.²⁹⁵ Price controls were also one of the main economic instruments of the Karimov era, aimed at protecting vulnerable segments of the population living in relatively poorer conditions. Although most prices were liberalized during the Karimov era, many items remained controlled until

²⁹³ Ruziev, Kobil. "Uzbekistan Development Experiment: An Assessment of Karimov's Peculiar Economic Legacy." *Europe-Asia Studies* 73(4):1-27, 2021. Doi:[10.1080/09668136.2021.1919602](https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2021.1919602).

²⁹⁴ One of the main tools of Karimov's economic strategy. The official rate was available to the government, state enterprises, and entities in priority sectors, while other entities could obtain foreign exchange at the parallel market rate, which was about double the official rate.

²⁹⁵ Lin Justin Yifu, Yu Jia, Nomozov Shakhzod. "Uzbekistan Before and After the 2016 Socio-Economic Reforms." In the book *"New Uzbekistan: The Third Renaissance."* Edited by Mirkasimov, Bakhrom and Pomfret, Richard. New York: Routledge, 2024, p.28

2017. After his election, Mirziyoyev took the necessary steps to lift most price controls. Between 2017–2022, the government lifted most of the remaining controls on food, including bread and wheat. The government also lifted price controls on gasoline and other petroleum products. In 2019, the government increased prices for natural gas and electricity, although some prices, particularly for households, remained below cost-recovery levels.²⁹⁶

Since independence, state banks have dominated Uzbekistan's banking system and have been used as a tool to support the main economic policy of independent Uzbekistan, namely import substitution. However, the dominant role of state banks in the country's banking sector made it difficult for the private sector to access credit and ultimately had a negative impact on development. In early 2021, Uzbekistan had more than 30 banks, 11 of which were state-owned, holding 82 percent of the banking system's assets.²⁹⁷

In March 2020, Mirziyoyev issued a decree entitled “About the strategy of reforming the banking system of the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2020–2025”.²⁹⁸ The main objective of the decree was to reduce the role and share of the state in the banking sector and increase the availability of credit to the private sector. It aimed to improve efficiency, ensure financial stability, reduce the state's share, and improve the quality of financial services. Notably, the strategy called for improving corporate governance, privatizing several state-owned banks, increasing the share of non-state banks in banking assets from 15 to 60 percent, and attracting at least three strategic foreign investors by 2025.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁶ Lin Justin Yifu, Yu Jia, Nomozov Shakhzod. “Uzbekistan Before and After the 2016 Socio-Economic Reforms.” In the book “*New Uzbekistan: The Third Renaissance*.” Edited by Mirkasimov, Bakhrom and Pomfret, Richard. New York: Routledge, 2024, p.29

²⁹⁷ Lin Justin Yifu, Yu Jia, Nomozov Shakhzod. “Uzbekistan Before and After the 2016 Socio-Economic Reforms.” In the book “*New Uzbekistan: The Third Renaissance*.” Edited by Mirkasimov, Bakhrom and Pomfret, Richard. New York: Routledge, 2024, p.35

²⁹⁸ “O Strategii Reformirovaniya Bankovskoi Sistemy Respubliki Uzbekistan na 2020-2025 gody.” (On the Strategy of the Reform of the Banking System of the Republic of Uzbekistan for the Period 2020-2025) dated 12.05.2020. Available at <https://president.uz/ru/lists/view/3570>. Accessed on 4 October 2024.

²⁹⁹ Lin Justin Yifu, Yu Jia, Nomozov Shakhzod. “Uzbekistan Before and After the 2016 Socio-Economic Reforms.” In the book “*New Uzbekistan: The Third Renaissance*.” Edited by Mirkasimov, Bakhrom, and Pomfret, Richard. New York: Routledge, 2024, p.36

Privatization has also been one of the tools used by Mirziyoyev to reduce the role of the state in the economy. It is worth noting that the Uzbek authorities have undertaken several reforms to open and liberalize the economy and reduce the role of state enterprises through privatization. Although the privatization process began with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the role of the state remains strong, especially in the more strategic sectors during the early years of the Mirziyoyev administration. However, a new law facilitating the privatization of state property in Uzbekistan, entitled "On Privatization of State Property," was approved by Mirziyoyev on February 14, 2024.³⁰⁰

In addition, a presidential decree entitled "On Additional Measures to Reduce State Participation in the Economy" was adopted in 2024, which clearly states that some strategically important state enterprises will also be subject to privatization. According to the law, the Silk Avia airline and the Humo payment system, both wholly owned by the State, will be put up for public sale. In addition, shares of state holdings in four organizations under "Uzbekneftegaz" JSC, forty-two under "Uzavtosanoat" JSC, and nine under "Uzbekistan Railways" JSC will be privatized.³⁰¹

Mirziyoyev also mentions the contribution of privatized companies to the Uzbek economy in the presidential decree dated 19 May 2024. 4.5 thousand state assets in 2020 - 2023, more than 20 thousand new jobs were created due to privatization, tax revenues of privatized enterprises increased by 1.3 times, and net assets increased by 1.5 times.³⁰² Mirziyoyev also promotes Uzbekistan's privatization campaign through official statements. It can be argued that the privatization process in the country

³⁰⁰ "Zakon Respubliki Uzbekistan o Privatizatsii Gosudarstvennogo Imushchestva." (Republic of Uzbekistan Law on Privatization of State Property) dated 14.02.2024, No ZRU-907. Available at: <https://lex.uz/ru/docs/6800650>. Accessed on 4th of October 2024

³⁰¹ "Uzbekistan Initiates Privatization of State Shares in Key Enterprises." available at: <https://kun.uz/en/news/2024/04/26/uzbekistan-initiates-privatization-of-state-shares-in-key-enterprises> accessed on 4th of October 2024.

³⁰² "Postanavlenie Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan o Dopolnitelnyh Merah po Sokrasheniyu Uchastiya Gosudarstva v Ekonomike." (Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Additional Measures to Reduce State Participation in the Economy) dated 19.04.2024, No: PP-162. Available at: <https://lex.uz/en/docs/6898708>. Accessed on 4th of October 2024

accelerated after 2023. In a statement in early 2024, Mirziyoyev argued that privatization will bring 20 trillion soums³⁰³ to the state budget in 2024. He also noted that out of 43-grain companies that are part of Donmahsulot, only 10 were sold. Some of the companies put up for auctions have still not been sold due to artificially inflated prices. Mirziyoyev set the task of reducing the price of 33-grain enterprises and selling them this year.³⁰⁴

In addition, as the most populous country in Central Asia, Uzbekistan has had a remarkable number of people working abroad. This outflow of labor began to increase in the 2000s and continued until 2024. This has two implications for the Uzbek economy. One is that workers emigrate when there is a lack of job opportunities or when the salary, they receive for that particular job is insufficient in their home country. The other is that the country's balance of payments is improved by the inflow of private remittances. In this sense, the amount of remittances the country receives thanks to its citizens working abroad and its positive role in the balance of payments is crucial for Uzbekistan's economy.

Russia and Kazakhstan are the two main destinations for Uzbekistan's unemployed or underpaid population. In 2024 the number of Uzbeks working in the Russian Federation was more than 1.7 million.³⁰⁵ Among the CIS countries, Uzbekistan is the largest recipient of remittances from Russia, accounting for almost a third of total Russian remittances. According to a report by the Central Bank of Uzbekistan, between January and October 2024, Uzbekistan received \$12.6 billion in remittances, an increase of 34% compared to the same period in 2023. Russia accounted for 78% of total remittances, with \$9.8 billion sent by Uzbek migrants, an increase of 35%. Other major contributors were Kazakhstan (\$699 million), the

³⁰³ Around 1.5 billion USD

³⁰⁴ “More State-owned Facilities will be Privatized – Shavkat Mirziyoyev.” Available at: <https://kun.uz/en/news/2024/01/16/more-state-owned-facilities-will-be-privatized-shavkat-mirziyoyev>. Accessed on 4 October 2024

³⁰⁵ “Uzbekistan Tops List of Labor Migrants to Russia in 2024.” Available at: <https://qalampir.uz/en/news/uzbekistonliklar-rossiyaga-borgan-migrantlar-soni-buyicha-yetakchilik-kilmok-da-109598>. Accessed on 4 October 2024

United States (\$470 million, +37%), South Korea (\$458 million, +71%), Turkey (\$331 million) and the United Kingdom (\$109 million, +76%).³⁰⁶

Despite the positive impact on the balance of payments, the fact that more than 2 million Uzbek citizens work outside Uzbekistan underlines the fact that there is an unemployment problem in the country. This is one of the reasons why Mirziyoyev considers the tourism sector to be strategic, as it has huge potential to create new employment opportunities. According to a statement made by Mirziyoyev in 2024, the aim was to create new job opportunities mostly in the service sector where tourism plays an important role. The president unveiled a plan to create 5 million jobs by 2024. Specifically, 2.5 million jobs will be created in the service sector, 2.1 million in agriculture, 250,000 in investment projects and industry, and 140,000 in construction.³⁰⁷

However, the policy of import substitution and export-led growth, which are hallmarks of developmental state economic policy, remains in place in some sectors. This is illustrated by the fact that the automobile industry, which was also one of the largest industries during the Karimov era, is still considered a key sector and is also directed and supported by the state. As imports of foreign cars, particularly those from China, increased in 2023³⁰⁸, the Mirziyoyev government adopted a protectionist industry policy. This included both tightening the procedures for importing Chinese cars and creating favorable conditions for the joint production of similar vehicles with the Chinese company. The cooperation with the Chinese company BYD is a good example of this policy.

From April 1, 2024, Uzbekistan was expected to tighten the procedure for importing cars. Moreover, it became known about a possible restriction on unofficial imports of cars from the Chinese BYD. The presidential decree

³⁰⁶ “Migrant Workers Boost Uzbekistan’s Economy with \$12.6 Billion in Transfers.” Available at: <https://kun.uz/en/news/2024/11/30/migrant-workers-boost-uzbekistans-economy-with-126-billion-in-transfers>. Accessed on 4 October 2024

³⁰⁷ “Uzbekistan Will Create 5 million Jobs in 2024, says Mirziyoyev.” Available at: <https://tashkenttimes.uz/national/12304-uzbekistan-will-create-5-million-jobs-in-2024-says-mirziyoyev>. Accessed on 4 October 2024

³⁰⁸ Car deliveries from China increased 5.2 times, from 11.2 thousand in 2022 to more than 58 thousand units in 2023. Hence, in 2023 the share of China in total imports exceeded 79 percent

dated March 18 on the approval of an investment agreement on organizing the production of electric and hybrid vehicles in Uzbekistan contains a clause that the investor – the BYD company – appealed to the government of Uzbekistan to limit the disorderly import of electric vehicles without an official guarantee. It is worth noting that Chinese automaker BYD signed an investment agreement on organizing the production of electric and hybrid vehicles and their components in Uzbekistan by creating a joint venture with Uzavtosanoat. The planned production volume at the first and second stages of the investment project will be 50 thousand and with the completion of the third stage – 300 thousand cars per year.³⁰⁹

It can be argued that Mirziyoyev's efforts to liberalize the economy and create favorable conditions for the private sector show promising results. From 2018 to 2023, despite external shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russia–Ukraine war, and higher global interest rates, Uzbekistan averaged a growth rate of 6 percent, according to the International Monetary Fund.³¹⁰ The World Bank (2024) estimates that the value-added industry increased from 11 billion in 2010 to 25 billion USD in 2022. Employment in industry (as a percentage of total employment) increased from 20 percent in 2000 to 24 percent in 2022.³¹¹

The understanding of the new economic policy also facilitated the process for the private sector representatives. The business climate in Uzbekistan has improved significantly, making the country one of the top twenty most improved economies in the world for ease of doing business. The report noted that the country had moved up the rankings to 69th out of 190 countries thanks to reforms in four key areas: tax payments, minority investor protection, cross-border trade, and contract enforcement. In terms of the economic implications of the leadership change in Uzbekistan, it is worth noting that by 2019, Mirziyoyev's economic reforms had led The Economist to name Uzbekistan its "Country of the year."³¹² This new climate and relatively easy

³⁰⁹ "Industrial Policy of Uzbekistan." Available at: <https://www.eurasian-research.org/publication/industrial-policy-of-uzbekistan/>. Accessed on 4 October 2024

³¹⁰ "Uzbekistan Opening up, but yet to Fulfil its FDI Potential." Available at: <https://www.fdiintelligence.com/content/feature/uzbekistan-opening-up-but-yet-to-fulfil-its-fdi-potential-83947>. Accessed on 4 October 2024

³¹¹ "Industrial Policy of Uzbekistan." Available at: <https://www.eurasian-research.org/publication/industrial-policy-of-uzbekistan/>. Accessed on 5 October 2024

³¹² Terzyan, Aram. "What has changed in Uzbekistan? Explaining Post-Karimov State Building." Available at: [http://eurasiainstitutes.org/files/file/psprp_n_6_uzbekistan_2020_\(1\).pdf](http://eurasiainstitutes.org/files/file/psprp_n_6_uzbekistan_2020_(1).pdf). Accessed on 5 October 2024

business environment has also contributed to the growth of tourism links and the increasing number of international visitors to Uzbekistan.

4.3. International Relations

When Mirziyoyev came to power in December 2016, there was a shift in foreign relations with Central Asian states, the Russian Federation, and powerful states such as China and the United States. However, this shift was primarily in international political relations. Consequently, these changes have led to increased bilateral economic relations between the states. In this part of the chapter, I will focus on economic ties while analyzing the development of Uzbekistan's international relations with other countries. Therefore, rather than focusing on hard IR policies such as security, this section will take a more soft power and liberal stance by focusing on international political economy and policies that lead to increased friendly and economic relations between Uzbekistan and its counterparts.

As noted above, Mirziyoyev's foreign policy serves as a tool to achieve Uzbekistan's economic development. In other words, economic goals also determine Uzbekistan's economic partners and the relationship between Uzbekistan and its economic partners should primarily benefit the country from the economic relationship, including tourism. After the Andijan incident, security issues had become the main focus of Karimov's foreign policy, to the detriment of economic relations, especially with the other Central Asian countries. In this regard, economic and political ties with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan were frozen for almost two decades during the Karimov era due to disputes such as water and irrigation disagreements with Tajikistan and border, water, and energy disputes with Kyrgyzstan. In order to benefit from and maximize the region's economic potential, Mirziyoyev sought to repair troubled relations with neighboring Central Asian states. For him, Uzbekistan's patterns of interaction with the outside world during Karimov's rule were the main obstacles to the country's economic development and security. In this sense, he saw the need to abandon Karimov's opportunistic, reactionary, or isolationist foreign policy and open up to the outside world.³¹³

³¹³ Toktogulov, [Beishenbek](#). "Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy under Mirziyoyev: Change or Continuity?" Eurasian Research Journal, ERJ, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 49-67, 2022.

When Mirziyoyev became president, perhaps the biggest change he made was to shift the perception of foreign policy from political to economic. As he took his first steps in international relations, the dominance of economics over politics and security was palpable. It can be argued that Mirziyoyev has prioritized the potential for economic cooperation when conducting foreign policy with other states. In this regard, Dadabayev argues:

Mirziyoyev's policy was first aimed towards rebuilding troubled relations with Uzbekistan's neighbor in order to both stabilize and maximize the economic potential of these relations. This policy also aimed to increase the efficiency of Uzbekistan's interactions with non-regional partners, especially in economic areas. In this sense, Mirziyoyev's foreign policy distinguished itself from Karimov's era in that it prioritized economic versus political issues in terms of setting the agenda for foreign policy interactions.³¹⁴

The new foreign policy in the Mirziyoyev era can be divided into three perceptions. Perhaps the first goal of Mirziyoyev's leadership in international relations was to intensify relations with the Central Asian countries and not to let political issues become an obstacle to economic cooperation between Uzbekistan and the Central Asian states. The second one is to strengthen cooperation with the Eurasian Economic Union³¹⁵ member countries in general and with the Russian Federation in particular.

As noted above, many Uzbeks work in the Russian Federation and contribute to the Uzbek economy through remittances. In addition, Russia remains Uzbekistan's second-largest trading partner.³¹⁶ And the third perception is to strengthen political and economic relations with powerful countries such as China and the US by protecting Uzbekistan's political and economic interests. In addition, relations with Turkey have also become crucial during this term as well.

³¹⁴ Dadabayev, Timur. "Developmental State and Foreign Policy in Post-Kerimov Uzbekistan." *The SAGE Handbook of Asian Foreign Policy*, Editor in Takahashi Inoguchi, 2019, SAGE, ss. 641-656.

³¹⁵ An economic union promoted by the Russian Federation. As of October 2024, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and the Russian Federation are official members of the union, but Uzbekistan has observer status since April 2020 and actively participates in the union's meetings.

³¹⁶ "Uzbekistan's Trade with Russia Narrows Gap with China, totals \$6.8bn vs. \$6.85bn in 7M24." Available at: <https://daryo.uz/en/2024/08/22/russia-becomes-uzbekistans-second-largest-trade-partner-with-almost-7bn-turnover-in-7m24>. Accessed on 4 October 2024

4.3.1. Relations with Central Asian Countries

One of the first initiatives of the new Uzbek leadership to develop the economic potential of the Central Asian states was to organize an economic forum with the participation of the leaders of the Central Asian states. In April 2017, an international conference dedicated to Central Asia's common future and cooperation was held in Samarkand. At this conference, Mirziyoyev declared that if fruitful cooperation between the Central Asian states is established, the GDP of the Central Asian countries will double in 10 years.³¹⁷ He also proposed creating a transportation development program and an economic union among the Central Asian states.

Both Mirziyoyev and other Uzbek officials have emphasized the need for cooperation with Central Asian countries and have adopted a more friendly policy based on mutual understanding with all their regional counterparts. He has expanded the scope and intensity of cooperation by frequently visiting all Central Asian countries and signing a number of important socio-economic and security agreements during these visits.³¹⁸ Mirziyoyev sees the region as a “single organism that has shared common geographic, economic, and cultural space for centuries.” In his own words, Mirziyoyev’s regional policy consists of two elements: “not avoiding (but discussing) sharp corners and (seeking) reasonable compromises”.³¹⁹

It can also be argued that after Mirziyoyev became president, Uzbekistan sought to play a leading role in increasing the volume of trade between Central Asian states and also in the economic development of the Central Asian region as a whole. Before turning to economic issues, Mirziyoyev's administration focused on resolving Uzbekistan's lingering problems with other Central Asian states, which were seen as an obstacle to improving trade relations. As a result, after his election, he made a

³¹⁷ “Uzbekistan Predlozhl Stranam Sentral Azii Razrabotat Programmu Razvitiya Transporta.” (Uzbekistan Suggested that the Central Asian Countries Should develop a Program for the Development of Transport) Available at: <https://regnum.ru/news/2343963>. Accessed on 4 October 2024

³¹⁸ Toktogulov, [Beishenbek](#). “Uzbekistan’s Foreign Policy under Mirziyoyev: Change or Continuity?” Eurasian Research Journal, ERJ, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 49-67, 2022.

³¹⁹ Dadabayev, Timur. “Developmental State and Foreign Policy in Post-Kerimov Uzbekistan.” The SAGE Handbook of Asian Foreign Policy, Editor in Takahashi Inoguchi, 2019, SAGE, ss. 641-656.

series of visits to Central Asian states to resolve these issues. In this regard, Abdulaziz Kamilov, who served as Uzbekistan's foreign minister between 1994-2003 and 2012-2022 and currently serves as a special advisor to the president on foreign relations, spoke about Uzbekistan's role in Central Asia in an interview in August 2024 as follows:

The President of Uzbekistan has identified the Central Asian region as the main priority area of Uzbekistan's foreign policy. The goal of achieving 'zero problems with neighbors' has been put at the top of the agenda. From an objective point of view, Uzbekistan bears a special responsibility for the future of Central Asia. We stand for establishing the Central Asian region as one of the world's centers of economic growth and investment activity. In addition to that, the President of Uzbekistan noted that ultimately "our strategic goal should be the formation of a Single Regional Market in the long term".³²⁰

After being elected president, Mirziyoyev made his first international visit to Central Asian countries. His first foreign visit was to Turkmenistan. Increasing economic cooperation was one of the priorities of the agenda. During this trip, in order to increase and use the economic potential of the region, he discussed the development of transport infrastructure through Turkmenistan, such as a rail and road corridor "Uzbekistan–Turkmenistan–Iran–Oman" as a way of opening up the country to the international community."³²¹

A week after he visited Turkmenistan, Mirziyoyev made his second foreign visit to Kazakhstan, where the main topic on the agenda was how to exploit the economic potential of the largest Central Asian states. The visit opened a new chapter in economic relations between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. During the visit, several agreements were signed between the parties. Among the most important in the economic sphere was the "Joint Declaration on Further Deepening the Strategic Partnership and Strengthening Good Neighborliness between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Republic of Uzbekistan", as well as the "Agreement on

³²⁰ "Novaya Sentralnaya Azia v Vneshnoi Politike Uzbekistana." (New Central Asia in the Foreign Policy of Uzbekistan) Available at: <https://ecis.info/news/566/120320/>. Accessed on 4 October 2024

³²¹ Dadabayev, Timur. "Developmental State and Foreign Policy in Post-Kerimov Uzbekistan." The SAGE Handbook of Asian Foreign Policy, Editor in Takahashi Inoguchi, 2019, SAGE, ss. 641-656.

Economic Cooperation for 2017-2019", the "Agreement on Interregional Economic Cooperation", the "Agreement on Avoidance of Double Taxation on Income and Property."³²²

Efforts to increase cooperation between countries have paved the way in a very short time. As a result of the business forum between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan in 2017, Kazakh and Uzbek companies signed contracts worth more than 1.2 billion USD.³²³ The volume of trade between the two countries has increased 35 percent year-on-year, reaching USD2 billion.³²⁴

Visits to Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan were followed in 2018 by visits to Tajikistan, where Mirziyoyev sought to resolve disputes inherited from the post-Soviet era. In March 2018, the president of Uzbekistan visited Tajikistan for the first time in 27 years. During this visit, several frozen conflicts were resolved, which would contribute to economic and people-to-people relations between the two states. The results of this visit are mixed. The free visa regime between the states began.³²⁵ In addition, the revival of the transport mechanism between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan has facilitated travel between the Uzbek and Tajik peoples. In the case of Tajikistan, President Mirziyoyev paved the way for the resumption of air traffic between the two countries for the first time since 1992, as well as the restoration of rail and road communications between the two states.³²⁶

³²² Iyonova, Elena "Vneshneopoliticheskoe Priorety Uzbekistana. (Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy Priorities) Available at: https://www.imemo.ru/files/File/magazines/rossia_i_novay/2018_02/12_Ionova.pdf. Accessed on 6 October 2024

³²³ Iyonova, Elena "Vneshneopoliticheskoe Priorety Uzbekistana. (Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy Priorities) Available at: https://www.imemo.ru/files/File/magazines/rossia_i_novay/2018_02/12_Ionova.pdf. Accessed on 6 October 2024

³²⁴ Dadabayev, Timur. "Developmental State and Foreign Policy in Post-Kerimov Uzbekistan." The SAGE Handbook of Asian Foreign Policy, Editor In Takahashi Inoguchi, 2019, SAGE, ss. 641-656.

³²⁵ Iyonova, Elena "Vneshneopoliticheskoe Priorety Uzbekistana. (Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy Priorities) Available at: https://www.imemo.ru/files/File/magazines/rossia_i_novay/2018_02/12_Ionova.pdf. Accessed on 6 October 2024

³²⁶ Dadabayev, Timur. "Developmental State and Foreign Policy in Post-Kerimov Uzbekistan." The SAGE Handbook of Asian Foreign Policy, Editor in Takahashi Inoguchi, 2019, SAGE, ss. 641-656.

In relations with Kyrgyzstan, conflicts inherited from the Soviet Union, such as border demarcation and water management, have been resolved. For example, Tashkent agreed with Bishkek on demarcating about 85 percent of the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border. The other achievement in this regard was signing an agreement on the full transfer of the Orto Tokoi reservoir to Kyrgyzstan and its joint use, which had long been a source of contention between Tashkent and Bishkek.³²⁷

As a result of the efforts of Mirziyoyev and other states to prioritize economic issues over politics and security as well as Tashkent's friendly policies aimed at mutually benefiting from the economic potential of the Central Asian region, economic relations between Central Asian states have grown dramatically in recent years. Although there was a pause in the growth during the Covid time, by 2023, the volume of trade between the Central Asian states will have reached USD 11 billion, which is 2.5 times more than 10 years ago.³²⁸

There has also been a dramatic increase in Uzbekistan's trade relations with the Central Asian states. Over 5 years, Uzbekistan's trade with the Central Asian states increased 2.6 times, from 2.5 billion in 2016 to 6.3 billion USD in 2021.³²⁹ Uzbekistan's foreign trade volume with the Central Asian states reached 7.2 billion USD in 2023, with an increase of 11.5 percent compared to the same year. Exports amounted to about 2.8 billion USD, while imports were about 4.4 billion USD.³³⁰ Figures for 2024 are also promising. Uzbekistan's trade volume with Central Asian

³²⁷ Toktogulov, [Beishenbek](#). "Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy under Mirziyoyev: Change or Continuity?" Eurasian Research Journal, ERJ, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 49-67, 2022.

³²⁸ "Obyem Torgovli Mezhdru Stranami Tsentralnoi Azii Previsil 11 mlrd dollarov." (Trade Volume Between Central Asian Countries Exceeded \$11bn) Available at: <https://www.inform.kz/ru/obem-torgovli-mezhdu-stranami-tsentralnoy-azii-previsil-11mlrd-dollarov-06fca7>. Accessed on 6 October 2024

³²⁹ "Uzbekistan In Trade with Central Asia." Available at: <https://www.eureporter.co/world/uzbekistan/2022/06/20/uzbekistan-in-trade-with-central-asia/>. Accessed on 4 October 2024

³³⁰ "Infografika: Torgovliya Uzbekistana So Stranami Tsentralnoi Azii za Yanvar-Dekabr 2023 Goda." (Infographics: Uzbekistan's trade with Central Asian countries for January-December 2023) Available at: <https://review.uz/post/infografika-torgovlya-uzbekistana-so-stranami-centralnoy-azii-za>. Accessed on 4 October 2024

states has increased by 10.3 percent in January-August 2024 compared to the same period of 2023.³³¹

4.3.2. Relations with the Russian Federation

As noted above, Mirziyoyev has prioritized Russia as one of his economic partners, as both countries have had economic ties since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In addition, millions of Uzbek workers are employed on the territory of the Russian Federation and contribute to the Uzbek economy through remittances. The Russian Federation was one of the first countries Mirziyoyev visited after becoming president.

Mirziyoyev's policy toward Russia is one of pragmatic cooperation. On the one hand, he refuses to be dictated to by Moscow on Russia's priorities in the Central Asian region, such as membership in the Eurasian Economic Union and Collective Security Treaty Organization. At the same time, on the other hand, he seeks to exploit the economic potential of both countries. Moreover, the large number of Uzbeks working in Russia makes Mirziyoyev cautious about protecting the rights of his compatriots. In this regard, Dadabayev argues, it is clear that Mirziyoyev's Russia policy is not ideologically driven but is rather focused on elements of pragmatic cooperation. He readily accepts facets of cooperation with Russia that benefit both countries but is in no hurry to make ambitious announcements about politically driven initiatives such as joining the Eurasian Union.³³²

In April 2017, Mirziyoyev made his third foreign visit to Russia. During his visit to the Russian Federation, which along with China is one of Uzbekistan's two largest trading partners, several investment and trade agreements were signed. Thirty-nine intergovernmental, interdepartmental, and commercial documents were signed, with a package of investment agreements worth 12 billion USD and trade contracts worth

³³¹ "Torgovlya Uzbekistana s Tsentral'noi Azii." (Uzbekistan's Trade with Central Asia) Available at: <https://weekly.uz/articles/13957/>. Accessed on 4 October 2024

³³² Dadabayev, Timur. "Developmental State and Foreign Policy in Post-Kerimov Uzbekistan." The SAGE Handbook of Asian Foreign Policy, Editor in Takahashi Inoguchi, 2019, SAGE, ss. 641-656.

3.8 billion USD.³³³ The visit also saw the signing of a five-year contract for purchasing Uzbek gas (previously, gas was purchased under one-year contracts), an agreement on the construction of steel and metallurgical plants, a copper processing complex, and the joint production of agricultural machinery.³³⁴

Mirziyoyev's efforts to improve the rights and conditions of Uzbek workers have also paved the way for signing an agreement between the Russian Federation and Uzbekistan during the visit. An agreement on the orderly recruitment of Uzbekistani migrant workers for temporary employment in Russia was a major achievement for the Uzbek side as this document ensures the protection of their legal rights.³³⁵

Uzbek migrant workers in the Russian Federation have significantly contributed to the Uzbek economy. As of February 2024, more than one million Uzbekistanis are working in the Russian Federation, and in 2023, remittances from the Russian Federation to Uzbekistan amounted to 8.58 billion USD, accounting for 78 percent of the total remittances received by Uzbekistan from abroad.³³⁶

It can be argued that Uzbek-Russian relations entered a new phase during the Mirziyoyev era, especially in the economic sphere. Negotiations between the states have intensified since 2017, and a new economic model has been pursued to benefit as much as possible from the economic potential of both states. An example of the close economic ties between Uzbekistan and Russia is the signing of the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Program for 2022-2026, which provides for

³³³ Iyonova, Elena “Vneshneopoliticheskoe Priorety Uzbekistana. (Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy Priorities) Available at: https://www.imemo.ru/files/File/magazines/rossia_i_novay/2018_02/12_Ionova.pdf. Accessed on 6 October 2024

³³⁴ Iyonova, Elena “Vneshneopoliticheskoe Priorety Uzbekistana. (Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy Priorities) Available at: https://www.imemo.ru/files/File/magazines/rossia_i_novay/2018_02/12_Ionova.pdf. Accessed on 6 October 2024

³³⁵ Toktogulov, [Beishenbek](#). “Uzbekistan’s Foreign Policy under Mirziyoyev: Change or Continuity?” Eurasian Research Journal, ERJ, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 49-67, 2022.

³³⁶ “Rossisko-Uzbekistanskie Otnosheniya.” (Russian Uzbek Relations) Available at: <https://tass.ru/info/20906463>. Accessed on 5 October 2024

the development of e-commerce, the digitalization of the economy, new energy and water-saving technologies, and the improvement of migration policy.³³⁷

The countries have cooperated in the fields of natural gas, nuclear energy, chemicals, finance, tourism and migrant workers. There are a large number of joint projects between the two countries. During Putin's visit to Uzbekistan in April 2024, which Mirziyoyev described as historic, the Uzbek president underlined the importance of bilateral economic relations as follows:

I would like to quote a few figures to show the extent of the cooperation between Russia and Uzbekistan. Today there are more than three thousand joint ventures and projects operating in Uzbekistan. Their number has doubled in recent years. The portfolio of cooperation projects amounts to about 45 billion USD. In addition to our meeting, we have worked out a new project worth over 20 billion USD. Dear Vladimir Vladimirovich, (Putin) never before have we had such indicators of a substantial industrial agenda in our cooperation. We are talking about cooperation in energy, metallurgy, petrochemicals, engineering, mining, agriculture, logistics, pharmaceuticals, artificial intelligence and many other areas. Joint projects will be mutually beneficial and will involve the most advanced technologies and equipment. To promote such projects, we are launching a joint investment platform.³³⁸

The volume of foreign trade between Uzbekistan and the Russian Federation amounted to 4.86 billion USD in 2017.³³⁹ This figure increased steadily during the Mirziyoyev era and reached 9.88 billion USD in 2023, with Uzbek imports accounting for about 6.576 billion USD and exports for about 3.30 billion USD.³⁴⁰

³³⁷ “Rossiya i Uzbekistan Podpisali Kompleksnuyu Programmu Ekonomicheskogo Sotrudnichestvo na 2022-2026 Gody.” (Russia and Uzbekistan Sign a Comprehensive Program of Economic Cooperation for the Period 2022-2026) Available at: https://www.economy.gov.ru/material/news/rossiya_i_uzbekistan_podpisali_kompleksnuyu_programmu_ekonomicheskogo_sotrudnichestva_na_2022_2026_gody.html. Accessed on 5 October 2024

³³⁸ “Nachalo Rossiysko-Uzbekistanskikh Peregovorov v Rasshirennom Sostave.” (Launch of Negotiations Between Russia and Uzbekistan in an Expanded Format) Available at: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/74123>. accessed on 5 October 2024

³³⁹ “Vneshnetorgovy Oborot Uzbekistana v 2017 Gody Sostovil okolo 27 mlrd.” (Uzbekistan's Foreign Trade Turnover amounted to about \$27 billion in 2017) Available at: <https://www.uzdaily.uz/ru/vneshnetorgovyi-oborot-uzbekistana-v-2017-godu-sostavil-okolo-27-mlrd/>. Accessed on 5 October 2024

³⁴⁰ “Kak İzmenilas Vneshnaya Torgovlya Uzbekistan v 2023 godu.” (How Uzbekistan's Foreign Trade Changed in 2023) Available at: <https://ecis.info/news/566/115397/>. Accessed on 7 October 2024

Uzbekistan and the Russian Federation continue to cooperate in the economic sphere, and the trade volume between the states is expected to reach 30 billion USD by 2030.³⁴¹

4.3.3. Relations with the People's Republic of China

As mentioned above, one of the main goals of Mirziyoyev's leadership has been to transform Uzbekistan into a competitive country in the economic sphere, and he has put all his efforts into international relations to benefit the economic potential of the countries with which Uzbekistan has relations. This tendency has been particularly noticeable in Uzbekistan's relations with China. In doing so, Uzbekistan relies on the advantage of being the most populous country in Central Asia, where lower labor costs would play an important role in gaining a comparative advantage in its exports. In this regard, Mirziyoyev's government sees China as a source of support and assistance in modernizing and developing Uzbekistan's economy. In other words, Uzbekistan sought to cooperate with China to produce goods and services on Uzbek territory using its own labor force and to market these products in Uzbekistan and other countries for export.

Close cooperation in the economic sphere with China began during the Karimov era. In 2016, China became one of the largest investors in the Uzbek economy. The volume of these investments reached about 7.8 billion USD. By the end of 2016, the mutual trade turnover amounted to 4.2 billion USD, and more than 700 companies with Chinese capital were operating in Uzbekistan.³⁴² Mirziyoyev's goal was to intensify this economic cooperation and to usher in a new era in the relationship so that Uzbekistan could benefit from China's industrial experience and gain an edge in foreign trade.

³⁴¹ "Uzbekistan i Rossiya Uvelichat Obyem Vzaimnoi Torgovli do \$30 mlrd k 2030 godu." (Uzbekistan and Russia to increase mutual trade to \$30bn by 2030) Available at: <https://kapital.uz/obem-vzaimnoy-torgovli-s-rf/>. Accessed on 5th of October 2024

³⁴² "Uzbekistan i Kitay Podpisal Ryad Dokumentov." (Uzbekistan and China Signed a Series of Documents) Available at: <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2017/05/13/china-docs/>. Accessed on 7 October 2024

Given the fact that China is considered a strategic economic partner for Uzbekistan, Mirziyoyev visited China after he visited Russia in May 2017 and signed various types of agreements, most of which were in the economic sphere. During this visit, more than 100 intergovernmental, interstate, and interagency documents were signed. Agreements on implementing a large package of investment projects with a total value of more than 23 billion USD.³⁴³ Most of these agreements involved the establishment of joint production facilities in Uzbekistan, contributing to Uzbekistan's policy of import substitution and export growth, which has been a key economic priority of Uzbekistan since independence. This is exemplified by the toy production facility, which aims to produce 7 million units of toys per year, 80 percent of which will be exported to other countries in Central Asia, Russia, Afghanistan, and others.³⁴⁴

The largest infrastructure-related agreements include the joint production of synthetic fuel, investments in Uzbekistan's oil industry, the construction of power generation facilities, and other investment projects.³⁴⁵

While Mirziyoyev seeks to balance relations with Russia and China pragmatically, he is also involved in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). It can be argued that Uzbekistan has become an important partner for China in implementing Chinese logistics and transportation projects in the Eurasian region in the context of the BRI. According to Toktogulov, the BRI-related projects in Uzbekistan will focus on developing transit links for regional efforts or local industrial development efforts.³⁴⁶ Of course, becoming a transport corridor for Chinese export goods would contribute to Uzbekistan's importance as a trading partner in the international economic arena.

³⁴³ "Uzbekistan i Kitay Podpisal Ryad Dokumentov." (Uzbekistan and China Signed a Series of Documents) Available at: <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2017/05/13/china-docs/>. Accessed on 7 October 2024

³⁴⁴ Dadabayev, Timur. "Developmental State and Foreign Policy in Post-Kerimov Uzbekistan." *The SAGE Handbook of Asian Foreign Policy*, Editor In Takahashi Inoguchi, 2019, SAGE, ss. 641-656.

³⁴⁵ Toktogulov, [Beishenbek](#). "Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy under Mirziyoyev: Change or Continuity?" *Eurasian Research Journal*, ERJ, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 49-67, 2022.

³⁴⁶ Toktogulov, [Beishenbek](#). "Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy under Mirziyoyev: Change or Continuity?" *Eurasian Research Journal*, ERJ, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 49-67, 2022.

The fact that Uzbekistan plays a crucial role in the BRI's logistics and transportation projects gives it an advantage in negotiations with China. Perhaps this alignment of interests has increased trade volume between Uzbekistan and China, with China overtaking the Russian Federation to become Uzbekistan's largest trading partner since 2018. Babayev links this cooperation to the similarity of the two countries' economic systems. Therefore, he argues that the two countries' economic structures are somewhat similar in terms of the relations between the state and the private sector because the government in both countries plays a significant role that resembles the developmental state model. Thus, the tasks of the working groups that were preparing agreements between the two countries were less complicated because their negotiating and bargaining styles were somewhat similar.³⁴⁷

As a result of the close cooperation between Uzbekistan and China, China has become a leading trade partner and a major investor in Uzbekistan's economy. Between 2017 and 2022, Chinese investment in the Uzbek economy will increase fivefold, reaching 12 billion USD. Between 2017 and 2022, total bilateral trade increased 1.9 times, from 4.7 billion USD (2017) to 8.9 billion USD (2022, 19.9 percent more than in 2021).³⁴⁸

By the end of 2023, the bilateral trade turnover amounted to 13.7 billion USD. China's share in Uzbekistan's total foreign trade reached 21.9 percent.³⁴⁹ Mirziyoyev stressed the importance of bilateral economic cooperation with China during his visit to Beijing in January 2024 as such:

In 2023, trade turnover between Uzbekistan and China reached 14 billion USD. There is a mutual understanding that we have an opportunity to

³⁴⁷ Dadabayev, Timur. "Developmental State and Foreign Policy in Post-Kerimov Uzbekistan." The SAGE Handbook of Asian Foreign Policy, Editor in Takahashi Inoguchi, 2019, SAGE, ss. 641-656.

³⁴⁸ "Infografika: Torgovo Investitsionnoe Sotrudnichestvo Uzbekistana s Kitaem." (Infographics: Uzbekistan's Trade and Investment Cooperation with China) Available at: <https://www.uzembassy.kz/ru/article/infografika-torgovo-investicionnoe-sotrudnichestvo-uzbekistana-s-kitaem>. Accessed on 6 October 2024

³⁴⁹ "Vsestoronnee Strategicheskoe Partnerstvo Mezhdru Respublikoi Uzbekistan i KNR v Novuyu Epohu." (Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the People's Republic of China in a New Era) Available at: <https://isrs.uz/ru/maqolalar/vsestoronnee-strategiceskoe-partnerstvo-mezhdru-respublikoj-uzbekistan-i-knr-v-novuyu-epohu>. Accessed on 6 October 2024

increase trade turnover to 20 billion USD in the near future. In recent years, the volume of Chinese investment in the Uzbek economy has increased fivefold, and the number of joint ventures has tripled. In this context, it was noted with satisfaction that at the end of last year, two new solar power plants with a capacity of 1,000 megawatts were inaugurated in Uzbekistan with the participation of Chinese companies.³⁵⁰

4.3.4. Relations with Türkiye

In addition to the Central Asian states, the Russian Federation, and China, Mirziyoyev's government is paying great attention to strengthening economic relations with Türkiye. Uzbek-Turkish relations had been frozen for a long time, and perhaps Mirziyoyev's attitude toward economic and political relations between Türkiye and Uzbekistan has ushered in a new era for both states. For Mirziyoyev, restoring and normalizing Uzbekistan's relations with Türkiye have been one of the most important foreign policy priorities, as evidenced by the concrete steps taken so far. His visit to Ankara in October 2017 was a milestone in Uzbek-Turkish relations as he was the first Uzbek leader to visit the Turkish capital since 1999, and Türkiye was the first country visited outside the region.³⁵¹ This visit was followed by the visit of the Turkish President to Uzbekistan. As a result of the visit, 25 different agreements were signed between Uzbekistan and Türkiye, including the establishment of a high-level Strategic Cooperation Council between the countries, which is to explore all forms of possible economic cooperation.³⁵² Since the beginning of the Mirziyoyev era, the two countries have been cooperating in the fields of energy, construction, transportation, agriculture and tourism. In 2019, Uzbekistan became a member of the Turkic Council,³⁵³ an international organization

³⁵⁰ "Lidery Uzbekistana i Kitaya Rasmotreli Voprosy Dalneyshego Rashireniya Mnogoplanovogo i Vsestoronnego Strategicheskogo Partnerstva." (Leaders of Uzbekistan and China Discussed Issues of Further Development of Multifaceted and Comprehensive Strategic Partnership) Available at: <https://president.uz/ru/lists/view/6990>. Accessed on 6 October 2024

³⁵¹ Toktogulov, [Beishenbek](#). "Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy under Mirziyoyev: Change or Continuity?" Eurasian Research Journal, ERJ, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 49-67, 2022.

³⁵² "Türkiye - Özbekistan Siyasi İlişkileri." (The Political Relations of Türkiye and Uzbekistan) Available at: <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye-ozbekistan-cumhuriyeti-siyasi-iliskileri.tr.mfa>. Accessed on 7 October 2024

³⁵³ "Vstuplenie Uzbekistana v Tyurskiy Sovet - Otrazhenie Estestvennykh Istoricheskikh Protsessov." (Uzbekistan's Accession to the Turkic Council Reflects Natural Historical Processes) Available at: <https://president.uz/ru/lists/view/2939>. Accessed on 7 October 2024

led by Türkiye. As a result of bilateral and multilateral efforts, Türkiye became Uzbekistan's fourth largest trade partner in 2023 after China, Russia, and Kazakhstan. By 2023, the trade volume between Türkiye and Uzbekistan reached 5 billion USD, while the projects implemented by Turkish construction companies carried out in Uzbekistan reached around 7 billion USD.³⁵⁴

4.4. Conclusion

Moving beyond Karimov's 'Uzbek model', Mirziyoyev has taken steps to integrate the country into the global economy through finance and trade. In contrast to Karimov's preference for a Soviet-style, state-dominated economy, Mirziyoyev has sought to make the economy more efficient by introducing a market mechanism while attracting foreign investment. In the post-Karimov era, the new president defined economic development as the primary guideline for foreign policy activities. In this sense, the new president described the facilitation of exports as the main goal of Uzbek foreign policy.

In addition to liberalizing the economy, Mirziyoyev has focused on improving relations with Uzbekistan's main trading partners. Perhaps the biggest change in Uzbekistan's new foreign policy is the shift from a politically motivated to an economically driven policy. In other words, in contrast to the Karimov era, Mirziyoyev prioritized economics over security in foreign relations. In his foreign diplomacy, Mirziyoyev has managed to resolve ongoing conflicts with neighbouring countries such as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan while at the same time establishing good relations with Uzbekistan's largest trading partners such as China, Russia, Kazakhstan, and Türkiye.

However, if Mirziyoyev's main goal is liberalization, there are also elements of the developmental state model, in which the government encourages foreign economic activity in priority areas. Mirziyoyev's administration prioritizes certain sectors of the economy and uses state-directed instruments, such as guiding the private sector

³⁵⁴ “Türkiye, Özbekistan ile Ticari İlişkilerinde Hedef Büyüttü.” (Turkey Raises the Target for Its Trade Relations with Uzbekistan) Available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/ekonomi/turkiye-ozbekistan-ile-ticari-iliskilerinde-hedef-buyuttu/3240600>. Accessed on 7 October 2024

through a strategy and protecting it through import substitution policies. Such policies can be observed in sectors that are considered infant and in need of development, such as the automotive industry and various joint production sectors established with foreign partners, as well as in tourism.

As a populous country, tourism in Uzbekistan is also seen as an industry directed and supported by the Mirziyoyev government's development policy. In the next chapter, I will analyze this phenomenon in detail through Uzbekistan's economic legacy and Mirziyoyev's economic policy.



CHAPTER 5

UZBEKISTAN'S TOURISM POLICIES DURING THE MIRZIYOYEV ERA

5.1. Introduction

Uzbekistan has always been an attractive and interesting cultural destination as it contains many UNESCO World Heritage Sites, several historical monuments, and famous destinations such as Bukhara, Samarkand, Hiva, etc. However, Uzbekistan's tourism potential was limited during the Soviet era because the country was part of the communist alliance, and travel was impossible for most of the world's population. The fact that tourism was not considered one of the main sources of economic income by the Soviet regime also contributed to the process of underestimating tourism as an economic factor.

During the Soviet period, tourism was used by the Soviet Union as a tool to introduce its country and its unique economic system to members of other nations of the world. It was also seen as a mechanism through which the economic and administrative system, together with the culture and everyday life of the Soviet system, could be introduced to foreign visitors. Suffice it to say that tourism was seen as an ideological or propaganda phenomenon rather than an economic one. And Uzbekistan, with its attractions and cultural heritage, was part of that system.

It can be argued that during the Karimov era, there were almost no activities to promote international tourist flows to Uzbekistan. The Karimov government was preoccupied with transition policies in the early years and then isolated itself from the international economic environment due to security concerns arising from the Andijan events. For the Mirziyoyev era, tourism can be seen as a new policy that marks a significant departure from the Karimov era's foreign policy of opening the country to foreign visitors and attracting foreign tourists.

Therefore, Mirziyoyev's main goal, which can be articulated as making the Uzbek economy more efficient by introducing market mechanisms, increasing international interaction, and attracting more foreign investment, is best understood through his unique reflection on tourism policy. After becoming president, Mirziyoyev began to implement a pro-tourism policy. Since Mirziyoyev came to power as president, state-directed policies to support the so-called infant tourism industry in Uzbekistan have been the main tool for developing Uzbekistan's tourism infrastructure and ultimately contributing to the country's economy by attracting more international visitors. Abolishing visas for potential tourist source countries such as Japan, Israel, Malaysia, Indonesia, South Korea, and Turkey in February 2018 was one of the first unique initiatives Mirziyoyev took after becoming president of tourism development in Uzbekistan.

In this chapter, I will give you an overview of Uzbekistan's state-led tourism policy during the Mirziyoyev era. The main focus of this chapter will be on the tourism policies of the Mirziyoyev government. Special emphasis will also be placed on government initiatives such as the presidential decrees, laws, regulations and practical policies in the sphere of tourism. I will also focus on the impact of key tourism policies for transforming the country into an international tourist destination regarding infrastructure development, promotion of various tourist destinations and products, visa policy, arranging and supporting air connectivity, etc., through figures and statistical analysis.

Since the 1990s, most international organizations have formally recognized the economic significance of tourism for developing countries as a means of generating earnings, attracting foreign investment, and creating employment opportunities.³⁵⁵ Poverty and income inequality are major factors restricting tourism growth in many developing countries throughout the world.³⁵⁶ On the other hand, tourism is an important source of employment, especially for women, local people, and the

³⁵⁵ Weibing Zhao, J. R. Brent Ritchie. "Tourism and Poverty Alleviation: An Integrative Research Framework." *Current Issues in Tourism*, 2007, 10(2&3):119-143. Doi [10.2167/cit296.0](https://doi.org/10.2167/cit296.0)

³⁵⁶ Dwyer Larry, Forsyth Peter, Dwyer Wayne. "Tourism Economics and Policy." Bristol: View Publications. 2020, p.85

relatively less-educated population. With its diverse relationships with more than fifty different sectors, the tourism industry has the potential to alleviate poverty while strengthening socio-economic development, especially in developing and less developed countries.

This is why developing, and less developed countries are trying to develop tourism policies and infrastructure to increase the number of international visitors and ultimately help generate revenue, attract foreign investment, and create jobs. On the other hand, the development of international tourism is related to different segments, such as having friendly relations with potential tourism source countries, being easily accessible by air, being a visa-friendly country, meaning that obtaining a visa should not be difficult, time-consuming, and expensive, having good domestic road and rail infrastructure, etc.

The state as an actor in the economy is crucial when developing countries seek a way to develop their economies and promote some of their industries. In addition, the role of the state in the economy is vital for developing countries as they seek to catch up with and compete with developed countries. As Atul Kohli concludes, private investors in late-late developing countries³⁵⁷ need organized help, help that effective states are most able to overcome such obstacles as capital scarcity, technological backwardness, rigidities in labour markets, and confront the overwhelming power of foreign corporations and competitive producers elsewhere.³⁵⁸

When it comes to the development of tourism in developing countries, the role of the state becomes even more important, as tourism has direct links with various industries. Tourist activities can be very diverse, overlapping with sectors that are far from tourism industries. It can be stated that tourism is a type of activity that has a direct impact not only on the internal components of the development of countries or

³⁵⁷ This is how Atul Kohli conceptualizes developing countries that want to catch up with the advanced economic levels of developed countries.

³⁵⁸ Kohli Atul. "State Directed Development: Political Power and Industrialization in the Global Periphery." New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p.377

their socio-economic, cultural, and educational spheres but also on the state of international economic, technical and humanitarian relations. Since tourism encompasses a wide range of services and goes beyond the traditional notion of it as a purely leisure phenomenon, its impact should be considered from the point of view of its influence on various economic, technical and humanitarian relations. Therefore, as a matter of fact, the role that the government plays in the development of the tourism industry in developing or less developed countries becomes unique and vital.

In other words, tourism is a complex industry that, because of its diversity, requires strategic guidance from the state. This need becomes even more apparent when a developing state seeks to develop its undeveloped tourism industry. Tourism encompasses all of the activities that tourists undertake, which makes the government's role in tourism different from its role in other industries.³⁵⁹

With the election of Mirziyoyev as president in 2016, the Uzbek government signaled a shift towards a new international political and economic agenda. Mirziyoyev's new policy was more problem-solving and prioritized the economy over security, which was the opposite of Karimov's prioritization. This tendency can be seen in Uzbekistan's new tourism policy, which changed with Mirziyoyev's election as president. The new President of Uzbekistan classified tourism as one of the elements of Uzbekistan's developmental state economic model, where the government positions the tourism industry as strategic for the state economy, promotes tourism development, and encourages international tourist flows to Uzbekistan.

5.2. The General Situation of Tourism in Uzbekistan when Mirziyoyev Became the President

However, before looking at Mirziyoyev's choice of developmental state tourism policy, it is better to focus on the general situation and the reasons why tourism

³⁵⁹ Blake Adam, Sinclair Thea. "The Economic Rationale for Government Intervention in Tourism." Available at: https://www.academia.edu/398842/The_Economic_Rationale_for_Government_Intervention_in_Tourism. Accessed on 20 October 2024

remained underdeveloped in Uzbekistan until 2016. This will give us a better perspective on understanding the tourism policies of the Mirziyoyev period and also help us determine which tourism policies were prioritized under which conditions and aspirations. It would also give us a clearer idea about the policies for the development of the tourism industry during the Mirziyoyev period.

Administrative and economic barriers to tourism, especially the visa regime, are among the main problems hindering the development of tourism and international tourist flows. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Uzbekistan's visa regime, especially for the citizens of non-Soviet countries, was considered a barrier to exploring Uzbekistan's tourism destinations and products in the post-Soviet period.

In addition, the lack of value for money in tourism services, including high tariffs for accommodation and flights, limited service levels, and incomplete technical, transport, and social infrastructure, was seen as an obstacle to increasing international tourist flows to the country. International tourist flows are also adversely affected by the high price of air tickets, which significantly increases the cost of travel to Uzbekistan and consequently reduces the country's competitiveness in the international market. In addition to this low level of service at Uzbekistan's airports, the monopoly position of the national carrier on domestic and international flights, the lack of low-cost carriers (LCC)³⁶⁰, which would allow more international tourists to travel to and within Uzbekistan, together with the less number of domestic flights connecting the cities with the tourism destinations and the weak marketing policy of the national carriers, have also had a negative impact on the number of international visitors to the country.

Easy and comfortable access between Uzbekistan's main tourist attractions in general and high-speed rail links between Uzbekistan's three most popular tourist destinations - Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva in particular, are vital to the country's tourism industry. However, despite positive developments in rail passenger

³⁶⁰ Low-cost carrier (LCC) is an airline that offers low fares in exchange for eliminating many traditional passenger services. Based on innovative and successful business models, LCC are the new boom segment in air transport and are having a major impact on tourism.

transport during the Karimov era, such as the launch of the Tashkent-Samarkand and Tashkent-Bukhara high-speed trains, problems, including 'the lack of sufficient rail services during the high tourist season and the difficulty of buying rail tickets and the lack of an electronic ticket for international services' had not been resolved by the end of 2016.

Besides, state control of tourist facilities and services was almost non-existent during the Karimov era, including state-guided licensing and certification of tourist activities and a lack of comfortable tourist information environment. Additionally, the weak promotion of Uzbekistan's tourism infrastructure and tourism products abroad contributes to the non-competitiveness of the national tourist product.

All of the above had prevented Uzbekistan's tourism industry from flourishing during the Karimov era. Mirziyoyev sought to take concrete steps to remove at least some of these obstacles immediately after becoming president.

The country's undeveloped tourism industry also influenced the general situation of the Uzbek tourism sector. In 2015, more than 1.917 million international visitors arrived in Uzbekistan, an increase of 3% compared to 2014. The average annual growth rate of arrivals of foreign citizens to the country in 2011-2015 was 16.1%.³⁶¹ However, as a negative consequence of the visa policy, the growth took place thanks to visitors from post-Soviet countries, while the number of international visitors from non-post-Soviet states decreased. A decrease of -9.2% was observed for citizens of non-CIS countries. The average number of overnight stays in Uzbekistan was around 1-3.³⁶²

Before Mirziyoyev became president, the number of tourism services and tourism's economic contribution to Uzbekistan slightly increased. In this regard, from 2011 to

³⁶¹ "Obsuzhdaetsya Proekt Kontsepsiya Razvitiya Turizma." (The draft Tourism Development Concept is Under Discussion.) Available at: <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2017/02/22/document/>. Accessed on 12 October 2024

³⁶² "Obsuzhdaetsya Proekt Kontsepsiya Razvitiya Turizma." (The draft Tourism Development Concept is Under Discussion.) Available at: <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2017/02/22/document/>. Accessed on 12 October 2024

2015, Uzbekistan doubled the volume of tourism services, and the number of new tourism enterprises increased by 27.2 percent.³⁶³ The economic contribution of tourism in Uzbekistan in 2015 was calculated as 1.1 percent of GDP, equal to US\$940 million. The direct contribution of tourism to employment is 5% (141.5 thousand people).³⁶⁴

The number of accommodation facilities was also limited. In 2016, there were 750 hotels and similar accommodation facilities in Uzbekistan with a capacity of 37,8 thousand beds.³⁶⁵ The highest concentration of accommodation establishments is in the oblasts of Tashkent (19.8%), Samarkand (16.4%), and Bukhara (15.4%), and the lowest in the oblasts of Jizzak (2.8%), Namangan (2.8%), and Syrdarya (1.6%).³⁶⁶

A good occupancy rate for a hotel can vary depending on a number of factors, such as the location of the hotel and seasonality. Generally, a hotel occupancy rate of 60-70% is considered good, while an occupancy rate of 80-90% is considered excellent. However, the average occupancy rate of Uzbekistan's hotels remained extremely poor before Mirziyoyev became the president. In this regard, the average occupancy rate of hotel rooms between 2011-2015 was 30.2% (27.3% in 2015 and 32.1% in 2011), and the average length of stay was 2.5 nights (2.8 in 2014). However, there is a continued positive trend in average revenue per room, which increased by 2% to \$102.5.³⁶⁷

³⁶³ Obsuzhdaetsya Proekt Kontsepsiya Razvitiya Turizma.” (The draft Tourism Development Concept is Under Discussion.) Available at: <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2017/02/22/document/>. Accessed on 12 October 2024

³⁶⁴ “Obsuzhdaetsya Proekt Kontsepsiya Razvitiya Turizma.” (The draft Tourism Development Concept is Under Discussion.) Available at: <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2017/02/22/document/>. Accessed on 12 October 2024

³⁶⁵ Gaibnazarova, Zumrat. “Perspektivy Razvitiya Turisticheskogo Potensiala Uzbekistana.” (The Prospects for the Development of the Potential of Tourism in Uzbekistan) *Scientific Research of Faculty of Economics Electronic Journal* 10(1):94-104, DOI: [10.38050/2078-3809-2018-10-1-94-104](https://doi.org/10.38050/2078-3809-2018-10-1-94-104), 2018

³⁶⁶ “Obsuzhdaetsya Proekt Kontsepsiya Razvitiya Turizma.” (The draft Tourism Development Concept is Under Discussion.) Available at: <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2017/02/22/document/>. Accessed on 12 October 2024

³⁶⁷ “Obsuzhdaetsya Proekt Kontsepsiya Razvitiya Turizma.” (The draft Tourism Development Concept is Under Discussion.) Available at: <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2017/02/22/document/>. Accessed on 12 October 2024

As noted in the previous chapters, Tashkent, Samarkand, and Bukhara are the main tourist centres of the country, where the majority of accommodation facilities are concentrated, most of which meet international standards. International hotel chains play an important role in attracting foreign visitors and increasing the level of service.

However, the presence of international hotel brands in the Uzbek market was low by 2016. All international hotel companies are concentrated in Tashkent, where accommodation prices are higher than in similar hotels in the world's leading tourist destinations. The cost of a room in international 5-star hotels in the capital is 1.5 times higher than in European countries. The inflated prices are due to the low occupancy rate, the low level of competition, and the high dependence on business travellers.³⁶⁸

5.3. Legal Framework of Tourism

Taking into account all these shortcomings in the tourism sector, Mirziyoyev, as soon as he was elected president, focused on pursuing a tourism policy to increase the flow of tourists to Uzbekistan. As a result, one of Mirziyoyev's first steps was to work on creating a legislative infrastructure and to prioritize tourism as a strategic sector for Uzbekistan. This was followed by Mirziyoyev's first governmental move to position the tourism industry in Uzbekistan in a completely different way, with the signing of the Presidential Decree on "Measures to Ensure the Rapid Development of the Tourism Industry of the Republic of Uzbekistan". It was published shortly after he was elected president, on 2 December 2016. This decree is important in that it was the first governmental step towards the development of tourism in the country and served as an indicator of state-led growth policies in tourism.

In addition to declaring tourism a strategic sector for economic development in Uzbekistan, Mirziyoyev's first decree on tourism had two main objectives. The first

³⁶⁸ "Obsuzhdaetsya Proekt Kontsepsiya Razvitiya Turizma." (The draft Tourism Development Concept is Under Discussion.) Available at: <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2017/02/22/document/>. Accessed on 12 October 2024

was to define the tasks and priorities of the state's tourism policy in the short and medium term, and the second was to establish the state body responsible for tourism and define its tasks and responsibilities.

Focusing on the priorities in tourism policy and the objectives of the state in the tourism policy-making process, the decree mentioned the main elements of international tourism policy, such as ensuring the safety of international visitors, improving the infrastructure of the tourism industry, improving relations with potential tourism source market countries and international tourism institutions, promoting Uzbekistan's tourist destinations and products, facilitation of the visa regime and finally the training of the employees working in the field of tourism.

Concerning safety during tourism activities, the decree states that "all necessary precautions should be taken to ensure the safety of life and health of tourists and excursionists in the organization of tourist services, in particular in the places of their accommodation, catering facilities, during their entire stay on the territory of the Republic."³⁶⁹

The decree also emphasizes the need to develop tourism infrastructure and aims to guide the relevant state authorities in this process. The emphasis is on raising the level of tourist services to a high standard with the help of improved tourist infrastructure. Therefore, the decree mentions the acceleration of the development of tourist industry facilities in all regions of Uzbekistan that meet modern world standards, needs, and requirements of tourists - hotels and similar accommodation facilities, catering facilities, transport and logistics structures, information centers, cultural and sports facilities. In addition, it is necessary to accelerate the construction and reconstruction of road, engineering and communications infrastructure, and roadside infrastructure along the main tourist routes, as well as to attract foreign investors for these purposes.

³⁶⁹ "Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan, O Merah po Obespecheniyu Uskorennogo Razvitiya Turistskoi Oblasti Respubliki Uzbekistan." (Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Measures to Ensure Accelerated Development of the Tourism Industry of the Republic of Uzbekistan) dated 02.12.2016, No UP-4861 2.12.2016. Available at: <https://lex.uz/docs/3077023>. Accessed on 12 October 2024

Although bilateral relations with most countries were imperfect, Uzbekistan's relations with UNWTO were very good during the Karimov era. As mentioned in the previous chapter, during the Karimov period, various activities were carried out in Uzbek tourist destinations in cooperation with UNWTO. In order to increase the visibility and recognition of Uzbekistan as a favorable tourist destination, the said decree also emphasizes the importance of increasing cooperation with international organizations and other countries as follows:

Expansion of international cooperation in the sphere of tourism activities, primarily with the UNWTO authoritative international and national tourism organizations of foreign countries - active participants of regional and world markets of tourism services, participation of Uzbekistan in universal international conventions and agreements regulating the sphere of tourism, introduction of international and interstate standards and norms into the practice of tourism activities.³⁷⁰

The image of Uzbekistan as a tourist destination should play an important role in attracting international visitors, and this can be achieved through aggressive promotion and marketing activities. The Mirziyoyev administration also directs the authorities responsible for improving Uzbekistan's image and states the importance of developing competitive tourism products and services and using modern marketing tools, developing a strategy for their promotion in the domestic and international tourism markets, creating a positive image of the country in the field of tourism by creating and developing a comfortable tourist information environment, carrying out extensive advertising and information activities abroad, and also opening tourist information centers in the country's regions and tourist offices and representations abroad.³⁷¹

³⁷⁰ “Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan, O Merah po Obespecheniyu Uskorennogo Razvitiya Turistskoi Oblasti Respubliki Uzbekistan.” (Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Measures to Ensure Accelerated Development of the Tourism Industry of the Republic of Uzbekistan) dated 02.12.2016, No UP-4861 2.12.2016. Available at: <https://lex.uz/docs/3077023>. Accessed on 12 October 2024

³⁷¹ “Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan, O Merah po Obespecheniyu Uskorennogo Razvitiya Turistskoi Oblasti Respubliki Uzbekistan.” (Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Measures to Ensure Accelerated Development of the Tourism Industry of the Republic of Uzbekistan) dated 02.12.2016, No UP-4861 2.12.2016. Available at: <https://lex.uz/docs/3077023>. Accessed on 12 October 2024

The decree also emphasizes the need to improve the quality of services provided by employees in the tourism industry by focusing on the fact that "a fundamental improvement of the system of qualitative training of qualified personnel for the tourism industry, especially in the field of management and marketing, together with the training of tourist guides, regular retraining and advanced training of employees in the subjects of tourism activity should be organized".³⁷²

In addition to the above-mentioned roadmap on the most important policies for tourism, the decree also heralds the creation of a new state body in charge of tourism. According to the decree, the State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Tourism Development was established to replace *Uzbektourism*, the main state body for tourism during the Karimov era. The tasks of the State Committee for Tourism were determined as follows:

- Licensing of tour operator activities; conducting, in close cooperation with the national certification body of the Republic of Uzbekistan - Agency "Uzstandart", mandatory certification of tour operator services (tourism products) and hotel services provided by subjects of tourism activity, including the establishment of classification of hotels and other accommodation facilities
- Inspection and control of compliance of certified tourism services with mandatory requirements and standards specified in normative documents.
- Prepare the program for tourism development in Uzbekistan from 2017 to 2021 in cooperation with other ministries, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Culture and Sport.
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the State Committee for Development of Tourism of the Republic of Uzbekistan shall assign counselors to Uzbek embassies abroad to promote the national tourist product and tourist destinations and increase the flow of tourists to the Republic of Uzbekistan.
- To take systematic measures to improve the level and quality of services provided to passengers, including on a free basis, by creating and developing a

³⁷² "Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan, O Merah po Obespecheniyu Uskorennogo Razvitiya Turistskoi Oblasti Respubliki Uzbekistan." (Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Measures to Ensure Accelerated Development of the Tourism Industry of the Republic of Uzbekistan) dated 02.12.2016, No UP-4861 2.12.2016. Available at: <https://lex.uz/docs/3077023>. Accessed on 12 October 2024

comfortable tourist information environment at airports and railway stations, including tourist information points, a tourist navigation system, orientation signs, etc.

- The State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Tourism Development, together with the Ministry of Information Technologies and Communications Development and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan within one month to create a specialized electronic automated program for keeping records of guests in hotels and other accommodation facilities in electronic form.³⁷³

To regulate the tourism industry, which was not among the main priorities during the Karimov era, the program placed special emphasis on the certification and investigation of tourism enterprises, including accommodation facilities and tourist agencies. The State Agency for Tourism Development has been entrusted with this task. According to the decree, only travel agencies and tourist facilities certified by the State Agency for Tourism Development can sign contracts with foreign tourist companies.

Visa facilitation has also been a major focus. As noted in the previous chapter, countries' visa facilitation policies play an important role in increasing the flow of tourists to that country. During the Karimov era, the general visa regime applied by the Uzbek government was seen as an obstacle to visiting Uzbekistan, especially by non-Soviet citizens. With this decree, Mirziyoyev ordered the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to work on a new visa regime that would make it easier for foreigners to visit Uzbekistan.

In addition to the presidential decrees, Mirziyoyev's administration also drafted a tourism law to meet the needs of the new tourism policy-making process. The aim was to cover and regulate all segments and representatives of the Uzbek tourism

³⁷³ “Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan, O Merah po Obespecheniyu Uskorennogo Razvitiya Turistskoi Oblasti Respubliki Uzbekistan.” (Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Measures to Ensure Accelerated Development of the Tourism Industry of the Republic of Uzbekistan) dated 02.12.2016, No UP-4861 2.12.2016. Available at: <https://lex.uz/docs/3077023>. Accessed on 12 October 2024

industry. As a result, on 21 June 2019, the 45-article Law on Tourism was adopted, replacing the 1999 Law on Tourism from the Karimov period.

It can be argued that the Law on Tourism serves as a legal basis for the decrees and other official documents of Uzbekistan in the field of tourism and contains almost the same objectives as the decrees issued on the development of tourism. In addition, the law emphasizes several times the leading role of the state in the field of tourism and the positive cooperation of the state with the private sector in order to increase the flow of international tourists to Uzbekistan. According to Article 4, the basic principles of the law are as follows

- Priority of protection of rights, freedoms, legitimate interests, and safety of tourists, tour operators, and subjects of the sphere of tourism.
- stability of the development of tourism and the creation of favorable conditions for it
- State support for entrepreneurship and development of competition in the sphere of tourism.
- publicity and openness in the sphere of tourism.³⁷⁴

As can be seen from the basic principles of the law, the main emphasis is on the protection of tourists' rights and state support for tourism development, which should be liberal and transparent. In Article 6, the state support for tourism is exemplified by the improvement of public-private partnerships and also by the creation of equal opportunities in the market of tourism services for business entities and stimulation through the establishment of tax and customs privileges for tourism companies.

In Article 8 of the Law on Tourism, the responsible government body for tourism is determined as the “State Committee for the Development of Tourism in Uzbekistan. Some of the main responsibilities of the Committee were underlined as follows:

- Participation in the development and implementation of state and other programs in the field of tourism

³⁷⁴ “Zakon Respubliki Uzbekistan o Turizme.” (The Law on Tourism of the Republic of Uzbekistan) dated 18.07.2019, No: ZRU-549. Available at: <https://www.lex.uz/docs/4428101>. Accessed on 25 January 2025

- Coordination of the development and monitoring of state, regional, and other programs in the field of tourism
- To develop proposals for improving and simplifying the visa regime
- Attraction of investments in the field of tourism
- Promoting Uzbekistan's tourism products and destinations abroad and within the country.
- Carrying out training programs to increase the quality of services of the employees working in the field of tourism.

With the ratification of the law on Tourism, the State Committee for Tourism has become the main state body responsible for the development of tourism in the country. The scope of its activities covers almost all areas of the vast tourism industry. In addition, the last clause of Article 8 underlines the strong authority of the State Committee for Tourism over the other state bodies in the field of tourism, stating that "the regulations and decisions of the state body responsible for tourism, adopted within the limits of its competence, shall be binding on the state and economic management bodies, local authorities and economic enterprises."³⁷⁵

To increase the cooperation between the state authorities and the private sector representatives, a coordination council was established according to Article 11 of the Tourism Law. "The Coordination Council for Tourism Development (hereinafter referred to as "the Coordination Council") is established to improve the interaction between state bodies, NGOs, and tourism entities with the aim of creating favorable conditions for sustainable tourism development."³⁷⁶

The law also establishes the legal basis for the operation of tour operators and travel agents and regulates their relationships with each other and with tourists. Finally, four articles deal with the safety of tourists visiting Uzbekistan, which, in fact, plays an important role in creating a positive image of any destination worldwide.

³⁷⁵ "Zakon Respubliki Uzbekistan o Turizme." (The Law on Tourism of the Republic of Uzbekistan) dated 18.07.2019, No: ZRU-549. Available at: <https://www.lex.uz/docs/4428101>. Accessed on 25 January 2025

³⁷⁶ "Zakon Respubliki Uzbekistan o Turizme." (The Law on Tourism of the Republic of Uzbekistan) dated 18.07.2019, No: ZRU-549. Available at: <https://www.lex.uz/docs/4428101>. Accessed on 25 January 2025

On 5 January 2019, President Mirziyoyev of Uzbekistan signed a decree entitled 'On additional measures for the rapid development of tourism in Uzbekistan'³⁷⁷, which was an additional step to the first decree on the development of tourism issued in 2016. This decree was signed with two annexes, namely the Concept of Tourism Development in the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2019-2025, which I will refer to as the Concept in this chapter, and the document containing details of the implementation of the Concept referred to as the Realization of the Concept for 2019-2025.

The Decree on Additional Measures to Develop Tourism (2019), similar to the first decree signed in December 2016, emphasizes tourism's importance as one of the most significant and strategic sectors of the Uzbek economy. It also highlights the need for visa facilitation and improved transport infrastructure to attract more international tourists to Uzbekistan.

In this regard, the Decree on Additional Measures to Develop Tourism focuses the main tools of the tourism policy, including the development of tourism infrastructure and the creation of an accessible and comfortable tourist environment, the diversification of tourism products and services aimed at success in different segments of the tourism market, the development of domestic tourism and the promotion of the tourism product of the Republic of Uzbekistan in the international and domestic tourism markets, the strengthening of the image of the country as a safe country for travel and tourism purposes and the importance of the facilitation of visa policy and the improvement of transport infrastructure.

In order to increase the flow of tourists, the decree introduces a new simplified procedure for granting visas to foreigners in Uzbekistan, which I will discuss in detail in the section on visa policy. In addition, the development of the aviation industry and the invitation of foreign airlines to Uzbekistan is also one of the main

³⁷⁷ “Ukaz Prezidenta Uzbekistan o Dopolnitelnyh Merah po Uskorennomu Razvitiyu Turizma v Respublike Uzbekistan.” (Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Additional Measures for the Acceleration of the Development of Tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan) dated 05.01.2019, No UP-5611. Available at: <https://lex.uz/ru/docs/4143186?ONDATE=24.05.2023>. Accessed on 25 January 2025

focuses of the said decree issued in 2019. According to the decree, in order to improve air connections between Uzbekistan and source tourism markets, a working group will be established to significantly improve Uzbekistan's logistical attractiveness and coordinate work on attracting foreign airlines to local airports. I will analyze this in detail in the Transportation section as well.

This decree also contributes by revealing the "Concept" of tourism development in Uzbekistan for 2019-2025. The concept determines the concrete steps of the government bodies for tourism development. It also aims to facilitate the process for private companies to become part of the international tourism industry. Finally, the concept provides strategic guidance in line with the state's tourism policy guidelines.

The concept emphasizes the importance of cooperation between the state and the private sector, as well as the need to attract investment in tourism, as follows: Implementing targeted measures to attract the private sector and stimulate entrepreneurial activity, thus ensuring the necessary conditions for the stable development of the industry; the introduction and widespread use of public-private partnership mechanisms.³⁷⁸

The concept gives details of the main tools of the tourism policy process as follows:

- Development of tourism and related infrastructure in all regions of the Republic, taking into account the needs and requirements of tourists and visitors
- The development of transport infrastructure, the development of external and internal routes, and the improvement of the quality of transport services
- Implementing comprehensive measures to reduce the impact of seasonality by diversifying tourism products and services to attract visitors from different tourism segments.

³⁷⁸ “Kontseptsiya Razvitiya Turizma v Respublike Uzbekistan v 2019-2025.” (Concept of Development of the Tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan for the period 2019-2025. Appendix No.1 to the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated 05.01.2019 No UP-5611) Available at:

[https://nrm.uz/contentf?doc=574255_koncepciya_razvitiya_sfery_turizma_v_respublike_uzbekistan_v_2019-2025_godah_\(prilozhenie_n_1_k_ukazu_prezidenta_ruz_ot_05_01_2019_g_n_up-5611\).](https://nrm.uz/contentf?doc=574255_koncepciya_razvitiya_sfery_turizma_v_respublike_uzbekistan_v_2019-2025_godah_(prilozhenie_n_1_k_ukazu_prezidenta_ruz_ot_05_01_2019_g_n_up-5611).)

Accessed on 12 October 2024

- Development of domestic tourism with the aim of stimulating the domestic economy, with a focus on the satisfaction of needs for tourism services within the republic.
- To promote the tourism products of the Republic of Uzbekistan in the domestic and foreign tourism markets, strengthening the image of the country as a safe and preferred tourist destination.
- Improvement of the qualification of the employees who provide service in the tourism sector of Uzbekistan.³⁷⁹

The concept also contains concrete goals in the field of tourism and a very detailed road map called "Action Plan for 2019 for the implementation of the Concept of Tourism Development in the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2019-2025."

Moreover, in order to ensure the achievement of the objectives of the concept, to monitor the process of implementation of the policy instruments of tourism, and also to enable systematic control over the implementation, coordination, and resolution of problematic issues hindering the development of tourism in Uzbekistan, a Coordination Council has been established, which will carry out the above-mentioned process through a public-private partnership, i.e. the members of the said committee are to be composed of both tourism industry representatives and state officials.

Suffice it to say that the Concept plays an important role in the development process of tourism in Uzbekistan. Therefore, in the following sections, I will analyze the main instruments of Uzbek tourism policy by reviewing the concept of tourism development together with its annexed documents, trying to link the country's concrete tourism development policy with the developmental state policy on tourism. However, before moving it, it would be better to briefly focus on the governmental bodies responsible for the implementation of tourism policies in the country.

³⁷⁹ "Kontseptsiya Razvitiya Turizma v Respublike Uzbekistan v 2019-2025." (Concept of Development of the Tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan for the period 2019-2025. Appendix No.1 to the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated 05.01.2019 No UP-5611) Available at: [https://nrm.uz/contentf?doc=574255_koncepciya_razvitiya_sfery_turizma_v_respublike_uzbekistan_v_2019-2025_godah_\(prilojenie_n_1_k_ukazu_prezidenta_ruz_ot_05_01_2019_g_n_up-5611\)](https://nrm.uz/contentf?doc=574255_koncepciya_razvitiya_sfery_turizma_v_respublike_uzbekistan_v_2019-2025_godah_(prilojenie_n_1_k_ukazu_prezidenta_ruz_ot_05_01_2019_g_n_up-5611)). Accessed on 12 October 2024

5.4. Institutional Framework of Tourism

It is important to establish a tourism institution with greater powers and competence, recognized by other institutions, to revive the fledgling tourism sector, to develop tourism in the country by encouraging and guiding the private sector, and also to carry out the necessary controls and inspections in the necessary areas of tourism to provide the highest quality and safety services.

While the Mirziyoyev administration has made great efforts to create a legal framework for the tourism industry and to guide the private sector through incentive and subsidy policies, the government body responsible for tourism has not been stable since 2016. The state body responsible for tourism policy has changed several times since Mirziyoyev's term in office began. On the one hand, frequent changes in the status and structure of state bodies responsible for tourism are a common phenomenon in the post-Soviet space, but on the other hand, in the case of Uzbekistan, it may be related to changing conditions in the tourism sector at a time when Uzbekistan has become a more preferred tourist destination as a result of aggressive tourism policies and promotional activities. In addition, the fact that the tourism sector was hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic in 2020-2021 may also be an important reason for these frequent shifts.

As mentioned above, the first decree on tourism in December 2016 established the State Committee for the Development of Tourism as the sole body responsible for tourism. However, a decree signed by Mirziyoyev on 6 April 2021, entitled 'On measures to further improve the system of public administration in the sphere of tourism, sport and cultural heritage', heralds the creation of the Ministry of Tourism and Sport. The reasons for raising the status of tourism from the level of the State Committee to the level of the Ministry were classified in the said decree as follows: Despite the opportunities created in the sphere of tourism, the development of tourism, sport and cultural heritage is not organized at the appropriate level, and there are unresolved issues of digitization and public-private partnership, including increasing the role of the private sector in these areas.³⁸⁰

³⁸⁰ “Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan O Merah po Dal’neyshemu Sovershenstvovaniyu Sistemy Gosudarstvennogo Upravleniya v Sferah Turizma, Sporta i Kulturnogo Naslediya.” (Decree of the

Less than a year later, Mirziyoyev signed a new decree on 18th February 2022 entitled 'On organizational measures to improve state management in the areas of tourism, cultural heritage, and sport.' As a result of this decree the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Heritage was established. The decree justified the change in the status of the state tourism organization as follows

The promotion of the policy of openness, rich cultural heritage and tourism has led to a significant increase in the number of tourists visiting our country in recent years. The pandemic has also had a negative impact on this sector. However, it is necessary to radically improve the efficiency of accelerating the development of tourism services in the country, especially the improvement of infrastructure, greater use of opportunities for pilgrimage and domestic tourism, and strengthening the protection of cultural heritage sites.³⁸¹

In December 2022, the status of the Ministry changed again, and the State Organization for Tourism became the "Ministry of Culture and Tourism." Finally, with the entry into force of the Decree signed on 27 July 2023 and entitled "On measures for the efficient organization of public administration in the field of culture and tourism within the framework of administrative reforms," the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Ecology, Environment, and Climate Change were established separately, replacing the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and the State Organization for Tourism was finalized as the Committee for Tourism and the Committee was affiliated to the Ministry of Ecology, Environment and Climate Change. The reasons for linking tourism with the environment and ecology are given in the above-mentioned decree as follows:

The Republic is gradually and effectively working on the accelerated development of the culture and tourism sector. At the same time, it is necessary to work on the diversification of tourist services, especially on the development of ecotourism for domestic and foreign tourists, making fuller

President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Measures to Further Improve the System of State Management in the Spheres of Tourism, Sport and Cultural Heritage) dated 06.04.2021, No UP-6199. Available at: <https://www.lex.uz/uz/docs/5356753>. Accessed on 12 October 2024

³⁸¹ “Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan Ob Organizatsionnyh Merah po Sovershenstvovaniyu Gosudarstvennogo Upravleniya v Sferah Turizma, Kul’turnogo Naslediya i Sporta.” (Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Organizational Measures to Improve State Management in the Spheres of Tourism, Cultural Heritage and Sport) dated 18.02.2022 No UP-75. Available at: <https://www.lex.uz/uz/docs/5868607>. Accessed on 25 January 2025

use of the opportunities of eco-zones, mountain and desert areas, and water protection zones of the country's water bodies.³⁸²

Until the beginning of 2025, the state body in charge of tourism is the State Committee, which operates under the Ministry of Ecology, Environment and Climate Change.

On the other hand, a relatively different and unusual organization, especially for post-Soviet states in the field of tourism, was established by a decree issued by Mirziyoyev in 2018. To this end, in February 2018, a state unitary enterprise “The National Public Relation (PR) Centre” was established by a presidential decree entitled 'On additional organizational measures for the creation of favorable conditions for the development of the tourism potential of the Republic of Uzbekistan.³⁸³ The tasks and responsibilities of the organization the National PR Centre, which is to report to the State Tourism Committee, are defined in the decree as the promotion of Uzbekistan’s tourism products and tourism destinations. The main duties of the National PR Centre are classified as follows:

- Participation with the national stand of Uzbekistan in international tourism exhibitions.
- Organizing a wide range of business events: briefings, round tables, press conferences, major conferences, and forums - both in Uzbekistan and abroad.
- Organizing events to promote the country's rich cultural heritage: international exhibitions, fairs, forums, and festivals.
- Development and distribution of promotional materials (brand books, magazines, brochures, booklets, flyers, booklets, press volumes, gift sets, and souvenirs with the company logo).

³⁸² “Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan o Merah po Efektivnoi Organizatsii Gosudarstvennogo Upravleniya v sfere Kultury i Yurizma v ramkah Administrativnyh Reform.” (Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Measures for Effective Organisation of State Management in the Sphere of Culture and Tourism within the Framework of Administrative Reforms) dated 27.07.2023, No UP-114 Available at: <https://lex.uz/docs/6547939>. Accessed on 26 January 2025

³⁸³ “Ukaz Prezidenta Uzbekistana O Dopol’nitelnyh Organizatsionnyh Merah po Sozdaniyu Blagopriyatnyh Usloviy dlya Razvitiya Turisticheskogo Potentsiala Respubliki Uzbekistan.” (Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Additional Organizational Measures to Create Favorable Conditions for the Development of the Tourism Potential of the Republic of Uzbekistan) dated 03.02.2018, No UP-5326 available at: <https://lex.uz/docs/3548463>. Accessed on 26 January 2025

- Production and distribution of promotional materials for events and diplomatic missions abroad.
- Developing and writing PR materials, articles, press releases, reports, social network posts.
- Digital promotion. Development of websites of any complexity from scratch, including promotion and SEO optimization.
- Brand development and promotion in mass media and social networks.³⁸⁴

As can be seen from the tasks, the National PR Centre of Uzbekistan acts as the official PR agency of Uzbek tourism authority and manages the whole process of PR activities to increase the country's visibility in the world. In the promotion section of the chapter, I will analyze the National PR Centre's activities and contributions to the promotion policy of the destination in detail.

In addition to the above-mentioned decrees on tourism development and the concept of tourism development, Mirziyoyev signed several documents on the regulation and development of the tourism industry in Uzbekistan. While I will give the names and dates of some of the decrees related to the tourism industry below, most of them will be mentioned in the following sections, where I analyze the country's main tourism policy instruments.

Among the most important decrees, there are:

- On measures for a significant increase in the flow of foreign tourists to the republic and further promotion of domestic tourism (2024)
- On additional measures to improve tourism infrastructure and further increase the flow of foreign tourists to the Republic of Uzbekistan (2024)
- On the creation of additional conditions for the further development of tourism, culture, cultural heritage and sport in Uzbekistan (2022)
- On the establishment of the Tourist and Recreational Zone of the Charvak Region (2018)

³⁸⁴ “Official Web page of the National PR Centre of Uzbekistan.” Available at: <https://nationalprcenter.uz/o-nas-2/>. Accessed on 26 January 2025

- On the establishment of the Silk Road International University of Tourism (2018)
- On the priority measures for the development of tourism for the period 2018-2019 (2017)

Having gained a general understanding of Uzbekistan's tourism management strategy and theoretical tourism development policy documents, we can now move on to analyzing practical measures and their tangible contribution to Uzbekistan's tourism sector.

5.5. Main Tourism Policies

In this section of the chapter, I will review the main tourism policy instruments and their impact on the development of tourism policy in Uzbekistan. In this regard, I will analyze the visa policy of the Mirziyoyev administration in relation to international tourist flows to the country. This will be followed by the policy of tourism infrastructure development and transport development. I will then focus on Uzbekistan's promotional activities, as they play a crucial role in increasing the visibility and building the positive image of any destination. This will be followed by the policy of training employees in the tourism industry, as the level of service quality is crucial for a country aiming to become an international tourist destination. Finally, I will briefly analyze Uzbekistan's international relations in the field of tourism, especially with those countries that can be classified as source markets in terms of tourist flows, as well as with international tourism organizations.

5.5.1. Visa Policies

Like other economic sectors, tourism is influenced by the dynamics of supply and demand. The complexity of the tourism industry lies in the fact that the dynamics of supply and demand in tourism are not purely economic. It is influenced by a wide range of factors, some of which are not economic. International relations and cultural factors can positively or negatively impact international tourism. Visa regimes determine the control of the movement of citizens of other nationalities through a

country's borders. Therefore, the visa policies of a country may have a restricting or encouraging effect on inbound mobility from foreign nations.³⁸⁵

International tourist movement can only be achieved through cross-border movement. This can be achieved solely by complying with the visa policy of the host country. Host countries set their visa policies according to their own political priorities. In this sense, countries must choose between security and economic priorities when setting their visa policies. It can be said that almost every state relying on tourism revenues is conflicted between encouraging international tourist movement by facilitating its visa regime for its own economic priorities and controlling and preventing international movement for its security interests in order to avoid illegal immigration and potential threats to its countries.

If a destination's visa policy is restrictive, it can hinder the international tourist flow; on the other hand, if it is liberal, it facilitates the flow to that particular destination. Concerning the impact of visa policies on international tourism, Eric Neumayer argues that

The vast majority of states impose visa restrictions on travelers from some foreign countries. Such restrictions are likely to deter foreign visitors from affected countries. They will, therefore, reduce the flow of tourists, businesspeople, and other travelers and thereby damage a country's tourism industry, reduce its trade, and affect its scientific, cultural, and other exchanges with foreign countries.³⁸⁶

On the other hand, the complicated and complex procedures for obtaining a visa have a negative impact on the final destination decisions of citizens of developed countries. The facilitation of visa procedures plays a positive role, while the citizens of the developed countries are in control of choosing which destination to visit. As these citizens have a wide range of visa-free travel options, any visa restrictions may hinder their willingness to visit that particular destination. As a result, liberal visa

³⁸⁵ Karaman, Abdullah S. "The Pernicious Impact of Visa Restrictions on Inbound Tourism: The Case of Turkey." *Turkish Studies* ISSN: 1468-3849 (Print) 1743-9663 (Online), 2016, DOI: [10.1080/14683849.2016.1170602](https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2016.1170602)

³⁸⁶ Neumayer, Eric. "Visa Restrictions and Bilateral Travel." *The Professional Geographer*, 62(2), 171–181. 2010, Doi: [10.1080/00330121003600835](https://doi.org/10.1080/00330121003600835)

policies for developing countries become more important in attracting visitors from developed countries, who have relatively more purchasing power. Developing a competitive tourism and travel sector internationally requires a certain degree of openness and travel facilitation. Restrictive policies such as cumbersome visa requirements diminish tourists' willingness to visit a country and indirectly reduce the availability of key services.³⁸⁷

In its 2023 report, the UNWTO highlights facilitated visa policies' role in the destination decision-making process. It states that:

Despite the progress made, current visa policies are still often inadequate, inefficient, and unnecessary burdens for international travelers. Travelers see visas mainly as a formality with costs. Suppose the cost of obtaining a visa – either the direct monetary cost imposed in the form of fees or the indirect costs, which may include distance, time spent waiting in lines, and the complexity of the process – exceeds a certain threshold. In that case, potential travelers may be deterred from making a particular journey or may choose an alternative destination that is easier accessible.³⁸⁸

Some studies aim to reveal the impact of visa regimes and the detrimental effects of imposing visa restrictions on international tourists. Karaman points out that visa facilitation is crucial for developing or less developed countries seeking international visitors from developed countries as follows:

Visa restrictions impact is on the higher side for countries with almost visa-free travel. Many other visa-free travel alternatives are available for this cluster and their citizens try to avoid the burden of obtaining a visa as much as they can. The deterring impact goes down for the low-segment countries the citizens of which do not have many visa-free alternatives to travel and whose citizens have to face the trouble of gathering a visa in any manner. Visa restrictions imposed on certain countries divert tourist flows to visa-free destinations, benefitting developing countries with tourism potential. This

³⁸⁷ “The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2019: Travel and Tourism at a Tipping Point.” World Economic Forum, p.5. Available at: https://www.weforum.org/publications/the-travel-tourism-competitiveness-report-2019/?gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAjw-qi_BhBxEiwAkxvbkNCSbNpeoH87QYg-Fb1C8zeZWV_PfIA0ONUwR6Oa4qylqqaZY7dJuxoCFr4QAvD_BwE. Accessed on 10 December 2024.

³⁸⁸ “UNWTO Tourism Visa Openness Report 2023.” Available at: www.e-unwto.org/doi/abs/10.18111/9789284425044. Accessed on 24 January 2025

result has important policy implications for developing countries that need to attract more tourists.³⁸⁹

Jaume Rossello and María Santana-Gallego worked on a research model called the structural gravity model for tourism demand to quantify the effect of different types of visas. Their research suggests that the presence of a visa requirement, regardless of its type, significantly reduces tourism flows (approximately 80%). Any alteration in the visa policy toward greater openness implies an increase in international tourist arrivals.³⁹⁰

When Mirziyoyev became president of Uzbekistan in December 2016, the country had a complicated and more security-oriented visa policy. This complicated visa application process was an obstacle to welcoming international visitors and developing the tourism industry. Considering this, the visa issue took up a large space in the Decree on the Rapid Development of the Tourism Industry, which was issued in December 2016. With regard to the visa facilitation process, Article 1 of the said Decree states that "the laws in force shall be designed to eliminate all obstacles and barriers to the development of tourism, simplifying visa and registration procedures and passport and customs control".³⁹¹

In addition to that, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been instructed to work on regulations and measures to enable a visa-free regime for international tourists visiting Uzbekistan by the beginning of 2017. Moreover, Mirziyoyev decreed that tourism would be a government priority and announced that an ambitious visa-free regime for a range of countries in Europe and Asia would be introduced from April 1, 2017.³⁹²

³⁸⁹ Karaman, Abdullah S. "The Pernicious Impact of Visa Restrictions on Inbound Tourism: The Case of Turkey." *Turkish Studies* ISSN: 1468-3849 (Print) 1743-9663 (Online), 2016, Doi: [10.1080/14683849.2016.1170602](https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2016.1170602)

³⁹⁰ Rossello, Jaume Santana Gallego Maris. "The Effects of Visa Type on International Tourism." *Economic Modelling* Volume 137 (C) August 2024, Doi: 10.1016/j.econmod.2024.106757.

³⁹¹ "Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan, O Merah po Obespecheniyu Uskorennogo Razvitiya Turistskoi Oblasti Respubliki Uzbekistan." (Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Measures to Ensure Accelerated Development of the Tourism Industry of the Republic of Uzbekistan) dated 02.12.2016, No UP-4861 2.12.2016. Available at: <https://lex.uz/docs/3077023>. Accessed on 12 October 2024

³⁹² Toktanaliev, Timur. "Opening Up Uzbekistan to Tourism." Available at: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/opening-uzbekistan-tourism>. Accessed on 25 January 2025

However, Mirziyoyev had to postpone this decision because of the negative reactions coming from the state security organs, mainly from the National Security Service. Therefore, in the same month, December 2016, Mirziyoyev signed a new decree entitled “Amendments and additions to the Decree on Measures to Ensure Accelerated Development of the Tourism Industry of the Republic of Uzbekistan,” and postponed the visa-free Regime for 27 Countries to 2021. The postponement can be explained by the Uzbek authorities continuing to view visa issues from a security rather than an economic perspective.

Throughout 2017, there was no progress on visa facilitation in Uzbekistan. However, 2018 marked a more successful new beginning. In December 2017, Mirziyoyev’s year-end address featured harsh criticism directed at the National Security Service. He points out that:

The main goal is to prevent the concentration of all powers and resources in the hands of one agency and the violation of the principle of checks and balances. At the same time, it should be noted that the bodies of the National Security Service operate on the basis of the regulations adopted by the Government 26 years ago. It should be emphasized that the regulations have not been amended for more than a quarter of a century, and all problems have been assessed as a threat to national security, leading to an unjustified expansion of this agency's powers.³⁹³

Perhaps tourism development and facilitating visas for international visitors were among the problems Mirziyoyev mentioned in his year-end feature and which security officials considered a threat to national security. As a result, in January 2018, Mirziyoyev's first move was to remove the head of the National Security Service, who had been in charge since 1995 and was also seen as a focal point of opposition to the liberal visa policy.³⁹⁴

³⁹³ “Poslanie Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan Shavkata Mirziyoyeva Oliy Mazhlisu.” (Address of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev to the Uzbek Parliament) 22.12.2017, dated 22.12.2017. Available at: <https://president.uz/ru/lists/view/1371>. Accessed on 26 January 2025

³⁹⁴ “Uzbekistan Dismisses Long-Serving and Much-Feared Security Service Chief.” Available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2018/02/uzbekistan-dismisses-long-serving-and-much-feared-security-service-chief/>. Accessed on 25 January 2025

On 3 February 2018, the President of Uzbekistan issued another decree in the field of tourism, named "On Additional Organizational Measures to Create Favorable Conditions for the Development of the Tourism Potential of the Republic of Uzbekistan." This decree was the first step in Uzbekistan's liberalized visa policy after the postponement. According to this decree, From 10 February 2018, citizens of seven countries - Israel, Indonesia, South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Turkey, and Japan - together with the cabin crew of foreign airlines operating regular flights to Uzbekistan will be granted visa-free access up to 30 days.³⁹⁵ This decision can be regarded as symbolic of the development of the country's tourism industry in the sense that for the first time in the Republic of Uzbekistan, citizens of some non-post-Soviet states have been granted free visa entry to the country.

Since the Karimov era, citizens of nine post-Soviet states have enjoyed a visa-free regime: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan. This decree brings the total number of countries for which citizens enjoy a visa-free regime to sixteen.

The Mirziyoyev government selected the first visa-free countries based on their potential for international tourist flows. Indonesia, Malaysia, South Korea, Israel, Singapore and Japan have the highest tourist spending. Turkey, which is culturally close to Uzbekistan, also has potential for the Uzbek tourism industry as a source tourism market.

Furthermore, with the same decree, a simplified procedure for issuing tourist visas, which provides for the cancellation of the required documents, such as a tourist voucher or an appeal by the inviting legal or natural person in Uzbekistan before applying for a visa, and also the issuance of a visa within two working days, has been introduced for 39 countries, including most European countries, China, the USA, and Australia.

³⁹⁵ "Ukaz Prezidenta Uzbekistana O Dopol'nitelnyh Organizatsionnyh Merah po Sozdaniyu Blagopriyatnyh Usloviy dlya Razvitiya Turisticheskogo Potentsiala Respubliki Uzbekistan." (Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Additional Organizational Measures to Create Favorable Conditions for the Development of the Tourism Potential of the Republic of Uzbekistan) dated 03.02.2018, No UP-5326 available at: <https://lex.uz/docs/3548463>. Accessed on 26 January 2025

Moreover, in March 2018, Uzbekistan abolished visa requirements for Tajik citizens, which had been in place since 2001, an important step as a result of the rapprochement between the two countries, which has been a major focus of the Mirziyoyev administration.³⁹⁶ In addition to this, two other potential tourism source markets, France and Germany, were also added to the visa-free list by the Mirziyoyev administration by October 2018 and January 2019, respectively.³⁹⁷

Mirziyoyev issued another resolution on visa facilitation in July 2018, entitled “On further measures to improve the procedure for entry of foreign nationals into the Republic of Uzbekistan”. According to the resolution, on 15 July 2018, Uzbekistan introduced the easiest way to obtain a visa, an online application process known as an electronic visa (e-visa) for citizens of 77 countries, including the United States. A single or multiple-entry electronic visa is valid for 30 days.³⁹⁸

The e-visa facility has become a smooth process for any foreigner visiting Uzbekistan. This decision also abolished the requirement for foreign citizens to apply to Uzbek diplomatic missions and consular offices abroad before visiting the country. The registration and issuance of electronic entry visas in Uzbekistan is carried out through a website called e-visa.uz.³⁹⁹ The cost of obtaining an e-visa for a single-entry electronic visa is \$35 (\$50 for multiple entries), and travelers must apply for the e-visa at least three days before departure.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁶ “Uzbekistan i Tazhikistan Otmenil Vizoviy Rejim Vvedeny Mezhdunarodnymi Stranami v 2001 Godu.” (Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have Abolished the Visa Regime that was Introduced between the two Countries in 2001) Available at: <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/5018793>. Accessed on 26 January 2025

³⁹⁷ “Bezvizovyy Rejim Rasprostranen eshe 45 Stran.” (Visa Free Regime has been expanded to 45 Countries) Available at: <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2019/01/05/visa-free/>. Accessed on 26 January 2025

³⁹⁸ “Tourism Development in Uzbekistan- Challenges and Opportunities, Special Policy Brief by Caspian Policy Center.” Available at: <https://www.caspianpolicy.org/research/report/special-policy-brief-tourism-development-in-uzbekistan-challenges-and-opportunities-9656>. Accessed on 26 December 2024

³⁹⁹ “Postanavlenie Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan, O Dal’neysih Merah po Optimizatsii Poryadka Vyezda Inostrannykh Grazhdan v Respubliku Uzbekistan.” (Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Further Measures to Improve the Procedure of Entry of Foreign Citizens into the Republic of Uzbekistan) dated 04.07.2018, No PP-3836. Available at: <https://lex.uz/ru/docs/3810645#3811726>. Accessed on 26 January 2025

⁴⁰⁰ “Ukaz Prezidenta Uzbekistan o Dopolnitelnykh Merah Po Uskorennomu Razvitiyu Turizma v Respublike Uzbekistan.” (Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Additional

The Uzbek government continued to work towards widening the scope of the visa-free regime to include other countries with potential as source tourism markets. Consequently, from 1 February 2019, Uzbekistan introduced a 30-day visa-free regime for citizens of 45 additional countries. This is stipulated in a new decree of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, "On additional measures to accelerate the development of tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan," signed on 5 January 2019. According to the decree, citizens of 45 countries, including European states, the United Kingdom, and Australia, have become eligible for visa-free entry to Uzbekistan.⁴⁰¹

On 13 August 2019, the Mirziyoyev administration issued another decree called "On Measures to Develop Tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan," which announced the list of 20 additional countries, mostly South American countries, that are included in the visa-free regime when visiting Uzbekistan.⁴⁰²

Finally, Mirziyoyev signed a decree on the 9th of February 2021 named as "On measures to develop domestic and pilgrimage tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan" According to this decree visa-free regime for citizens of the Kingdom of Bahrain, the State of Kuwait, the Sultanate of Oman and the People's Republic of China, including the Special Administrative Regions of Hong Kong and Macao of the People's Republic of China, for a period of 10 days from the date of entry into the territory of the Republic of Uzbekistan was established.⁴⁰³ The visa-free regime with

Measures for the Acceleration of the Development of Tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan) dated 05.01.2019, No UP-5611. Available at: <https://lex.uz/ru/docs/4143186?ONDATE=24.05.2023>. Accessed on 25 January 2025

⁴⁰¹ "Ukaz Prezidenta Uzbekistan o Dopolnitelnyh Merah Po Uskorennomu Razvitiyu Turizma v Respublike Uzbekistan." (Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Additional Measures for the Acceleration of the Development of Tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan) dated 05.01.2019, No UP-5611. Available at: <https://lex.uz/ru/docs/4143186?ONDATE=24.05.2023>. Accessed on 25 January 2025

⁴⁰² "Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan O merah Po Dal'neishemu Razvitiyu Sfery Turizma v Respublike Uzbekistan." (Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Measures to Develop Tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan) dated 13.08.2019, No-5781. Available at: <https://lex.uz/ru/docs/4474549#4475938>. Accessed on 26 January 2025

⁴⁰³ Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan, O merah po Dal'neyshemu Razvitiyu Vnutrennego i Palomnicheskogo Turizma v Respublike Uzbekistan." (Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Measures for Further Development of Domestic and Pilgrimage Tourism in the

the Republic of China, one of the most potential source markets for international tourism, was extended to 30 days reciprocally as a result of the official meeting of the foreign ministers of both countries in 2024.⁴⁰⁴

As a result, by 2025, the number of countries whose citizens can enjoy a visa-free regime when visiting Uzbekistan will have reached 90. For almost all other countries, including the USA, India, and Saudi Arabia, an electronic visa is required, which is also a relatively smooth process for obtaining a visa while visiting Uzbekistan.

Regarding regional cooperation and the revival of the Silk Road tourism potential, Uzbekistan has made some efforts towards the "Silk Road Visa," allowing one to visit Silk Road countries with a single visa. Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan planned to launch a unified service project called the "Silk Road Visa." The project is still under discussion by the beginning of 2025 but gained support from representatives of the tourism departments of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan during the first Tourism Fair of the CIS countries. The ultimate goal of the "Silk Road Visa" is to create an "Asian Schengen all Central Asian countries in the system."⁴⁰⁵

Aziz Abdukhakimov, who used to be the Head of the State Tourism Committee, stated that with the president of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev's approval of the roadmap for the development of tourism which provides the launch of a single Silk Road visa regime for tourists traveling to the countries of the Great Silk Road, should be available soon.⁴⁰⁶ However, with the hit of the pandemic of Covid-19, the

Republic of Uzbekistan) dated 09.02.2021, No UP-6165. Available at: <https://lex.uz/ru/docs/5283959>. Accessed on 26 January 2025

⁴⁰⁴ "Mezhdu Uzbekistanom and Kitaem Vveden 30 Dnevny Bevizony Rejim." (30-day Visa-free Regime Introduced Between Uzbekistan and China) Available at: <https://www.inform.kz/ru/30-dnevniy-bevizoviy-rezhim-vveden-mezhdu-uzbekistanom-i-kitaem-29a59c>. Accessed on 26 January 2025

⁴⁰⁵ "Tourism Development in Uzbekistan- Challenges and Opportunities, Special Policy Brief by Caspian Policy Center." Available at: <https://www.caspianpolicy.org/research/report/special-policy-brief-tourism-development-in-uzbekistan-challenges-and-opportunities-9656>. Accessed on 26 December 2024

⁴⁰⁶ "Silk Road Visa Launch Expected Before Year End." Available at: <https://www.apta.uz/en/news/72>. Accessed on 26 January 2025

common visa project for most of the Turkic states had to be postponed. On the other hand, with the initiative of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, the so-called “Silk Road” or “Asian-Schengen” visa should be launched by 2025. According to the idea, a ‘Silk Road visa’ holder can enter one of the Central Asian countries and then move freely through the territory of other regional republics. The plans also include involving Azerbaijan and Turkey in this project.⁴⁰⁷

Mirziyoyev inherited a security-oriented and complex visa policy from the Karimov administration. This complicated visa application process hindered Uzbekistan's efforts to develop its tourism industry. The newly elected President of Uzbekistan sought to immediately begin solving this problem through a decree issued a few days after his election. However, the legacy of the Karimov period and the perception of a security-oriented visa policy led to the postponement of this initiative for about a year.

The dismissal of the head of the National Security Service symbolized the overturning of the legacy of Karimov's security-oriented visa policy; Uzbekistan accelerated the visa facilitation process for international visitors planning to experience the destination. As a result of the tourism-oriented visa policy, by 2025, Uzbekistan has become the most liberal country in the post-Soviet region in terms of visa policy. Consequently, the visa facilitation policy through free visa and e-visa tools plays a critical role in increasing the number of international visitors and ultimately will contribute to economic growth and the development of the tourism industry in Uzbekistan.

5.5.2. Development of Tourism Infrastructure

Uzbekistan inherited an inadequate tourism infrastructure from the Soviet era. During the Soviet period, tourism was not a priority sector. In addition, the country did not compete with other destinations, and visitors to the Soviet Union, particularly Uzbekistan, traveled without expecting high service and infrastructure quality levels.

⁴⁰⁷ “Shelkovaya Viza.” (Silk Road Visa) Available at: <https://ekonomika.media/shyolkovaya-viza/>. Accessed on 26 January 2025

In other words, improved tourism infrastructure was unimportant to Uzbekistan tourists.

In the post-Soviet period, although Uzbekistan took steps to improve its tourism infrastructure under the first President, Islam Karimov, these policies were insufficient to adequately improve its tourism infrastructure. Although the tourism sector has become more important under Karimov than it was during the Soviet period, it has still not become one of the country's leading sectors, and the number of foreign visitors has remained limited during this period. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the present territory of Uzbekistan was located at the crossroads of different cultures and was the main host of the ancient Silk Road. The country has many historical, archaeological, and ecological sites along the ancient Silk Road, which offer great potential for attracting international visitors.

Investment provides the resources for the construction and improvement of tourism projects that are crucial for tourism development and the growth of tourism capacity. Tourism investment brings many benefits, including economic growth, job creation, skills acquisition, export expansion, development of remote areas, providing quality infrastructure, and generating inward tourism flows and spending. The nature and the standard of the facilities and service infrastructure available to tourists are largely responsible for the success of any tourist destination. In all destinations, there is a need to develop an improved range of accommodation facilities, ancillary services (restaurants, bars, entertainment, shopping and transport), tourism enterprises (diving, snorkeling, fishing, sailing and visits to historical sites) and support services (travel brokering, visitor advice and professional services).⁴⁰⁸

Adequate infrastructure is a necessary condition for the development of tourism. Poor infrastructure is a deterrent to tourist flows, especially if a destination has competitors with similar tourism products or segments. Therefore, the quality and development of tourism infrastructure is crucial for the destination, as developing destinations compete with developed ones to catch up and strive to become one of

⁴⁰⁸ Dwyer Larry, Forsyth Peter, Dwyer Wayne. "Tourism Economics and Policy." Bristol: View Publications. 2020, p. 293

them. The operation of tourism facilities, services, and amenities heavily depends on the available quantity and quality of infrastructure. These facilities and service infrastructure provide complimentary experiences that contribute to the overall perception of a tourism destination.⁴⁰⁹

Uzbekistan is home to several unique cultural heritage sites. The country has 4,000 rare historical monuments housed with many other unique architectural mausoleums, minarets, and mosques in the ancient cities of Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva. Based on these archaeological discoveries, Uzbekistan is now ranked ninth in the world for the total number of historical and architectural monuments.⁴¹⁰

Cultural tourism has become the main focus of the current Uzbek administration in developing tourism. With the growth of leisure travel and tourism movement, objects of cultural policy and cultural heritage, which would turn into museums, galleries, and festivals, have already become the objects of tourist desire and, therefore, a tool for economic growth and development. The tourist brand of Uzbekistan has been formed since the emergence of the Great Silk Road; Uzbekistan has world-famous cities (Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva, Shakhrisabz, Termez). There are 8.2 thousand cultural heritage sites, some of which are included in the UNESCO World Heritage List.⁴¹¹

The country's main cultural attractions include the ancient city of Khiva, one of the oldest cities in the world and is renowned for its unique architecture and historical monuments. Samarkand was the center of the Golden Horde and one of the largest cities in Central Asia in the Middle Ages. It is home to monuments such as Registan, Guri Emir, Shah-i-Zinda, and many others. Bukhara is one of the oldest cities in Central Asia. It is famous for its architecture, mosques, madrassas, and many other

⁴⁰⁹ Dwyer Larry, Forsyth Peter, Dwyer Wayne. "Tourism Economics and Policy." Bristol: View Publications. 2020, p. 328

⁴¹⁰ Patterson Ian Robert, Tureav Hamid. "New Developments in Promoting Tourism in Uzbekistan." *Journal of Tourismology*, Year 2020, Volume: 6 Issue: 2, 201, doi.org/10.26650/jot.2020.6.2.0005

⁴¹¹ İbragimova Naylya, Alisherovic Nurbek. "Povyshenie Roli Turizma kak Vazhnoi Otrasti Ekonomiki Uzbekistana." (Strengthening the Role of Tourism as an Important Sector of the Uzbek Economy) Available at: <https://imrs.uz/files/publications/ru/296396.pdf>. Accessed on 26 January 2025

historical monuments. In addition, the capital city of Tashkent, where you can see many interesting sights such as the Museum of Art of Uzbekistan, Abu Bakr Kaffal Shashi Mausoleum, Navoi Park, has huge potential for the different types of tourism segments such as cultural, experiential, meetings, incentives, conferences, exhibitions (MICE) and gastronomy.

The country is also rich in natural attractions. Charvak is a lake in the Tien Shan Mountains, a popular place for swimming and recreation; Ugam-Chatkal National Park is a nature reserve in the Tien Shan Mountains, famous for its beautiful nature reserve where you can see wild animals and birds. Sharqiya and Western Alai Mountain systems - here, you can go skiing, snowboarding in winter, mountaineering, and hiking in summer.⁴¹²

Uzbekistan's 5 cultural and 2 natural heritage sites have been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The historical center of Bukhara (1993), the historical center of Shakhrisyabz (2000), Itchan Kala (1990), which is the inner city of the ancient oasis of Khiva, the historical city of Samarkand (2001) and the Zarafshan-Karakum corridor (2023), which is a key section of the Silk Roads in Central Asia, connecting other corridors from all directions, have been included in the UNESCO World Heritage List.⁴¹³ In addition, Uzbekistan has 2 UNESCO natural sites: Cold Winter Deserts of Turan and Western Tien-Shan, which were added to the UNESCO Natural World Heritage List in 2023 and 2016 respectively.⁴¹⁴

In addition to cultural and nature tourism, Uzbekistan offers various tourism segments and has the potential to become a popular destination for various types of tourism, including culinary tourism, MICE tourism, business tourism, winter

⁴¹² Abduazimovna, Dinara. "Razvitie Turizma v Uzbekistane." (Development of Tourism in Uzbekistan) Science and Education Scientific Journal/May 2023/Volume 4 Issue 5. Available at: <https://openscience.uz/index.php/sciedu/article/view/5753>

⁴¹³ "UNESCO Uzbekistan." Available at: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/uz/>. Accessed on 26 January 2025

⁴¹⁴ UNESCO Uzbekistan." Available at: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/uz/>. Accessed on 26 January 2025

tourism, adventure tourism, pilgrimage tourism, wildlife and ecological tourism, ethnographic tourism, sports tourism, and medical tourism.

As mentioned above, as soon as Mirziyoyev became the second president of Uzbekistan, he began to take steps to develop the country's tourism sector. Perhaps the most important of these steps, and the area where the characteristics of a developmental state economic and development model are most needed, is the development of tourism infrastructure. Larry Dwyer explains infrastructure as follows:

Infrastructure refers to the basic physical and organizational structures needed for the operation of a society or the services and facilities necessary for an economy to function. The term typically refers to the technical structures and assets that support a society, such as air transport infrastructure (air services, airports), ground transport infrastructure (roads, motorways, railways), water-based infrastructure (port facilities, marinas, cruise ship terminals), information communications technology (ICT) infrastructure (internet, post, telecommunications), water supply, waste disposal systems, energy and power generation, recreational assets and so forth.⁴¹⁵

Tourism infrastructure is the basic building block of a nation's growth, and it refers to the fundamental facilities, services, and systems that support tourism in a destination. These physical and organizational elements help tourists visit and enjoy a place while ensuring their safety and comfort.⁴¹⁶

There are several reasons why investment in tourism infrastructure is important. Good infrastructure can increase visitor satisfaction, which would increase the number of potential visitors, as the best advertisement for a destination is a satisfied visitor who speaks positively about the destination. Some of the other reasons why tourism infrastructure development is important include:

- The provision of tourism infrastructure is important for long-term tourism growth. Facilities are needed to serve the needs of visitors and to maintain relatively uninterrupted service levels.

⁴¹⁵ Dwyer Larry, Forsyth Peter, Dwyer Wayne. "Tourism Economics and Policy." Bristol: View Publications. 2020, p. 328

⁴¹⁶ "Importance of Tourism Infrastructure Development." Available at: <https://www.mywestford.com/blog/importance-of-tourism-infrastructure-development/>. Accessed on 26 January 2025

- The creation of infrastructure has an impact on the jobs market – both during the construction stage and in tourism operations.
- Infrastructure increases the efficiency of privately producing and distributing tourism services.
- The infrastructure on which a destination's tourism industry relies is a major determinant of its overall competitiveness, including destination 'experience' and perceived trip value.
- Developed destinations typically possess better quality infrastructure than developing destinations. It will take many years for emerging destinations to overcome these basic infrastructure differences.
- Public sector investment in tourism and community infrastructure may have both counter-cyclical and longer-term merits.⁴¹⁷

The most important components of the tourism infrastructure system are accommodation facilities, tourist attractions such as museums, cultural heritage sites, national parks, mountains, natural attractions, theme parks, and the transport system and transport facilities, which I will discuss separately in the transport section. Restaurants, tourist information centers, the high-quality services of tourist agencies that would provide quality service to visitors, qualified guides, and any product or service that an international or local tourist needs and uses are also components of the tourism infrastructure. The availability of international banking and payment systems, or the availability of online booking of hotels and air tickets, can be exemplified as a service that an international visitor uses while visiting Uzbekistan.

As the definition suggests, tourism infrastructure is a comprehensive concept. Compared to other tourism policy instruments, the development of tourism infrastructure is one of the most important areas requiring government contribution and intervention. As the number of tourists visiting a destination increases, it is important that the destination's infrastructure has the quality and capacity to cope. Today, the excessive influx of tourists in some countries is putting the problem of over-tourism on the agenda; inadequate infrastructure and the inability to meet the

⁴¹⁷ Dwyer Larry, Forsyth Peter, Dwyer Wayne. "Tourism Economics and Policy." Bristol: View Publications. 2020, p. 329

needs of a large number of tourists ultimately have a negative impact on the daily life of the local population, are provoking reactions and protests within the framework of over-tourism.⁴¹⁸

Therefore, infrastructure investment is seen as the key to tourism development for a developing country that wants to be a popular tourist destination. Infrastructure may become a competitive weapon when destinations seek to attract tourists. Adequate infrastructure is a necessary precondition of tourism growth, but so is the provision of the right type and quality of infrastructure at the right price.⁴¹⁹

After becoming president in December 2016, Mirziyoyev made it clear that tourism had already become a strategic sector for the Uzbek economy, which would stimulate economic growth and employment. The development of tourism infrastructure became one of the main focuses of Mirziyoyev's administration, and the government began to work on improving tourism infrastructure by December 2016.

As pointed out above, in December 2016, just days after being elected President of Uzbekistan, Mirziyoyev signed the first decree on tourism: 'Measures to Ensure the Rapid Development of the Tourism Industry of the Republic of Uzbekistan'. The first article of the decree described one of the priorities of state policy in the tourism sector in the medium term as follows:

In all regions of the country, accelerate the development of tourist industry facilities that meet modern world standards, needs and requirements of tourists, such as hotels and similar accommodation facilities, catering facilities, transport and logistics structures, information centers, cultural and sports facilities, advanced construction and reconstruction of road transport, engineering and communications infrastructure, roadside infrastructure along the main tourist routes, wide attraction of foreign investors for these purposes.⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁸ "Protests over Mass Tourism could Spread Beyond Spain, Says UNESCO Official." Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/aug/09/protests-mass-tourism-spain-europe-unesco>. Accessed on 26 January 2025

⁴¹⁹ Dwyer Larry, Forsyth Peter, Dwyer Wayne. "Tourism Economics and Policy." Bristol: View Publications. 2020, p. 346

⁴²⁰ "Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan, O Merah po Obespecheniyu Uskorennogo Razvitiya Turistskoi Oblasti Respubliki Uzbekistan." (Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on

The first decree on tourism development consisted of concrete subsidies and incentives for people and companies investing in the development of tourism infrastructure and accommodation facilities. In this regard, the decree recommends that the Central Bank and private banks support the tourism infrastructure development projects proposed by the State Tourism Committee. In addition, the exemption of customs duties for hotel investments is also mentioned in Article 12 of the Decree as follows: For a period of 5 years, legal entities are exempted from paying customs duties on imported equipment, machinery, raw materials, components and spare parts, construction and other materials (including furniture and fixtures) for the construction, reconstruction and equipping of hotels and other accommodation facilities.⁴²¹

The Decree "On additional measures for the rapid development of tourism in Uzbekistan," signed in 2019, emphasizes the importance and necessity of developing tourism infrastructure. As mentioned, the decree was signed with two annexes: the Concept of Tourism Development in the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2019-2025 and the Plan of Realization of the Concept for 2019-2025.

Chapter 3 of the Concept, entitled "Main areas of tourism development," which aims to identify the main objectives of tourism, mentions the following objectives in the area of improving tourism infrastructure:

- Development of tourism and related infrastructure in all regions of the Republic, taking into account the needs and requirements of tourists in particular;
- Development of a set of measures for the development of the tourist industry, including not only the construction of new and the reconstruction of existing accommodation facilities but also the development of related infrastructure

Measures to Ensure Accelerated Development of the Tourism Industry of the Republic of Uzbekistan) dated 02.12.2016, No UP-4861 2.12.2016. Available at: <https://lex.uz/docs/3077023>. Accessed on 12 October 2024

⁴²¹ "Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan, O Merah po Obespecheniyu Uskorennogo Razvitiya Turistskoi Oblasti Respubliki Uzbekistan." (Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Measures to Ensure Accelerated Development of the Tourism Industry of the Republic of Uzbekistan) dated 02.12.2016, No UP-4861 2.12.2016. Available at: <https://lex.uz/docs/3077023>. Accessed on 12 October 2024

(catering facilities, transport and logistics structures, entertainment industry, cultural and sports facilities, tourist exhibition facilities, etc.)

- Simplification of the mechanism for implementation of projects for the construction of hotels and other tourist infrastructure facilities, creation of additional conditions for entrepreneurs to improve the quality of their services, as well as stimulation of attraction of world-known brands of hotel business to Uzbekistan.
- Gradual development of accommodation facilities stimulating the construction of large, medium, and small hotels and hostels, as well as focusing on the reconstruction and modernization of existing hotels;⁴²²

The same chapter of the concept also includes a concrete target in terms of the number of accommodation facilities, their room capacity, and the number of tour operators, which play a key role in attracting international visitors to any destination, including Uzbekistan. Implementing the objectives of the concept will make it possible to develop tourism infrastructure in accordance with international standards by increasing the number of tour operators (travel agents or touristic agencies) from 860 to 1,676 units and the number of accommodation facilities from 850 to 3,000.⁴²³

As mentioned above, during the Mirziyoyev era, many legal and regulatory documents on tourism development were adopted, and theoretical policies and their practical implementation in all regions of the country aimed to exploit the huge tourism potential of the regions. Specific decrees have been issued on the development of tourism and tourism infrastructure in the country's popular tourist destinations such as Bukhara, Samarkand, and Khiva. More concrete and detailed

⁴²² “Kontsepsiya Razvitiya Turizma v Respublike Uzbekistan v 2019-2025.” (Concept of Development of the Tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan for the period 2019-2025. Appendix No.1 to the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated 05.01.2019 No UP-5611) Available at:

[https://nrm.uz/contentf?doc=574255_koncepciya_razvitiya_sfery_turizma_v_respublike_uzbekistan_v_2019-2025_godah_\(prilojenie_n_1_k_ukazu_prezidenta_ruz_ot_05_01_2019_g_n_up-5611\)](https://nrm.uz/contentf?doc=574255_koncepciya_razvitiya_sfery_turizma_v_respublike_uzbekistan_v_2019-2025_godah_(prilojenie_n_1_k_ukazu_prezidenta_ruz_ot_05_01_2019_g_n_up-5611)).

Accessed on 12 October 2024

⁴²³ “Kontsepsiya Razvitiya Turizma v Respublike Uzbekistan v 2019-2025.” (Concept of Development of the Tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan for the period 2019-2025. Appendix No.1 to the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated 05.01.2019 No UP-5611) Available at:

[https://nrm.uz/contentf?doc=574255_koncepciya_razvitiya_sfery_turizma_v_respublike_uzbekistan_v_2019-2025_godah_\(prilojenie_n_1_k_ukazu_prezidenta_ruz_ot_05_01_2019_g_n_up-5611\)](https://nrm.uz/contentf?doc=574255_koncepciya_razvitiya_sfery_turizma_v_respublike_uzbekistan_v_2019-2025_godah_(prilojenie_n_1_k_ukazu_prezidenta_ruz_ot_05_01_2019_g_n_up-5611))

plans can be seen in the specific decrees devoted to developing tourism and tourism infrastructure in particular tourist destinations.

In this regard, A decree was signed by Mirziyoyev in 2017 entitled “On measures to accelerate the development of tourism potential of Bukhara city and Bukhara region for 2017-2019”. The decree aims to increase the competitiveness and visibility of Bukhara and its historic center, which was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1993. This can be achieved by implementing a number of policies to create a new and improved image of Bukhara and the Bukhara region; by working on the modernization of urban and transport infrastructure along with increasing the number of entities involved in tourism activities, modern hotels, so that the flow of tourists from Europe, Africa, Asia and the CIS countries would increase. Some of the important objectives for the development of tourism in the region have been mentioned in Article 1 of the abovementioned decree, and they are as follows:

- Construction of new hotels, cultural and recreational centers, shopping and entertainment centers, and other tourist infrastructure facilities to create the necessary conditions for tourism development
- Improvement of the public catering system and creation of conditions for evening entertainment of tourists, including through the construction of modern restaurants, theatrical concert performances of Uzbek national music, demonstration of national customs and traditions on the territory of cultural heritage sites
- Creation of new tourist routes and development of new types of tourism, including through the development of tourist infrastructure around Agutma Lake in Shafirkan district, the overhaul of the Visitor Centre of the Zhairon Ecological Centre and construction of a zoological park around it, creation of necessary conditions for hunting, beach and sports tourism at Korakir Lake in Peshkun district, improvement of the area around the Afshona Museum with the construction of specialized treatment houses.⁴²⁴

⁴²⁴ “Postanovlenie Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan, O merah po Uskorennomy Razvitiyu Turistskogo Potentsiala Goroda Buhary i Buharskoi Oblast na 2017-2019.” (Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Measures for Accelerated Development of Tourism Potential of the City of Bukhara and the Bukhara Region for 2017-2019) dated 19.05.2017, No PP-2980. Available at: <https://lex.uz/docs/3577051>. Accessed on 26 January 2025

Decrees on regional tourism development differ from other decrees in that they set more concrete goals for the region. In this sense, the aforementioned decree, which aims to develop tourism and infrastructure in Bukhara, also has region-specific objectives and measures. In this regard, the decree announced the creation of a new tourist zone called *Kadimiy Bukhoro* (Ancient Bukhara).

According to the decree of the city of Bukhara, with the construction of modern low-rise hotels and cultural, recreational, shopping, and entertainment centres on its territory, *Kadimiy Bukhoro* is to be created as a year-round destination for international visitors.⁴²⁵

The decree also aims to regulate the process of attracting foreign investment, loans, and grants from donor countries and international financial institutions to co-finance the activities included in the document. As a general policy, such projects will receive full support from state banks and will be exempted from most taxes. Suffice it to say that state support for major projects is crucial for foreign companies, especially Western ones, planning to invest in any post-Soviet state. In this context, to illustrate the general support provided by the Uzbek government for various types of tourism development projects, the support for the *Kadimiy Bukhoro* project in the Decree on the Development of the Bukhara Region can be reviewed accordingly,

The National Bank of the Republic of Uzbekistan, within the framework of the implementation of the project "Construction of the Tourist Zone "*Kadimiy Bukhoro*", at the request of investment companies, as well as other business entities operating in the Tourist Zone "*Kadimiy Bukhoro*", were instructed to provide timely conversion of funds for the purchase of equipment, raw materials, components, construction and other materials, and exemption of legal entities from land tax, profit tax, customs payments (except for customs duties) for imported equipment, raw materials, components, construction and other materials not produced in the Republic of Uzbekistan, and other materials, and exemption of legal entities from property tax, and other materials, and exemption of legal entities from land tax, profit tax, property tax and customs payments (except for customs duties) for imported

⁴²⁵ "Postanovlenie Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan, O merah po Uskorennomy Razvitiyu Turistskogo Potentsiala Goroda Buhary i Buharskoi Oblast na 2017-2019." (Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Measures for Accelerated Development of Tourism Potential of the City of Bukhara and the Bukhara Region for 2017-2019) dated 19.05.2017, No PP-2980. Available at: <https://lex.uz/docs/3577051>. Accessed on 26 January 2025

equipment, raw materials, components, construction and other materials not produced in the Republic of Uzbekistan.⁴²⁶

In the context of this decree, the Uzbek government signed a contract with a French Company, Bouygues to construct the Ancient Bukhara tourist site. The National Bank of Uzbekistan and Bouygues signed a cooperation agreement on the implementation of projects in the tourism industry for 100 million Euros.⁴²⁷

The Uzbek state is also planning to build an ethnographic tourist center in Bukhara's historical part. According to the government resolution on measures to implement the investment program for the first quarter of 2024, the project of the ethnographic tourist center "*Bokii Bukhoro*" (Eternal Bukhara) on the borders of the historical part and the buffer zone of Bukhara is estimated at \$470 million.⁴²⁸

For the development of tourism and tourism infrastructure of Uzbekistan's popular tourism destinations, the Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan signed a decree for Samarkand entitled "On the Measures for the Accelerated Development of the Tourism Potential of the City of Samarkand and the Samarkand Region for the Years 2017-2019". In addition to that, a presidential decree named "On the Program of Integrated Development of Tourism Potential of Khiva City and Khorezm Province for 2017-2021 years" was signed by Mirziyoyev in 2017.

The decree on Samarkand, like the one on Bukhara, is primarily aimed at developing the region's tourism infrastructure. The decree focuses on the construction of new hotels, including international chains, with the support and incentives of the Uzbek

⁴²⁶ Postanovlenie Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan, O merah po Uskorennoy Razvitiyu Turistskogo Potentsiala Goroda Buhary i Buharskoi Oblast na 2017-2019." (Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Measures for Accelerated Development of Tourism Potential of the City of Bukhara and the Bukhara Region for 2017-2019) dated 19.05.2017, No PP-2980. Available at: <https://lex.uz/docs/3577051>. Accessed on 26 January 2025

⁴²⁷ "French Bouygues Company to Invest 100 million Euros on Implementation of Projects in Tourism Industry in Uzbekistan." Available at: <https://www.strategeast.org/french-bouygues-company-to-invest-100-million-euros-on-implementation-of-projects-in-tourism-industry-in-uzbekistan/>. Accessed on 30 January 2025

⁴²⁸ "Proekt Turisticheskogo Tsentra ryadom s Istoricheskoi Chastyu Buhary Otsenivaetsya v \$470 million." (Tourism Centre Project which is situated next to the Bukhara Historical part calculated around \$470 million) Available at: <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2024/02/25/buxara/>. Accessed on 30 January 2025

government, to increase Samarkand's international competitiveness as a tourist destination and raise its profile.

Article 1 of the decree emphasizes the need to improve Samarkand's tourism infrastructure by prioritizing the construction of new hotels, cultural and recreational centers, shopping and entertainment centers, tourist and recreational zones, and other tourist infrastructure facilities, creating the necessary conditions for tourism development.⁴²⁹

As in the case of the Bukhara Decree, Article 7 of the Samarkand Decree emphasizes the fact that the targeted projects will be implemented under the protection of the Uzbek authorities and state banks, which would ultimately increase the willingness and readiness of foreign companies to participate in these projects: It is determined that the implementation of the projects "Construction of the tourist zone "Samarkand city" and "Construction of the sports, recreational and tourist zone on the territory of the rowing canal" will be carried out by investment companies under the National Bank for Foreign Economic Activity of the Republic of Uzbekistan and JSCB Uzbek Industrial and Construction Bank, respectively.⁴³⁰

The decree on tourism development in Khiva and Khorezm province has almost the same objectives as the one for Bukhara and Samarkand, with the development of tourism infrastructure and increasing the region's competitiveness and visibility among the main focuses. Another decree, signed by Mirziyoyev in January 2019, focuses mainly on creating new accommodation facilities and attracting investments for different levels of hotels and famous hotel chains. The decree also aimed to develop and construct 3-and 4-star hotels that would meet international standards and be relatively affordable in Uzbekistan's tourism destinations.

⁴²⁹“Postanavlenie Kabineta Ministrov Respubliki Uzbekistan, O merah po Uskrorennomu Razvitiyu Turistkogo Potensiala Goroda Samarkanda i Samarkandskoi Oblasti na 2017-2019.” (Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Measures for Accelerated Development of Tourism Potential of the City of Samarkand and the Samarkand Region for 2017-2019) dated 30.06.2017, No-450. Available at: <https://lex.uz/docs/3255466>. Accessed on 30 January 2025

⁴³⁰ “Postanavlenie Kabineta Ministrov Respubliki Uzbekistan, O merah po Uskrorennomu Razvitiyu Turistkogo Potensiala Goroda Samarkanda i Samarkandskoi Oblasti na 2017-2019.” (Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Measures for Accelerated Development of Tourism Potential of the City of Samarkand and the Samarkand Region for 2017-2019) dated 30.06.2017, No-450. Available at: <https://lex.uz/docs/3255466>. Accessed on 30 January 2025

In this regard, the presidential decree entitled "On Measures for the Rapid Development of the Tourism Industry," signed in January 2019, consists of many articles that emphasize the subsidies and any kind of support from the state authorities for companies that plan to invest in the construction of 3- and 4-star hotels as well as for the franchising of the world-famous international hotel chains. Article 5 of the said Decree specifically mentions the fiscal support from the State budget to the investors in case the investor cooperates with well-known hotel chains in the framework of a franchising agreement. According to Article 5, in case of an agreement with an international hotel brand or chain (it should be among the top 50 hotel brands or among the top 5 hotel chains according to the ratings), a part of the license fees of Uzbek citizens will be paid by the state budget of Uzbekistan for a period of three years. The state budget will pay USD 200 per single room per year for the first fifty 3-star hotels that apply for the subsidy, and USD 400 per single room per year for the first thirty 4-star hotels that apply for the subsidy.⁴³¹ These incentives have been extended until 2026 by a decree signed by the president. In this context, Shavkat Mirziyoyev approved a new package of measures to support the tourism industry and the opening of accommodation facilities.⁴³²

Article 7 of the above-mentioned Decree announces that state fiscal support for the construction of hotels is not limited to 3-4 star hotels or international chains: The State Fund for the Support of the Development of Entrepreneurial Activity provides small business entities with compensation to cover interest costs on commercial bank loans granted to finance projects for the creation and reconstruction of tourist infrastructure facilities, hotels, and sanitary centers.⁴³³

⁴³¹ "Postanavlenie Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan O Merah po Uskorennomu Razvitiyu Turistskoi Oblasti." (Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Measures to Accelerate the Development of the Tourism Industry) dated 05.01.2019, No PP-4095, available at: <https://lex.uz/ru/docs/4141463>, accessed on 30 January 2025

⁴³² "Gov't Extends Payment of Subsidies for Opening New Hotels until End of 2026." Available at: <https://kun.uz/en/news/2023/07/31/govt-extends-payment-of-subsidies-for-opening-new-hotels-until-end-of-2026>. Accessed on 30 January 2025

⁴³³ "Postanavlenie Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan O Merah po Uskorennomu Razvitiyu Turistskoi Oblasti." (Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Measures to Accelerate the Development of the Tourism Industry) dated 05.01.2019, No PP-4095, available at: <https://lex.uz/ru/docs/4141463>, accessed on 30 January 2025

In addition to that, in order to encourage international investment and utilize the international high standards of service in terms of accommodation, tax incentives are also provided by the Uzbek government. Concerning the encouragement of foreign investment and the granting of tax incentives to hotel and tourist services, the Uzbek state assisted by exempting them from corporate income and property tax, as well as other types of taxation relief, such as hotels only needing to pay a single social payment from their payroll fund if they employed qualified foreign specialists as management personnel; and that the income of qualified foreign specialists who were invited as hotel management personnel was also exempt from personal income tax.⁴³⁴ Clear state support for expanding the number of hotels and accommodation facilities has increased the volume of accommodation facilities in all regions of Uzbekistan, which has had a profound impact on the country's competitiveness in the international tourism arena.

The Uzbek government is also focusing on privatizing state-owned hotels. According to Mirziyoyev, privatization in the tourism sector is taking place because state-owned companies in Uzbekistan are inefficient, using outdated methods.⁴³⁵ In this regard, some of the hotels in the main tourist destinations of Uzbekistan have undergone the privatization process. As a result of the privatization policy in the tourism sector, the former Chorsu Hotel, Samarkandkimyo Enterprise, and the state's stake in Uzbekistan Hotel were already sold in 2020.⁴³⁶ In addition to that, Uzbekistan's first 5-star hotel, the International Hotel, which started operating in 1997, was sold for a price of \$26 million in 2024.⁴³⁷ Besides the impact of accommodation facilities on tourism competitiveness, travel agencies are another important service provider in

⁴³⁴ Patterson Ian Robert, Tureav Hamid. "New Developments in Promoting Tourism in Uzbekistan." *Journal of Tourismology*, Year 2020, Volume: 6 Issue: 2, 201, doi.org/10.26650/jot.2020.6.2.0005

⁴³⁵ "V Uzbekistane Nachnut Nalazhivat Turizm i Privatizirovat Gosaktivy." (Uzbekistan to Develop Tourism, Privatize State Assets) Available at: <https://sng.today/tashkent/13264-v-uzbekistane-nachnut-nalazhivat-turizm-i-privatizirovat-gosaktivy.html>. Accessed on 30 January 2025

⁴³⁶ V Uzbekistane Nachnut Nalazhivat Turizm i Privatizirovat Gosaktivy." (Uzbekistan to Develop Tourism, Privatize State Assets) Available at: <https://sng.today/tashkent/13264-v-uzbekistane-nachnut-nalazhivat-turizm-i-privatizirovat-gosaktivy.html>. Accessed on 30 January 2025

⁴³⁷ "Gostinitsa International v Tashkente Prodan na \$26 million." (International Hotel in Tashkent was Sold for \$26 million) Available at: <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2024/11/21/international-hotel/>. Accessed on 31 January 2025

the tourism industry. Travel agencies are the other aspect of tourism through which international and domestic tourists demand and receive quality services when visiting a destination. Any visitor planning a trip to a destination needs information before the trip. The process of choosing a destination is strongly influenced by the services provided by travel agents before and during the trip. The role of travel agencies in the tourism industry is to provide information and advice on tourism products and destinations and to create, market, and distribute tourism packages of different products. Therefore, travel agents contribute to the development of tourist destinations by providing quality and affordable service to visitors to a destination, and their role in increasing the competitiveness of any destination in the international tourism market cannot be ignored. Moreover, qualified travel agents play a more crucial role in developing less-known destinations where tourists have less information or prior experience.

The Mirziyoyev administration has taken further steps to support and facilitate the process of creating travel agencies and tour operators in Uzbekistan that would provide quality services to international and domestic tourists. As mentioned above, during the Soviet Union, *Intourist*, a state institution, acted as a travel agency. During the Karimov era, this tendency continued, and the Uzbek tourism market was dominated by state-owned travel agencies, especially in the first decade after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Perhaps the Association of Private Tourism Agencies of Uzbekistan (APTA), Uzbekistan's only travel agency association, established in 1998, marked this tendency. Unlike its counterparts worldwide, its name underlines the fact that the association is composed of private travel agencies.⁴³⁸

In this regard, the Presidential Decree "On Additional Measures to Improve Tourism Infrastructure and Further Increase the Flow of Foreign Tourists to the Republic of Uzbekistan" dated 18.07.2024 plays a crucial role in subsidizing tourism agencies and also aims to support their activities in organizing tours for international visitors

⁴³⁸ "The Association of Private Tourism Agencies of Uzbekistan." Available at: <https://www.apta.uz/>. Accessed on 28 January 2025

to Uzbekistan. Article 1 of the said decree is dedicated to the support of the tourism agencies. From 1 September 2024, the Fund for Reconstruction and Development will open a credit line in national currency in the amount of USD 50 million at an annual interest rate of %14 through commercial banks of the Republic to provide working capital to tour operators established in the Republic of Uzbekistan and engaged in inbound tourism activities to attract tourists from abroad to the Republic.⁴³⁹

In addition to that State Tourism Committee also provides direct support to tourism agencies as well. In this regard, The State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan for Tourism Development is assisting tourism companies in establishing direct business contacts with foreign travel companies by holding the International Uzbek Tourist Exhibition and the Tashkent International Tourism Fair. In 2017, the State Committee supported a total of 118 new businesses that began to operate in Uzbekistan, of which 60 focused on hotel services, while 58 provided tourist services.⁴⁴⁰

The number of hotels, their number of rooms and the number of operating tourist agencies has increased dramatically due to Mirziyoyev's tourism policy, which is aimed at developing Uzbekistan's tourism infrastructure. By the end of 2023, there were 5.526 thousand hotels and other tourist accommodation facilities in Uzbekistan. Over the past 6 years, this indicator has increased by 7.2 times, i.e., in 2017, the number of such facilities was only 767.⁴⁴¹

The figures for 2024 were also positive for the increase in the number of accommodation establishments in Uzbekistan. According to a report published by

⁴³⁹ “Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan, O Dopolnitel’nyh Merah po Uluchsheniyu Turisticheskoi Infrastruktury i Dal’neyshemu Uvelicheniyu Potoka Inostrannyh Turistov v Respubliku Uzbekistan.” (Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Additional Measures to Improve Tourism Infrastructure and Further Increase the Flow of Foreign Tourists to the Republic of Uzbekistan) dated 18.07.2024, No UP-102. Available at: <https://lex.uz/en/docs/7031238?ONDATE=23.07.2024>. Accessed on 28 January 2025

⁴⁴⁰ Patterson Ian Robert, Tureav Hamid. “New Developments in Promoting Tourism in Uzbekistan.” Journal of Tourismology, *Year 2020*, Volume: 6 Issue: 2, 201, doi.org/10.26650/jot.2020.6.2.0005

⁴⁴¹ “V Uzbekistane Chislo Gostinits Vyroslo Bolee chem v 7 raz.” (In Uzbekistan, The Number of Hotels has Increased More Than 7 times) Available at: <https://upl.uz/economy/40819-news.html>. Accessed on 28 January 2025

State Tourism Committee, in 2024, 124 new hotels (6.4 thousand new beds) and 239 hostels (7.6 thousand new beds) were opened, bringing the total number of accommodation establishments to over 6.1 thousand and the number of beds to over 161 thousand.⁴⁴²

As a result of the supporting policy of the state in creating new hotels and accommodation facilities, renowned hotel brands and chains began their operation in Uzbekistan in 2024. In 2024, hotels of the Azimut, Bentley, Bill Wyndham & Co. were opened in Tashkent. Hilton Garden Inn Termez Airtom, a 4-star hotel, opened in Termez. Dedeman Hotel opened in Navoi. Hilton Samarkand Regency, Hilton Garden Inn Samarkand Sogd and Intercontinental hotels opened in the tourist centre of Samarkand.⁴⁴³ The increase in the number of accommodation facilities contributed to the creation of new tourist agencies serving international and domestic tourists. In this respect, 866 new tourist organizations and tour operators were created in 2024 to serve tourists, and the total number of tourist agencies reached 3,686. 3,200 tour guides work throughout the Republic, and 700 new professionals were trained in 2024.⁴⁴⁴

In addition to subsidizing and supporting investment in accommodation and travel agencies, Uzbekistan is also working to diversify its tourism product to overcome the seasonality problem and attract tourists looking for a different experience when visiting a destination. Much effort has been put into enabling visitors to experience different activities, such as winter skiing, mountaineering, hiking, and rafting. To this end, recreational areas and comfortable infrastructure facilities have been built in various parts of Uzbekistan.

⁴⁴² “V 2025 Godu, Kolichestvo Gostinits i Mest Razhmesheniya v Uzbekistane Uvelichat pochtu do Semi Tyshyac.” (By 2025, the Number of Hotels and Accommodation Facilities in Uzbekistan will Increase to Almost Seven Thousand) Available at: <https://vzglyad.uz/ru/post/2025/01/31/turizm>. Accessed on 31 January 2025

⁴⁴³ “V 2025 Godu, Kolichestvo Gostinits i Mest Razhmesheniya v Uzbekistane Uvelichat pochtu do Semi Tyshyac.” (By 2025, the Number of Hotels and Accommodation Facilities in Uzbekistan will Increase to Almost Seven Thousand) Available at: <https://vzglyad.uz/ru/post/2025/01/31/turizm>. Accessed on 31 January 2025

⁴⁴⁴ “V 2025 Godu, Kolichestvo Gostinits i Mest Razhmesheniya v Uzbekistane Uvelichat pochtu do Semi Tyshyac.” (By 2025, the Number of Hotels and Accommodation Facilities in Uzbekistan will Increase to Almost Seven Thousand) Available at: <https://vzglyad.uz/ru/post/2025/01/31/turizm>. Accessed on 31 January 2025

For example, the Chimgan, Beldersay and Charvak sport and recreation centres in the Tashkent region have created the necessary conditions for skiing and other winter sports. Ski slopes of various types have been built here, ranging in length from 300 to 3,000 meters. Holidaymakers can reach the top by cable car using a special lift.⁴⁴⁵ In winter, the Chimgan and Amirsay ski resorts, 70 kilometers from Tashkent, welcome local and foreign tourists. In addition to skiing, visitors to Chimgan can enjoy snowboarding, free riding, horse riding and flying. The centre is equipped with about 10 slopes and a 1.5 km cable car.⁴⁴⁶

Important affords have been put in for the development of mountains, nature, and ecotourism in Uzbekistan, too. Activities have been carried out in the Charvak Mountain region and the Zaamin Mountain region, located between Tashkent and Samarkand at an altitude of 2,500 metres above sea level. In this context, more than 20 hotels, a 2.5 kilometre-long cable car, and a 305-metre-long and 150-metre-high suspension pedestrian bridge were built in the 950-hectare Zaamin tourist recreation area.⁴⁴⁷

Some works have also been carried out in the field of tourist security as well. In this regard, Independent travellers have not been overlooked, as taxi orders for travelling to restaurants, as well as an ‘alarm button app’ for mobile phones that helps the safety of tourists, particularly those travelling to natural outdoor areas with a special interest in ecotourism, have been introduced.⁴⁴⁸ The «Uzbekistan Pass» has also been developed as a mobile application that provides detailed information about cultural and historical places to visit. The tourist card will be valid throughout the Republic.

⁴⁴⁵ “Razvitie Turizma v Uzbekistane.” (The Development of Tourism in Uzbekistan) Available at: <https://www.uzbekistan.org.ua/ru/news/3153-razvitie-turizma-v-uzbekistane.html>. Accessed on 31 January 2025

⁴⁴⁶ “V Uzbekistane Razvivayut Kruglogod’chny Turizm.” (Year-round Tourism Developing in Uzbekistan) Available at: www.aa.com.tr/ru/мир/в-узбекистане-развивают-круглогодичный-туризм/3254335. Accessed on 6 February 2025

⁴⁴⁷ “V Uzbekistane Razvivayut Kruglogod’chny Turizm.” (Year-round Tourism Developing in Uzbekistan) Available at: www.aa.com.tr/ru/мир/в-узбекистане-развивают-круглогодичный-туризм/3254335. Accessed on 6 February 2025

⁴⁴⁸ Patterson Ian Robert, Tureav Hamid. “New Developments in Promoting Tourism in Uzbekistan.” *Journal of Tourismology*, Year 2020, Volume: 6 Issue: 2, 201, doi.org/10.26650/jot.2020.6.2.0005

Using the card, tourists can purchase goods and services at a discount, including when making online sales.⁴⁴⁹

The development of tourism infrastructure plays a key role in improving the competitiveness of a destination worldwide. The presence and availability of different levels of accommodation facilities, the existence of different types of tourism agencies, each with expertise and professionalism in different types of tourism segments and being a destination that can offer different tourism experiences are crucial for a destination to become a popular destination around the world. The Mirziyoyev administration has made great efforts through presidential decrees to guide private sector representatives in the sphere of tourism and support them in creating different types of tourism enterprises through subsidies and incentives. Although there is still much to be done, thanks to these efforts, Uzbekistan has made significant strides towards becoming a developed tourism destination.

According to the World Economic Forum's Travel & Tourism Development Index (TTDI) 2024 report, Uzbekistan experienced the greatest increase in TTDI score, which measures the set of factors and policies that enable sustainable and resilient development of the tourism and travel industry. More broadly, TTDI measures the development level of a destination, which typically includes factors such as more conducive business environments, access to more dynamic, qualified, and resilient labor markets, openness, and good Information and Communication Technology readiness. In particular, these countries also tend to have excellent transport and tourism infrastructure and services and a very high concentration of natural, cultural and nonleisure resources and attractions.⁴⁵⁰ According to the TTDI report, in 2024, Uzbekistan experienced the fastest growth between 2019 and 2024 of +7.8%, moving from 94th to 78th place.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁹ “Uzbekistan to Introduce Special Tourist Card, Uzbekistan Pass.” Available at: <https://www.uzbekembassy.in/uzbekistan-to-introduce-special-tourist-card-uzbekistan-pass/>. Accessed on 6 February 2025

⁴⁵⁰ “World Economic Forum, Travel and Tourism Development Index 2024, Insight Report May 2024.” Available at: https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Travel_and_Tourism_Development_Index_2024.pdf p.17, Accessed on 6 February 2025

⁴⁵¹ “World Economic Forum, Travel and Tourism Development Index 2024, Insight Report May 2024.” Available at:

The other important factor in tourism development policies is transportation policies, which I will analyze in the next section of this chapter.

5.5.3. Transport Policies

One of the defining characteristics of tourism research is the interdisciplinary nature of its scope and the issues it addresses. Issues or sectors not directly related to tourism can have a direct impact on the number of foreign visitors to a country, either through adaptation or lack of adaptation. Thus, accessibility and the existence of a quality and comfortable transport infrastructure play a crucial role in determining the place of a destination in the international tourism league.

As mentioned in the previous section, infrastructure is one of the competitive tools when a destination is trying to attract tourists and become a global tourist destination of choice. Given its intensive use of infrastructures, the transport sector is an important component of any destination and a basis for economic development nationally and regionally.⁴⁵²

In this section, I will examine the development of the various modes of tourism transport infrastructure and the policies pursued by the Mirziyoyev administration. Although tourism transport policy has a wide range of components, I will pay particular attention to air transport in this section of the chapter because air transport is the most important part of the international tourism movement and has a great influence on the development of tourism in a destination.

Transport in general, and air transport in particular, is one of the main components of tourism infrastructure that plays a key role in increasing the number of visitors to a particular destination. The quality of the transport network to and within a destination is an important influence on destination choice. Transport can often be

https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Travel_and_Tourism_Development_Index_2024.pdf p.17,
Accessed on 6 February 2025

⁴⁵² Dwyer Larry, Forsyth Peter, Dwyer Wayne. "Tourism Economics and Policy." Bristol: View Publications. 2020, p. 375

the single most important factor in determining the viability of a destination's tourism sector.⁴⁵³

In an increasingly globalized world, most travel is now done by air. The airline industry has facilitated global tourism growth like no other mode of transport. In just about one century, aviation advanced from virtual non-existence to a giant, high-technology industry.⁴⁵⁴ The development of air transport infrastructure is of great importance, especially for countries trying to attract tourists from relatively distant countries, for which air transport is the only tool for receiving visitors. Given the strong link between aviation and tourism, it can be argued that the development of tourism in some countries depends exclusively on the possibilities and availability of air services. For example, 98% of all tourists coming to the Philippines are travelling by air.⁴⁵⁵ Therefore, air transport and the availability of different segments of air transport services, such as the availability and connectivity of low-cost carriers (LCCs), play a key role in the development of any tourism destination. In addition to air transport, the quality of infrastructure in terms of airports, terminals, and road and rail links has a profound impact on the number of visitors to a destination as well.

As noted in the previous chapter, Uzbekistan was one of the first Central Asian states to establish a national airline, Uzbekistan Airlines, after the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, during the Karimov period, as with the visa policy, the national aviation policy was not pursued in parallel with the tourism development policy in Uzbekistan. When Mirziyoyev became president, as was the case with the visa policy, Uzbekistan began to pursue a tourism-oriented aviation policy.

In the first two years of the Mirziyoyev era, the main policy in the sphere of aviation was aimed at integrating the service infrastructure of the national airline, Uzbekistan Airways (UzA), into the international system. In this respect, UzA initiated the

⁴⁵³ Dwyer Larry, Forsyth Peter, Dwyer Wayne. "Tourism Economics and Policy." Bristol: View Publications. 2020, p. 375

⁴⁵⁴ Peter Robinson, Michael Lück, Stephen Smith. "Tourism." Boston: CABI, 2020, p.76

⁴⁵⁵ Zajac, Grzegorz. "The Role of Air Transport in The Development of International Tourism Journal of International Trade, Logistics and Law, Vol. 2, Num. 1, 2016, 1-8. Available at: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4904024. Accessed on 5 February 2025.

online booking and payment of airfare services through “UzCard” bank cards, one year later through “Visa” cards, and starting from November 9, 2018, to the existing online payment method “MasterCard” was added.⁴⁵⁶ In addition to that, the increase of the frequencies for the potential destinations in terms of tourism movement tourism markets was also the case in the initial years of Mirziyoyev's presidency. In this regard, the national carrier increased the number of flights to the following well-known destinations such as Almaty, Astana, Istanbul, Seoul and the whole Russian Federation.⁴⁵⁷ In addition to that, the Russian carriers Nordstar, Red Wings Airlines and Nordwind Airlines began to fly into the country.⁴⁵⁸

The period 2017-2018 in the sphere of air transport policymaking can be considered the initial stage, when the Mirziyoyev administration aimed to facilitate the process for international passengers using the UzA service and increase the frequencies of UzA with the countries from which Uzbekistan can benefit in terms of international tourist flows. However, during this period, Uzbekistan is still far from being well-connected internationally, which makes it difficult for international tourists to travel to or within the country. In 2017, there were only 3.7 million international seats to and from Uzbekistan, and less than 1 million domestic seats, according to Center for Aviation and Official Airline Guide data. By comparison, Kazakhstan, the second largest country in Central Asia by population (but bigger in terms of GDP), has more than three times as many seats.⁴⁵⁹

As in the case of visa policy, a more radical policy in the aviation sector began relatively late in the Mirziyoyev era. Since Uzbekistan's independence, visitors from

⁴⁵⁶ Khalikov Sarvar, Liu Wei, Turaeva Madina, Achilova Liliya. “Uzbekistan’s Development under the Leadership of Various Political Reforms: The Case of Air Transport Industry.” [The Open Transportation Journal](https://doi.org/10.2174/1874447802115010160) 15(1):160-169, DOI:10.2174/1874447802115010160

⁴⁵⁷ Khalikov Sarvar, Liu Wei, Turaeva Madina, Achilova Liliya. “Uzbekistan’s Development under the Leadership of Various Political Reforms: The Case of Air Transport Industry.” [The Open Transportation Journal](https://doi.org/10.2174/1874447802115010160) 15(1):160-169, DOI:10.2174/1874447802115010160

⁴⁵⁸ Khalikov Sarvar, Liu Wei, Turaeva Madina, Achilova Liliya. “Uzbekistan’s Development under the Leadership of Various Political Reforms: The Case of Air Transport Industry.” [The Open Transportation Journal](https://doi.org/10.2174/1874447802115010160) 15(1):160-169, DOI:10.2174/1874447802115010160

⁴⁵⁹ “Uzbekistan Aviation Market: Central Asian Tourism Booms, Promising Rapid Growth.” Available at: <https://centreforaviation.com/analysis/reports/uzbekistan-aviation-market-central-asian-tourism-booms-promising-rapid-growth-393649>. Accessed on 2 February 2025.

neighboring and post-Soviet countries have accounted for the largest share of international visitors to Uzbekistan. Given Uzbekistan's main objective of increasing the number of international visitors by diversifying its tourism markets, the role of the aviation industry and the development of air transport is crucial. This would only be achieved by increasing the number of airlines flying to Uzbekistan, making UzA a more flexible and competitive company by reducing the role of the state in its operations and also supporting the establishment of low-cost airlines, which would make the cost of flying to Uzbekistan relatively lower. In this regard, the first decree on civil aviation was signed at the end of 2018.

A presidential decree was published entitled “The Measures on Radical Improvement of the Civil Aviation of the Republic of Uzbekistan.” The decree's main goals were to accelerate the introduction of modern forms and methods of management in the field of civil aviation, restructure the industry following global trends and standards, create conditions for the development of competition in the air transport market, and actively attract investment to the industry.⁴⁶⁰

The document highlights the fact that the outdated and non-transparent aviation management system, which includes the functions of state regulation and commercial activity, does not allow for the introduction of a modern management system. In addition, the monopoly system of civil aviation in Uzbekistan, including the operation of ground infrastructure, has led to a significant shortfall in the global level of service provision in this area, as well as the unprofitability of individual airports in the country.

The separation of aviation and ground management is perhaps the most important result of this decree. With this decree, the government reorganized the state-owned Uzbekistan Airways into two joint stock companies: the airline Uzbekistan Airways and Uzbekistan Airports. The main aim of the reorganization and separation of the airline and ground services was to focus separately on two different segments to

⁴⁶⁰ “Ukaz Respubliki Prezidenta Uzbekistan, O Merah po Kardinalnomy Sovershenstvovaniyu Grazhdanskoi Aviatsii Respubliki Uzbekistan.” (Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Measures to Improve Civil Aviation in the Republic of Uzbekistan) dated 27.11.2018, No UP-5584. Available at: <https://lex.uz/docs/4082764>. Accessed on 2 February 2025

reach world service standards by improving the level of service in Uzbekistan's airports and aviation management.

Some of the main responsibilities and tasks of Uzbek Airways, which are also related to the development of an air-oriented tourism strategy per Article 2 of the aforementioned Decree, would be as follows:

- Efficient use of the aircraft fleet, including the development of new destinations and the expansion of the flight routes.
- Introduction of modern systems and technologies for managing production processes, as well as modernization, technological upgrading, and renewal of the aircraft fleet.
- Improving the quality of services provided to passengers on board aircraft, maintenance, and repair of aircraft, including those of foreign airlines.
- Ensure a high level of flight safety and aircraft maintenance, integrate the airline into the international airline community, and achieve the status of a regional leader in the air transport sector.⁴⁶¹

State control over Uzbek Airlines has also been reduced to ensure the development of a sustainable business model for its operations, taking into account an optimal asset structure to ensure the airline's profitability and economic sustainability. High quality of service at airports and smooth and speedy passport control plays a key role in international visitors' satisfaction and ultimate preference for the destination in question. With this in mind, developing airport infrastructure and modernizing and increasing the capacity of Uzbekistan's airports, most of which have been operating under Soviet-era conditions, is one of the priorities of the Mirziyoyev government's transport policy. Accordingly, the above-mentioned decree transferred the ground services of the airports to the joint company Uzbekistan Airport Joint Company.

In accordance with the Decree on the Measures for Radical Improvement of Civil Aviation of the Republic of Uzbekistan, some of the tasks of Uzbekistan Airport

⁴⁶¹ “Ukaz Respubliki Prezidenta Uzbekistan, O Merah po Kardinalnomy Sovershenstvovaniyu Grazhdanskoi Aviatsii Respubliki Uzbekistan.” (Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Measures to Improve Civil Aviation in the Republic of Uzbekistan) dated 27.11.2018, No UP-5584. Available at: <https://lex.uz/docs/4082764>. Accessed on 2 February 2025

Joint Company which is to follow the tourism-oriented strategies in the sphere of airport infrastructure, are defined as follows:

- Develop and implement long-term airport development strategies.
- Attracting investment to improve airport infrastructure, including through public-private partnerships and cooperation with leading international airport management companies.
- Maintaining a high level of service to passengers at airports and creating all necessary conditions for their comfort.
- Timely and quality preparation of aerodromes for flights, implementation of measures to ensure regularity and safety of flights, introduction of modern methods of maintenance and repair of aerodromes.
- Improvement of infrastructure and creation of favorable conditions for quality logistics services.
- Expanding the network of modern retail, catering, banking and other passenger service facilities at airports, including on a public-private partnership basis.⁴⁶²

With this decree, the maintenance, repair, and overhaul service provider Uzbekistan Airways Technics and 11 of the country's airports, including Bukhara, Samarkand, and Tashkent, are also being individually reformed into separate limited liability companies to clarify responsibilities and enhance efficiency.⁴⁶³

In order to facilitate and encourage the purchase of aircraft and equipment, Uzbekistan offered a tax exemption. According to Article 17 of the said decree, until 1 January 2023, local airlines will be exempt from customs duties (except for customs clearance fees) on aircraft imported into the country, including those manufactured no more than 10 years prior to importation, as well as on service

⁴⁶² "Ukaz Respubliki Prezidenta Uzbekistan, O Merah po Kardinalnomy Sovershenstvovaniyu Grazhdanskoi Aviatsii Respubliki Uzbekistan." (Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Measures to Improve Civil aviation in the Republic of Uzbekistan) dated 27.11.2018, No UP-5584. Available at: <https://lex.uz/docs/4082764>. Accessed on 2 February 2025

⁴⁶³ Tourism Development in Uzbekistan- Challenges and Opportunities, Special Policy Brief by Caspian Policy Center, available at: <https://www.caspianpolicy.org/research/report/special-policy-brief-tourism-development-in-uzbekistan-challenges-and-opportunities-9656>, accessed on 2 February 2025

equipment and world-brand alcoholic beverages used exclusively for passenger services.⁴⁶⁴

In short, with the reorganization of airline state institutions, Uzbekistan Airways will be responsible for flight operations and fleet utilization, including the development of new destinations and expansion of flights through new routes, integration of the airline into international airline communities, achieving the level of a regional leader in the sphere of air transport, while Uzbekistan Airports will be responsible for airports, including the development and implementation of strategies for their long-term development, maintaining a high level of service for airline passengers at airports where passengers enjoy maximum comfort as well as attracting investments. As pointed out before, the decree on additional measures to develop tourism in 2019, signed by Mirziyoyev, includes specific articles on developing transport infrastructure and attracting foreign airlines to fly to Uzbekistan to increase the number of international visitors. In this regard, the task of establishing new flights for potential tourist countries as a source market and also increasing the number of frequencies from them are linked to the development of air transport. Besides, one of the main objectives of the decree in the field of transport is to form a working group dedicated to improving the logistical attractiveness of Uzbekistan and also to ensure that foreign airlines would be eager to fly to local Uzbek airports shortly as a result of incentives supporting the state's foreign airline-friendly policy. According to the decree, the main tasks of the working group, which also aims to increase the number of international visitors to the country, would be as follows:

- Rapid improvement of the transport communications system in the Republic to increase trade turnover, the number of passengers transported, and investment, especially from Europe and South-East Asia.
- Accelerate the resolution of the issue of attracting airlines to increase the flow of tourists, including the opening of regular flights from Indonesia.
- Identification of strategically important flight destinations to attract tourist traffic.

⁴⁶⁴ “Ukaz Respubliki Prezidenta Uzbekistan, O Merah po Kardinalnomy Sovershenstvovaniyu Grazhdanskoi Aviatsii Respubliki Uzbekistan.” (Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Measures to Improve Civil Aviation in the Republic of Uzbekistan) dated 27.11.2018, No UP-5584. Available at: <https://lex.uz/docs/4082764>. Accessed on 2 February 2025

- Developing a flexible system of discounts and preferences for foreign carriers to launch new routes at the country's airports.
- Increasing the number of passengers on long-haul routes by creating connecting flights,
- Conducting negotiations with foreign and local airlines, as well as considering their offers and rationally distributing them among airports.
- Simplification of the mechanism of charter flight coordination.
- Introduction of the “Open Skies” regime at selected airports of the country.
- Revision of the regulatory and legal framework to facilitate the establishment of local airlines.
- Elaboration of documents on the further development of tourist transportation to ensure intermodal transportation within the country (bus, rail, and air transportation);
- Reducing airline costs and optimizing air ticket prices for consumers.
- Increasing the number of domestic air transportation routes between regions of the country.⁴⁶⁵

In addition, as mentioned above, the aforementioned decree includes a concept for the development of tourism for the period of 2019-2025, which also includes tasks and goals for the development of transport infrastructure aimed at increasing the flow of international tourists to Uzbekistan. The third chapter of the Concept focuses on the improvement of transport infrastructure, the most important of which are as follows:

- Development of transport logistics, development of external and internal routes, and improvement of the quality of transport services, including
- Drawing up a passenger transport development program, including those approved by intergovernmental agreements, providing for the establishment of regular transport links, the organization of convenient connections between different modes of transport, the reconstruction of existing roads, and the construction of new roads of national and regional importance linking tourist

⁴⁶⁵ Ukaz Prezidenta Uzbekistan o Dopolnitelnyh Merah po Uskorennomu Razvitiyu Turizma v Respublike Uzbekistan.” (Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Additional Measures for the Acceleration of the Development of Tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan) dated 05.01.2019, No UP-5611. Available at: <https://lex.uz/ru/docs/4143186?ONDATE=24.05.2023>. Accessed on 25 January 2025

centers, the improvement of roadside infrastructure (camping sites, service facilities, catering, medical and sanitary points)

- Development and implementation of measures to optimize transport tariffs.
- Attracting major international airlines and organizing low-cost air transport.
- Development of air services between the regions of the Republic.
- Improvement of existing and construction of new railway lines, expansion of the use of high-speed electric trains.
- Periodic renewal of the rolling stock of transport vehicles to provide quality transport services.⁴⁶⁶

The concept aims to increase the number of direct international flights to Uzbekistan's most popular tourist destinations, such as Samarkand, Bukhara, and Tashkent, as well as reduce the cost of flying to Uzbekistan and improve the quality of service both during the flight and at the country's various airports.

In addition, taking into account Uzbekistan's unique location in the Eurasian region, one of the main characteristics of being an attractive destination, which is to be a transport hub, is also mentioned in the concept as the goal of transforming Uzbekistan into a larger regional transport hub in the sphere of passenger transport. traffic.⁴⁶⁷

In addition to the above-mentioned state documents, such as decrees and regulations in the field of aviation, the Mirziyoyev administration has issued a number of decrees aimed at developing the aviation industry and, ultimately, international tourism. The most important state documents on aviation are listed below:

- Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan of 16.10.2023 N PP-337 "On additional measures to ensure the efficient organization of air transport".

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ "Kontseptsiya Razvitiya Turizma v Respublike Uzbekistan v 2019-2025." (Concept of Development of the Tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan for the period 2019-2025. Appendix No.1 to the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated 05.01.2019 No UP-5611) Available at:

[https://nrm.uz/contentf?doc=574255_koncepciya_razvitiya_sfery_turizma_v_respublike_uzbekistan_v_2019-2025_godah_\(prilojenie_n_1_k_ukazu_prezidenta_ruz_ot_05_01_2019_g_n_up-5611\)](https://nrm.uz/contentf?doc=574255_koncepciya_razvitiya_sfery_turizma_v_respublike_uzbekistan_v_2019-2025_godah_(prilojenie_n_1_k_ukazu_prezidenta_ruz_ot_05_01_2019_g_n_up-5611)).

Accessed on 12 October 2024

- Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated 26.10.2022 N PP-412 "On Additional Measures to Develop Local Air Transportation in the Country".
- Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated 07.05.2022 N PP-238 "On measures for the implementation of the project on modernisation and management of the international airport "Samarkand" based on the project on modernization and management of the international airport "Samarkand"
- Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated 30.04.2021 N PP-5100 "On measures of transformation and support of civil aviation enterprises".
- Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated 29.03.2021 N PP-5042 "On measures to develop the public-private partnership in the sphere of management of airports of the Republic".
- Regulation on the Development Fund of the Civil Aviation Agency under the Ministry of Transport of the Republic of Uzbekistan (Annex N 1 to the Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated 30.09.2019 N 825)

Thanks to the policies in the sphere of aviation pursued by the Mirziyoyev administration since 2018, the number of airline companies and also the number of flights increased dramatically in Uzbekistan. In addition to that, with the public-private partnership in the management of the important airports in the country, the level of service and the capacity has grown, which ultimately contributes to the increasing number of international visitors visiting Uzbekistan. Consequently, the number of airline companies reached 15 including 10 private ones by the end of 2024 in the country. The total fleet consists of 75 aircraft and is expected to exceed 100 aircraft by the end of 2025.⁴⁶⁸

Uzbekistan Airways, the largest state-owned airline, has a fleet of 42 aircraft, including Boeing and Airbus aircrafts. The company has been expanding its routes

⁴⁶⁸ "Brief Overview of Civil Aviation in Uzbekistan." Available at: <https://www.strategy.atocomm.eu/overview>. Accessed on 4 February 2025

and passenger numbers since 2018. According to Shuhrat Hudaykulov, the company's deputy general director, the company has increased the number of passengers by about 1 million per year over the past three years. The company ended 2024 with a record 6,007,151 passengers (+19 percent), 2023 with 5 million, and 2022 with 4.2 million.⁴⁶⁹ The number of flights has also increased, as has the load factor. Hudaykulov went on to say that 40,416 flights were made during the year, 25 percent more than in 2023. The passenger load factor at the end of last year was 83.1 percent, compared to 81.1 percent in 2023.⁴⁷⁰

As mentioned above, the company determines its flight routes not only based on profitability and economic sustainability but also based on national tourism policy strategies. In this regard, in 2024 the airline expanded its geographical footprint by adding several new destinations and re-launching services to Rome, Mumbai and Lahore. The frequency of flights to existing popular destinations also increased. The company has maintained flights to Paris and Tokyo for the winter season, despite low demand. The number of destinations that the airline flies is 99 destinations, 8 of which are domestic. In 2024 flights were opened from Tashkent to Sanya, Makhachkala, Nizhnevartovsk, Hangzhou, Hurghada, Nha Trang and Goa; from Nukus to Istanbul and Almaty; and from Fergana Valley to St. Petersburg. Flights from Tashkent to Rome, Mumbai, and Lahore, as well as from Karshi to St. Petersburg, were resumed.⁴⁷¹

As mentioned above, LCCs play a key role in attracting international visitors, as visitors around the world tend to pay less for air travel. There are two ways to attract LCCs to your destination. One is to minimize the cost of the airport so that LCCs would want to fly there and also to create or encourage the creation of LCCs in your

⁴⁶⁹ “Uzbekistan Airways v 2025 Godu Namerana Perevezti 7 mln Passazhirov.” (Uzbekistan Airlines Aiming to Carry 7 Million Passengers in 2025) Available at: <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2025/01/28/uzbekistan-airways-plans/>. Accessed on 4 February 2025

⁴⁷⁰ “Uzbekistan Airways v 2025 Godu Namerana Perevezti 7 mln Passazhirov.” (Uzbekistan Airlines Aiming to Carry 7 Million Passengers in 2025) Available at: <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2025/01/28/uzbekistan-airways-plans/>. Accessed on 4 February 2025

⁴⁷¹ “Uzbekistan Airways v 2025 Godu Namerana Perevezti 7 mln Passazhirov.” (Uzbekistan Airlines Aiming to Carry 7 Million Passengers in 2025) Available at: <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2025/01/28/uzbekistan-airways-plans/>. Accessed on 4 February 2025

country. A good example of this arises with secondary airports in Europe that seek to attract LCCs. If LCCs such as Ryanair or Wizz Air fly to a city, its tourism industry will receive a boost. As a result, many regional and city governments are willing to provide airport facilities on attractive financial terms to potential LCC operators. In the case of LCC traffic, what is required is a basic level of quality – no more – and a price that is kept to a minimum.⁴⁷² In addition to reducing the costs of its airports for both LCCs and other foreign airlines, Uzbekistan has facilitated and encouraged the establishment of local LCCs to increase visitor numbers.

As a result of the smooth and liberal policies in the sphere of aviation, several airlines, both private and state-owned, have started operations in the country, most of which are expected to be LCCs by 2021. Until 2021, Uzbekistan Airways was the only airline operating in the country. Some of the new airline companies include Qanot Sharq Airlines, SilkJet, Silk Avia, Humo Air, Panorama Airways and Air Samarkand.⁴⁷³

In this regard, the development of Qanot Sharq, the first private airline in Uzbekistan, is a good example of the development of aviation in Uzbekistan. It started its operations as an LLC in 2021. Since then, the airline has been operating from several regional airports in Uzbekistan, providing scheduled air services to international destinations such as Istanbul, Ankara Dubai Jeddah, Medina Moscow, St Petersburg and Almaty.⁴⁷⁴ On December 19, 2024, as part of the implementation of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan's initiative to attract 1 million Chinese tourists annually, a ceremony was held at Tashkent International Airport named after Islam Karimov to launch a new flight route "Tashkent-Sanya-Tashkent" by Qanot

⁴⁷² Dwyer Larry, Forsyth Peter, Dwyer Wayne. "Tourism Economics and Policy." Bristol: View Publications. 2020, p. 293

⁴⁷³ "Kak Razvivaetsya Aviatsionnaya Otrasl v Uzbekistane." (How the Aviation Industry is Developing in Uzbekistan) Available at: <https://kz.kursiv.media/2022-12-15/kak-razvivaetsya-aviacionnaya-otrasl-v-uzbekistane/>. Accessed on 4 February 2025

⁴⁷⁴ "Kak Razvivaetsya Aviatsionnaya Otrasl v Uzbekistane." (How the Aviation Industry is Developing in Uzbekistan) Available at: <https://kz.kursiv.media/2022-12-15/kak-razvivaetsya-aviacionnaya-otrasl-v-uzbekistane/>. Accessed on 4 February 2025

Sharq Airlines.⁴⁷⁵ In March 2024, the airline started its flight from Tashkent to Madrid.⁴⁷⁶

In addition, thanks to the liberal and foreign airline-friendly policies of the Mirziyoyev government, new frequencies have been added by foreign airlines that previously flew to Uzbekistan, and new airlines have also started flying to and from Uzbekistan. Uzbek domestic airlines operated more than 73.9 thousand flights and carried more than 8.735 million passengers in 2024. Foreign airlines, in turn, made more than 39.6 thousand flights and carried more than 4.767 million passengers, which also testifies to the active attraction of foreign airlines and the growth of international air traffic.⁴⁷⁷

In this respect, the volume of flights by international airlines to Uzbekistan is increasing, thanks to a smooth policy that allows for an increase in frequencies. As an example, the number of flights between Türkiye and Uzbekistan also increased in 2024, with the number of weekly flights between the cities of the two countries exceeding 90.⁴⁷⁸ In addition, the number of flights between Uzbekistan and India is expected to double. By 2025, there will be 28 flights between the two countries.⁴⁷⁹

Since 2018, there has also been an increase in the number of people using the services of the country's airports. More than 13.503 million passengers used Uzbekistan's airports in 2024, including 11.022 million on international flights and

⁴⁷⁵“Uzbekistan and China Strengthen Tourism Ties.” Available: <https://uzbektourism.uz/en/news/view?id=3700>. Accessed on 4 February 2025

⁴⁷⁶ “Uzbekistan’s Qanot Sharq to Fly between Tashkent and Madrid.” Available at: <https://www.aviacionline.com/uzbekistans-qanot-sharq-to-fly-between-tashkent-and-madrid>. Accessed on 4 February 2025

⁴⁷⁷ “Aeroporty Uzbekistana Obsluzhil Bolee 13.5 mln Passazhirov v 2024 Godu.” (Airports in Uzbekistan have Served more than 13.5 million Passengers in 2024) Available at: <https://uz24.uz/ru/articles/avia-25-1-16>. Accessed on 4 February 2025

⁴⁷⁸ “Posol Turtsii v Tashkente: Otnoshenie Dvuh Stran Nahodyatsya na Pike Svoego Razvitiya.” (Turkish Ambassador in Tashkent: Relations between the Two Countries at a High Point) Available at: www.aa.com.tr/ru/политика/посол-турции-в-ташкенте-отношения-двух-стран-находятся-на-пике-своего-развития/3467900. Accessed on 4 February 2025

⁴⁷⁹ “Uzbekistan and India to Increase Number of Flight Routes.” Available at: <https://www.uzdaily.uz/en/uzbekistan-and-india-to-increase-number-of-flight-routes/>. Accessed on 4 February 2025

2.48 million on domestic flights. The overall growth in passenger traffic was 30 percent compared to the previous year, when the figure reached 10.409 million passengers. More than 113.6 thousand flights were handled by the country's international airports in 2024, an increase of 33 percent compared to the previous year. Of the total number of flights, 80.2 thousand were to international destinations, while 33.4 thousand were to domestic destinations.⁴⁸⁰

Besides air transportation, there are also developments in railway and road transportation as well. Transportation is virtually synonymous with tourism. Tourism, by definition, involves travel. This may be by air, water, or, most frequently, by land. Transportation is associated with both innovation and nostalgia.⁴⁸¹ Butler identifies five ways in which transport affects tourism: time reduction, financial cost reduction, improvements in safety and comfort, increased convenience, and increased accessibility of destinations. Butler also notes that all forms of transport can be part of a tourist experience for the person who enjoys driving or relaxing on board a train, flying, or going on a cruise.⁴⁸²

In addition to connecting origin and destination, in the case of Uzbekistan, this is connecting from different countries to Tashkent, Bukhara, or Samarkand. Linking transport is also needed to provide access within a given destination, in other words, from the airport to the hotel, from the hotel to a tourist attraction, and, in the case of a multi-destination trip, to connect the different destinations within the trip, such as connecting Tashkent to Bukhara or Samarkand or vice versa.

In this regard, the development of tourism infrastructure depends on the availability of the connection of the origin and the destination, France and Uzbekistan as instance and also between the destinations; suppose a French tourist wants to see Kazakhstan

⁴⁸⁰ “Aeroporty Uzbekistana Obsluzhil Bolee 13.5 mln Passazhirov v 2024 Godu.” (Airports in Uzbekistan have served to more than 13.5 million passengers in 2024) Available at: <https://uz24.uz/ru/articles/avia-25-1-16>. Accessed on 4 February 2025

⁴⁸¹ Peter Robinson, Michael Lück, Stephen Smith. “Tourism.” Boston: CABI, 2020, p.98

⁴⁸² Butler, Richard W. “The Concept of a Tourist Area Cycle of Evolution: Implications for Management of Resources.” Canadian Geographer 24(1):5 – 12, 2008, Doi:[10.1111/j.1541-0064.1980.tb00970.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-0064.1980.tb00970.x)

after Uzbekistan and as well as the development of infrastructure within the various destinations visited, which is also of utmost importance as our case it is the available connection for a French visitor between Tashkent-Samarkand, Samarkand-Bukhara and Bukhara-Tashkent. Therefore, the connections and networks between these means of transport in different destinations are crucial for the comfort of international visitors, which would ultimately contribute to the competitiveness of the destination. The networks through which modes of transport operate function as important economic conduits for many destinations. Networks can be global, regional, and local. It is important that local networks are integrated into regional and international networks in order to maximize visitor flows into a destination.⁴⁸³

Since Mirziyoyev became President, Uzbekistan has implemented concrete policies to develop the country's rail and road infrastructure, particularly with the aim of developing tourism and providing convenient and comfortable transport between the country's major tourist destinations. As road and rail infrastructure is a very broad and technical subject and is not only related to tourism development, this section will only analyze road and rail development in terms of its contribution to tourism destinations and products and will not go into the details of the decrees and regulations.

A high-speed railway authorizes a reduction in transportation costs and can be a tool for tourism destination development by allowing accessibility improvement.⁴⁸⁴ Investment in connecting Uzbekistan's most popular tourist destinations by railway began during the Karimov era. 2011 saw the opening of the Tashkent-Samarkand high-speed train, which cut the journey time to two hours.⁴⁸⁵ The extension of the high-speed train from Samarkand to Bukhara, which also provides a Tashkent-

⁴⁸³ Dwyer Larry, Forsyth Peter, Dwyer Wayne. "Tourism Economics and Policy." Bristol: View Publications. 2020, p. 342

⁴⁸⁴ Masson Sophie, Petiot Romain. "Can the High-Speed Rail Reinforce Tourism Attractiveness? The Case of the High-Speed Rail between Perpignan (France) and Barcelona (Spain)." *Technovation*, Volume 29, Issue 9, 2009, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.technovation.2009.05.013>

⁴⁸⁵ "Poezdka v Samarkand na Poezde Afrosiyob Teper Zanimaet Dva Chasa." (It Now Takes Two Hours to Travel to Samarkand on the Afrosiyob Train) Available at: <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2013/02/12/afrosiyob/>. Accessed on 4 February 2025

Bukhara and Samarkand-Bukhara link and reduces the journey time from Tashkent to Bukhara to 3 hours 20 minutes, was launched in August 2016.⁴⁸⁶

The Mirziyoyev era has seen the launch of a high-speed train project that will link Tashkent with Khiva, one of Uzbekistan's most popular tourist destinations. The high-speed train, which will reduce the travel time from Tashkent to Khiva to 7 hours, is estimated to be put into operation by 2025.⁴⁸⁷

In addition to increasing high-speed rail links between popular destinations, the Uzbek authorities have been actively working to introduce tourist trains to Uzbekistan, which have recently become a major tourist product worldwide. Tourist trains, especially the luxury ones, offer a high level of service to high-end visitors who want to get to know a destination while at the same time having a positive impact on increasing the number of qualified tourists coming to the country.

In this regard, On November 18, 2024, the first tourist train, "*Jibek Joly*" (Silk Road in Kazakh) on the route "Almaty-Turkestan-Tashkent-Almaty" took place at the Central Railway Station of Tashkent.⁴⁸⁸ As an initiative to revive and promote the Silk Road destinations and also as an attempt to stimulate the growth of tourist flows between the countries of Central Asia, the tourist train would contribute to the diversification of Uzbekistan's tourism products. On the Silk Road Train, professional guides will accompany all excursions, and the route will be traveled by tourist buses, with travelers spending one day in Turkestan and two days in Tashkent to see the main attractions, scenic spots, and other interesting places.⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁶ "Zapushen Vysokorostnoi Poezd do Buhary." (High-Speed Train to Bukhara has been launched) Available at: <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2016/08/25/railway/>. Accessed on 4 February 2025

⁴⁸⁷ "S 2025 Goda Mezhd Tashkentom I Khivoi Zapustyat Skorostnoi Poezd." (By 2025, a High-Speed Train will be Operating between Tashkent and Khiva) Available at: <https://daryo.uz/ru/2023/06/13/s-2025-goda-mezhdu-tashkentom-i-hivoy-zapustat-skorostnoj-poezd>. Accessed on 4 February 2025

⁴⁸⁸ "The First Tourist Train on the Almaty-Turkestan-Tashkent-Almaty Route Arrived in Tashkent." Available: <https://uzbektourism.uz/en/news/view?id=3627>. Accessed on 4 February 2025

⁴⁸⁹ "The First Tourist Train on the Almaty-Turkestan-Tashkent-Almaty Route Arrived in Tashkent." Available: <https://uzbektourism.uz/en/news/view?id=3627>. Accessed on 4 February 2025

In addition, the Uzbek government is also investing in luxury trains, which would contribute to an increase in revenue for the tourism industry. In this regard, by 2026 the luxury train named Samarkand Express is planned to be inaugurated within the country. The "Samarkand Express", which is expected to start operating in Uzbekistan in late 2026, will consist of 13-15 carriages with 38 compartments of different comfort categories for 76 passengers in Deluxe, Luxury and Super Deluxe and will cover the Tashkent - Khiva route in 2 nights and 3 days with stops in Samarkand and Bukhara.⁴⁹⁰

The need for significant improvements in road infrastructure can be seen as a legacy of the Soviet Union in Central Asia. During the Soviet period, as well as in the early years of independence, many roads and highways were in poor condition, hindering the flow of people within Uzbekistan. Although international visitors tend to use flights to reach a destination, especially in a country like Uzbekistan, where there are more than 3-4 attractions to visit, the trip may involve more than one mode of transport. Tourists may use buses at the destination. Smooth and quality roads make it easier for visitors to experience the destination and ultimately act as a catalyst for the development of the destination.

Since Mirziyoyev became president, Uzbekistan has invested heavily in road quality and infrastructure. Since 2016, Uzbekistan has allocated 58 trillion UZS (around \$4.5 billion) to road construction, leading to the development of 2,000 kilometers of new roads and the repair of 100,000 kilometers.⁴⁹¹ Mirziyoyev government has been actively working on this problem. Efforts to attract foreign investment, improve regulatory frameworks, and promote public-private partnerships are being undertaken to accelerate infrastructure development in the country.⁴⁹²

⁴⁹⁰ "Samarkand Express" to Be Launched in Uzbekistan in 2026." Available at: <https://eco-tourism.expert/en/news/samarkand-express-to-be-launched-in-uzbekistan-in-2026>. Accessed on 4 February 2025

⁴⁹¹ "President Mirziyoyev Urges to Speed up Toll Road Construction, Ensuring Free Alternatives." Available at: <https://m.kun.uz/en/news/2024/10/17/president-mirziyoyev-urges-to-speed-up-toll-road-construction-ensuring-free-alternatives>. Accessed on 6 February 2025

⁴⁹² Arabov Nurali, Nasimov Dilmurad and others. "Shaping the Future of Uzbekistan's tourism: An in-depth Analysis of Infrastructure Influence and Strategic Planning." *Journal of Eastern European and Central Asian Research (JEECAR)*, 11(1), 53–65. <https://doi.org/10.15549/jeecar.v11i1.1478>

Advanced equipment, acquired with grants from the World Bank, allows for the evaluation of the physical properties of road surfaces and the inspection of underground utilities without damaging the surface.⁴⁹³ Private sector representatives are also actively involved in this area. The operation of 260 kilometers of roads in the regions has been outsourced to entrepreneurs. Within the framework of the Asian Development Bank project, an agreement has been reached that, for the first time, local contractors will exclusively participate in constructing 841 kilometers of roads.⁴⁹⁴

However, further efforts are needed to improve the country's road infrastructure. To this end, the construction of the Tashkent-Andijan and Tashkent-Samarkand toll roads will begin in 2025, according to Uzbek Transport Minister Ilkhom Mahkamov. With the support of the World Bank, the Tashkent-Andijan toll road, a 314-kilometer motorway, is expected to reduce travel time between the two cities from 5 to 3 hours, while the Tashkent-Samarkand Road is expected to be completed by the end of 2028 and then handed over to a private operator on a public-private partnership (PPP) basis. The preliminary cost of the Tashkent-Samarkand road is \$2.2 billion.⁴⁹⁵ The Tashkent-Andijan project is estimated to cost \$4.28. The PPP agreement for the construction of the road will be in effect for 49 years.⁴⁹⁶ In addition, a three-year program has been initiated to reconstruct 4,700 bridges that need repair, and 70 new service complexes will be built along approximately 4,000 kilometers of international highways.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹³ "President Mirziyoyev urges to speed up toll road construction, ensuring free alternatives." Available at: <https://m.kun.uz/en/news/2024/10/17/president-mirziyoyev-urges-to-speed-up-toll-road-construction-ensuring-free-alternatives>. Accessed on 6 February 2025

⁴⁹⁴ "Essential Tasks in Road Construction are Considered." Available at: <https://gov.uz/en/news/view/24525>. Accessed on 30 January 2025.

⁴⁹⁵ "Stroitel'stvo Platnyh Trass Tashkent-Andijan i Tashkent-Samarkand Nachnetsya v 2025 godu." (Construction of Tashkent-Andijan and Tashkent-Samarkand Toll Motorways to Start in 2025) Available at: <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2025/02/04/toll-roads/>. Accessed on 6 February 2025

⁴⁹⁶ "Tender for Tashkent-Andijan Toll Road Project announced." Available at: <https://tashkenttimes.uz/national/14577-tender-for-tashkent-andijan-toll-road-project-announced>. Accessed on 6 February 2025

⁴⁹⁷ "Tender for Tashkent-Andijan Toll Road Project announced." Available at: <https://tashkenttimes.uz/national/14577-tender-for-tashkent-andijan-toll-road-project-announced>. Accessed on 6 February 2025

A tourist destination must have a range of quality transport facilities. The quality of a destination and the quality of the transport network within the destination play an important role in destination preference. Efficient transport infrastructure is crucial to unlocking the productivity gains that underpin a destination's future prosperity. Without adequate transport connections, operators and host communities cannot reap the economic benefits of a thriving tourism industry or develop their local economies.⁴⁹⁸

In this regard, the presence of high-quality road and motorway infrastructure, as well as high-quality coaches for tourists, play a crucial role in providing comfort and, ultimately, a pleasant experience and journey for visitors. The main contribution of buses to the tourism and transport task lies in their long-distance use. There are three main tourist markets – bus transport in urban areas, coach tours and origin-destination travel. The flexibility of bus routes means that they can carry tourists to destinations and to attractions in the destination, sometimes in remote areas, for general sightseeing.⁴⁹⁹ For almost all post-Soviet states, the lack of quality touring coaches has been a problem when it comes to providing a high quality service to international visitors. With this in mind, the Uzbek government, in a decree signed on 18th June 2024 entitled "On Additional Measures to Improve Tourism Infrastructure and Further Increase the Flow of Foreign Tourists to the Republic of Uzbekistan", finalized incentives and tax exemptions for tour operators (tourist agencies) in case of importing new high-class tourist buses as follows:

- Until 1 August 2025, buses and minibuses imported by business entities engaged in tourism activities shall be exempt from customs duties.
- These privileges are granted to new buses meeting the requirements of ecological class "Euro-5" and above, as well as to minibuses with eight or more seats, excluding the driver's seat, imported into the customs territory of the Republic of Uzbekistan;⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁸ Dwyer Larry, Forsyth Peter, Dwyer Wayne. "Tourism Economics and Policy." Bristol: View Publications. 2020, p. 400

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 421

⁵⁰⁰ "Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan, O Dopolnitel'nyh Merah po Uluchsheniyu Turisticheskoi Infrastruktury i Dal'neyshemu Uvelicheniyu Potoka Inostrannyh Turistov v Respubliku Uzbekistan."

Covering some destinations requires more than one mode of transport. Uzbekistan is also a tourist destination that requires different modes of transport, such as air, rail and road, to explore its diverse and unique tourist destinations and products. During the Mirziyoyev period, transport development policies, such as the visa policy, have been implemented in parallel with the tourism policy, which has become the country's strategic sector since 2016.

In this sense, the active aviation policy since 2018 has led to a significant increase in the number of airlines and aircraft in the country, with a parallel almost threefold increase in the number of flights and aircraft passengers. The policy of improving the quality of services at the country's main airports has also improved the quality of services offered to foreign tourists coming to the country.

In addition, the country's main tourist destinations have been linked by high-speed railways, and investment in this area is continuing. Efforts to improve and modernize the country's road network, as well as to increase the number of high-quality coaches in the country's tourism industry, have continued during the Mirziyoyev period, with the help of government support and incentives, as well as the participation of international financial institutions and the private sector.

5.5.4. Promotion Policies

As the other components of tourism policy, tourism promotion plays a key role in increasing international tourist flows to a given destination. Promotional activities help increase awareness of a destination and the visibility and competitiveness of a destination in the international tourism system. In the field of tourism, the main objective of promotional activities is to encourage actual and potential visitors to come and experience the destination. Information dissemination through various channels about the destination, tourism products, and general issues such as the availability and comfort of transport within the destination or the safety of

(Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Additional Measures to Improve Tourism Infrastructure and Further Increase the Flow of Foreign Tourists to the Republic of Uzbekistan) dated 18.07.2024, No UP-102. Available at: <https://lex.uz/en/docs/7031238?ONDATE=23.07.2024>. Accessed on 28 January 2025

international visitors are among the main tools of tourism promotion policies. The objective of promotion is consistent with the general marketing plan are to identify the target group to which the promotion is conducted, to find out the effective advertising, sales support, and public relations programs to be planned, and to select the best methods to be used to control and assess the promotion operation.⁵⁰¹

Tourism promotion plays an important role in enhancing the competitive edge of one tourist destination over another because tourists' image of a destination and the attitude of tourists toward that destination seem to be two of the most important factors responsible for this variation. As a result, the aggressiveness of the promotion campaigns launched by tourist destinations has added a new dimension to competitiveness. It has resulted in increasing numbers of image advertisements in travel and tourism literature and the mass media, leading tourist destinations to spend billions of dollars annually on image-building and image-correction promotion programs.⁵⁰²

Tourism marketing refers to the management and promotion of destinations through the creation of images and experiences related to food, culture, and community to attract tourists and drive regional development.⁵⁰³ It can also be explained as the management process of identifying selected tourist segments and communicating with potential visitors to create awareness, interest, and desire that would translate into a concrete desire to visit the destination.

Although promotion and marketing are two different issues, and promotion is sometimes included under the broad heading of marketing, in this section, when I focus on promotion policy, I will also analyze marketing policy. Some of the promotional activities carried out by public authorities using the state budget may

⁵⁰¹ "Tourism Promotion in the EU and Destination Image." Available at: <https://www.aalep.eu/tourism-promotion-eu-and-destination-image>. Accessed on 8 February 2025

⁵⁰² Navruzzoda M. "Sovershenstvovanie Metodiki Otsenki Kachestva Turisticheskix Uslug." (Improvement of the Methods for the Assessment of the Quality of Tourism Services) In the Article "Overview of Uzbekistan Tourism Industry" written by Safaeva S.R., Tarikulov. Available at: https://iqtisodiyot.tsue.uz/sites/default/files/maqolalar/21_S_Safayeva_M_Tarikulov_0.pdf. Accessed on 10 January 2025.

⁵⁰³ "Tourism Marketing." Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/tourism-marketing>. Accessed on 9 February 2025

overlap with marketing activities, either independently or by supporting or encouraging the country's tourism enterprises, whether a hotel or a tourist agency, to be involved in marketing activities in different parts of the world. Therefore, in this section, both tourism policy and tourism promotion and marketing activities will be analyzed under the umbrella of promotional activities.

Where the other tourism policy instruments are adequate, tourism promotion plays a vital role in increasing the number of tourists travelling to a country. The role of promotion in the tourism industry is evident in efforts to build a strong brand identity and destination image. Through marketing and promotional activities, destinations and tourism-related businesses have the chance and opportunity to create a distinctive image that differentiates the destination from its competitors and creates a positive perception, which ultimately contributes to increasing the number of visitors. It can be argued that promotional activities are more important for those countries whose image is not positive or well-known among the potential visitors living in the target markets. In this respect, Uzbekistan needs more promotional activities as its tourism destinations and products are not fully known, especially by potential Western visitors.

It should also be borne in mind that Uzbekistan has just emerged as an international tourist destination after a long period of isolation during the Soviet Union, followed by the prioritization of regional conflicts and security issues over tourism during the Karimov period.

Florian J. Eitzenberger and Tatyana Thimm conducted a study to understand the image of Uzbekistan among residents and potential German tourists living in Germany in December 2024. The survey results underline the importance of conducting aggressive promotional campaigns, especially in the Western countries from which Uzbekistan plans to attract visitors. In the survey, residents and potential tourists in Germany were asked about the first things that come to mind when they think about Uzbekistan. While the answers of the residents were positive, such as peace, hospitality and beauty, the answers of the Germans reflected the fact that most of them had either limited knowledge about Uzbekistan or prejudices related to the

Soviet legacy. According to the survey, German citizens' top-of-mind image attributes were less concrete and often associated with other countries or regions. Most frequently mentioned were the words "Asia" (36 counts) and "The Soviet Union" (18 counts), followed by "country" (17 counts), "mountains", "poverty" (each 15 counts), "beautiful" (13 counts), "Central Asia" (12 counts), "nothing" (11 counts), "Islam", "Russia" and "Silk Road" (each 10 counts).⁵⁰⁴

The image of Uzbekistan among potential German tourists is not positive either; the answers they give do not seem to correspond to reality. Among the German respondents, Uzbekistan is often considered a conservative Muslim country. Additionally, it is frequently confused with other countries ending in "-stan," such as Pakistan or Afghanistan, leading to concerns about safety and security. Another common misconception is that Uzbekistan remains under strong Russian influence as a post-Soviet country. Overall, these factors contribute to a generally grim image of the country⁵⁰⁵

As noted above, promotional activities are important in creating a positive image of the destination in the target markets, while the presence of potential visitors who have no personal experience of the destination means that the formation of the destination's image relies heavily on external sources of information, which an effective promotion strategy can best provide.

As mentioned earlier, Mirziyoyev declared tourism to be a strategic sector for the country soon after becoming president and immediately began implementing policies to develop the tourism industry in Uzbekistan. He also knew the importance and contribution of promotional activities to the competitiveness of Uzbekistan as a tourist destination in the world and the increasing number of international visitors. In his March 2017 speech, Mirziyoyev noted that it is required to develop a strategy for producing competitive tourist products and services in the region, their promotion on

⁵⁰⁴ Eitzenberger Florian J., Thimm Tatyana. "Perception Disparity: Analyzing the Destination Image of Uzbekistan Among Residents and Non-Visitors." *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, Volume 34, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2024.100946>

⁵⁰⁵ Eitzenberger Florian J., Thimm Tatyana. "Perception Disparity: Analyzing the Destination Image of Uzbekistan Among Residents and Non-Visitors." *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, Volume 34, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2024.100946>

the domestic and international tourist market, and the broad establishment of appropriate advertising and information activities.⁵⁰⁶

Soon after, Uzbekistan, as with the other main instruments of tourism policy, sought to establish guidelines for the general principles of promotional policy through state documents. Article 7 of the Concept of Tourism Development for 2019-2025 outlines the roadmap for the promotion of Uzbekistan's tourist destinations and products in the domestic and foreign tourist markets, as well as the strengthening of Uzbekistan's image as a preferred tourist destination. The guideline for promotional activities includes:

- Creating a unified national tourism brand of the Republic of Uzbekistan, on the basis of which regional tourism brands will be created, taking into account the specifics of each region
- Developing an effective strategy for the promotion of the national tourist product, focusing mainly on the key markets of the tourist destination and having a stable character.
- Supporting and consolidating specialized exhibition activities to create one of the largest regional tourism exhibitions in the national tourism market
- Carry out image promotion and information campaigns in the country and abroad.
- Encourage the participation of tourism organizations in the promotion of their tourism products at international tourism events.
- Increasing the number of information kiosks throughout the country providing free information, including reservations, souvenirs, books, and tourist maps.
- Establishment of specialized units in law enforcement agencies to ensure safe tourism in the areas with the greatest tourism potential and to provide them with modern technical and transport facilities.⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰⁶ “Shavkat Mirziyoyev: Turizm-Vazhnaya Otrasl Nashei Ekonomiki.” (Shavkat Mirziyoyev: Tourism is an Important Industry of our Economy) Available at: <https://president.uz/ru/lists/view/314>. Accessed on 10 February 2025

⁵⁰⁷ “Kontseptsiya Razvitiya Turizma v Respublike Uzbekistan v 2019-2025.” (Concept of Development of the Tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan for the period 2019-2025. Appendix No.1

Article 7 of the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan On Measures to Significantly Increase the Flow of Foreign Tourists to the Country and to Further Intensify Domestic Tourism, signed on 12.01.2024 has specific aims for making promotional activities abroad more efficient which includes:

- From 2024, a tourism representative of the Tourism Committee will be appointed to promote the tourism potential of the Republic abroad.
- Candidates for the position of Tourism Representative and foreign countries where the tourism potential of the Republic is promoted shall be approved by the Tourism Committee.
- Stimulation of the activities of the Tourism Representative on promotion of the tourism potential of the Republic of Uzbekistan is carried out at the expense of the Tourism Support Fund.⁵⁰⁸

The presence of tourism counsellors in the target source tourism markets is crucial for a destination to carry out effective promotional activities. Tourism counsellors should be able to identify the needs of their country and the potential types of tourism to be promoted; they should also be able to engage in lobbying and various forms of cooperation with tourism sector representatives in the country where they are based; and, most importantly, they should be able to use the promotional budget appropriately and effectively.

Tourist agencies are essential for any country to increase the number of international visitors. Their promotional activities help to increase the number of international tourists visiting specific destinations. In order to increase the number of new tourist industry facilities in the regions of the country, to introduce modern mechanisms for active promotion of national tourist products on the world market and to support the

to the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated 05.01.2019 No UP-5611) Available at:

[https://nrm.uz/contentf?doc=574255_koncepciya_razvitiya_sfery_turizma_v_respublike_uzbekistan_v_2019-2025_godah_\(prilojenie_n_1_k_ukazu_prezidenta_ruz_ot_05_01_2019_g_n_up-5611\)](https://nrm.uz/contentf?doc=574255_koncepciya_razvitiya_sfery_turizma_v_respublike_uzbekistan_v_2019-2025_godah_(prilojenie_n_1_k_ukazu_prezidenta_ruz_ot_05_01_2019_g_n_up-5611)).

Accessed on 12 October 2024

⁵⁰⁸ “Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan o Merah po Znachitel’nemu Uvelicheniyu Potoka Inostrannyh Turistov v Respubliku i Dalneyshemu Aktivizatsii Vnutrennego Turizma.” (Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Measures to Significantly Increase Foreign Tourist Flows to the Country and Develop Domestic Tourism) dated 12.01.2024, No UP-9. Available at: <https://www.lex.uz/ru/docs/6759641>. Accessed on 10 February 2025

promotional activities of tourist agencies, the Government of Uzbekistan announced an incentive program to support the activities of travel agencies. According to the Decree signed on 18 July 2024 "On Additional Measures to Improve Tourism Infrastructure and Further Increase the Flow of Foreign Tourists to the Republic of Uzbekistan", the incentives to encourage tourist agencies involved in promotional activities abroad and ultimately contribute to the growth of international tourist flow are classified as follows:

- To attract foreign tourists to our country, a separate credit line of \$50 million is being opened from the Recovery and Development Fund through Republican commercial banks. These loans will be provided for 10 years with a two-year grace period at an annual interest rate of up to 17% in the national currency.
- Under this targeted credit line, loans will be provided to tour operators who have been operating for more than one year and can attract at least 15% of their own funds (including investments in the form of buildings and structures). These loans will be intended to finance working capital related to the costs of attracting tourists from foreign countries to the republic and may be granted to a single business entity for up to 25 billion soums. (around \$2 million)
- To ensure the effective and targeted use of the allocated loans, tour operators commit to increasing the number of serviced foreign tourists, as well as revenues from the provision of tourism services by at least 25%
- 50 per cent of the costs of renting a pavilion at international tourism fairs and exhibitions for tour operators who have been in business for no more than three years since the start of their activities shall be covered by the extra-budgetary Tourism Support Fund of the Committee on Tourism.⁵⁰⁹

Most international visitors tend to use the services of travel agencies when planning a trip abroad. This tendency increases when planning a trip to a relatively less-known

⁵⁰⁹ "Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan, O Dopolnitel'nyh Merah po Uluchsheniyu Turisticheskoi Infrastruktury i Dal'neyshemu Uvelicheniyu Potoka Inostrannykh Turistov v Respubliku Uzbekistan." (Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Additional Measures to Improve Tourism Infrastructure and Further Increase the Flow of Foreign Tourists to the Republic of Uzbekistan) dated 18.07.2024, No UP-102. Available at: <https://lex.uz/en/docs/7031238?ONDATE=23.07.2024>. Accessed on 28 January 2025

destination. Therefore, for a destination such as Uzbekistan, the strong business relationship between travel agencies is crucial when planning to increase the number of visitors from non-post-Soviet countries, as potential visitors from these states tend to have relatively less information about Uzbekistan's tourism offer. Therefore, subsidizing the international promotional activities of Uzbek travel would help to increase the number of international visitors to the country.

As mentioned in the section on the legal framework, in 2018 the National PR Centre was established under the Tourism Committee of Uzbekistan, the state body responsible for all types of public relations and promotional activities abroad. Promotion is the most important policy element that will increase the flow of tourists to a destination, provided that other conditions of tourism policy tools are met to the maximum extent possible. In this respect, the organization of family trips, roadshows and workshops, joint promotional activities with representatives of the tourism sector abroad, advertising, participation in tourism fairs and, finally, the organization of advertising and cultural events to promote tourism products can be considered as the main tools of promotional activities.

It can also be said that promotional policies are particularly important for newly developing tourism countries seeking a place among developed tourist destinations. These countries need to implement aggressive promotion policies in order to compete and, if possible, catch up with the world's leading tourist destinations. In this section, I will review the variety of promotional commitments by giving concrete examples of some of the promotional activities recently undertaken by the Uzbek state authorities with the help of the state budget. In this sense, I will try to give a general idea of Uzbekistan's current tourism promotion policy.

Promotional activities vary, but hosting media and tourism industry representatives, also known as fam trips, such as journalists, social media influencers and travel agents, is one of the most important promotional tools, giving foreign representatives the opportunity to get to know local destinations and tourism products first-hand and to promote the destination in their countries by writing articles and posting on social media.

In this context, the Uzbek State Agency for Tourism organized a familiarization trip for world-famous Hungarian bloggers and journalists to Uzbekistan in 2024. The aim was to increase the number of tourists from European countries, especially from Hungary, to widely promote the tourism potential of our historical cities and to familiarize the Hungarian public with life in Uzbekistan.⁵¹⁰ Another example of this promotional activity is the organization of a family trip for Chinese bloggers and tourism writers dedicated to increasing the visibility of Uzbekistan's tourist destinations and products in China. To this end, master classes on handicrafts and cooking were held in Samarkand, Bukhara and Tashkent, and filming was organized at places of pilgrimage and attractions for the Chinese guests.⁵¹¹ Throughout 2024, 26 information and press fam-tours were organized in Uzbekistan for more than 100 foreign media representatives, bloggers and influencers from more than 20 countries.⁵¹²

Roadshows, which can be identified as multi-city tourism events or workshops organized in the country where a tourist flow is expected, aim to facilitate interaction between local tourism representatives and those from the source tourism market. In addition to the promotion of destinations and tourism products, joint marketing events with tourism play an important role, especially in bridging the tourism agencies, hoteliers and various service providers with the potential tourism marketers. In this respect, Uzbekistan organized a roadshow event in October 2024 in South Korea. The Uzbek Korean tourism forum, which became part of the "roadshow" events, was held in Seoul. The forum brought together more than 100 representatives of the tourism industry of the two countries. The main goal of the event was to promote the rich tourism potential and cultural heritage of Uzbekistan, as well as to establish cooperation between travel companies.⁵¹³

⁵¹⁰ "A Press Tour was Organized for Representatives of Leading Hungarian Media." Available at: <https://uzbektourism.uz/en/news/view?id=3622>. Accessed on 11 February 2025

⁵¹¹ "Famous Chinese Bloggers Promote the Tourism Potential of Uzbekistan." Available at: <https://uzbektourism.uz/en/news/view?id=3531>. Accessed on 11 February 2025

⁵¹² "V 2025 Godu, Kolichestvo Gostinit i Mest Razmesheniya v Uzbekistane Uvelichat pochtu do Semi Tyshyac." (By 2025, the Number of Hotels and Accommodation Facilities in Uzbekistan will Increase to Almost Seven Thousand) Available at: <https://vzglyad.uz/ru/post/2025/01/31/turizm>. Accessed on 31 January 2025

⁵¹³ "Uzbek Korean Tourism Forum Held in Seoul." Available at: <https://uzbektourism.uz/en/news/view?id=3536>. Accessed on 10 February 2025

Joint promotional activities with local or foreign travel agents are also an important part of tourism marketing and promotion. In this regard, the Uzbek tourism authorities organized a joint multi-country roadshow with Miki Travel Asia, an international travel company that sends Asian tourists to various countries around the world. The roadshow took place from 24 April to 1 May 2024 in Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia. The business interactions (B2B) events of the roadshow enabled an Uzbek delegation consisting of 25 different companies to hold a series of meetings with foreign partners to discuss prospects for cooperation in the tourism sector, which would then help to increase the number of visitors to Uzbekistan from the above-mentioned countries.⁵¹⁴ The total number of roadshows, similar to the above-mentioned ones, was held in 12 foreign countries in 2024 by Uzbekistan tourism authorities.⁵¹⁵

Advertising is also a powerful tool for increasing the awareness and visibility of a destination in potential source markets. It becomes more efficient when the promotional activities are carried out in countries where the knowledge of the destination is relatively low. Although it is an expensive activity depending on the results, advertising is still popular in the tourism sector. In 2024, videos about the sights of Samarkand, Bukhara, Khiva and Shakhrisabz were shown on a big screen outdoors in the Japanese capital, Tokyo.⁵¹⁶

The Uzbek authorities also cooperate with airlines in the field of advertising. A good example of this policy is the cooperation with Wizz Air, a low-cost airline that flies mainly to European countries. The Chairman of the Tourism Committee held negotiations with the Chief Commercial Officer of WizzAir in Hungary in June, and

⁵¹⁴ “Uzbekistan Organizovyvaet v Stranah Dalnego Vostoka Mezhdunarodnye Turisticheskie Meropriyatiya Roadshow.” (Uzbekistan Organizes International Touristic Activity of Roadshow in Far East Countries) Available at: <https://nationalprcenter.uz/novosti/uzbekistan-organizovyvaet-v-stranah-dalnego-vostoka-mezhdunarodnye-turisticheskie-meropriyatiya-road-show/>. Accessed on 5 February 2025

⁵¹⁵ “V 2025 Godu, Kolichestvo Gostinits i Mest Razhmesheniya v Uzbekistane Uvelichat pochti do Semi Tyshyac.” (By 2025, the Number of Hotels and Accommodation Facilities in Uzbekistan will Increase to Almost Seven Thousand) Available at: <https://vzglyad.uz/ru/post/2025/01/31/turizm>. Accessed on 31 January 2025

⁵¹⁶ “Uzbekistan's Tourism Potential is Promoted in Tokyo.” Available at: <https://uzbektourism.uz/en/news/view?id=3596>. Accessed on 9 February 2025

as a result it was decided to conduct a joint advertising campaign on international flights and the airline's websites to promote Uzbekistan's tourism potential.⁵¹⁷

Participation in tourism fairs, together with the tourism sector's representatives, also plays an important role in the promotion of the destination. Uzbekistan In 2024, Uzbekistan's national tourism stand was presented at 22 international fairs held in 19 leading countries of the world.⁵¹⁸ In this respect, regular participation in the World Tourism Market (WTM), which is considered to be the most efficient tourism exhibition in the world, is crucial. Stand of the tourism brand of Uzbekistan was presented at the exhibition in London WTM, where visitors could get acquainted with the rich cultural and historical heritage of the country within the framework of the event; B2B negotiations were held between national tour operators and foreign companies interested in new tourist destinations.⁵¹⁹

Moreover, since 1995 Uzbekistan has organized its own tourism exhibition, the Tashkent International Tourism Fair "Tourism on the Silk Road". The 2024 Silk Road Tourism Fair has helped Uzbek tourism authorities to promote Uzbek tourism destinations and products, and to acquaint foreign tourism representatives with Uzbekistan's tourism potential. In this regard, the event was attended by more than 20 thousand people, who were able to assess the prospects of new destinations in 14 regions of the country. In addition, B2B (Business to Business) meetings were held within the framework of the fair, where more than 20 thousand negotiations were held, and more than 8 thousand agreements were signed.⁵²⁰

⁵¹⁷ "An Advertisement of Uzbekistan will be Shown on WizzAir International Flights." Available at: <https://uzbektourism.uz/en/news/view?id=3302>. Accessed on 10 February 2025

⁵¹⁸ "V 2025 Godu, Kolichestvo Gostinits i Mest Razhmesheniya v Uzbekistane Uvelichat Pochti do Semi Tyshyac." (By 2025, the Number of Hotels and Accommodation Facilities in Uzbekistan will Increase to Almost Seven Thousand) Available at: <https://vzglyad.uz/ru/post/2025/01/31/turizm>. Accessed on 31 January 2025

⁵¹⁹ "Uzbekistan Has Demonstrated Tourism Potential and Opportunities for Travelers in London." Available at: <https://uzbektourism.uz/en/news/view?id=3609>. Accessed on 10 February 2025

⁵²⁰ "Tashkent Stal Tsentrom Mezhdunarodnogo Turizma na 29 j Yarmarke Turizm na Shelkovom Puti." (Tashkent has Become the Center of International Tourism during the 29th Tourism Fair "Silk Road") Available at: <https://titf.uz/novosti-tmtya/tashkent-stal-tsentrom-mezhdunarodnogo-turizma-na-29-j-yarmarke-turizm-na-shelkovom-puti/>. Accessed on 10 February 2025

Tourism advertorials are organic news or articles published in newspapers or magazines to promote destinations or tourism products. In this respect, cooperation with renowned magazines, newspapers and TV channels plays a crucial role in increasing the visibility of any destination in the country concerned. Consequently, Uzbek tourism authorities cooperate with media houses in their target countries as a tourism source market. Some of the important efforts include collaborations with Belgium and the Russian Federation. In this regard, the newspaper "L'Avenir", owned by one of the largest media groups in Belgium, published an article under the title "Uzbekistan - the heart of the Silk Road". The author conveys to readers the atmosphere of our country, its rich history and attractive features, such as modern transport infrastructure and affordable prices for accommodation and food.⁵²¹ Besides, On June 22-28 2024, the creative group of the popular program "The Lives of Others" of the "Russian TV Channel One" visited the sights, tourist sites and historical places of Samarkand, which will help widely promote the tourism potential of Uzbekistan in Russia and further increase the number of tourists from this country.⁵²² In 2024, Uzbekistan cooperated with different leading media companies in order to efficiently promote the destination and tourism products. In this regard, contracts have been signed with international media companies such as World Media Group, Blue Sky, Sky One, Wanderlust, Euronews, BBC, National Geographic, CNN, Travel Tomorrow, Warner Bros. Discovery, Saga Travel Group, as well as online platforms Ctrip.com, Holiday Factory, Voyage Prive.⁵²³

The organization of cultural events of various kinds contributes to the diversification of the tourist product of any destination wishing to attract more visitors with different purposes of visit. In this sense, Uzbekistan is a rich country with a huge cultural heritage and cultural events, as well as its rich cuisine. The Uzbek tourism

⁵²¹ "Belgian Readers Discover the Tourism Potential of Uzbekistan." Available at: <https://uzbektourism.uz/en/news/view?id=3556>. Accessed on 13 February 2025

⁵²² "Turisticheskiy Potentsial Uzbekistana Shiroko Prodvigaetsya na Rossiskih Telekanalah." The Touristic Potential of Uzbekistan is Actively Promoted in Russian TV Channels." Available at: <https://uzbektourism.uz/ru/news/view?id=3344>. Accessed on 13 February 2025.

⁵²³ "V 2025 Godu, Kolichestvo Gostinits i Mest Razhmesheniya v Uzbekistane Uvelichat pochni do Semi Tyshyac." (By 2025, the Number of Hotels and Accommodation Facilities in Uzbekistan will Increase to Almost Seven Thousand) Available at: <https://vzglyad.uz/ru/post/2025/01/31/turizm>. Accessed on 31 January 2025

authorities have organized various cultural events to promote the country's various cultural assets. At the gastronomic festival, which Uzbek officials organized in April 2024, more than 30 chefs prepared the best national dishes of their countries and presented them to the participants of the event in the area of "Craftsmen's Center" on the historic square.⁵²⁴

Taking into account the importance of cultural events for a tourism destination, Uzbekistan is also investing in the organization of major cultural events. In this regard, the country is also planning to organize its first biennial ever. The Bukhara Biennial will be the first major international biennial in Uzbekistan, scheduled to take place in September 2025. According to the official page, Bukhara's rich history as an important intellectual and economic center for production on the Silk Roads and as a hub for cultural exchange between Asia, Africa, and Latin America in the twentieth century will be manifested through an interdisciplinary experience with a strong focus on craft and cultures of togetherness.⁵²⁵

In addition, Uzbekistan's tourism strategy also makes provision for increasing the number of domestic tourists within Uzbekistan through marketing activities. Although encouraging Uzbek citizens to travel within Uzbekistan will not have a direct impact on international tourist flows to the country, increasing the number of domestic tourists will go a long way towards eliminating seasonality and increasing and sustaining employment. Furthermore, the existence of a strong domestic tourism market would insulate the local tourism industry from the crisis in international source markets, as well as avoid dependence on some specific international tourism markets, as was one of the main concerns in the dependency approach of international tourism policy.

In order to stimulate the domestic tourism movement, a presidential decree entitled "On Additional Measures to Diversify Domestic Tourism Services, dated 30 April

⁵²⁴ "A gastronomic festival was held with the participation of chefs from ECO member states. available at: <https://yuz.uz/en/news/v-shaxrisabze-proveden-gastronomicheskij-festival-s-uchastiem-shef-povarov-stran---chlenov-oes>. Accessed on 13 February 2025

⁵²⁵ "Bukhara Biennial." Available at: <https://www.bukharabiennial.uz/en>, Accessed on 13 February 2025

2022" was signed. The main objective of the decree is to diversify and significantly increase the volume of domestic tourism services, to create the necessary conditions for familiarizing citizens with the tourism potential of the country, to improve the quality of tourism services and increase competitiveness on the world markets, to create additional opportunities for businesses operating in the tourism sector, to accelerate the development of a modern service infrastructure under the name of *Ўzbekiston buylab sayoxat khil* (Travel across Uzbekistan).⁵²⁶

Based on the tasks defined in Article 4 of the said Decree, the Tourism Committee, together with the Tax Committee, has launched cash-back system for local tourists. According to it, the reimbursement of the part of the travel expenses made through the assigned electronic platform, including the mobile application, shall be made by the Uzbek government. The reimbursement of travel expenses will be made in case of simultaneous fulfilment of using air, railway and/or road transport, using services of accommodation facilities and visiting cultural institutions. The reimbursement of travel expenses shall be paid to each tourist in the following amounts,

- 15 per cent of the cost of a round-trip air ticket, but not more than 150 thousand soums (about \$11.5);
- 15 per cent of the cost of a round-trip ticket by train or bus, but not more than 80 thousand soums (about \$6);
- 15 per cent of the cost of one night's accommodation, but not more than 80 thousand soums; (about \$6);
- 50 percent of the cost of each ticket for visits to theatres, museums, circuses and art galleries, but not more than 20 000 soums. (about \$2USD).⁵²⁷

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, which almost froze international tourism movements for about three years, the best year for Uzbekistan's tourism industry in terms of the

⁵²⁶ “Postanovlenie Prezidenta Uzbekistan, o Dopolnitelnyh Merah po Diversifikatsii Uslug Vnutrennego Turizma.” (Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Additional Measures for the Diversification of Services in the Domestic Tourism Sector) dated 30.04.2022, No PP-232. Available at: <https://www.lex.uz/ru/docs/5991967>. Accessed on 12 February 2025

⁵²⁷ “Postanovlenie Prezidenta Uzbekistan, o Dopolnitelnyh Merah po Diversifikatsii Uslug Vnutrennego Turizma.” (Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Additional Measures for the Diversification of Services in the Domestic Tourism Sector) dated 30.04.2022, No PP-232. Available at: <https://www.lex.uz/ru/docs/5991967>. Accessed on 12 February 2025

number of international visitors was 2019. In 2019, Uzbekistan was visited by 6.7 million tourists. The largest number of tourists came from the Central Asian region - 5.7 million people. 495.6 thousand tourists came from the CIS countries. The number of visitors from non-CIS countries amounted to 488.4 thousand people.⁵²⁸ In 2023, which is regarded as the recovering year from the pandemic, the number of international visitors reached 6.6 million, which was still less than 2019.⁵²⁹ However, by 2024, the figures are promising for the Uzbek tourism Industry.

As a result of extensive work and aggressive promotional activities to develop the tourism sector. In 2024, 10.2 million international visitors visited the country for tourism and other purposes, and tourism receipts totaled US\$3.5 billion. These figures increased by 1.5 times compared to the previous year.⁵³⁰ The number of local visitors increased as well. Under the "Travel Across Uzbekistan!" program, 22.7 million visits were made by residents of the regions.⁵³¹

The goals and objectives of attracting more visitors from non-post-Soviet countries were achieved through the diversification of tourism source markets. Compared to 2023, the number of tourists from China increased by 1.8 times, from Italy by 1.5 times, from India by 1.6 times, from Germany by 1.2 times, from Turkey by 1.4 times, from South Korea by 14 percent.⁵³²

Uzbekistan's active efforts to promote tourism are also recognized by leading tourism publications and organizations in various countries. In this sense, Uzbekistan, as a

⁵²⁸ "6.7 million tourists visited Uzbekistan in a Year - State Committee for Tourism." Available at: <https://www.apta.uz/en/news/54>. Accessed on 8 February 2025

⁵²⁹ "In 2023 6.6 million Tourists from Foreign Countries visited Uzbekistan." Available at: <https://uzbekistan.travel/en/uzbekistan-tourist-arrivals/>. Accessed on 8 February 2025

⁵³⁰ V 2025 Godu, Kolichestvo Gostinits i Mest Razhmesheniya v Uzbekistane Uvelichat pochtu do Semi Tyshyac." (By 2025, the Number of Hotels and Accommodation Facilities in Uzbekistan will Increase to Almost Seven Thousand) Available at: <https://vzglyad.uz/ru/post/2025/01/31/turizm>. Accessed on 31 January 2025

⁵³¹ Ibid., accessed on 8 February 2025

⁵³² Turpotok v Uzbekistan Vyros v 1.5 raza." (Tourist Flow to Uzbekistan Increased for 1.5 times) Available at: <https://uz.kursiv.media/2025-01-20/turpotok-v-uzbekistan-vyros-v-15-raza/>. Accessed on 15 February 2025

tourist destination, has recently received a number of awards and honors in recognition of its promotional activities and, ultimately, growing popularity.

In December 2024, the expert jury of the national tourism award "Russian Traveler Awards 2024", organized by the Russian magazine "Russian Traveler," declared Uzbekistan the best tourism destination among the CIS countries.⁵³³

In addition, the British magazine Wanderlust named Uzbekistan as the best-emerging tourist destination in 2024. At a ceremony held in London in November 2024, Uzbekistan became the winner of the prestigious Wanderlust Reader Travel Awards 2024 in the category "The Most Desirable Emerging Destination".⁵³⁴

Global Media Portal BBC Travel, named Uzbekistan among the 25 best places to travel in 2025 together with destinations such as Japan, USA, Canada. According to BBC Travel, Uzbekistan strives to maintain its unique traditions and cultures, it is investing in tourism with new hotels, train routes, domestic flights and cultural attractions to grow its economy, retain its youth and attract more visitors.⁵³⁵

5.5.5. Training of the Employees Working in the Tourism Industry

In any tourist destination, the quality of service provided to visitors and their subsequent satisfaction with that service is of great importance to the development and competitiveness of a destination. Soon after taking office, Mirziyoyev focused on improving the skills of Uzbekistan's tourism workforce, which is seen as one of the key components of a developed tourism destination.

⁵³³ "V Rossii Uzbekistan Priznan Luchshim Turisticheskim Napravleniem 2024 Goda Sredi Stran SNG." (Russia Recognizes Uzbekistan as the Best Tourist Destination of the year 2024 Among the Countries of the CIS) Available at: https://cis.minsk.by/news/28681/v_rossii_uzbekistan_priznan_luchshim_turisticheskim_napravleniem_2024_goda_sredi_stran_sng. Accessed on 15 February 2025

⁵³⁴ "Uzbekistan has been awarded «the Most Desirable Emerging Destination» in the field of tourism." available at: <https://uzbekistan.travel/en/o/uzbekistan-has-been-awarded-most-desirable-emerging-destination-field-tourism/>. Accessed on 15 February 2025

⁵³⁵ "The 25 best places to travel in 2025." Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20250115-the-25-best-places-to-travel-in-2025>. Accessed on 15 February 2025

In the decree of the of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On measures for further improvement of the system of continuous training of specialists in the field of tourism, cultural heritage and museology”, adopted on 30 October 2021, one of the priorities of the Uzbek government in the sphere of tourism education and mentioned as follows: "To further improve the system of continuous education in the field of tourism, cultural heritage and museology in the Republic of Uzbekistan following international standards, to establish the process of training highly qualified competitive personnel under modern requirements of the labour market.”⁵³⁶

In any sector, employees must have a certain level of qualification and receive regular training and courses. Regardless of the industry, in a rapidly changing world, it is only possible to keep up with new conditions through regular training and updates. On the other hand, a high level of competence becomes even more important for employees who are in direct contact with customers, as direct interaction, if handled well, would only lead to customer satisfaction. Some researchers, like Holbrook, suggest that customer satisfaction is one of the goals of marketing activity.⁵³⁷

Quality of Service is becoming a key factor in customer satisfaction, especially in highly competitive industries. Service quality has been widely acknowledged as an important issue in many industries as it helps a company enhance its profits and also satisfy and retain customers. By providing excellent service quality, a business can create a competitive advantage to distinguish it from other organizations.⁵³⁸

⁵³⁶ “Postanavlenie Respubliki Uzbekistan o Merah po Dal’neyshemu Sovershenstvovaniyu Sistemy Nepreryvnoi Podgotovki Kvalifitsirovannyh Kadrov v Sfera Turizma Kulturnogo Naslediya i Muzevedeniya.” (Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on measures to Further Improve the System of Continuous Training of Qualified Personnel in the fields of Tourism, Cultural Heritage and Museum Studies) dated 30.10.2021 PP-5270. Available at: <https://lex.uz/docs/5701954>. Accessed on 16 February 2025

⁵³⁷ Holbrook, Moris B. “The Nature of Customer Value: An Axiology of Services in the Consumption Experience.” In “Service quality: New direction on theory and practice.” Edited by [Rust](#) Roland T., Oliver Richard L., Sage Publication. doi.org/10.4135/9781452229102.n2.

⁵³⁸ Buttle, Francis Arthur. SERVQUAL: Review, Critique, Research Agenda.” European Journal of Marketing. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235313579_SERVQUAL_review_critique_research_agenda. Accessed on 12 February 2025.

High-quality service, which is a common and usual expectation in the hospitality sector from the consumer's point of view, can only be achieved by highly skilled employees. Highly skilled employees can only be developed through high-level theoretical education and also practical training programs. This issue becomes vital in situations such as tourism and hospitality, where direct communication with customers is mandatory when almost all customers are expected to be pleasant and satisfied with the service that they get during their vacation. Ivanka Nestoroska and Irina Petrovska argue that having in mind the character of the activities in the hospitality industry where direct contact between employees and guests is necessary for providing and realizing the services, the success of service realization and fulfilling guests' satisfaction depends on the most on the human factor, i.e. the employees.⁵³⁹

Employees are the most important asset in the hospitality industry. They provide a quality of service that results in customer satisfaction. To achieve the quality of service that leads to customer satisfaction, hospitality employees need to be trained and qualified to understand and satisfy the needs of guests. Sommerville argues that “training is a process that provides employees with the knowledge and the skills required to operate within the systems and standards set by management.”⁵⁴⁰ Therefore, effective and regular training programs for the employees working in the field of tourism would play a key role in increasing customer satisfaction and contribute to growth in visitor numbers by ultimately attracting repeat customers to the destination. For improvement of work performance in hospitality, it's necessary to implement different methods that will contribute to providing high-quality services. Staff training is very common and is used to give employees new and advanced knowledge or skills that will assist them in their better job performance.⁵⁴¹

⁵³⁹ Nestoroska Ivanka., Petrovska Irina. “Staff Training in Hospitality Sector as Benefit for Improved Service Quality.” Available at: <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1658462450?sourcetype=Scholarly%20Journals>. Accessed on 13 February 2025.

⁵⁴⁰ Sommerville, Kerry L. “Hospitality Employee Management and Supervision: Concepts and Practical applications.” New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2007, p. 232

⁵⁴¹ Nestoroska Ivanka, Petrovska Irina. “Staff Training in Hospitality Sector as Benefit for Improved Service Quality.” Available at:

The level of service quality in the tourism sector, like other instruments of the main tourism policies, such as promotion, visa policy or infrastructure development, can also play a decisive role in attracting visitors or repeat visitors since the satisfaction of visitors during their holidays is one of the prior expectations of tourists. Through training, the employees are introduced to the kind of role their job position plays and its contribution to the whole business, which leads to increased employee job satisfaction and recognition, increased self-confidence for future self-development and achievement of personal and professional goals.⁵⁴²

During the Soviet period, Uzbekistan inherited a tourism sector with little competition from the world's leading tourist destinations. Visitors came and visited Uzbekistan without being encouraged by promotional activities. Even in the post-Soviet period, during the Karimov era, the tourism sector cannot be said to have developed in a competitive environment.

The lack of qualified personnel due to the limited number of institutions providing quality education and training for tourism personnel, perhaps one of the characteristics of the Soviet legacy, is one of the problems facing Uzbekistan's national tourism industry. It is also one of the difficulties that the Mirziyoyev administration will have to overcome if Uzbekistan is to become a developed tourist destination. Needless to say, the lack of high-level professionals in areas such as hotels, restaurants and sightseeing services has a negative impact on the quality and competitiveness of Uzbekistan's tourism industry.

Azizova, Mamasobirova, and Karimova argue that one of the reasons for this problem is the limited number of specialized institutions offering tourism education programs and the insufficient number of qualified teachers in the country. Due to the lack of an education system, many tourism workers in Uzbekistan have inadequate

<https://www.proquest.com/docview/1658462450?sourcetype=Scholarly%20Journals>. Accessed on 13 February 2025.

⁵⁴² Nestoroska Ivanka, Petrovska Irina. "Staff Training in Hospitality Sector as Benefit for Improved Service Quality." Available at: <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1658462450?sourcetype=Scholarly%20Journals>. Accessed on 13 February 2025.

professional training, lack training, lack skills in communicating with tourists and lack knowledge of international standards in the industry, and the services they provide often do not meet quality and international service standards.⁵⁴³

Aware that one of the conditions for becoming a world-renowned and developed tourist destination is linked to the high quality of service provided to visitors in the country's tourism sector, Mirziyoyev began taking concrete steps to improve the level of service provided by tourism workers as soon as he became president.

In this regard, Article 1 of the Presidential Decree on "Measures to Ensure the Rapid Development of the Tourism Industry of the Republic of Uzbekistan", signed by Mirziyoyev and, states that "Fundamental improvement of the system of qualitative training of qualified personnel for the tourism industry, especially in the field of management and marketing, training of tourist guides, regular retraining and advanced training of employees of the subjects of tourism activity is one of the main priorities of the Uzbek Government."⁵⁴⁴

In addition to that, the Concept also contains important guidelines for the training of the employees working in the tourism industry. The most important of them includes:

- Improvement of the system of training of highly qualified specialists, retraining and professional development of employees providing services,
- Conducting qualification assessments of personnel and graduates of professional educational institutions in the sphere of tourism
- Creation of a unified multi-level system of continuous education in tourism that meets international requirements

⁵⁴³ Azizova Nazira, Mamasobirova Guliznabonu, Karimova Gulnoza. "Otsenka i Perspektivy Razvitiya Sovremennogo Turisticheskogo Rynka Uzbekistana." (The Assessment and the Prospects of the Development of the Modern Tourist Market of Uzbekistan) Available at: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/otsenka-i-perspektivy-razvitiya-sovremennogo-turisticheskogo-rynka-uzbekistana>. Accessed on 5 February 2025

⁵⁴⁴ "Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan, O Merah po Obespecheniyu Uskorennoego Razvitiya Turistskoi Oblasti Respubliki Uzbekistan." (Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Measures to Ensure Accelerated Development of the Tourism Industry of the Republic of Uzbekistan) dated 02.12.2016, No UP-4861 2.12.2016. Available at: <https://lex.uz/docs/3077023>. Accessed on 12 October 2024

- Introduction of modernized educational standards, training and methodological programs, advanced information and communication technologies with practical orientation of education
- Development of standards establishing mandatory qualification requirements for employees of the tourism industry directly providing tourism services (guides, instructors-guides, employees of tourism facilities, catering, transport and others) in the sphere of inbound and domestic tourism
- Development and introduction of a system of training for tourism workers in the rules of safety instruction and information work with tourists
- Improving the system of professional training of tourism personnel by involving foreign specialists in the training process, as well as increasing the number of educational institutions organizing the system of professional training of tourism personnel, including in the regions of the country
- Opening branches of leading international higher education institutions to train specialists in tourism.⁵⁴⁵

One of the first steps taken by the Mirziyoyev administration to improve education and training programs was the establishment of an international university focused on training programs in the field of tourism. In this regard, the “International University of Tourism and Cultural Heritage, Silk Road” was created with the adoption of the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on 28 June 2018 entitled “On the establishment of the International University of Tourism "Silk Road.”

It was agreed to sign a cooperation agreement between the State Tourism Committee and the UNWTO, which provides for recognition of the status of the University as an international university, granting the University the right to use the UNWTO logo, as well as recognition of the University as an official partner.⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴⁵ “Kontsepsiya Razvitiya Turizma v Respublike Uzbekistan v 2019-2025.” (Concept of Development of the Tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan for the period 2019-2025. Appendix No.1 to the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated 05.01.2019 No UP-5611) Available at: [https://nrm.uz/contentf?doc=574255_koncepciya_razvitiya_sfery_turizma_v_respublike_uzbekistan_v_2019-2025_godah_\(prilojenie_n_1_k_ukazu_prezidenta_ruz_ot_05_01_2019_g_n_up-5611\)](https://nrm.uz/contentf?doc=574255_koncepciya_razvitiya_sfery_turizma_v_respublike_uzbekistan_v_2019-2025_godah_(prilojenie_n_1_k_ukazu_prezidenta_ruz_ot_05_01_2019_g_n_up-5611)). Accessed on 12 October 2024

⁵⁴⁶ Juliboyogli, Oybek. “Razvitie Turizma v Uzbekistane: Proshloe i Nastoyoshee.” (The Development of Tourism in Uzbekistan: The Past and the Present) Akademik Tarih ve Düşünce

Article 2 of the Decree on the Establishment of the Silk Road University states the objectives of the establishment of the University, which will be responsible for organizing a system of training for professionals in the field of international tourism, as follows:

- To provide quality education to higher qualified tourism professionals in accordance with national and international educational standards, using modern innovative and scientific-pedagogical technologies, the latest achievements of science and technology.
- development and implementation of new educational programs and innovative forms of training aimed at improving and modernizing the system of training in the field of tourism
- organization of retraining and advanced training of specialists of tourism entities.
- implementation of tourism activities and passenger transportation activities in tourism.
- development of cooperation with leading national and foreign educational institutions and research centers, including through the involvement of their specialists and experts in the process of training and research, organization of international scientific-practical conferences, seminars and symposiums to discuss topical issues in the sphere of tourism.⁵⁴⁷

In addition, Article 24 of the said decree exempts the University from customs payments (except for customs duties) for modern educational and scientific laboratory equipment, computer hardware, software products, educational and scientific-methodical literature, inventory and material and technical resources not produced in the Republic of Uzbekistan, imported to equip and support the activities of the University until 1 January 2021.

Dergisi, (The Journal of Academic History and Idea). Available at: <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/atdd/issue/46797/588234>. Accessed on 25 November 2024.

⁵⁴⁷ “Postanavlenie Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan, O Sozdanii Mezhdunarodnovo Universiteta Shelkovy Put.” (Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on the Establishment of the Silk Road International University of Tourism) dated 28.06.2018 No PP-3815. Available at: <https://www.lex.uz/ru/docs/3799080>. Accessed on 5 February 2025

In addition to that, with the Initiative of the President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev and in collaboration with UNWTO, the Samarkand International Academy of Tourism and Hospitality (Samarkand Tourism Academy) was established within the Silk Road University. The Academy, inaugurated on 20 October 2023, during the 25th anniversary session of the UN World Tourism Organization General Assembly in Samarkand, serves as a regional hub for training qualified personnel in the tourism sector.⁵⁴⁸

By cooperating with UNWTO, Uzbekistan began to use international experience in the sphere of tourism education and will also have an opportunity to use UNWTO networks for the practice of graduate students in the tourism industry. In this regard, graduates of the Academy will become highly skilled professionals in the sphere of tourism, with diplomas and certificates recognized by all UN member states. They will gain practical experience through internships with UN Tourism and other international partner organizations and may also work with these organizations.⁵⁴⁹

The Academy acts as an international training center for those wishing to build an international career in the hospitality industry. Highly qualified specialists from Swiss hospitality schools conduct the training process in English. The International Tourism Academy will train a total of 2,740 mid-level professionals over three years.⁵⁵⁰

Recognizing the need for more practical training in tourism, on 18 July 2024 Mirziyoyev signed a decree entitled 'On Measures to Improve the System of Training Personnel in the Tourism Sector'. The main aim of the decree is to improve the practical skills of students studying in the hospitality industry and to increase the

⁵⁴⁸ “International Academy of Tourism in Samarkand Welcomes First Students.” Available at: <https://www.uzdaily.uz/en/international-academy-of-tourism-in-samarkand-welcomes-first-students/>. Accessed on 5 February 2025

⁵⁴⁹ International Academy of Tourism in Samarkand Welcomes First Students.” Available at: <https://www.uzdaily.uz/en/international-academy-of-tourism-in-samarkand-welcomes-first-students/>. Accessed on 5 February 2025

⁵⁵⁰ “International Tourism Academy Accepts First Students.” Available at: <https://uzbekistan.travel/en/o/international-tourism-academy-accepts-first-students/>. Accessed on 7 February 2025

number of tourist guides serving tourists from countries that are among Uzbekistan's main tourist source markets. Some of the objectives of the decree are as follows:

- Starting from the academic year 2024/2025 in the state higher educational institutions of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the proportion of theoretical and practical teaching in the educational process will be as, in the first year-80 percent theory and 20 percent practice; in the second year-50 per cent theory and 50 percent practice; in the third year 30 percent theory and 70 percent practice.
- The Ministry of Ecology, Environmental Protection and Climate Change together with the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs shall take measures to introduce internationally recognized educational programs based on "franchise" in professional educational institutions under the International University of Tourism and Cultural Heritage "Silk Road"
- Increase the number of guides-interpreters providing services to additional training courses for guides-interpreters providing services in Arabic, Japanese, Chinese, Hindi, Spanish, Italian, Korean, Urdu, Indonesian and Malay languages.⁵⁵¹

In the field of practical training, both the State Tourism Committee and the country's tourism NGOs have provided opportunities for using the experience of foreign experts to improve the practical skills of personnel working in the tourism industry. The experience of foreign employees/trainers working in popular tourist destinations of the world contributes to the overall skills of Uzbek tourism personnel. An example of this is the training organized by APTA. The training for representatives of the hotel business and tour operators in marketing sustainable tourism" was held in Khorezm (Khiva city) and Tashkent region (Shafran mountain resort), which were conducted by specialists from Latvia and Greece in February 2024.⁵⁵²

⁵⁵¹ "Postonavlennie Prezidenta Respublikki Uzbekistan, O Merah po Sovershenstvovaniyu Sistemy Podgotovki Kadrov v Sfere Turizma." (Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Measures to Improve the System of Personnel Training in the Sphere of Tourism) dated 18.07.2024, No PP-269. Available at: <https://www.lex.uz/ru/docs/7031187>. Accessed on 6 February 2025.

⁵⁵² "A Training Seminar 'Training of Representatives of the Hotel Business and Tour Operators in the Marketing of Sustainable Tourism' was Held in Uzbekistan." Available at: <https://www.apta.uz/en/event/113>. Accessed on 5 February 2025

The State Committee for Tourism also cooperates with various institutions around the world to improve skills in the field of tourism. In this regard, as a result of negotiations with the University "Le Cordon Bleu Paris" on the issue of training of personnel in the field of gastronomic tourism in Uzbekistan, on 4 February 2025, professional chefs from the International Culinary Academy "Le Cordon Bleu Paris" held a special master class at the UNWTO Tourism Academy in Samarkand. The event was attended by chefs and their assistants from cafes, restaurants and hotels in Samarkand that focus on gastronomic tourism, as well as students from the Samarkand Tourism and Cultural Heritage Technical College.⁵⁵³

Another recent example of this policy is the training of trainers, which is regarded as one of the most efficient tourism training models in the sphere of tourism education. In this respect, On 16 October 2024, the Samarkand Tourism Academy launched a 6-month training program for 20 trainers in the field of hospitality management to improve their skills and knowledge, led by international hospitality experts and faculty members from Switzerland, UK, Australia, UAE and Georgia, enabling participants to acquire the latest knowledge and skills in the industry.⁵⁵⁴

In close cooperation and coordination with the representatives of the tourism industry, the State Committee for Tourism has taken measures to implement the policy of having qualified personnel in the field of tourism. In this regard, the State Committee for Tourism has organised regular meetings with Uzbek hoteliers and tourist agencies in order to determine and improve the practical training of Uzbek employees working in the field of tourism. As an example of this policy, the State Committee on Tourism held a meeting with leading tour operators and representatives of the hotel industry of Uzbekistan on 5 December 2024 to exchange views and proposals on ways to improve the quality of tourism services, develop

⁵⁵³ "Professional Chefs from the International Culinary Academy in France Conducted a Special Masterclass at the Samarkand UNWTO Tourism Academy." Available at: <https://www.univ-silkroad.uz/en/news/novosti-universiteta/item/2942-professional-chefs-from-the-international-culinary-academy-in-france-conducted-a-special-masterclass-at-the-samarkand-unwto-tourism-academy>. Accessed on 5 February 2025

⁵⁵⁴ "The International Tourism Academy Has Launched the Training of Trainers (TOT) Program." Available at: <https://uzbektourism.uz/en/news/view?id=3567>. Accessed on 5 February 2025

hotel infrastructure and introduce new approaches to attract international and local tourists through the introduction of digital technologies in tourism and hotel business.⁵⁵⁵

Since Mirziyoyev became the second President of Uzbekistan, efforts have been made in various areas of tourism to develop the tourism sector, which has been announced as a strategic sector. Among these areas of tourism development, increasing the theoretical and practical knowledge of employees plays an important role in improving the quality of services provided in the tourism sector. In this sense, Uzbekistan, through the State Tourism Committee, is cooperating with international organisations and renowned international educational institutions; it is also developing the country's tourism educational infrastructure by establishing new education institutions and conducting practical training in close cooperation with the tourism sector.

5.6. Bilateral Relations in the sphere of Tourism

Since Mirziyoyev became president, Uzbek's foreign policy has been increasingly shaped by economic considerations such as export markets, investment opportunities, and development in tourism. There have been government efforts to turn foreign policy into a domestic issue for reasons of democratization, identity, and civil society involvement in order to reach the level of developed states by eliminating the unemployment problem and achieving economic growth and wealth creation.

As noted in Chapter 4, in contrast to Karimov's stance, Mirziyoyev's foreign policy serves Uzbekistan's priorities, such as economic development. Since the tourism industry is part of Uzbekistan's economic development and has been declared a strategic sector for the Uzbek economy, bilateral and international relations in the field of tourism have been prioritized by a more liberal approach in the Mirziyoyev era. In other words, as in the case of economic relations, relations with Uzbekistan's

⁵⁵⁵ “The Tourism Committee Discussed Ways to Improve the Quality of Tourism Services.” Available at: <https://uzbektourism.uz/en/news/view?id=3675>. Accessed on 9 February 2025

tourism partners, i.e. source countries, as well as with international institutions, have been designed to contribute to the growth of Uzbekistan's tourism industry and international tourism revenues.

The diplomacy system of countries also has a unique and distinguished position related to other institutions and organizations in the very important category of tourism. International tourism is one of the most significant forms of tourism that has a significant, direct and indirect relationship with the foreign affairs department's decisions; it is interpreted as tourism diplomacy in specialized circles and can guide, channel, and facilitate the international relations and platforms of tourism industry.⁵⁵⁶

One of the most obvious ways in which international politics can negatively affect tourism is the imposition of travel restrictions and regulations on a destination. Just as in foreign trade, where barriers and tariffs are applied to imports from a particular country, in tourism, governments can introduce visa requirements, travel bans or other restrictions with political conflicts or other issues that they see as harming themselves.

International tourism is a sensitive industry in the sense that any instability or security problems have a negative impact on international tourist flows. Therefore, friendly relations with neighboring countries, political stability and the perception of the destination as stable and safe contribute to the image of the destination, which ultimately increases the number of international visitors. In this section of the dissertation, I will briefly focus on the relations between Uzbekistan and potential tourism source countries such as Central Asian countries, People's Republic of China, Russian Federation, and Turkiye, as well as the relations in the field of tourism with international organizations such as UNWTO, UNESCO and Organizations of Turkic States.

⁵⁵⁶ Jalalpour Shiva, Shojaeifar Jamshid. "The Tourism Industry and The International Relations." World Journal of Environmental Biosciences, Volume 6, Supplementary: 68-72. Available at: <https://environmentaljournal.org/storage/models/article/GsCnMvHlotn6A602LDMHIVv3wPVUFzGIDpvi3hd18zHGIfEKUXn9Z8uV3o8M/the-tourism-industry-and-the-international-relations.pdf>. Accessed on 5 February 2025.

5.6.1. Relations with Central Asian States

As mentioned in Chapter 4, after becoming President, Mirziyoyev tried to solve all kinds of conflicts and problems with the Central Asian states, to use the potential of Central Asia as an economic area. In the strategy of action for the development of Uzbekistan, signed by the president as a decree, one of the five priority directions of the development of the Republic of Uzbekistan was linked to stability in Central Asia by stating that the provision of security, inter-ethnic harmony and religious tolerance, the implementation of a balanced, mutually beneficial and constructive foreign policy aimed at strengthening the independence and sovereignty of the state, the creation of a belt of security, stability and good-neighbourliness around Uzbekistan, and the improvement of the country's international image.⁵⁵⁷

The Central Asian region has become more sustainable and stable, independently overcoming emerging challenges and threats, embarking on a path of progressive development, transforming itself into a centre of economic activity including tourism. Having resolved almost all issues of conflict with the Central Asian states, Mirziyoyev emphasises the importance of togetherness and solidarity in the political decision-making process in Central Asia. Speaking at the 2021 Consultative Meeting of Central Asian Heads of State, he said: "Only together we can solve the region's problems. There is no other alternative."⁵⁵⁸

Mirziyoyev's tourism policies regarding Central Asia have two main features. The first is to increase tourism flows between Central Asian countries and contribute to the tourism development of Uzbekistan and the region by eliminating travel restrictions among the citizens of Central Asian countries; the second is to make the region an attractive tourism destination by making Central Asian countries a center

⁵⁵⁷ "Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan O Strategii Deystvii po Dalneyshemu Razvitiyu Respubliki Uzbekistan." (Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on the Strategy of Actions for the Further Development of the Republic of Uzbekistan) dated 07.02.2017, No UP-4947. Available at: <https://lex.uz/ru/docs/3107042>. Accessed on 16 February 2025

⁵⁵⁸ "Tolko Vmeste My Reshim Problemy Regiona. Drugovo Alternativa Net." (Only Together We Can Solve the Region's Problems. There is no Other Alternative) Available at: <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2021/08/06/president/>. Accessed on 13 February 2025

of attraction for tourists from outside the region, especially within using the potential of Silk Road, through implementing joint policies and promotional activities.

In addition to working independently with Central Asian states to make Central Asia a single destination for the revival of Silk Road destinations, with the help of policies such as the inauguration of the tourist train (*Jibek Joly*) covering Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, Mirziyoyev aims to facilitate the tourist movement in the region by introducing the touristic destination named as “One Tour-Whole Region.”

At the meeting of Central Asian leaders in Avaza, Turkmenistan in 2021, Mirziyoyev underlined the importance of tourism as one of the effective factors contributing to the rapprochement of the peoples of the region. As an additional incentive to increase tourist exchanges within Central Asia, he proposed to start the practical implementation of the joint program “One tour - the whole region.”⁵⁵⁹

In addition, in order to stimulate tourism flows between Central Asian states, at the Sixth Consultative Meeting of the Heads of Central Asian States in Astana, Mirziyoyev proposed to study the issue of mutual recognition of national identity cards for travel between Central Asian states and the development of mass tourism products on the principle of “one tour - the whole region.”⁵⁶⁰

5.6.2. Relations with Russian Federation

The Russian Federation, as one of the largest source tourism markets in the world, is also crucial for the development of tourism in Uzbekistan. In 2024, about 850 thousand Russian tourists visited Uzbekistan.⁵⁶¹ Therefore, the main focus of

⁵⁵⁹“Odin Tur Ves Region Rassmatrivaetsya Sovmestnyj Turisticheskij Proekt.” (One Tour - the Whole Region" - a Joint Tourism Project under Consideration) Available at: <https://orient.tm/ru/post/33885/odin-tur-ves-region-rassmatrivaetsya-sovmestnyj-turisticheskij-proekt>. Accessed on 13 February 2025

⁵⁶⁰ “Uzbekistan Predlozhil Sosedyam Vzaimno Priznat Vnutrennie Pasporta, Kak eto Moglo bi Rabotat.” (Uzbekistan has Proposed that Its Neighbours Recognize Each Other's Internal Passports. How could this Work?) Available at: <https://asiaplustj.info/ru/news/centralasia/20241007/uzbekistan-predlozhil-sosedyam-vzaimno-priznat-vnutrennie-pasporta-kak-eto-moglo-bi-rabotat>. Accessed on 5 February 2025

⁵⁶¹ “Uzbekistan and Yakutia Discussed Promising Areas of Cooperation in the field of Tourism.” Available at: <https://uzbektourism.uz/en/news/view?id=3774>. Accessed on 5 February 2025

Uzbekistan's tourism policy with the Russian Federation is to increase the flow of tourists from Russia to Uzbekistan. In this regard, Uzbekistan has signed several documents and held official meetings with almost all regions of the Russian Federation to increase its promotional activities.

In May 2024, a joint action plan for tourism until 2026 was signed between Uzbekistan and the Russian Federation. The document contained articles that would enable Uzbekistan to attract more tourists from the Russian Federation. The document was signed in Tashkent by Laziz Kudratov, Minister of Investment, Industry and Trade of Uzbekistan, and Maxim Reshetnikov, Minister of Economic Development of Russia, during Russian President Vladimir Putin's state visit to Uzbekistan.⁵⁶²

The joint action plan consisted of measures aimed at strengthening interaction and cooperation between the tourism industries of the two countries, including the organization of regular meetings between government and business tourism organizations, the holding of sectoral meetings and forums in the field of tourism. Concerning the signing of the document, Russian Minister of Economic Development Maxim Reshetnikov quoted as follows: “We forecast that the implementation of the planned activities will allow to increase the mutual tourist flow by another 40% by 2027, which will bring the number of trips to the mark of 2 million per year. We will achieve these indicators by consolidating marketing efforts, developing new tourist routes and solving the problem of payments.”⁵⁶³

The practical implementation of the roadmap was organizing of the meeting of the subcommittee on cooperation in the field of tourism between Uzbekistan and the Russian Federation held in 2024, in addition to discussing such issues as the

⁵⁶² “Uzbekistan i Rossiia Podpisali Sovmestnyi Plan Deistvii v sfere Turizma do 2026 Goda.” (Uzbekistan and Russia Sign Joint Action Plan in Tourism until 2026) Available at: <https://www.uzdaily.uz/ru/uzbekistan-i-rossiia-podpisali-sovmestnyi-plan-deistvii-v-sfere-turizma-do-2026-goda/>. Accessed on 5 February 2025

⁵⁶³ “Uzbekistan i Rossiia Podpisali Sovmestnyi Plan Deistvii v sfere Turizma do 2026 Goda.” (Uzbekistan and Russia Sign Joint Action Plan in Tourism until 2026) Available at: <https://www.uzdaily.uz/ru/uzbekistan-i-rossiia-podpisali-sovmestnyi-plan-deistvii-v-sfere-turizma-do-2026-goda/>. Accessed on 5 February 2025

intergovernmental action plan on creating conditions for increasing the flow of tourists between Uzbekistan and Russia and the cooperation program on increasing the flow of tourists between the two countries for 2025-2026, as well as development of marketing campaigns to attract tourists; the decision on implementation of the Year of Uzbek Tourism in the Russian Federation in 2024-2025 was adopted.⁵⁶⁴ With the adoption of the Year of Uzbek Tourism in the Russian Federation, Uzbekistan started to conduct various promotional activities in different cities and regions of the Russian Federation within the context of the Uzbek Tourism Year. Some of them include:

- Uzbekistan Tourism “Road Show” was held in the city of Khabarovsk on August 7, 2024.⁵⁶⁵
- A delegation from Uzbekistan visited the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) and held talks with the head of the region Aysen Nikolaev. Special attention was paid to the promotion of Uzbek tourism potential in the framework of the "Year of Uzbek Tourism in Russia".⁵⁶⁶
- Road Show" tourism event held in Vladivostok as part of the "Year of Tourism of Uzbekistan in Russia" and to promote the tourism potential of Uzbekistan and increase the flow of tourists to Vladivostok.⁵⁶⁷
- As part of the “Year of Tourism of Uzbekistan in Russia”, the delegation of the Tourism Committee headed by the First Deputy Chairman Jamshid Abdusalamov, with the assistance of the Consulate General of our country in

⁵⁶⁴ “Ukreplenie Svyazei i Razvitie Turizma Mezhdru Uzbekistanom i Rossiiskoi Federatsiei.” (Strengthening Ties and Developing Tourism between Uzbekistan and the Russian Federation) Available at: <https://www.uzdaily.uz/ru/ukreplenie-svyazei-i-razvitie-turizma-mezhdu-uzbekistanom-i-rossiiskoi-federatsiei/>. Accessed on 5 February 2025

⁵⁶⁵ “Uzbekistan Privlekaet Turistov iz Dalnih Regionov Rossii.” (Uzbekistan Attracts Tourists from Distant Regions of Russia) Available at: <https://uzbekistan.travel/ru/o/uzbekistan-privlekaet-turistov-iz-dalnih-regionov-rossii/>. Accessed on 5 February 2025

⁵⁶⁶ “Uzbekistan i Yakutia Ukrepliyayut Sotrudnichestvo v sfere Turizma.” (Uzbekistan and Yakutia Strengthen Tourism Cooperation) Available at: <https://www.uzdaily.uz/ru/uzbekistan-i-iakutiia-ukrepliyayut-sotrudnichestvo-v-sfere-turizma/>. Accessed on 5 February 2025

⁵⁶⁷ “God Turizma Uzbekistana v Rossii: V Vladivostoke Proshlo Turisticheskoe Meropriyatie.” (The Year of Uzbekistan Tourism in Russia": Vladivostok Hosted the "Road Show" Tourism Event) Available at: https://cis.minsk.by/news/27874/%C2%ABgod_turizma_uzbekistana_v_rossii%C2%BB vo_vladivostoke_proshlo_turisticheskoe_meropriyatie_%C2%ABroad_show%C2%BB. Accessed on 5 February 2025

Vladivostok, presented the tourism opportunities, culture and traditions of Uzbekistan during a hockey match between the “Admiral” and “Avtomobilist” teams in the Fetisov Arena ice palace with a capacity of about 6 thousand seats.⁵⁶⁸

5.6.3. Relations with People’s Republic of China

China is one of the fastest growing source markets for tourism. In 2019, before the pandemic, Chinese travellers made 155 million international trips and spent a total of \$245. billion.⁵⁶⁹ In addition, Chinese travelers are known to be cultural enthusiasts when it comes to international tourism. Consequently, Uzbekistan's main priority in its international tourism policy is to enrich its relations in the field of tourism, which would ultimately help to attract more Chinese tourists to Uzbekistan.

As already mentioned in the section on visas, one of the most important steps in enabling the flow of Chinese tourists to Uzbekistan was the visa-free regime with the Republic of China, which was reciprocally extended to 30 days as a result of the official meeting of the foreign ministers of the two countries in 2024. The other important step in this direction was taken during Mirziyoyev's state visit to China in January 2024. In accordance with the agreements reached between the leaders of Uzbekistan and China, the "Year of Tourism in Uzbekistan" was announced for 2025. On 3 December, an official ceremony to launch the "Uzbek Year of Tourism" was held in Beijing with the participation of UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili.⁵⁷⁰

The Year of Tourism activities allow tourism authorities to carry out promotional activities in the target countries efficiently with a relatively low budget. According to

⁵⁶⁸ “To Uzbekistan through Hockey.” Available at: <https://uzbektourism.uz/en/news/view?id=3769>. Accessed on 15 February 2025

⁵⁶⁹ “China Outbound Surges by almost 400% in 2024.” Available at: <https://www.webintravel.com/chinese-outbound-surges-by-almost-400-in-2024/>. Accessed on 15 February 2025

⁵⁷⁰ “The Year of Tourism of Uzbekistan launched in China.” Available at: <https://uzbektourism.uz/en/news/view?id=3670>. Accessed on 15 February 2025

the agreements between governments, most of the promotional activities are organized with the support of the host country, which in turn reduces the budget and allows more activities to be carried out in that particular country. Therefore, the signing of Tourism Year Agreements is considered a useful tool for the promotion of tourist destinations and products for the states that aim to increase the tourist flow from that source market.

With the Uzbekistan Tourism Year in China, Uzbekistan would have the opportunity to conduct various promotional activities with the support of Chinese authorities, within China such as cultural, tourism, and economic events, media tours, visits from tourism companies, and a range of articles and programs in Chinese media are planned in different cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Hangzhou, Xi'an, Tianjin, Shenzhen, Chengdu, and many others.⁵⁷¹

The important activities include:

- Meeting of the Head of State Tourism Committee with Chinese Tour Operators for preparing different routes for Uzbekistan.⁵⁷²
- Meeting of the Head of State Tourism Committee with China's largest travel platforms in order to increase the touristic flow from China to Uzbekistan
- Launch of first direct flight Tashkent – Guangzhou.⁵⁷³

Uzbekistan's relations in the field of tourism with potential tourist countries such as India, Malaysia and South Korea are almost the same as with China. Uzbekistan's main tourism policy towards these countries is to establish friendly relations with them and also to create favorable conditions for their citizens so that, with the help of aggressive promotional activities, Uzbekistan would utilize the potential of these markets by increasing the number of visitors from these countries to Uzbekistan.

⁵⁷¹ "Uzbekistan Tourism Year Launches in China." Available at: <https://buzb.uz/en/news/uzbekistan-tourism-year-launches-in-china>. Accessed on 12 February 2025

⁵⁷² "Major Chinese Tour Operators to Launch Tour Routes in Uzbekistan." Available at: <https://uzbektourism.uz/en/news/view?id=3674>. Accessed on 12 February 2025

⁵⁷³ "The First Direct Flight Tashkent - Guangzhou Opened New Prospects for Tourism and Business." Available at: <https://uzbektourism.uz/en/news/view?id=3650>. Accessed on 12 February 2025

5.6.4. Relations with Türkiye

It can be argued that Uzbekistan's tourism relations with Turkey have two distinct objectives. The first is to attract more Turkish tourists through new flights from Türkiye, with which Uzbekistan has cultural and historical ties, and the second is to accelerate Uzbekistan's tourism development process by using the experience of Türkiye, which has great experience in tourism development and is the 6th country in the world in terms of the number of international visitors by 2024.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Türkiye and Uzbekistan became politically closer immediately after Mirziyoyev was elected president. And this rapprochement has been felt first and foremost in tourism relations. In May 2017, a delegation led by the Minister of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Turkey, consisting of state officials as well as representatives of Turkish tourism NGOs and the tourism industry, visited Tashkent. During this visit, in addition to holding a working group meeting on tourism, which allows both states to discuss opportunities for possible cooperation in various fields of tourism, and signing a cooperation agreement between the tourism authorities of the two countries, the tourism NGOs of both states, the Association of Turkish Travel Agencies (TURSAB) and the Turkish Hoteliers Federation (TUROFED) signed two different cooperation protocols with the Association of Private Tourism Agencies of Uzbekistan (APTA).⁵⁷⁴

As part of the exchange of experience between Turkey and Uzbekistan in the field of tourism, the President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, at the request of the President of Uzbekistan, has proposed that a Turkish advisor on tourism issues be sent to Uzbekistan. In this regard, Sadik Badak, a former member of the Turkish National Assembly from Antalya, started working as an advisor to the Chairman of the State Committee for Tourism Development of Uzbekistan by the end of 2017. The main tasks of the advisor include sharing his experience with Uzbek specialists and helping to develop a medium- and long-term strategy for the development of

⁵⁷⁴ “Türkiye and Uzbekistan Signed Protocols in the sphere of Tourism.” Available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/turkiye-ozbekistan-turizm-alaninda-is-birligi-protokolleri-imzalandi/825542>. Accessed on 16 February 2025

tourism in Uzbekistan; assisting in developing a plan of projects for the development of tourism infrastructure in the regions of Uzbekistan and improving legislation in the field of tourism; and contributing the process for developing special educational programs for the training of specialists in the tourism sector, special tourism products for foreign and local tourists.⁵⁷⁵

Since the beginning of 2017, Turkish and Uzbekistan tourism authorities have conducted various meetings where the main focus point was Uzbekistan's tourism and tourism infrastructure development. In this respect, On 6 June 2024, during Mirziyoyev's official visit to Türkiye, a protocol was signed between the Tourism Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Türkiye on the further development of cooperation in the field of tourism.⁵⁷⁶ The protocol included articles aimed at expanding cooperation and exchange of experience in the field of tourism, as well as activities in favor of increasing tourist flows between the states. On the basis of the tasks set by the President of Uzbekistan at the conference on tourism on 3 June this year, the issues of improving the qualifications of managers of the Uzbek hotel business in large complexes in Türkiye, attracting Turkish experience in the development of medical tourism, implementation of new educational programs for students and other proposals were worked out with the Turkish side.⁵⁷⁷

In addition, Uzbekistan has carried out promotional activities for Turkish citizens to increase the number of Turkish tourists to Uzbekistan. As a result, with the positive contribution of the expansion of flights between Turkey and Uzbekistan, the number of Turkish people visiting Uzbekistan is increasing. In this regard, more than 110 thousand Turkish citizens visited Uzbekistan in 2024.⁵⁷⁸

⁵⁷⁵ "Turkish Expert to Help Work Out Tourism Development Programs in Uzbekistan." Available at: <https://www.uzbekembassy.in/turkish-expert-to-help-work-out-tourism-development-programs-in-uzbekistan/>. Accessed on 16 February 2025

⁵⁷⁶ "Uzbekistan i Turtsiya Rasshiryayut Sotdrnichestvo v Sfere Turizma." (Uzbekistan and Türkiye Expand Cooperation in Tourism) Available at: <https://www.uzdaily.uz/ru/uzbekistan-i-turtsiia-rasshiraiut-sotrudnichestvo-v-sfere-turizma/>. Accessed on 16 February 2025

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid., accessed on 16 February 2025

⁵⁷⁸ Posol Turtsii v Tashkente: Otnoshenie Dvuh Stran Nahodyatsya na Pike Svoego Razvitiya, (Turkish Ambassador in Tashkent: Relations between the two Countries at a High Point) Available at:

5.7. Relations with International Organizations in the sphere of Tourism

As noted in the previous chapter, Uzbekistan's relationship with UNWTO began during the Karimov era. When Mirziyoyev became President, relations with UNWTO expanded in the context of Uzbekistan's efforts to become an international tourist destination and also in the context of using UNWTO's experience in tourism training programs.

In order to increase its recognition as a favorable tourist destination, Uzbekistan has cooperated with UNWTO in the organization of some of its events and congresses. In this regard, one of the most important events in which Uzbekistan cooperated with UNWTO is the organization of the 25th session of the UNWTO General Assembly, which was held in Samarkand from 16-20 October 2023. Speaking at the main forum of the World Tourism Organization, which was attended by representatives of more than 140 countries, Mirziyoyev underlined the general tourism development policy of his government and said that today tourism is one of the dynamically developing and promising sectors of the world economy. Uzbekistan attaches high priority to the development of tourism within the framework of large-scale and irreversible reforms aimed at modernizing the country's economy.⁵⁷⁹ Samarkand was selected as the 2023 World Tourism Capital in cooperation with UNWTO, following a decision taken at the 24th General Assembly of the UNWTO in Madrid, Spain, in 2021.⁵⁸⁰

As noted in the previous section, Uzbekistan has been cooperating with UNWTO on education and training programs for Uzbek personnel working in the tourism industry. In addition to the establishment of the Samarkand Tourism Academy in cooperation with UNWTO, Uzbekistan has cooperated with UNWTO in various ways in the field of tourism education.

www.aa.com.tr/ru/политика/посол-турции-в-ташкенте-отношения-двух-стран-находятся-на-пике-своего-развития/3467900. Accessed on 16 February 2025

⁵⁷⁹ “President Voices Several Important Initiatives at the 25th Session of the World Tourism Organization General Assembly.” Available at: <https://www.uzembassy.org.tr/news/4821?language=en>. Accessed on 19 March 2025

⁵⁸⁰ “Uzbekistan's Historic Samarkand City named 2023 World Tourism Capital.” Available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/uzbekistans-historic-samarkand-city-named-2023-world-tourism-capital/2438688>. Accessed on 19 March 2025

Uzbekistan also has close relations with United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in various fields, however, I will briefly focus the field of the study and preservation of the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of Uzbekistan, as cultural heritage is also regarded as tourism products. The Republic of Uzbekistan became a full member of UNESCO in October 1993 in Paris. Since December 1994, the National Commission for UNESCO has been operating in the republic, and in 1996 a UNESCO representative office in Uzbekistan was opened in Tashkent.⁵⁸¹

An important aspect worth mentioning is the increased interest and willingness of the Government of Uzbekistan to establish an open and honest cooperation with UNESCO, in particular with the World Heritage Centre (WHC). The protection of World Heritage has been a pressing topic on the agenda of the meetings between President Shavkat Mirziyoyev and Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO, since 2018. At their meeting in 2018, the Joint Action Plan was adopted for 2018-2021, aimed at bringing relations to a new level, innovative solution of joint tasks and strengthening cooperation in all areas including the protection of cultural assets in Uzbekistan.⁵⁸²

In order to ensure the preservation of cultural and historical values, Uzbekistan, in addition to creating the necessary regulatory framework in national legislation, has also ratified a number of UNESCO international acts on the protection of cultural heritage and investment in its preservation. UNESCO also provides technical assistance to Uzbekistan in the protection of its cultural heritage. For example, UNESCO is working on preserving and safeguarding cultural heritage in Bukhara through a project called “Preservation and Safeguarding of Cultural Heritage in Bukhara”, funded by Saudi Arabia.⁵⁸³

⁵⁸¹ Rakhimov, Sadrittin. “Cooperation between the Republic of Uzbekistan and UNESCO on the Development of International, Cultural and Humanitarian Relations.” *Theoretical & Applied Science* 131(03):80-83, 2024, Doi:[10.15863/TAS.2024.03.131.12](https://doi.org/10.15863/TAS.2024.03.131.12)

⁵⁸² “Shavkat Mirziyoyev Meets with the Director-General of UNESCO and President of the French Senate.” Available at: <https://kun.uz/en/38063232#>. Accessed on 19 March 2025

⁵⁸³ “Uzbekistan and UNESCO's Strong Partnership for the Preservation and Promotion of World Heritage Sites.” Available at: <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/uzbekistan-and-unescos-strong-partnership-preservation-and-promotion-world-heritage-sites>. Accessed on 19 March 2025

In addition to that Uzbekistan utilizes the funds of international organizations and institutions for the activities dedicated and safeguarding its cultural heritage. Therefore, cooperation with other governments, multilateral international organizations and the foreign private sector plays an important role in Uzbekistan's efforts to develop its tourism industry through protecting its heritage. In this respect, in 2018, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development launched the Integrated Cultural Heritage Framework in Uzbekistan Khiva/Khorezm Region to fund sovereign, sub-sovereign, and private-sector projects across sectors to support regional development holistically while using cultural heritage resources as a driver.⁵⁸⁴

Finally, Uzbekistan's tourism relations with the Organization of Turkic States also deserve attention, especially as they have the potential to revitalize regional and Silk Road tourism and thus contribute to Uzbek tourism. As it is known, the Turkic Council was established in 2009, and Uzbekistan became a full member of the Turkic Council in 2019. Tourism was one of the first and most important areas of cooperation of the Organization of Turkic States. As a sign of significance to the collaboration in the field of tourism, the theme of the 4th Organization of Turkic States Summit, which was held in Bodrum in 2014, is dedicated to “Tourism Cooperation.”⁵⁸⁵ In this sense, since 2012, the Council has organized a number of events with the Ministries of Tourism of the member states to promote the Silk Road as a tourist destination and attract foreign visitors to the region, and has participated in fairs around the world for this purpose. After becoming a full member in 2019, Uzbekistan has focused on improving its relations with member states of the Turkic Council in the sphere of tourism, both to attract visitors from member states and, using the potential of the Silk Road, to attract visitors from non-member states to the region. In this respect, Uzbekistan adopted the Presidential Decree “On Measures to Accelerate the Development of Cooperation with the Turkic States in the Sphere of

⁵⁸⁴ “Tourism Development in Uzbekistan- Challenges and Opportunities, Special Policy Brief by Caspian Policy Center.” Available at: <https://www.caspianpolicy.org/research/report/special-policy-brief-tourism-development-in-uzbekistan-challenges-and-opportunities-9656>. Accessed on 19 March 2025

⁵⁸⁵ “Tourism Cooperation.” Available at: <https://www.turkicstates.org/en/areas-of-cooperation-detail/5-tourism-cooperation>. Accessed on 20 March 2025

Tourism” in July 2022. Among the points in connection with the development of tourism in Uzbekistan mentioned in the decree are:

- Further strengthening of relations in the field of tourism with the member countries of the Turkic Organization
- Organization of tours to pilgrimage and cultural heritage sites and development of new travel routes
- Organizing regular propaganda activities in the field of pilgrimage and cultural-historical tourism
- Creation and promotion of the "Blessed Pilgrimage" brand based on cooperation within the framework of the Organization of Turkic States
- Wide attraction of tourists from the member states and observers of the Organization of Turkic States, other countries where the diaspora of Turkic peoples is widespread
- Attracting tourists by holding seminars, symposia, conferences, scientific-practical forums, and publishing materials in popular scientific publications on the scientific and cultural heritage of great thinkers in Tashkent, Samarkand.⁵⁸⁶

The 6th Meeting of the Ministers in Charge of Tourism of the Organization of Turkic States was convened on 24 June 2021 in Kokand, Uzbekistan. As a result of the meeting, the city of Kokand of Uzbekistan was announced as the first “Turkic World Tourism Capital” of the Organization of Turkic States as a result of which several cultural and tourism events were held in the city.⁵⁸⁷

In addition to cooperation in the sphere of tourism with the international organizations, in order to stimulate and facilitate the international tourism movement, Uzbekistan aimed at providing the necessary conditions for global tourist agents and

⁵⁸⁶ “Postanavlenie Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan O merah po Uskorennomu Razvitiyu Sotrudnichesta s Tyurskimi Gosudarstvami v Sfera Turizma.” (Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Measures to Accelerate the Development of Cooperation with Turkic States in the field of Tourism) dated 29.07.2022, available at: <https://president.uz/ru/lists/view/5389>, accessed on 20 March 2025

⁵⁸⁷ “Tourism Cooperation.” Available at: <https://www.turkicstates.org/en/areas-of-cooperation-detail/5-tourism-cooperation>. Accessed on 20 March 2025

booking portals to serve within the country. In this respect, the involvement of international companies like Booking, Airbnb, and Trip Advisor has strongly improved the quality and convenience of travelling in Uzbekistan. Such involvement has also created more job opportunities. Airbnb also enrolled Uzbekistan into its 2019 trending destinations, which will attract more tourists.⁵⁸⁸

5.8. Conclusion

In 2016, after Mirziyoyev became president, tourism was declared the country's strategic sector to contribute to the national economy, increase employment and reduce regional inequality in Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan's tourism laws, tourism infrastructure and the state of the private tourism sector, inherited from both the Soviet and Karimov eras, were not sufficient to compete internationally in the tourism industry. Especially after the year 2000, tourism movements and subsequently tourism revenues began to grow at a high rate worldwide, and countries began to work intensively to increase their share of global tourism revenues. The fact that Uzbekistan is a former Soviet country and has an image of being isolated during the Karimov era is a factor that makes it even more difficult for Uzbekistan to compete in international tourism. Aware of all this, Uzbekistan's second president, Mirziyoyev, immediately began working to develop the country's tourism and change the country's image into a positive tourism destination perception after taking office in December 2016.

In the early years of his presidency, despite the challenges posed by Soviet and Karimov-era habits, Mirziyoyev introduced radical policy changes in key areas of tourism policy aimed at increasing foreign visitors to the country. In this respect, Mirziyoyev's contribution to the development of tourism dedicated to increasing the number of international tourists visiting Uzbekistan can best be seen in areas such as the Uzbekistan's visa policy towards other states, the development of tourism and transport infrastructure, promotional policies, opportunities for raising the level of

⁵⁸⁸ Tourism Development in Uzbekistan- Challenges and Opportunities, Special Policy Brief by Caspian Policy Center.” Available at: <https://www.caspianpolicy.org/research/report/special-policy-brief-tourism-development-in-uzbekistan-challenges-and-opportunities-9656>. Accessed on 26 December 2024

service quality of personnel working in the tourism sector, and the improvement of bilateral tourism relations with source tourism market countries as well as multilateral tourism relations.

Improvements in visa policy can be seen as Mirziyoyev's most radical policy for increasing the number of international visitors to Uzbekistan. Despite harsh criticism from the bureaucracy initially, Mirziyoyev liberalized the visa policy and made Uzbekistan one of the most liberal visa-policy states in the post-Soviet space. Currently, more than citizens of 90 countries enjoy a visa free regime for Uzbekistan whereas citizens of over 70 countries can apply for electronic tourist visas before visiting Uzbekistan.

Uzbekistan inherited a relatively low-quality tourism infrastructure from the Soviet and Karimov eras. The development of tourism infrastructure is essential to improve the competitiveness of a destination in the global market. The presence and availability of different levels of accommodation facilities, the existence of different types of travel agents, each with expertise and professionalism in different types of tourism segments, and a destination that can offer different tourism experiences are crucial for a destination to become a popular destination in the world. In this sense, the government's leading role in managing the private sector's investment in the infrastructure of Uzbekistan's tourism industry, the incentives and support provided by the Uzbek government have greatly contributed to the process of improving Uzbekistan's tourism infrastructure. Although there is still a long way to go, Uzbekistan's tourism infrastructure has made progress in potentially meeting the expectations of visitors of different nationalities and expectations. If such policies continue to be implemented, the country's tourism infrastructure will be much better, paving the way for a developed tourism destination.

Accessibility and the existence of a quality and comfortable transport infrastructure play a crucial role in determining a destination's place in the international tourism league. Transport in general, and air transport in particular, is one of the main components of tourism infrastructure that plays a key role in increasing the number of visitors to a given destination. In this sphere, the Mirziyoyev administration has

adopted policies in favor of increasing the number of airlines flying to different cities of Uzbekistan. The state played an encouraging role in the establishment of LCC within Uzbekistan to facilitate the travel of both international and domestic visitors. As a result, the number of domestic and international airlines flying to various destinations in Uzbekistan has increased. In addition, investments in the quality of roads, as well as funds for the expansion of the country's high-speed rail network, have contributed to the improvement of Uzbekistan's transport infrastructure since Mirziyoyev's reign.

Promotion and public relations activities are of great importance in raising awareness of a destination both in the world and in countries identified as tourism source markets. In this sense, Uzbekistan has recently increased the resources devoted to the promotion of the country and has started to carry out different events specific to these countries in order to increase the number of visitors from the target countries. The specific promotion policy for different markets also plays an important role in increasing the number of visitors. As a concrete result of this policy, with specific policies in all segments of tourism policy tools, starting from visa, aviation and promotion, applied to China, the number of Chinese tourists visited in 2024 has increased by 75 percent.⁵⁸⁹

One of the main goals of Uzbekistan's tourism policy is to increase the number of international visitors from countries outside the post-Soviet space. In this respect, as a result of the promotional policies conducted in those countries the number of visitors from the United Kingdom, France, Spain, and Germany increased in 2024. Tourism from Germany experienced significant growth in 2024, with 37,526 German tourists visiting Uzbekistan, an increase of 7,918 from the previous year whereas Spanish tourists made a notable contribution to the influx of visitors, with 23,564 tourists arriving in Uzbekistan in 2024. This represents an increase of 8,401 compared to 2023.⁵⁹⁰

⁵⁸⁹ “Chinese Tourist Arrivals to Uzbekistan up 75 pct in 2024.” Available at: <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202502/23/WS67ba953ca310c240449d6b54.html>. Accessed on 22 March 2025

⁵⁹⁰ “Uzbekistan Sees Significant Growth in Tourist Arrivals from Europe and Asia.” Available at: <https://kun.uz/en/news/2025/02/21/uzbekistan-sees-significant-growth-in-tourist-arrivals-from-europe-and-asia>. Accessed on 20 March 2025.

Prominent tourism destinations assign tourism counsellors to the target markets in order to conduct efficient market-oriented promotional activities. Although, in the short term this would bring a to the promotion budget of the country, in the long run, the overall promotion budget is reduced as a result of the increased efficiency and effectiveness of the planned activities at source. As mentioned at Article 7 of the Presidential Decree of signed on 12.01.2024, Counselors for Tourism has been assigned to countries such as Japan, China, the USA and Germany by 2024.⁵⁹¹

The appointment of representatives dedicated to tourism in potential countries as a tourism source market can be regarded as an indication of the Uzbek authorities' determination to become an international tourist destination.

The professionalism and quality of the tourism workforce contribute significantly to the positive perception of destinations and their competitiveness. Although it can be argued that it should be more or less the responsibility of the private sector to improve the skills of its workforce, especially in countries that are trying to develop and compete with developed destinations in the field of tourism, government tourism authorities should ensure that tourism workers are provided with high-quality service skills as they have face-to-face interaction with visitors, including international ones. Therefore, the Mirziyoyev administration has taken steps in this area, both by establishing institutions or academies that provide theoretical and practical training in the field of tourism services, in cooperation with UNWTO and institutions of prominent countries that are considered to be experienced in this field, and by creating conditions for practical training for those who are already working in the industry.

International relations play an important role for a country wishing to increase the number of international tourists visiting that country. Friendly relations with source market countries would increase the visibility and competitiveness of the destination as a safe place to visit and will also help to overcome potential barriers to

⁵⁹¹ “V 2025 Godu, Kolichestvo Gostinits i Mest Razhmesheniya v Uzbekistane Uvelichat pochtu do Semi Tyshyac.” (By 2025, the Number of Hotels and Accommodation Facilities in Uzbekistan will Increase to Almost Seven Thousand) Available at: <https://vzglyad.uz/ru/post/2025/01/31/turizm>. Accessed on 31 January 2025

international tourist flows. Unlike his predecessor, Mirziyoyev has shaped his international relations policy by prioritizing economic cooperation and economic interests over other considerations such as security. In this regard, relations with neighboring countries, as well as target countries for attracting international visitors, have been shaped from an economic and tourism perspective, ultimately contributing to the development of tourism in the country. The same can be said of relations with international organizations in the field of tourism, where both the development of tourism infrastructure and destination development have been prioritized by the Mirziyoyev administration since 2016.



CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This thesis has attempted to identify and discuss the role of the Uzbek state in developing the tourism industry during the Mirziyoyev era. The international tourism movement and the international tourism economy have been growing steadily since 1980. With the ease of travel linked to the expansion of the aviation industry in general and low-cost carriers in particular, the number of international tourists and, ultimately, international tourism revenues have increased dramatically worldwide since the 2000s and developing countries have invested in their tourism industries to compete with developed destinations and also to attract international visitors to increase tourism revenues. Considering that tourism is a labour-intensive sector, international tourist flows contribute to creating new employment opportunities, boosting local production by serving visitors, generating foreign exchange earnings, and ultimately increasing government revenues, which will also help alleviate poverty and reduce inequalities between regions and populations, Mirziyoyev, the second President of Uzbekistan, identified tourism as one of the strategic sectors of Uzbekistan immediately after taking office in 2016.

The thesis tries to answer the primary research question, "What kind of economic and tourism policies has the Mirziyoyev government pursued to transform Uzbekistan into an international tourist destination? While attempting to answer the primary question, the thesis also seeks to explain the other research questions: To what extent have developmental state economic policies pursued in international tourism policy under Mirziyoyev? and To what extent have the international political economy and tourism policies of the Soviet and Karimov eras influenced Mirziyoyev's tourism policies in Uzbekistan?

Based on the review of existing literature, presidential and governmental decrees, and analysis of all the concrete tourism policies that the Uzbek government has implemented since Mirziyoyev's presidency, as well as discussions with Uzbek officials and representatives of the tourism sector, and all the research conducted in this thesis, the main argument of the thesis is as follows: Since Mirziyoyev became president in 2016, Uzbekistan has been implementing developmental state policies to develop its tourism industry to receive more international visitors and thus increase international tourism revenues. In order to develop the country's tourism industry and subsequently increase the number of international visitors to Uzbekistan, the state bodies, to a large extent, have been conducting developmental state and state-interventionist tourism-related policies, implementing the necessary incentives and measures to ensure the smooth operation of the private sector, and playing a guiding role in the functioning of the private sector in the sphere of tourism. The recognition of tourism as a strategic sector and the parallel implementation of stable and decisive tourism development policies by government institutions also contribute to this process.

Concerning the third research question of the thesis, no direct impact of Soviet-era economic and tourism policies on Mirziyoyev-era tourism development policies was observed. Although Uzbekistan was a well-known tourist destination in both the Soviet and Karimov eras, the tourism industry could not develop, especially during the Soviet period, because international tourism was not seen as a revenue-generating sector for the Soviet Union but rather used for propaganda purposes. During both periods, the international tourism movement was limited to Soviet Uzbekistan. As a result, the tourism infrastructure of the Uzbek Republic was virtually non-existent during the Soviet era. On the other hand, although security concerns were one of the main motivations for the Karimov administration, the state economy was relatively stable during this period as a result of the gradualist transition policy. During the Karimov period, the local aviation industry and relations with international tourism organizations improved. On the other hand, visa, tourism infrastructure and promotion policies did not favor Uzbekistan's tourism development policy. Therefore, if the policies of the Soviet Union have no direct impact on the tourism development of the Mirziyoyev era, it can be said that the economic and tourism

policies of the Karimov era have a limited positive impact on the tourism industry in Uzbekistan today.

In terms of methodology, I mainly use the qualitative research method to investigate the above points. The main research tools are in-depth analysis and documentary analysis, mainly using primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include the presidential decrees, state regulations, or speeches of the president or high officials working in the field of tourism, as well as the newspaper reports and reports on the activities of state bodies and tourism NGOs aimed at realizing the tasks or responsibilities set for them in the state documents, most of which were in Russian. As secondary sources, I have tried to collect data from the literature of scientific books, journals, statements, and writings. The research mainly includes books and articles on political economy that are directly related to a country's international tourism economic policy. The thesis also relies on tourism and economic statistics to better understand the phenomenon of tourism development in Uzbekistan.

There are few comprehensive studies of tourism policy and development in the former Soviet space. Perhaps the most important reason for this is that except for the Baltic states, most former Soviet countries have not yet fully opened their countries to international tourist flows, and the Central Asian states are no exception. We can observe that Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have implemented limited tourism development policies, as they also pursued more liberal policies during the transition phase, but they were not able to achieve tourism development for various reasons, the most important of which is can be regarded as the lack of a general tourism policy, which directs different government bodies to pursue tourism-oriented policies. Several studies point to the richness of Central Asian countries, especially Uzbekistan, in terms of tourism products and destinations and the inadequacy of tourism infrastructure. Until Mirziyoyev became President of Uzbekistan in 2016, none of the Central Asian countries considered tourism as a strategic sector and embarked on a comprehensive state-led development to increase the number of foreign visitors to their countries.

The developmental state policy in the development of Uzbekistan's tourism industry fits well with the thesis, as the Uzbek government is using all its policy tools to

improve the tourism infrastructure and increase the destination's global competitiveness. As in the case of Asian developing countries, which used state interventionist and developmental state policies to reach the level of economic growth of developed Western countries, Uzbekistan during the Mirziyoyev period used state-led tourism policies to catch up with already popular international tourist destinations in the world.

Developmental state policies in international political economy discourse have been associated with Asian states, namely South Korea, Japan, and China. One of the main features of this policy is to support infant industries until they reach a level where they can compete with large companies. For example, in Japan, in particular, the elites and high state officials selected a few national champions and supported them in the markets, eventually creating cartels that soon became very large firms, which is the main characteristic of the developmental state.

Export-led growth was also the key to industrialization in South Asia. States used a variety of incentives to turn entrepreneurs into exporters. However, the influence and presence of the state in the economy is rejected by the classical Western understanding of the economy and its application to IPE. In the classical liberal economic literature, the view is that there should be no government intervention unless there is a good reason for it. The free market is the most efficient resource allocation, and government intervention is only needed when the market is imperfect, and there are market failures. As Atul Kohli points out, the standard but popular version of it summarized by the New York Times in 2002 is as follows: “A nation that opens its economy and keeps government’ role to a minimum invariably experiences more rapid economic growth and rising incomes.”⁵⁹² Western economic ideology revolves around this statement, emphasizing the fact that the more the state intervenes in the economy, the more corrupt it becomes and the more distortions it creates rather than economic growth or development. The main tenet of the liberal free market argument for the development discourse emphasizes that state-led and developmental state development would only lead to failure, and also in the

⁵⁹² Kohli Atul. “State Directed Development: Political Power and Industrialization in the Global Periphery.” New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p.375

globalized world, the state's role in the economies has been continuously diminishing.

States and state intervention can be a powerful force for good insofar as they help to promote rapid industrialization and economic growth in developing countries. The success of most developing countries in their economic growth has been linked to their developmental state policies, where the state played a role in guiding firms and, when necessary, protecting them from competition from firms of already developed countries until the time when those firms come to a level for competing with them. Rapid industrialization and economic growth in the world of developing countries are almost always due to the state playing a decisive role in the economy.

The fact that Western countries were the first to have developed economies, most of them perhaps using their colonial relationships, and also the fact that they did not have to face any competition in the process of developing their economies, is not a valid situation for developing countries trying to achieve economic development today. Developing countries now have to compete with the vast private sector organizations of countries that reached a certain level of development decades ago, sometimes even with their state support. Therefore, if properly applied, state interventionist policies for the developing states have become crucial for the industries in which they compete with developed states.

The state's role in reducing market failures best explains developmental state policies' success. States with some power can use it to enable economic growth. They do this by mobilizing resources, channeling them into strategic areas, directing private initiatives into areas of state priority, changing the socio-economic context in which private firms operate, and engaging in direct economic activities aimed at economic development. However, there is some evidence that some developing countries use developmental state models and state intervention for corruption, i.e. elite self-enrichment. Therefore, it is crucial for developing countries that developmental state policies are implemented decisively and without prioritizing the interests of any group or family and that investments channeled into declared strategic sectors are used efficiently and appropriately.

This is also true for developing countries that want a share of the ever-growing international tourism pie. Potential tourism destinations, if they are rich in terms of tourism heritage as well as tourism products and destinations, should strive to develop their tourism industry and infrastructure to become one of the world's tourism destinations, attracting millions of international visitors each year. As in the case of any infant industry, the state's role in guiding the private sector, channelling resources for the improvement of the tourism industry and creating smooth conditions for the growth of the tourism industry would be crucial for all developing countries, including Uzbekistan.

As in the case of general economic development policy, some scholars are also opposed to government intervention in developing the tourism industry. However, especially for developing countries trying to reach the level of development in competition with Western countries, state organizations are important in regulating the economic and political system to promote their strategic industries and catch up with the industries of the developed countries. The importance attributed to society's materialist basis means that a key role for statist intervention to encourage capital accumulation and economic expansion.⁵⁹³

In fact, the application of political economy, particularly to tourism development and governance, is few. Tourism studies also tend to ignore the state's role in developing the tourism industry. Few studies have focused on the role of the state and the local state in developing some types of tourism, such as sports or event tourism. Instead, most of the political economy applications in tourism include unequal economic relations between peripheral tourist destinations and metropolitan economies, concepts of power, and uneven development. In this respect, Edington and Redman argue that many of the supposed benefits of tourism as a panacea for economic development have not been realized. The intensity of competition for domestic or international tourism businesses has constrained demand below expectations.⁵⁹⁴

⁵⁹³ Bevir, Mark. "Key Concepts in Governance." London: Sage Publications, 2009, p.178

⁵⁹⁴ Edington, William R. and Milton B. Redman. "Economics and Tourism." *Annals of Tourism Research* 18 41-56.,2011, DOI:[10.1016/0160-7383\(91\)90038-D](https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383(91)90038-D)

However, Uzbekistan has chosen a different path. In this sense, one of Mirziyoyev's first steps as president in 2016 was to declare tourism a strategic sector and to build all tourism-related policies on developing tourism and tourism infrastructure in Uzbekistan. As mentioned earlier, some industries in developing countries need organized support that can only be provided by the state, and this was also relevant for Uzbekistan in the case of tourism development. Furthermore, the state plays an important role in tourism planning and development, market positioning, and the management of tourism destinations. It can be argued that, Mirziyoyev prioritized economic growth and the growth in the tourism industry as a state goal. In the tourism industry, Mirziyoyev mobilized domestic and foreign capital to undertake investments in Uzbekistan's tourism industry.

Tourism is directly related to many different industries and policies. The fact that a tourist is involved in almost every sector of the economy makes the tourism industry and its development complex. A country's visa regime for foreigners, the country's transport and infrastructure development policies, civil aviation policies, the education and training of tourism workers, and even foreign policy all play a role in tourism development. When Mirziyoyev became the president, he began to conduct policies to promote tourism and development. In addition to presidential decrees and government regulations to guide both state and private institutions, the Uzbek state has played an active role in bringing other sectors into line with the tourism development policies of the country.

Despite the backlash from other institutions and circles, the Mirziyoyev administration, recognizing that one of the key instruments of the international tourism movement is a liberal visa policy, has introduced a very lenient visa regime for visitors to potential tourism source markets, a radical step for a country with a former Soviet legacy. Currently, the citizens of more than 160 countries enjoy a visa-free or e-visa regime when visiting Uzbekistan.

In addition, the Uzbek state has directed some of its resources to develop tourism infrastructure, as tourism infrastructure and a variety of accommodation facilities and travel agencies focused on different segments of tourism types play a crucial role in

making a tourist destination internationally competitive. The Uzbek state has also introduced various types of incentives and support mechanisms to attract investment in the accommodation sector, increasing the number of international hotel chains operating in Uzbekistan. In addition, to contribute to the destination's competitiveness, most of the state-owned hotels have been privatized and handed over to professional management.

The Uzbek state has also played a leading role in the aviation sector. Realizing that an increase in the number of local and international airlines is crucial for a tourist destination in terms of the number of international visitors and also the role that LCC plays in facilitating travel, the Uzbek government has supported and facilitated the process of establishing new local airlines, including low-cost carriers in the country; on the other hand, the implementation of an open sky policy by Uzbek civil aviation policymakers allows international airlines to fly to Uzbekistan without hassle.

As in the case of infrastructure and aviation, the Uzbek state has directed some of its resources to the theoretical and educational training of employees working in the tourism industry. The quality of services provided to international and local visitors is one of the main features determining the level of competitiveness of any destination and also one of the main tools in the competition of prominent international tourist destinations. The Uzbek government is investing in this area through cooperation with international institutions and companies.

Promotion is one of the most expensive activities for destinations trying to attract visitors worldwide. Most of the world's leading destinations either encourage the private tourism sector to carry out promotional activities or carry out promotional activities themselves in cooperation with government agencies and the private sector, raising funds both from the state budget and from tourism sector representatives. Since Mirziyoyev's presidency, Uzbekistan has been conducting promotional activities using state funds and encouraging the participation of Uzbek private tourism companies. As legalized by presidential decrees, some of the costs of private tourism companies' activities, such as participation in tourism fairs or roadshows, are subsidized by Uzbek state bodies. In addition, to overcome the seasonality problem,

Uzbekistan also supports and incentivizes the domestic tourism movement inside the country.

As a result of the implementation of all the above state tourism policies, the tourism sector in Uzbekistan is undergoing a period of significant development. The state-directed tourism policies had a positive impact on the number of tourism enterprises serving in Uzbekistan's tourism industry too. In 2016, there were 750 hotels and similar accommodation facilities in Uzbekistan with a capacity of 37.8 thousand beds, while this number increased to 6.1 thousand hotels and more than 161 thousand beds by the end of 2024. The number of travel agencies in Uzbekistan also increased. In 2016, the number of travel agents was about 350, by 2024, the total number of travel agents increased to 3,686.

In 2016, Uzbekistan received about 2 million international visitors. As a result of the pro-tourism development policies of government organizations and the initiatives taken by private tourism representatives, this number increased to 2.7 million in 2017 and 5.3 million in 2018. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the number of international visitors to Uzbekistan reached to 10.2 million in 2024. The Uzbek government has set a target of receiving 11 million foreign tourists by the end of 2025.

It can be argued that a foreign policy based on economic interests and a tendency to strengthen friendly relations with countries with the economic potential to increase both the GDP and tourism revenues of the country. Consequently, the economic policies of the Mirziyoyev era have led to a further increase in per capita income and gross domestic product (GDP), and the share of tourism in GDP is also on the rise. As pointed out in the third chapter, in 2016 Uzbekistan's GDP was around \$86 billion whereas the tourism revenue was calculated at around \$579 million which constituted 0.67% of the GDP.⁵⁹⁵ As a result of the economic policies pursued by Mirziyoyev, the country's GDP reached \$115 billion, with an increase of 6.5%

⁵⁹⁵“Uzbekistan Tourism Industry Statistics.” Available at: <https://tourcentralasia.com/uzbekistan/uzbekistan-tourism-industry-statistics/>. Accessed on 10 March 2025.

compared to 2023.⁵⁹⁶ The increase in the number of international visitors positions the tourism industry in Uzbekistan as one of the largest contributors to the country's GDP. In this respect, the total revenues from international tourism reached \$3.5 billion in 2024, which makes the share of international tourism in GDP 3%.⁵⁹⁷ As a result, the share of international tourism revenues in the country's GDP increased by about 4.5 times between 2016 and 2024.

⁵⁹⁶ “Uzbekistan’s GDP Reaches \$115 Billion in 2024.” Available at: <https://www.gazeta.uz/en/2025/01/17/gdp/>. Accessed on 20 March 2025

⁵⁹⁷ “V 2025 Godu, Kolichestvo Gostinits i Mest Razhmesheniya v Uzbekistane Uvelichat pochtu do Semi Tyshyac.” (By 2025, the Number of Hotels and Accommodation Facilities in Uzbekistan will Increase to Almost Seven Thousand) Available at: <https://vzglyad.uz/ru/post/2025/01/31/turizm>. Accessed on 31 January 2025

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APPENDICES

A. CURRICULUM VITAE

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Surname, Name: Ersöz, Hasan Deniz

Nationality: Turkish

EDUCATION

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) 2013- Middle East Technical University (METU)
Graduate School of Social Sciences, Area Studies

Master's Degree (MS) **(2009-2012)** Middle East Technical University (METU)
Graduate School of Social Sciences, Eurasian Studies

Bachelor's Degree (BA) **(2003-2008)** Anadolu University (Distance Education)
Faculty of Business Administration, Business Administration

One Year Language Education **(2002-2003)** Moscow State Pedological University
(Scholarship from the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Türkiye)

Bachelor's Degree (BA) **(1998-2002)** Ankara University, Russian Language and
Literature

WORK EXPERIENCE

2023- Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Directorate General of Promotion, Head of
Branch, Russian, East European and Turkic Republics Branch, Ankara

2018-2023, Culture and Tourism Counsellor, Turkish Embassy in New Delhi, India

2014-2015 Lecturer, Ankara University, Department of Russian Language and
Literature, Subject: Eurasian Union and Its Perspectives, Ankara

2013-2018 Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Bilateral Relations and European Union
Department, Head of Branch, CIS Countries and Bilateral Relations, Ankara

2008-2013 Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Bilateral Relations and European Union
Department Culture and Tourism Assistant Expert, Ankara

2005-2008, Export Area Specialist and Manager, Merinos Carpet A.Ş, Gaziantep

LANGUAGE SKILLS

Turkish- Native

English- Full Professional Proficiency (YDS 2023, 87)

Russian-Full Professional Proficiency (YDS 2023, 82)



B. TURKISH SUMMARY / TRKE ZET

Turizm, son yıllarda dnya apında önemli ölçde gelir getiren bir iş kolu haline gelmiştir ve lkelerin kalkınmasında hatırı sayılır bir rol oynamaktadır. Özellikle, 1980'lerden bu yana, gelişmekte olan pek çok lke, dnyanın önde gelen ve tercih edilen turistik destinasyonlarından biri haline gelmek için politikalar geliştirmekte; lkelerini uluslararası turizm hareketleri için uygun hale getirme yönnde aba göstermektedir. Bu bağlamda, turizm ve uluslararası turizm, emek yoğun bir sektör olarak, gelişmekte olan ve az gelişmiş lkeler için büyük önem arz etmekte; adı geçen lkelerin eğitimli ve daha az eğitimli nüfusları için yeni istihdam fırsatları yaratmalarına yardımcı olan bir sektör olarak ön plana çıkmaktadır.

Statista'nın araştırmasına göre, 2025 yılına kadar turizm gelirinin dnya apında 955,94 milyar dolara ulaşacağı tahmin edilmektedir. Söz konusu gelirin, yıllık %3,91 oranında büyüyerek 2029 yılına kadar 1,11 trilyon dolarlık bir pazar hacmine ulaşacağı öngörülmektedir. Uluslararası Çalışma Örgtü'ne göre ise Eylül 2024 itibariyle 270 milyondan fazla kişi veya küresel işgücnn yaklaşık yüzde 8,2'si turizm sektörnde istihdam edilmektedir. Dnya Seyahat ve Turizm Konseyi'nin belirttiği gibi, turizm sektörnn, 2034 yılına kadar Dnya apında 449 milyon kişiye istihdam sağlayan bir sektör haline gelmesi; dnya üzerindeki iş gücnn yaklaşık %12,2'sinin turizm sektörnde istihdam edilmesi öngörülmektedir. Bu kapsamda Seyahat ve Turizmin küresel istihdamdaki önemli rol tüm lkelerce anlaşılmaktadır.

Orta Asya, tarih boyunca birçok medeniyet için bir kavşak noktası olmuş ve İpek Yolu aracılığıyla Doğu ile Batı'yı birbirine bağlamada muazzam bir rol oynamıştır. Aynı zamanda tarihin ilk turistik rotalarından biri olarak kabul edilen İpek Yolu'nun büyük bir kısmı bugnk Özbekistan toprakları içerisindedir. Hem İpek yolu hem Özbekistan, turizm rünleri ve destinasyonlarını zenginliği bağlamında son yıllarda

pek çok akademik çalışmanın öznesi olmuştur. Bunun yanında, Özbekistan tarih boyunca daima ilgi çeken bir turizm destinasyonu ola gelmiştir.

Sovyet döneminde Özbekistan, Sovyetler Birliği'nin başlıca turizm destinasyonlarından biriydi. Yaygın kanının aksine, Sovyetler Birliği döneminde bölgeye bir uluslararası turizm hareketi vardı ve Özbekistan, Birliğin önde gelen kültür turizmi destinasyonlarından biri olarak kabul ediliyordu. Başta diğer komünist ülkelerden olmak üzere çok sayıda yabancı turist Özbekistan'ın Semerkant, Buhara, Hiva gibi ilgi çekici yerlerini ziyaret ederlerdi. Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasından sonra Özbekistan, ekonomik anlamda Sovyet mirasını takip etmeyi ve daha korumacı bir ekonomi politikası izlemeyi tercih etti. Özbekistan, ekonomisini liberalleştirmek ve uluslararası finans kuruluşlarının önerdiği ekonomik reformları benimsemek yerine, sıkı devlet kontrolü altında ithal ikamesine ve devlet yönlendirmesine dayalı bir sistem kurmayı tercih etti. Korumacı yaklaşım ülkenin turizm sektörünü de etkiledi ve büyük bir potansiyele sahip olmasına rağmen Özbekistan Cumhuriyeti'nin ilk Başkanı olan İslam Karimov döneminde turizm sektörü ve uluslararası turizm hareketi ülkede yeterince gelişme imkanı bulamadı.

Kerimov döneminin ilk yıllarında devletin ana odak noktası, planlı ekonomiden serbest piyasa ekonomisine geçiş sürecinin hane halkı üzerindeki olumsuz etkilerini azaltmaktı; bu nedenle bir endüstri olarak turizmin ihmal edildiği; dikkatin, bu dönemde, Özbekistan Halkının, diğer pek çok Sovyet Ülkesinde olduğu gibi planlı ekonomiden serbest piyasa ekonomisine geçerken yaşanan şoklardan uzak tutulmasına verildiği söylenebilir. Kerimov döneminin ikinci kısmı, 2005'teki Andican olaylarının ardından turizm sektörünü daha fazla ihmal edilen bir sektör haline getiren ve güvenlik politikaların ön plana çıktığı izolasyon dönemi olarak tanımlanabilir.

Özbekistan'ın ilk cumhurbaşkanı İslam Kerimov'un ölümünün ardından 2016 yılında Şavkat Mirziyoyev'in iktidara gelmesiyle birlikte ekonomi politikası ve dolaylı olarak turizm politikası farklı bir hal alarak Özbekistan turizm alanında daha liberal bir ekonomi politikası benimsemeye başladı. Mirziyoyev'in göreve başlaması ile birlikte, turizm sektörü Özbekistan ekonominin stratejik sektörlerinden biri olarak

belirlendiği bizzat Mirziyoyev tarafından defalarca dile getirildi. Diğer bir deyişle, Özbek yetkililer, ülke ekonomisinin ve istihdamı arttırmanın ana yollarından birinin uluslararası ziyaretçi sayısının arttırmak ve turizm sektörünü geliştirmek olduğunu kabul ederek bu yönde politikalar geliştirmek olduğunu kabul etmişlerdir.

Mirziyoyev yönetiminin genel olarak hizmet sektörünün ve özellikle de turizmin geliştirilmesinin ekonomik büyüme, kalkınma ve istihdamın sağlanmasında çok önemli bir rol oynayacağı tarımsal-endüstriyel sistemden post-endüstriyel ekonomik sisteme geçişe öncelik verdiği söylenebilir. Sonuç olarak turizm sektörü, Mirziyoyev'in 2016 sonlarında göreve gelmesinin ardından Özbek hükümeti tarafından ilk odaklanılan sektörler arasında yer aldı. Dolayısıyla Mirziyoyev yönetiminin turizm ve turizm politikasına yönelik yeni yaklaşımının Kerimov'un ekonomi politikalarından tamamen farklı bir yol izlediği söylenebilir.

Mirziyoyev yönetimi, Özbek ekonomisinin kilit sektörlerinden ve toplayıcılarından biri olarak turizme öncelik verdi. Aralık 2016'da cumhurbaşkanı seçildikten sadece birkaç gün sonra Mirziyoyev, “Özbekistan'da Turizm Sektörünün Hızlı Gelişimi için Tedbirler Hakkında” başlıklı bir cumhurbaşkanlığı kararnamesi yayınlayarak turizmin Özbek ekonomisinin stratejik sektörlerinden biri olarak kabul edildiğini ilan etti. Bu anlamda, Mirziyoyev yönetimi söz konusu kararnameyi imzalayarak turizm sektörünün ve gelişiminin kendi döneminin temel önceliklerinden biri olacağını açıkça ifade etmiş oldu. Kararnameye odaklanıldığında, Özbekistan'ın devlet müdahalesi yardımıyla yerel turizm endüstrisini geliştirmeyi hedeflediği görülebilir. Uluslararası seyahatin kolaylaştırılması, vize rejiminin hafifletilmesi, turizm altyapısının iyileştirilmesi, komşu ülkelerle ortak turizm paketlerinin oluşturulması ve Özbekistan'ın turizm destinasyonlarının ve ürünlerinin görünürlüğünün artırılması gibi tedbirler, Özbekistan'ın uluslararası turizmden alacağı payı arttırmak amacı ile ancak devlet müdahalesi ve devlet ile özel sektör arasında üst düzey iş birliği ile gerçekleştirilebilecek politikalar olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır.

Turizm politikalarının farklı sektörlerle doğrudan veya dolaylı bağlantıları vardır. Farklı sektörlerle dayanan bir endüstri olarak turizm politikalarını yönetmek daha karmaşık hale gelmektedir. Bu nedenle, devletin rolü ve kalkınma politikaları, geç

gelişen turizm destinasyonları üzerinde derin bir etkiye sahiptir. Japonya ve Güney Kore hükümetlerinin 1980'lerde otomobil endüstrisi gibi gelişmekte olan endüstrilere yönelik devlet koruması politikalarını koruduğu bir gerçek olduğuna göre, geç gelişen turizm destinasyonları da dünyaca ünlü turizm destinasyonlarıyla rekabete girecek yeterli güç ve deneyime sahip olana kadar bir süre korunmalı ve teşvik edilmelidir. Bu nedenle, turizm endüstrisinin henüz emekleme döneminde sayıldığı Özbekistan'ın turizm gelişiminde kalkınmacı devlet ve devlet müdahalesi politikalarının büyük önem taşıdığı düşünülmektedir.

Turizm, gelişmiş ülkelerde ve gelişmekte olan ve daha az gelişmiş ülkelerde en büyük ve en hızlı büyüyen endüstrilerden biridir. Birçok ülke için turizm, ekonomik faaliyetleri canlandırmada önemli bir rol oynadığı için bir kalkınma aracı olarak görülmektedir. Emek yoğun bir sektör olarak turizm, yeni istihdam fırsatları yaratır ve ödemeler dengesi, brüt gelir ve üretimi olumlu etkiler. Görece olarak emek yoğun bir sektör olan turizm, vasıfsız işçiler, kadınlar ve gençler için fırsatlar yaratır.

Turizm, tarım ve imalat gibi birincil sektörlerden hizmet sektörlerine işgücünü kaydıran bir sektör olarak görülmektedir. Ayrıca birçok ülke için en büyük ihracat segmenti olarak kabul edilmektedir. Bunu göz önünde bulundurarak, akademisyenlerin turizmin hem yurt içinde hem de yurt dışında etkisini kapsamlı bir şekilde analiz etmiş olması şaşırtıcı değildir. Ancak, Turizm Politikalarını teorileştirme sürecine gelince, literatürün Uluslararası Siyasi Ekonomi (IPE) literatürüne kıyasla yetersiz olduğu sonucuna varılabilir. Turizm politikası üzerine çalışan tanınmış bir akademisyen olan Bianchi' ye göre "Uluslararası ticaretin bir ögesi olarak sahip olduğu öneme rağmen, turizm daha geniş kalkınma çalışmaları literatüründe nispeten ihmal edilmektedir. Turizmin farklı ülkelerin ve bölgelerin ekonomik kalkınmasına göreceli katkısını değerlendirmeyi amaçlayan birçok çalışma yapılmış olsa da turizmin politik ekonomisi henüz ayrı bir araştırma alanı olarak kendini tam olarak kanıtlamış değildir.

Uluslararası turizm dünyanın önde gelen ekonomik sektörlerinden biri olarak genişlemiş ve çeşitlenmiş olsa da Chin, Clancy, Bianchi ve Ferguson gibi akademisyenler dışında, turizmin uluslararası politik ekonomisi literatürde yaygın

olarak incelenmemiştir. Ayrıca, uluslararası turizm politikalarının kavramsallaştırılması konusunda bir fikir birliği olmadığı da ileri sürülebilir. Akademisyenler arasında uluslararası ve yerel turizm politikalarını kalkınma politikaları ile ilişkilendirme eğilimi vardır. Öte yandan, bazı akademisyenler bu kavrama uluslararası turizm politikaları adını verirken, diğerleri buna turizmin uluslararası politik ekonomisi adını vermektedirler. Tezimizde, turizm politikalarının sürecini teorileştirmenin ana kavramı “Uluslararası Turizm Politikaları” olacaktır. Turizm politikası çalışmaları, ekonomik büyümeye katkıda bulunan turizm geliştirme politikaları ve uluslararası ve yerel olarak teorik ekonomik politika tarafından şekillendirilmiştir. Turizm, ulusal ekonomilere ve dünya ticaretine önemli ölçüde katkıda bulursa da uluslararası politik ekonomi perspektifinden turizm politikası üzerine teorik araştırma çok sınırlıdır.

İkinci Dünya Savaşı'ndan kısa bir süre sonra, uluslararası turizm, sanayileşmiş devletler tarafından daha az gelişmiş ve gelişmekte olan ülkeler için ekonomik kalkınma sağlama aracı olarak teşvik edildi. Bu nedenle, uluslararası turizm politikalarının yürürlükte olduğu 1950'ler ve 1960'larda, ana odak kalkınmaydı ve turizm, kalkınma çalışmalarının önemli yönlerinden biri olarak kabul edildi. Sonuç olarak, uluslararası turizm politikası teorisi, kalkınma olgusu etrafında şekillendi. Uluslararası Politik Ekonomi teorisi sürecinde olduğu gibi, turizmdeki kalkınma süreci de politiktir ve ekonomik, sosyo-kültürel ve politik güçlerden etkilenir. Bu nedenle, zamanla, modernleşme, bağımlılık, neoliberalizm ve alternatif kalkınma gibi teoriler ve kalkınma çerçeveleri, uluslararası turizmin baskın teorileri haline gelmiştir. Kalkınma çerçeveleri, turizmin nasıl geliştiğini ve bir kalkınma aracı olarak nasıl işlediğini anlamak için bir temel sağlar. Ayrıca, turizmin bu baskın kalkınma teorilerinin yörüngesinde geliştiğini ve ekonomik büyüme ve eşitsizlikle ağırlıklı olarak ilgilenen kalkınma politikalarının yanı sıra sosyal, insani ve çevresel sorunlar çerçevesinde ayrıca kavramsallaştırıldığı söylenebilir.

Ülkeler tarafından izlenen ekonomik politikalar ile aynı ülkelerde izlenen turizm politikaları arasında bir bağlantı olduğu rahatlıkla savunulabilir. Ülkeler, turizm politikalarında tercih ettikleri ekonomik modeli yansıtmaya eğilimindedir. Başka bir deyişle, devletin siyasi ekonomiye yaklaşımı, söz konusu ülkelerde uygulanan turizm

kalkınma politikalarını şekillendirmektedir. Daha liberal ekonomik politikalara sahip ülkeler, turizm endüstrisiyle başa çıkmak için sağlam kurumlara sahip olmaya istekli olmayacaktır. Öte yandan, ekonomik politikayı şekillendirmede önemli bir rol oynayan devletler, turizm kalkınma politikalarını güçlü ve devlet tarafından yönetilen kurumlar aracılığıyla uygulama eğilimindedir. Bu nedenle, devletin turizmin zorluklarına verdiği yanıtların öncelikle siyasi ekonomi tarzıyla tutarlı olduğu görülmektedir. Siyasi ekonomi hakkındaki yaygın düşünce paradigmaları, devletlerin turizm politikaları şekillendirme süreçlerini etkilemektedir.

1960'larda turizm, gelişmekte olan ülkelere bir kalkınma aracı olarak sunulmaya başlandı. Gelişmiş devletler, daha az gelişmiş devletlere, belirli bir kalkınma seviyesine ulaşmak için batılı devletlerin izlediği aynı yolu izlemelerini önerdi. Ancak o zamana kadar, Batı'nın önerdiği “Modernleşme ve Neoliberalizm” gibi turizm politikalarının gelişmekte olan ülkelerin kalkınmasına katkıda bulunmadığı; aksine, bu tür turizm politikalarının çoğunlukla gelişmekte olan ülkelerin gelişmiş ülkelere olan ekonomik bağımlılıklarının artmasına neden olduğu anlaşılmıştı. Zamanla, devletin turizm politikalarının şekillendirilmesindeki rolü ve bir ülkeyi önemli sayıda uluslararası ziyaretçinin ziyaret edebileceği ve ulusal ekonomiye katkıda bulunabileceği bir turizm destinasyonuna dönüştürme sürecindeki eşsiz katkısı anlaşılmıştı.

Çoğu gelişmekte olan ülke için turizm sektörü, uzun yıllardır unvanlarını koruyan ve büyük çoğunluğu ekonomik olarak gelişmiş olan dünyanın en popüler turizm destinasyonlarıyla rekabet etmesi gereken, emekleme döneminde bir sektör olarak kabul edilir. Bu nedenle, herhangi bir yeni destinasyon için, gelişmiş ülkelerle rekabet etmesi gerçeği ışığında, özellikle emekleme döneminde turizm geliştirecek politikalar, kalkınmacı devlet ekonomik yaklaşımı kapsamında devletin yönlendirdiği bir süreç olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Devlet öncülüğündeki turizm politikaları, turizmin gelişme sürecine ve nihayetinde özellikle gelişmekte olan ülkelerde ve turizm destinasyonlarında istihdamın artırılması ve yoksulluğun hafifletilmesine katkıda bulunacaktır.

Turizm, küresel ekonomi için önemli bir endüstri olarak kabul edilmektedir; bunun yanında ulusal ekonomilere katkıda bulunan ve az gelişmiş veya gelişmekte olan

lkelerin ekonomilerini geliřtirmek iin nemli bir ara olarak n plana ıkmaktadır. Turizm endstrisinin yeni geliřmeye bařladığı 1950’li yıllarda, ekonomik bymenin bir aracı olarak turizm, geliřmiř lkeler tarafından nemi anlařılan ve kullanılan bir endstri olarak n plana ıkmıřtır.

Turizm sektrnn ulusal ekonomiler iin nemi yirminci yzyılın ortalarından nce kabul edilmiř olsa da geliřmiř lkeler turizmi daha az geliřmiř veya geliřmekte olan lkeler iin kalkınma yollarından biri olarak nermeye bařladığı dnem olan 1950’lere kadar, turizm kresel byme ve kalkınma alıřmalarında genellikle gz ardı edilmiř bir alan olmuřtur. te yandan 1950’li yıllardan sonra turizmin, kalkınma alıřmaları iin nemli bir endstri haline geldiğı sylenebilir. zellikle havacılığın kullanılabilirliğı ve yaygınlařmasıyla, turizm, kresel ekonominin en nemli ekonomik aralarından biri haline gelmiřtir.

Sz konusu geliřmeler kapsamında, pek ok geliřmekte olan lke uluslararası turizm gelirlerinden yararlanmak iin turizm politikaları uygulamaya bařlamıřtır. Bugn, turizmin iř hacmi petrol ihracatı, gıda rnleri veya otomobillerle eřit durumdadır. Turizm, uluslararası ticaretin bařlıca aktrlerinden biri haline gelmiřtir ve aynı zamanda birok geliřmekte olan lke iin ana gelir kaynaklarından birini temsil etmektedir. Bu byme, destinasyonlar arasındaki rekabeti de olabildiğince arttırmıřtır.

Turizmin elliden fazla farklı endstriyle doğrudan veya dolaylı bir iliřkisi vardır ve turizmin en nemli tanımlarından biri, turizm endstrisinin baėlantılı olduğı farklı segmentleri vurgular. Turizm, bir dizi somut ve soyut bileřenden oluřan bir hizmet endstrisidir. Somut unsurlar arasında ulařım sistemleri- hava, demir yolu, yol, su ve hatta uzay bulunurken, ayrıca misafirperverlik hizmetleri, konaklama, yiyecek ve iecekler, turlar ve hediyelik eřyalar ve bankacılık, sigorta, emniyet ve gvenlik gibi ilgili hizmetler yer alır. Somut olmayan unsurlar arasında dinlenme ve rahatlama, kltr, kaıř, macera ve yeni ve farklı deneyimler yer almaktadır.

Turizm, dnya apında birok lke iin nemli bir endstridir ve kalkınmalarında nemli bir rol oynar. 1980’lerden bu yana birok geliřmekte olan lke, varıř

noktalarını dünyanın tercih edilen turistik yerlerinden biri haline getirmek için politikalar üretmektedir. Gelir kaynağı olarak turizm, gelişmekte olan ve daha az gelişmiş ülkeler için özellikle önemli ve benzersiz bir rol oynar. İstihdam yaratan bir sektör olarak turizm endüstrisi, gelişmekte olan ülkelerin yalnızca eğitilmiş ve eğitilmiş insanları için değil, aynı zamanda daha az eğitilmiş nüfusları için de yeni istihdam fırsatları yaratmalarına yardımcı olur. Dahası, turizm sektörünün kendisi 2000'lerden bu yana yaygınlaşmakta hem uluslararası ziyaretçi sayısı hem de uluslararası turizm gelirlerinin miktarı, COVID-19 salgınının olumsuz etkisinin hala dünya çapında turizm endüstrisini etkilediği 2020-2022 dönemi hariç olmak üzere her yıl önemli ölçüde artmaktadır.

Uluslararası turizm gelirleri, uluslararası taşımacılık için ulusal taşıyıcılara yapılan ödemeler de dahil olmak üzere uluslararası gelen ziyaretçilerin harcamalarıdır. Bu gelirler, varış ülkesinde alınan mal veya hizmetler için yapılan diğer tüm ön ödemeleri içerir. Bu bağlamda, uluslararası turizm gelirleri, ön tahminlere göre 2023 yılında 1,4 trilyon ABD dolarına ulaştı; bu, 2019 yılında destinasyonların kazandığı 1,5 trilyon ABD dolarının yaklaşık %93'ü. Turizmin doğrudan gayri safi yurt içi hasıla (TDGPD) cinsinden ölçülen turizmin ekonomik katkısına ilişkin ön tahminler, 2023 yılında 3,3 trilyon ABD doları veya küresel GSYİH'nin %3'üne işaret ediyor.

GSYİH, bir ülkede bir yılda üretilen tüm mal ve hizmetlerin toplam değeridir. Bir ülkenin ekonomik gücünün önemli bir göstergesi olarak kabul edilir ve GSYİH'deki olumlu bir değişim, ekonomik büyümenin bir işaretidir. 2023 yılında seyahat ve turizmin küresel GSYİH'ye katkısı 9,9 trilyon ABD dolarıydı. Bu rakamın 2024 yılında tahmini 11,1 trilyon ABD dolarına ulaşması öngörülüyor. 2034 yılında seyahat ve turizmin küresel GSYİH'ye katkısının 16 trilyon ABD dolarına ulaşması bekleniyor. Uluslararası ziyaretçi sayısının da 2024'te arttı. 1.4 milyar kişi 2024 yılında kendi ülkesi dışında bir ülkeyi ziyaret etti. Bu sayı 2023'e göre yaklaşık %9 daha fazla.

Nispeten emek yoğun bir sektör olan turizm, aynı zamanda yeni iş sahaları yaratmak sureti ile gelişmekte olan ülkelerdeki istihdam sorunlarının hafifletilmesine yardımcı olmaktadır. Bu aynı zamanda nispeten kalabalık ülkelerin turizm altyapılarını

geliştirme ve ülkelerine yabancı turist çekme konusunda daha agresif olma eğiliminde olmalarının başlıca nedenlerinden biri olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır.

Turizm, Dünya Turizm Örgütü tarafından gelişmekte olan ülkelerin sürdürülebilir kalkınma hedeflerine ulaşmalarına ve küresel ekonomideki paylarını artırmalarına yardımcı olmak için etkili bir yol olarak kabul edilmektedir. Turizm sektörünün ulusal ekonomilere olan temel katkılarını aşağıda gösterilmektedir.

1. Yerel üretim ve çıktının teşviki
2. Yeni istihdam fırsatlarının yaratılması
3. Döviz gelirlerinin oluşturulması
4. Artan hükümet gelirleri
5. Bölgesel kalkınma
6. Yoksulluğun azaltılması

Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasından sonra, yeni kurulan devletler kendilerini farklı seviyelerde de olsa zorlu bir siyasi, ekonomik ve sosyal geçiş döneminde buldular. Nispeten daha iyi ekonomik ve siyasi koşullara sahip olanlar için dağılmanın etkisi çok önemli değildi. Ancak, Sovyet ekonomik sistemine daha karmaşık bir şekilde entegre olmuş devletler, bağımsızlıklarının ilk yıllarında diğerlerinden daha fazla sorun yaşadılar. Örneğin, daha uzun bir bağımsız devlet olma dönemine sahip olan Baltık devletleri, bağımsız devlet olmaya hızla uyum sağlayabildiler. Buna karşılık, bağımsız, modern bir devlet olma geçmişi olmayan Orta Asya ülkeleri, yeni koşullara uyum sağlamayı zor buldular.

Orta Asya devletleri, Çarlık Rusya'sının ve ardından Sovyetler Birliği'nin himayesinde geçen yüz yıllık bir süreden sonra bağımsızlıklarına kavuştular. Öte yandan, Orta Asya devletlerinin Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasından yana olmadıklarını belirtmekte ayrıca fayda var. Sovyetler Birliği'nin geleceğine karar vermek için 1991'de yapılan referandumda, Orta Asya ülkelerinde yaşayan nüfusun büyük bölümü Sovyetler Birliği'nin devamı yönünde oy kullanmış idi.

Sovyetler Birliği 1991 yılında dağıldığında, Orta Asya devletleri, Sovyetler Birliği'ndeki en fakir Cumhuriyetler idi. Orta Asya ekonomilerinin, Sovyet

döneminde ekonomilerini nispeten zayıf kılan kendine özgü özellikleri vardı. Bölgelerin yukarıda belirtilen ekonomik geri kalmışlığının nedenleri arasında, Orta Asya ülkelerine nispeten geç gelen ve bu reformların içeriğinin de nispeten sınırlı olduğu Sovyetler Birliği döneminde gerçekleştirilen reformlar ve ekonomik yönetimdeki deneyim eksikliği sayılabilir. Sonuç olarak, Orta Asya ülkeleri çöküşle birlikte ekonomik zorluklar ve belirsizliklerle karşı karşıya kaldı. Bu ekonomik sorunlar, Orta Asya devletlerinin en kalabalık olanı olan Özbekistan'ın başlıca endişesi haline geldi ve bu durumda son tahlilde Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasından sonra ülkede devlet odaklı ekonomik politikalar uygulanmasının önünü açtı.

Özbekistan, Çarlık Rusya'nın Orta Asya'ya olan ilgisinin 19. yüzyılda başlamasından bu yana pamuk ve çeşitli tarım ürünlerinin deposu ola gelmiştir. Çarlık Rusya'nın Orta Asya'ya ilgisinden önceki dönemde bugünkü Özbekistan toprakları yüzyıllar boyunca ticaretin merkezi olan Büyük İpek Yolu'nun bir parçasıydı.

Sovyet döneminde, Özbek ekonomisi, Sovyet ekonomisinin ana parçalarından biriydi. Sovyetler Birliğinin ilk yıllarında, Moskova tarafından Özbekistan'a, genel olarak tarım ürünlerinin ve özellikle pamuğun büyük bir üreticisi olma rolü verilmişti. İkinci Dünya Savaşı Sovyetler Birliği'nin Avrupa bölgelerine yayıldıkça, büyük endüstriyel üretim tesislerinden bazıları Sovyet Özbekistan'a aktarıldı ve bu da sonunda Sovyet Özbek ekonomisinin çeşitlenmesine katkıda bulunacak bir süreç olarak tarihteki yerini alacaktı. Özbekistan'ın bahse konu yeni endüstrilerin ülkesinde faaliyet göstermesi sürecinden edindiği deneyim, Özbekistan'ın Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasıyla liberal bir ekonomiye geçişin sonuçlarından daha az etkilenmesine de yardımcı olan bir unsur olarak karlımıza çıkmaktadır.

Bu dönemde turizm ne Sovyetler Birliği'nde ne de Sovyet Özbekistan'da başlıca ekonomik sektörlerden biri değildir. Buna karşın, genel inanın aksine, Sovyet döneminde ülkeye gelen uluslararası bir turizm hareketi mevcuttur. Sovyet döneminde turizm, ekonomik bir sektör olmaktan ziyade Sovyet ideolojisinin başlıca propaganda araçlarından biri olarak hizmet vermiştir. Bu dönemde Özbekistan, Sovyetler Birliği'ni ziyaret etmek isteyen yabancılar için önde gelen turistik cazibe merkezlerinden biri olarak öne çıkmakta idi.

Sovyetler Birlięi 1991 yılında daęılınca, Sovyet döneminde önemli görevlerde bulunan İslam Karimov baęımsız Özbekistan'ın ilk Cumhurbaşkanı olmuştur. Sovyetler Birlięi'nin daęılması sonucunda, baęımsız Özbekistan'ın ekonomisini piyasa ekonomisine adapta etmek için önünde iki seçenek bulunmakta idi. Sovyet döneminde aynı zamanda bir ekonomist olan Özbekistan'ın ilk cumhurbaşkanı İslam Karimov, şok terapisi yerine kademeli bir geçiş yaklaşımını tercih ederek, Orta Asya'nın en kalabalık ülkesi olan Özbek ulusunu, şok terapisi geçiş yönteminin olası olumsuz etkilerinden korumaya çalıştı. Karimov'un "Devletin Ekonomideki Etkili Eolu Tarafından Desteklenen Piyasa Temelli bir Ekonomi" olarak açıklanabilecek geçiş ekonomisine yönelik benzersiz yaklaşımı, bazı akademisyenler tarafından "Özbek Yolu" olarak adlandırılmıştır. Ancak, geçiş ekonomisine yönelik bu farklı yaklaşım Özbekistan'a başarı getirdi ve 2000'lere gelindiğinde Özbekistan, eski Sovyet Ülkeleri arasında, ekonomik olarak en istikrarlı ülkelerden biri haline geldi. Bu başarı bazı Batılı akademisyenleri şaşırttı ve bu sürece kendilerince Özbek Paradoksu adı verildi. Ekonomik rakamlar olumlu olmaya devam ederken, Karimov'un iktidarının son yılları, 2005 yılında gerçekleşen Andijan olayları sonrası yaşanan toplumsal karışıklığın da etkisi ile Özbekistan uluslararası ekonomik sistemden görece izole bir şekilde varlığını sürdürdü.

Karimov, görev süresi boyunca ülkenin turizm sektörünü geliştirmek için somut adımlar attı. Özbek havayollarının kurulması, *Uzbekturizm*'in oluşturulması, ülkenin turizm politikasını uygulayacak devlet komitesi ve Dünya Turizm Örgütü ile ilişkilerin geliştirilmesi, Karimov döneminde gerçekleşti. Ancak, turizm altyapısının geliştirilmesi ve turizm tanıtımı bu dönemde yeterince ele alınmadı. Bunun en önemli nedenleri arasında bu alanlara yeterince kaynak ayrılmaması ve 2005 yılında gerçekleşen Andijan olaylarından sonra ülkede daha dışa kapalı ve güvenliği öncelik alan bir dış politika izlemesi sayılabilir.

2016 yılında Mirziyoyev'in Cumhurbaşkanı olmasının ardından, turizm, Özbekistan'da ulusal ekonomiye katkıda bulunmak, istihdamı artırmak ve bölgesel eşitsizliği azaltmak için ülkenin stratejik sektörü ilan edildi. Özbekistan'ın hem Sovyet hem de Karimov dönemlerinden miras kalan turizm yasaları, turizm altyapısı ve turizm sektörünün durumu, uluslararası alanda rekabet etmek için yeterli değildi.

Özellikle 2000 yılından sonra turizm hareketleri ve buna bağlı olarak turizm gelirleri dünya çapında yüksek oranda büyümeye başladı ve ülkeler küresel turizm gelirlerindeki paylarını artırmak için yoğun bir şekilde çalışmaya başladılar. Özbekistan'ın eski bir Sovyet ülkesi olması ve Karimov döneminde izole edilmiş bir imaja sahip olması, Özbekistan'ın uluslararası turizmde rekabet etmesini daha da zorlaştıran etkenler arasındadır.

Tüm bunların farkında olan Özbekistan'ın ikinci Cumhurbaşkanı Şevket Mirziyoyev, Aralık 2016'da göreve geldikten sonra ülke turizmini geliştirmek ve ülkenin imajını olumlu bir turizm destinasyonu algısına dönüştürmek için ivedilikle çalışmaya başladı.

Başkanlığının ilk yıllarında, Sovyet ve Karimov dönemi alışkanlıklarının getirdiği zorluklara rağmen Mirziyoyev'in ülkeye gelen yabancı ziyaretçileri artırmayı amaçlayan turizm politikasının temel alanlarında radikal politika değişikliklerini başlattığı söylenebilir. Bu bağlamda Mirziyoyev Özbekistan'a gelen yabancı ziyaretçilerin sayısını arttırmak amacıyla politikalar yürütmeye başladı. Özbekistan'ın diğer devletlere yönelik vize politikası, turizm ve ulaşım altyapısının geliştirilmesi, tanıtım politikaları, turizm sektöründe çalışan personelin hizmet kalitesini yükseltmeye yönelik çalışmalar ve kaynak turizm pazarı ülkeleriyle ikili turizm ilişkilerinin yanı sıra çok taraflı turizm ilişkilerinin iyileştirilmesi söz konusu politikaların ana uygulama alanlarıdır.

Özbekistan'ın diğer ülkelere uyguladığı vize politikasındaki iyileştirmeler, Mirziyoyev'in Özbekistan'a gelen yabancı ziyaretçi sayısını artırmaya yönelik en radikal politikası olarak nitelendirilebilir. Karimov döneminin etkilerine sahip Devlet bürokrasinin ilk başlardaki sert eleştirilerine rağmen, Mirziyoyev vize politikasını serbestleştirdi ve Özbekistan'ı Sovyet sonrası alanda en liberal vize politikası uygulayan ülkelerden biri yaptı. 2025 yılı mart ayı itibari ile 90'dan fazla ülkenin vatandaşı Özbekistan'a vizesiz gelebilirken; 70'ten fazla ülkenin vatandaşı Özbekistan'ı ziyaret etmeden önce elektronik turist vizesi başvurusunda bulunabilmektedir.

Özbekistan, Sovyet ve Karimov dönemlerinden nispeten düşük kaliteli bir turizm altyapısı devralmıştır. Küresel pazarda bir destinasyonun rekabet gücünü temel unsurlarından biri turizm altyapısının gelişmişlik seviyesidir. Farklı seviyelerdeki konaklama tesislerinin varlığı, her biri farklı turizm segmentlerinde uzmanlığa ve profesyonelliğe sahip farklı türde seyahat acentelerinin ülkede faaliyet göstermesi; ek olarak değişik turizm deneyimleri sunabilen bir deneyimli turizm acentalarının pazardaki etkinliği bir destinasyonun dünyada popüler bir destinasyon haline gelmesi için çok önemlidir. Bu bağlamda, Özbek Devlet kurumlarının, Özbekistan turizm endüstrisi altyapısına yaptığı yatırımlar; özel sektörü söz konusu yatırımlara çekme, ortak etme ve yönlendirmedeki Devletin öncü rolü; ek olarak Özbekistan hükümetinin bu alanda sağladığı teşvikler ve destek, Özbekistan'ın turizm altyapısının geliştirilmesi sürecine büyük katkı sağlamıştır. Hala gidilecek çok yol olmasına rağmen, Özbekistan'ın turizm altyapısı potansiyel olarak farklı milletlerden ziyaretçilerin beklentilerini karşılama konusunda ilerleme kaydetmiştir. Söz konusu turizm altyapısının geliştirilmesi yönündeki politikaların devam etmesi halinde, ülkenin turizm altyapısı çok daha iyi bir seviyeye ulaşacak; Özbekistan'ın dünyanın önde gelen turizm destinasyonları arasına girme süreci hızlanacaktır.

Erişilebilirlik ve kaliteli ve konforlu bir ulaşım altyapısının varlığı, bir destinasyonun uluslararası turizm ligindeki yerini belirlemede önemli bir rol oynar. Genel olarak ulaşım ve özellikle hava taşımacılığı, belirli bir destinasyona gelen ziyaretçi sayısını artırmada kilit rol oynayan turizm altyapısının ana bileşenlerinden biridir. Bu anlamda, Mirziyoyev yönetimi, Özbekistan'ın farklı şehirlerine uçan yerli ve yabancı havayolu firmalarının sayısını artırma yönünde politikalar izlemektedir. Özbekistan kanun yapıcıları hem uluslararası hem de yerel ziyaretçilerin seyahatini kolaylaştırmak için Özbekistan içinde düşük bütçeli hava yolu (low-cost-carriers) kurulmasında teşvik edici bir rol oynamaktadır. Sonuç olarak, Özbekistan'daki çeşitli destinasyonlara uçan yerel ve uluslararası havayolu sayısı 2016 yılından itibaren sürekli artmaktadır. Buna ek olarak, oto yolların kalitesinin arttırılmasına ve ülkenin yüksek hızlı tren ağının genişletilmesine yönelik yapılan yatırımlar da devam etmektedir.

Tanıtım ve halkla ilişkiler faaliyetleri hem dünyada hem de turizm kaynağı pazarları olarak tanımlanan ülkelerde bir destinasyonun farkındalığını artırmada büyük önem

taşımaktadır. Bu anlamda, Özbekistan son dönemde, ülkenin tanıtımına ayırdığı kaynakları artırmış ve hedef ülkelerden gelen ziyaretçi sayısını yükseltmek için bu ülkelere özgü farklı tanıtım etkinlikleri yapmaya başlamıştır. Farklı pazarlara yönelik özel tanıtım politikası da söz konusu bölgelerden gelen yabancı ziyaretçi sayısını artırmada önemli rol oynamaktadır. Bu politikanın somut bir sonucu olarak, vize, havacılık ve tanıtım başta olmak üzere turizm politikası araçlarının tüm segmentlerinde Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti'ne özel olarak uygulanan politikalar sonucunda 2024 yılında Özbekistan'ı ziyaret edilen Çinli turist sayısı yüzde 75 oranında artmıştır.

Özbekistan'ın turizm politikasının temel hedeflerinden biri, eski Sovyet Ülkeleri dışındaki ülkelerden gelen uluslararası ziyaretçi sayısını artırmaktır. Bu bağlamda, söz konusu ülkelerde yürütülen tanıtım politikaları sonucunda Birleşik Krallık, Fransa, İspanya ve Almanya'dan gelen ziyaretçi sayısı 2024 yılında artmıştır. Almanya'dan gelen turist sayısında da önemli bir büyüme yaşanmış, 2024 yılında, 37.526 Alman turist Özbekistan'ı ziyaret etmiştir.

Turizm işgücünün profesyonelliği ve kalitesi, destinasyonların olumlu algılanmasına ve rekabet gücüne önemli ölçüde katkıda bulunur. Özellikle turizm alanında gelişmiş destinasyonlarla rekabet etmeye ve gelişmeye çalışan ülkelerde işgücünün becerilerini geliştirmenin daha çok özel sektörün sorumluluğunda olması gerektiği ileri sürülse de turizm alanında faaliyet gösteren kamu kuruluşları da ülkenin turizm sektöründe çalışan kişilerin verdikleri hizmet kalitesini yükseltmek üzere politikalar takip etmektedirler. Bu bağlamda, Mirziyoyev yönetimi, hem turizm hizmetleri alanında teorik ve pratik eğitim veren kurum veya eğitim akademiler kurarak, hem de Dünya Turizm Örgütü ve bu alanda deneyimli olduğu düşünülen önde gelen ülkelerin ilgili kurumlarıyla iş birliği yaparak, halihazırda turizm sektöründe çalışanlar ve gelecekte turizm sektöründe hizmet verme potansiyeli olan kişilerin pratik ve teorik hizmet çalışanlar seviyesini yükseltmek için çalışmalar gerçekleştirmektedir.

Uluslararası ilişkiler, o ülkeyi ziyaret eden uluslararası turist sayısını artırmak isteyen bir ülke için kilit bir rol oynar. Kaynak pazar ülkeleriyle dostane ilişkiler, ziyaret

edilecek güvenli bir yer olarak destinasyonun görünürlüğünü ve rekabet gücünü artıracak ve ayrıca uluslararası turist akışlarına yönelik potansiyel engellerin aşılmasına yardımcı olacaktır. Mirziyoyev, sefelinin aksine, güvenlik gibi diğer hususların üzerinde ekonomik iş birliğini ve ekonomik çıkarları önceliklendirerek uluslararası ilişkiler politikasını şekillendirmiştir. Bu bağlamda, komşu ülkelerle ve uluslararası ziyaretçileri çekmek için hedef ülkelerle ilişkiler ekonomik ve turizm perspektifinden şekillendirilmiş ve nihayetinde ülkedeki turizmin gelişmesine katkıda bulunmuştur. Aynı şey, Mirziyoyev yönetimi tarafından 2016'dan bu yana hem turizm altyapısının geliştirilmesinin hem de destinasyon gelişiminin önceliklendirildiği turizm alanındaki uluslararası örgütlerle ilişkiler için de söylenebilir.

Uluslararası Politik Ekonomi söylemi, kalkınmacı devlet politikalarını Güney Kore, Japonya ve Çin gibi Asya devletleriyle ilişkilendirilmiştir. Bu politikanın temel özelliklerinden biri, büyük şirketlerle rekabet edebilecekleri bir seviyeye ulaşana kadar yeni endüstrilerin Devlet tarafından desteklenmesidir. Bu konuda örnek verilebilecek en önemli ülkelerden biri Japonya'dır. Japonya'da kamu ekonomi politikaları yapıcılar, ülke için stratejik öneme sahip sektörleri seçerek, bahse konu sektörlerde faaliyet gösteren firmaları destekleyerek, bahsi geçen firmaları aynı sektörde uzun yıllardır faaliyet gösteren büyük uluslararası firmalar ile rekabet edecek duruma getirilmesi konusunda katkı sunmuşlardır. Bu husus da kalkınmacı devletin politikalarının temel özelliği durumundadır.

İhracat odaklı büyüme ve bu alandaki devlet yönlendirmesi Asya'da sanayileşmenin de anahtarıydı. Devletler, girişimcileri ihracatçıya dönüştürmek için çeşitli teşvikler kullandılar. Ancak, devletin ekonomideki etkisi ve varlığı, ekonominin klasik Batı anlayışı ve Batı Merkezli Uluslararası Politik Ekonomi söylemi tarafından reddedilir. Klasik liberal ekonomi literatüründe, iyi bir neden olmadığı sürece hiçbir hükümet müdahalesi olmaması gerektiği görüşü vardır. Serbest piyasa en verimli kaynak tahsisidir ve hükümet müdahalesi yalnızca piyasa kusurlu olduğunda ve piyasa başarısızlıkları olduğunda gereklidir. Atul Kohli'nin belirttiği gibi, 2002'de New York Times tarafından özetlenen hususun genel geçer versiyonu şu şekildedir: “Ekonomisini uluslararası pazarlara açan ve devletin rolünü minimumda tutan bir

ulus, her zaman daha hızlı ekonomik büyüme ve artan gelir sağlar.” Batı ekonomik ideolojisi, devletin ekonomiye ne kadar çok müdahale ederse, ekonominin o kadar yozlaştığını ve bu durumun ekonomik büyüme veya kalkınmadan ziyade, daha fazla yolsuzluk yarattığını vurgular. Liberal serbest piyasa ekonomisinin ana argümanlarından biri, özellikle gelişen ülkeler için ekonomik kalkınmanın yolunun devlet müdahalesinin azlığından geçtiğini belirterek, devlet öncülüğünde kalkınmacı devlet politikalarının yalnızca başarısızlığa yol açacağını ve küreselleşmiş dünyada devletin ekonomilerdeki rolünün sürekli olarak azaldığını vurgular.

Devletin ekonomideki rolü ve stratejik sektörlere yapılan devlet müdahalesi, gelişmekte olan ülkelerde hızlı sanayileşmeyi ve ekonomik büyümeyi teşvik etmeye yardımcı oldukları ölçüde refahı arttırıcı bir rol oynayabilir. Çoğu gelişmekte olan ülkenin ekonomik büyümesindeki başarısı, devletin firmalara rehberlik etme ve gerektiğinde onları gelişmiş ülkelerin firmalarının rekabetinden koruma rolünü üstlendiği, bu firmaların onlarla rekabet edebilecek seviyeye gelene kadar devam ettiği kalkınmacı devlet politikalarıyla bağlantılıdır. Gelişmekte olan ülkelerin, ekonomik anlamda gelişmiş olan ülkeler ile içerisine girdiği rekabet kapsamında, ulaştığı hızlı sanayileşme ve ekonomik büyüme neredeyse her zaman devletin ekonomide belirleyici bir rol oynaması sayesinde mümkün olmaktadır.

Batılı ülkelerin, muhtemelen geçmişte elde ettikleri sömürge ilişkilerinin de katkısı ile bugünkü gelişmişliklerine ulaşması; ayrıca ekonomilerini geliştirme sürecinde herhangi bir üst düzey rekabetle karşılaşmamış olmaları, günümüzde ekonomik kalkınmaya ulaşmaya çalışan gelişmekte olan ülkeler için geçerli bir durum değildir. Gelişmekte olan ülkeler, günümüzde onlarca yıl önce belirli bir gelişme düzeyine ulaşmış ülkelerin geniş özel sektör kuruluşlarıyla, hatta bazen devlet desteğiyle bile rekabet etmek zorunda bırakılmaktadır. Bu nedenle, uygun şekilde uygulanırsa, gelişmekte olan ülkeler için devlet müdahaleci politikaları, gelişmiş ülkelerle rekabet ettikleri endüstriler için hayati öneme sahip bir durumdadır.

Devletin piyasa başarısızlıklarını azaltmadaki rolü, kalkınmacı devlet politikalarının başarısını en iyi şekilde açıklamaktadır. Bir miktar güce sahip olan devletler, bunu ekonomik büyümeyi sağlamak için kullanabilir. Bunu kaynakları harekete geçirmek

sureti ile stratejik alanlara yönlendirerek, özel girişimleri devletin öncelikli alanlarına yatırım yapma konusunda teşvik ederek, özel firmaların faaliyet gösterdiği sosyo-ekonomik bağlamı değiştirerek ve ekonomik kalkınmayı hedefleyen doğrudan müdahale yolu ya da ekonomik faaliyetlerde bulunmak sureti ile gerçekleştirebilirler. Öte yanda, bazı gelişmekte olan ülkelerin kalkınmacı devlet modellerini ve devlet müdahalesini yolsuzluk, yani kamu ve bürokrasi elitlerinin, kendilerini ve çevresini zenginleştirme için kullandığına dair bazı kanıtlar da mevcuttur. Bu nedenle, gelişmekte olan ülkeler için kalkınmacı devlet politikalarının kararlı bir şekilde ve herhangi bir grup veya ailenin çıkarlarına öncelik vermeden uygulanması ve ilan edilen stratejik sektörlerle yönlendirilen yatırımların verimli ve uygun şekilde kullanılması kalkınmacı devlet politikaları için hayati önem taşımaktadır.

Yukarıda bahsedilen hususlar, sürekli büyüyen uluslararası turizm pastasından pay almak amacı ile emekleme döneminde olan turizm sektörünü geliştirmek isteyen ülkeler için de geçerlidir. Potansiyel turizm destinasyonları, turizm ürünleri ve destinasyonları açısından zenginlerse, her yıl milyonlarca yabancı ziyaretçinin ülkelerine seyahat gerçekleştirdiği dünyanın önde gelen turizm destinasyonlarından biri olmak için turizm endüstrilerini ve altyapılarını geliştirmeye çalışmaktadırlar. Bu kapsamda, herhangi yeni bir iş kolunda olduğu gibi, devletin özel sektörü yönlendirme, turizm endüstrisinin iyileştirilmesi ve geliştirilmesi için devlet kaynakları kanallara etme ve turizm endüstrisinin büyümesi için sorunsuz koşullar yaratma rolü, Özbekistan da dahil olmak üzere, turizm sektörünü geliştirmek ve dünyanın önde gelen turizm destinasyonları ile rekabet etmek amacıyla tüm gelişmekte olan ülkeler için hayati öneme sahiptir.

Genel ekonomik kalkınma politikasında olduğu gibi, bazı akademisyenler turizm endüstrisinin geliştirilmesinde hükümet müdahalesine de karşı çıkmaktadır. Ancak, özellikle Batılı ülkelerle rekabet ederek kalkınma düzeyine ulaşmaya çalışan gelişmekte olan ülkeler için, stratejik endüstrilerini teşvik etmek ve gelişmiş ülkelerin endüstrilerine yetişmek için ekonomik ve politik sistemi düzenlemede devlet kuruluşlarının rolü oldukça önemlidir.

Aslında, Uluslararası Politik Ekonomi literatüründe, turizm gelişimi ve yönetimi uygulamaları pek fazla yer tutmamaktadır. Turizm ve Turizm yoluyla kalkınma

alışmalarının, devletin turizm endüstrisini geliřtirmedeki rolünü göz ardı etme eğiliminde olduđu söylenebilir. Uluslararası yazında bulunan, sayıları az da olsa bazı alışmalar, spor veya etkinlik turizmi gibi bazı turizm türlerinin geliřtirilmesinde devletin ve yerel otoritelerin rolüne odaklanmıřtır. Bunun yanında, turizmi Uluslararası Politik Ekonomi literatürü kapsamında inceleyen alışmaların büyük bölümü, geliřmiř ölkeler ile ve geliřmekte olan turizm destinasyonu plan ölkelerin arasındaki eřitsiz ekonomik iliřkilerini bağımlılık yazını kapsamında inceleyerek, güç kavramlarını ve eřitsiz iliřkiler kapsamındaki geliřimi irdeler. Söz konusu bağımlılık iliřkisi devletin turizm geliřimi konusunda etkin olmadıđı; geliřmekte olan turizm destinasyonu ölkelerinin geliřmiř ölkeler ile olan rekabette yalnız kaldıđı durumlarda daha fazla gözlemlenmiřtir.

Ne var ki, Özbekistan, turizm sektörünün geliřtirilmesinde farklı bir yol seçmiřtir. Bu anlamda, Mirziyoyev'in 2016'da cumhurbaşkanı olarak attıđı ilk adımlardan biri, turizmi stratejik bir sektör ilan etmek ve turizmle ilgili devletin tüm politikaları Özbekistan'da turizmi ve turizm altyapısının geliřtirilmesi üzerine inşa etmek üzere alışmalar yapmak olmuřtur. Daha önce de belirtildiđi gibi, geliřmekte olan ölkelerdeki bazı endüstriler, özellikle geliřmiř ölkelerin sektörleri ile rekabet etme sürecinde, yalnızca devlet tarafından sađlanabilen organize desteđe ihtiya duymaktadır ve bu durum turizm endüstrisinin geliřmesi kapsamında Özbekistan için de geçerli bir durum olarak kařımızı çıkmaktadır. Buna ek olarak, devlet otoriteleri, turizm planlaması ve geliřtirilmesi, uluslararası pazarda söz konusu destinasyonun konumlandırılması ve turizm destinasyonlarının yönetimi konusunda hayati bir rol oynamaktadır. Bu anlamda 2016 yılının Aralık ayında Özbekistan Devlet Başkanı olarak görevi devralan Mirziyoyev'in, ekonomik büyümeyi ve süreçte yerel turizm endüstrisinin geliřtirilerek, Özbekistan'ın dünyaca bilinen bir turizm destinasyonu haline gelmesini bir devlet politikası olarak önceliklendirdiđi iddia edilebilir.

Turizm, birçok farklı iř kolu ve politikayla doğrudan iliřkilidir. Ülkeyi ziyaret eden bir turistin ekonominin hemen hemen her sektörü ile iliřki içerisinde yer alması, turizm endüstrisini ve geliřimini karmařık hale getirmektedir. Bir ülkenin yabancılar için vize rejimi, ülkenin ulaşım ve altyapı geliřtirme politikaları, sivil havacılık politikaları, turizm sektöründe hizmet veren alışanlarının teorik ve pratik alanda

eđitimi, bunun yanında dıř politika konuları, bunların hepsi bir turizm destinasyonun geliřiminde ve yönetiminde bařat rol oynar. Mirziyoyev'in Cumhurbaşkanı olarak göreve gelmesi ile birlikte, ÷lke turizmini geliřtirmek ve teřvik etmek amacı ile bütünc÷l politikalar yürütmeye bařlayan Özbekistan Devleti hem kamu hem de özel sektör kurumlarını yönlendiren Cumhurbaşkanlığı kararnameleri ve hükümet düzenlemelerini yayınlanmasının yanı sıra, diđer sektörlerin de ÷lkenin turizm geliřtirme politikalarıyla uyumlu hale getirilmesinde temel rol oynamıřtır.

Bu politikaların en önemlisinin vize politikası olduđu söylenebilir. Diđer kamu kurumları ve çeřitli çevrelerden gelen tepkilere rađmen, Mirziyoyev yönetimi, uluslararası turizm hareketinin temel araçlarından birinin görece serbest vize politikası olduđunu kabul ederek, eski Sovyet mirası ve kültürüne sahip bir ÷lke için radikal bir adım olarak kabul edilen potansiyel turizm kaynak pazarlarına gelen ziyaretçiler için serbest bir vize rejimini olanaklı hale getirmiřtir. Bu kapsamda, 2025 yılının mart ayı itibari ile, 160'tan fazla ÷lke vatandařı ya vizesiz olarak, ya da Vize konsolosluklarına herhangi bir belge sunmaksızın alınabilen elektronik vize vasıtası ile Özbekistan'ı ziyaret edebilmektedir.

Buna ek olarak, Özbekistan turizm altyapısının geliřimi içinde çalıřmalar gerçekleřtirmektedir. Bilindiđi üzere, geliřmiř bir turizm altyapısı ve farklı segmentlerde hizmet veren çeřitli konaklama tesisleri ve seyahat acentalarının varlıđı, bir turizm destinasyonunu uluslararası arenada rekabet edebilir bir düzeye getirmede önemli bir role sahiptir. Özbekistan, ayrıca, konaklama sektörüne yapılan yatırımı arttırmak amacıyla, çeřitli teřvikler ve destek mekanizmaları geliřtirerek, Özbekistan'da faaliyet gösteren uluslararası otel zincirlerinin sayısının artması anlamında somut adımlar atmaktadır. Ayrıca, destinasyonun rekabet gücüne katkıda bulunmak amacıyla, Sovyet ve Karimov döneminde açılan konaklama tesislerinin büyük bir çođunluđu da özelleřtirilerek, devletin turizm sektöründeki iřletmeci rolü azaltılmıřtır.

Havacılık sektörünün geliřmesinde de Özbekistan devleti bařat bir rol oynamaktadır. Bilindiđi üzere, bir destinasyona uçan yerel ve uluslararası havayolu firması sayısındaki artış, buna ek olarak düşük bütçeli hava yolu firmalarının destinasyona

uçmaya başlamasının teşvik edilmesi bir turizm destinasyonu için hayati önem taşımaktadır. Nu anlamda Özbekistan, kararnameler ve teşvik mekanizmalarının yardımı ile, ÷lkede düşük maliyetli taşıyıcılar da dahil olmak üzere yeni yerel havayollarının kurulması sürecini desteklemiş ve kolaylaştırmıştır. Diğer yandan, Özbek sivil havacılık politika yapıcılarını tarafından havayolu firmalarına uçuşlarını kolaylaştırıcı politikalar uygulanması, uluslararası havayollarının Özbekistan'a kolay bir şekilde uçmasını beraberinde getirmiştir.

Altyapı ve havacılıkta olduğu gibi, Özbekistan, kaynaklarının bir kısmını turizm sektöründe hizmet veren çalışanların teorik ve pratik eğitime yönlendirmiştir. Uluslararası ve yerel ziyaretçilere sağlanan hizmetlerin kalitesi, herhangi bir destinasyonun rekabet düzeyini belirleyen temel özelliklerden biri ve aynı zamanda önde gelen uluslararası turizm destinasyonlarının rekabet gücünün ana etmenlerinden biri olarak kaşımıza çıkmaktadır. Bu alanda, Özbekistan, uluslararası kuruluşlar ve firmalar ile iş birliği yaparak, turizm sektöründe çalışan kişilerin niteliklerinin artırılması alanında çalışmalar gerçekleştirmektedir.

Tanıtım ve halka ilişkiler faaliyetleri, ÷lkesine diğer ÷lkelerden turist gelmesi için çaba gösteren destinasyonlar için en masraflı faaliyetlerden biridir. Dünyanın önde gelen destinasyonlarının bazıları, özel turizm sektörü temsilcilerini, tanıtım faaliyetlerine dahil olmaya teşvik ederken, bazı turizm destinasyonları da ya kamu kaynaklarını kullanmak ve özel sektörle iş birliği yapmak sureti ile tanıtım faaliyetlerini kendileri yürütmektedir. Kimi ÷lkelerde söz konusu faaliyetler için hem devlet bütçesinden hem de turizm sektörü temsilcilerinden bütçe kullanmaktadır. Mirziyoyev'in cumhurbaşkanlığından bu yana Özbekistan, devlet bütçesini kullanarak tanıtım faaliyetleri yürütmekte; söz konusu faaliyetlere Özbekistan turizm sektörü temsilcilerinin katılımını teşvik etmektedir. Cumhurbaşkanlığı kararnameleriyle yasallaştırıldığı üzere, özel turizm şirketlerinin faaliyetlerinin bazı maliyetleri, örneğin turizm fuarlarına veya tanıtım gezilerine katılım, Özbek devlet organları tarafından sübvansede edilmekte; buna ek olarak, turizmin ana sorunlarından olan mevsimsellik sorununu aşmak için Özbekistan, ÷lke içindeki iç turizm hareketinin artması amacı ile çeşitli teşvik mekanizmaları geliştirmiştir.

Yukarıdaki bahsedilen turizm politikalarının uygulanması sonucunda, Özbekistan turizm sektörü önemli bir gelişme ve büyüme sürecinden geçmektedir. 2016 yılında Özbekistan yaklaşık 2 milyon yabancı ziyaretçi ağırlamış iken, Kalkınmacı Devlet Politikalarının da katkısı ve özel turizm temsilcilerinin girişimleri sonucunda bu sayı 2017 yılında 2,7 milyona, 2018 yılında ise 5,3 milyona çıkmıştır. Buna paralel olarak uluslararası turizmden elde edilen gelir de artmaktadır. 2016 yılında uluslararası turizmden elde edilen gelir \$579 milyon olurken, 2024 yılında söz konusu gelir \$3.5 milyara yükselmiştir. 2024 yılında, Özbekistan'ı ziyaret eden yabancı ziyaretçi sayısı rekor kırarak yılında 10,2 milyona ulaşmıştır. Özbekistan Hükümeti 2025 yılı sonuna kadar 11 milyon yabancı ziyaretçiyi ağırlamak hedefindedir.



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