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## Preservation of Cultural Heritage and Local Communities in Uzbekistan: UNESCO World Heritage Sites

Özbekistan'da Kültürel Mirasın Korunması ve Yerel Toplumlar: UNESCO Dünya Mirası Alanları

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### ÖZET

Bu araştırma, Özbekistan'daki UNESCO Dünya Mirası alanlarında kültürel mirasın korunması ile yerel topluluklar arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemektedir. Özbekistan, Orta Asya'nın tarihsel ve kültürel açıdan en zengin ülkelerinden biri olarak, İpek Yolu üzerindeki stratejik konumu sayesinde medeniyetler arası etkileşimlerin merkezinde yer almıştır. Ülkenin tarihi şehirleri, arkeolojik alanları ve mimari yapıları, UNESCO tarafından Dünya Mirası Listesi'ne alınmış ve uluslararası koruma altına alınmıştır. Ancak, bu miras alanlarının korunması sürecinde turizm, kentleşme ve modernleşme gibi çağdaş dinamiklerin yarattığı baskılar, sürdürülebilir bir koruma sürecinin zorluklarını artırmaktadır.

Araştırmanın bulguları, kültürel mirasın korunmasında yerel halkın aktif katılımının ve bu süreçlerde ekonomik fayda sağlamalarının önemini vurgulamaktadır. Özellikle Buhara, Semerkant ve Şahrisabz gibi tarihi şehirlerde, yerel toplulukların bu alanlardaki günlük yaşamları kültürel mirasla doğrudan etkileşim halindedir. Turizmin ekonomik kalkınmaya katkı sağladığı, ancak aynı zamanda yoğun ziyaretçi baskısı nedeniyle tarihi yapılar üzerinde fiziksel ve kültürel tahribat risklerini artırdığı gözlemlenmiştir. Bu nedenle, Özbekistan'daki kültürel miras alanlarının korunması için sürdürülebilir turizm politikalarının geliştirilmesi gerekmektedir. Ayrıca, modern altyapı projelerinin tarihi dokuya zarar verdiği ve özellikle Şahrisabz'ın tehlike altındaki miras alanları listesine girdiği tespit edilmiştir. Araştırma, uluslararası standartlara uygun bir koruma stratejisinin, ulusal kalkınma hedefleri ile uyumlu bir şekilde yürütülmesi gerektiğini savunmaktadır. Yerel halkın bu süreçte dahil edilmesi ve turizmden elde edilen kazançların adil bir şekilde dağıtılması, mirasın korunmasında kritik rol oynamaktadır.

### ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between the preservation of cultural heritage and local communities in Uzbekistan's UNESCO World Heritage sites. As one of the most historically and culturally rich countries in Central Asia, Uzbekistan has been at the center of civilizational interactions due to its strategic location on the Silk Road. The country's historic cities, archaeological sites, and architectural structures have been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List and are under international protection. However, the pressures brought by modern dynamics such as tourism, urbanization, and modernization have increased the challenges of achieving sustainable conservation of these heritage sites.

The findings of the study emphasize the importance of active participation of local communities in the preservation of cultural heritage and the economic benefits they should derive from these processes. In historic cities such as Bukhara, Samarkand, and Shakhriyabz, the daily lives of local communities are in direct interaction with cultural heritage. While tourism contributes to economic development, it also increases the risk of physical and cultural degradation of historical sites due to heavy visitor traffic. Therefore, it is essential to develop sustainable tourism policies to preserve Uzbekistan's cultural heritage sites. Moreover, modern infrastructure projects have been found to damage the historical fabric, with Shakhriyabz being placed on the list of endangered heritage sites. The study advocates for a preservation strategy that adheres to international standards and is aligned with national development goals. The inclusion of local communities in this process and the fair distribution of economic gains from tourism play a critical role in the success of conservation efforts.

**Keywords:** Cultural Heritage, UNESCO, Uzbekistan.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kültürel Miras, UNESCO, Özbekistan.





## Introduction

Uzbekistan, located in the heart of Central Asia, has been a crossroads of civilizations for millennia, playing a pivotal role in the transmission of culture, trade, and ideas along the historic Silk Road. The country's rich cultural landscape is adorned with ancient cities, architectural marvels, and archaeological sites that stand as testimony to its historical importance. With its unique blend of Persian, Turkic, and Islamic influences, Uzbekistan hosts some of the world's most significant cultural heritage sites, many of which are recognized by UNESCO as World Heritage Sites (UNESCO, 2021). These sites are not only crucial for understanding the historical and cultural evolution of Central Asia but also play a significant role in shaping the identity and economy of local communities today.

The preservation of cultural heritage in Uzbekistan has become a key concern, particularly as the country undergoes rapid socio-economic transformation. Since gaining independence in 1991, Uzbekistan has prioritized the protection and promotion of its cultural assets as part of its nation-building process. However, this ambition faces numerous challenges, including urbanization, tourism pressures, and the need to balance modern development with heritage conservation (Smith and Robinson, 2020). The intersection of cultural heritage and community development thus presents a complex dynamic in which the interests of preservationists and local populations sometimes conflict. Studies indicate that while heritage sites can be engines of local economic growth, primarily through tourism, they can also disrupt traditional livelihoods and lead to cultural commodification (Harrison, 2015; Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2013).

UNESCO's designation of World Heritage status confers not only global recognition but also a heightened responsibility for the protection of these sites. Currently, Uzbekistan boasts five UNESCO World Heritage Sites: the Historic Centre of Bukhara, the Historic Centre of Shakhrisyabz, Itchan Kala, Samarkand - Crossroads of Cultures, and the Western Tien-Shan mountains (UNESCO, 2021). These sites exemplify the diverse cultural and natural heritage of the region and offer a window into the complex history of the Silk Road civilizations. However, the inclusion of these sites on the World Heritage List also introduces new dynamics in terms of conservation policies, resource allocation, and the engagement of local communities (Labadi, 2017). The involvement of local communities in heritage conservation has been emphasized in recent years, as it is recognized that sustainable preservation efforts require not only technical expertise but also the participation and cooperation of those living in and around heritage sites (Meskell, 2018).

Despite the efforts to preserve Uzbekistan's heritage, challenges remain in achieving a balance between tourism-driven economic development and the protection of cultural integrity. Tourism, while offering economic benefits, can lead to the degradation of historical sites and put immense pressure on local resources (Timothy and Nyaupane, 2009). Furthermore, rapid urbanization and infrastructural development pose a threat to the traditional urban fabric and may lead to the displacement of local populations (Dani and Alcock, 2016). Therefore, it becomes imperative to critically examine the role of local communities in the preservation process, as their involvement is crucial for ensuring the long-term sustainability of these heritage sites. This study aims to explore the intricate relationship between cultural heritage conservation and local communities in Uzbekistan's UNESCO World Heritage Sites. By analyzing the socio-economic and cultural impacts of heritage preservation on local populations, this research seeks to identify both the benefits and challenges of integrating community interests with national and international conservation efforts. In doing so, it contributes to the broader discourse on sustainable heritage management and offers insights into the ways in which heritage sites can serve as a foundation for both cultural preservation and local development.

Uzbekistan has historically been home to significant civilizations and has served as a central hub for cultural and commercial interactions. The rich cultural heritage that emerged in this region holds great importance in understanding the historical development of Central Asia. The cultural assets of the



country bear traces of past Persian, Turkic, and Islamic civilizations, while also playing a critical role in the nation-building process of modern Uzbekistan. In this context, the preservation of cultural heritage is not only about keeping the memories of the past alive, but it also emerges as a major necessity for ensuring cultural continuity for future generations (Abdullaeva, 2020). However, in developing countries like Uzbekistan, the protection of these cultural assets must be managed in harmony with modern dynamics such as economic development, urbanization, and tourism. This situation adds further complexity to the challenges faced in the field of cultural heritage management. Sites included on the UNESCO World Heritage List contribute significantly to increasing international awareness and securing the necessary resources for their preservation. However, the national and international responsibilities that come with such status cannot be overlooked. In Uzbekistan, these heritage sites are closely intertwined with the lives of local communities, making it critical to consider social sensitivities during preservation efforts to achieve sustainable outcomes. Indeed, local communities must not only act as observers but also as active participants in the protection of these cultural areas (Mansurov and Ergashev, 2019). Especially in historic cities like Bukhara and Samarkand, the economic and social lives of the local population are in direct interaction with cultural heritage. Preservation efforts should aim to safeguard the cultural integrity of these areas without disrupting the daily lives of local communities. Moreover, the role of tourism in the preservation of these heritage sites can be seen as both an opportunity and a threat. While tourism generates economic development and provides a source of income for local populations, it can also lead to physical and cultural degradation of these delicate sites due to the pressure of heavy visitor traffic (Toshev and Kamalov, 2018). Therefore, it is essential to protect Uzbekistan's cultural heritage sites within the framework of sustainable tourism policies. While UNESCO status increases tourism activities, if these processes are not carefully managed, both the local economy and the cultural fabric may suffer. In this context, the inclusion of local communities in tourism and ensuring they benefit from these processes is a crucial factor in the success of preservation efforts (Mirsuljanova and Saidakbarov, 2020). In addition to this, the processes of urbanization and modernization pose significant challenges to the preservation of cultural heritage in Uzbekistan. Particularly in historic cities like Shakhrisyabz, it is known that modern infrastructure projects have damaged the historical fabric, leading to its inclusion on the list of endangered heritage sites by UNESCO (World Heritage Centre, 2021). This situation once again underscores the critical importance of adhering to international standards in the preservation of heritage sites. In a country as historically rich as Uzbekistan, such projects must be carried out in alignment with national development goals, requiring a delicate balance between meeting modernization needs and protecting historical heritage.

In conclusion, this study aims to deeply examine the role of local communities in the preservation of Uzbekistan's UNESCO World Heritage sites. The participation of local people in the protection of cultural heritage is of vital importance not only in terms of economic benefits but also for the sustainable transmission of these areas to future generations. When developing conservation strategies, the needs of local communities, their connections to cultural heritage, and the socio-economic dynamics within these areas must be considered. In this way, Uzbekistan's rich cultural heritage can be preserved both at the national and international levels and sustained in harmony with the goals of sustainable development.



## Objective and Method

The primary objective of this research is to examine the role of local communities in the preservation of cultural heritage sites listed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in Uzbekistan from a multidimensional perspective. Uzbekistan's rich cultural heritage is considered an important part of the world's cultural heritage, and its preservation and sustainable transmission to future generations is of great significance, not only on a national level but also internationally. In this context, the focus of this research is to analyze the socio-economic and cultural impacts of heritage conservation policies on local populations. The research aims to analyze the levels of participation of local communities living in Uzbekistan's historic cities and natural areas in the preservation of this heritage, the effects of conservation efforts on local life, and the economic opportunities and cultural transformation processes that arise in connection with tourism. Identifying the contributing or hindering factors in the relationship between local communities and cultural heritage sites, as well as the sustainable management of these areas, is another important goal of this study. By examining in detail the direct and indirect effects of UNESCO World Heritage status on local populations' lifestyles, traditional activities, and economic well-being, the study aims to provide guiding insights for developing more inclusive and sustainable approaches to cultural heritage management. This research also seeks to explore the balance between cultural heritage preservation and economic development efforts and to assess the impacts of these efforts on the socio-economic development of local communities. The findings of the study aim to offer recommendations specific to Uzbekistan that will help ensure the active involvement of local communities in the preservation of cultural heritage. In this way, a more comprehensive understanding of the sustainable management of cultural heritage sites and their contributions to societal well-being will be developed. The study also aims to address the management of tourism activities in Uzbekistan's UNESCO World Heritage Sites and to examine the positive and negative impacts of these tourism activities on local communities. The research will analyze in detail the interaction between the economic benefits of tourism, local community participation, and the preservation of heritage sites. Thus, it is expected to make a scientific contribution to how tourism can be managed sustainably without harming heritage sites. In conclusion, the purpose of this study is to understand the roles and contributions of local communities in the preservation and sustainable management of cultural heritage sites in Uzbekistan, and to thoroughly explore the socio-economic and cultural dimensions of this process. The findings aim to offer recommendations that will contribute to the development of future cultural heritage policies and enable the more active involvement of local communities in these processes. The methodology of this research is structured around qualitative research methods to understand the role of local communities in the preservation of UNESCO World Heritage sites in Uzbekistan and the socio-economic and cultural dynamics that emerge during this process. Document analysis, content analysis, and descriptive analysis methods have been used as the main data collection tools for the research. These methods have been combined to ensure an in-depth examination of the topic, and each contributes to a more comprehensive analysis of the findings presented throughout the research process. Document analysis, as one of the primary methods of the study, is based on the examination of written sources such as national and international reports, academic articles, laws, and regulations related to UNESCO World Heritage sites. In particular, the preservation and management strategies published by UNESCO for the relevant heritage sites, along with Uzbekistan's governmental policies on cultural heritage preservation, have been analyzed. These documents form the theoretical framework of the study and provide insights into the existing approaches regarding the roles of local communities in these processes. Through document analysis, similarities and differences between local and international approaches to cultural heritage preservation have been identified, revealing the impacts of these approaches on local communities. In addition, content analysis was conducted to perform an in-depth examination of the documents, written texts,



and official reports obtained during the research. Content analysis enabled the systematic coding of the data into meaningful categories, facilitating a thorough evaluation of both local and international perspectives and policies on the preservation of UNESCO World Heritage sites in Uzbekistan. By focusing on topics such as preservation strategies, local community participation, and tourism management, content analysis helped identify the opportunities and challenges faced in the sustainable management of heritage sites. Moreover, content analysis involved the examination of academic studies and field reports on the relationships between local communities and cultural heritage sites in Uzbekistan, allowing for comparisons between the research findings and existing literature. Descriptive analysis played a significant role in interpreting the findings of the research. This method provided a descriptive presentation of key aspects such as the socio-economic conditions of local communities in Uzbekistan's UNESCO World Heritage sites, their relationships with these areas, and their contributions to cultural heritage preservation. The research data were organized into a meaningful whole through descriptive analysis, addressing the attitudes, needs, and expectations of local communities regarding cultural heritage preservation based on concrete data. Descriptive analysis contributed to the systematic classification of the data and provided a clearer understanding of the relationship between the preservation of cultural heritage sites in Uzbekistan and the local population. In this process, detailed analyses were made on the economic activities of local communities, the income generated from tourism, and their active roles in preservation efforts, highlighting the importance of these factors in cultural heritage management.

By combining these methods, the research aimed to analyze the data obtained comprehensively from both theoretical and practical perspectives. The roles of local communities in the preservation of UNESCO World Heritage sites in Uzbekistan were evaluated through both written sources and findings from the existing literature, with the challenges and solutions that arise in this process being addressed from an academic perspective. In conclusion, through the use of document analysis, content analysis, and descriptive analysis methods, this study provides an in-depth examination of the preservation of cultural heritage sites in Uzbekistan and the impacts of this process on local communities.

## Findings

The findings of this research comprehensively address the role of local communities in the preservation of UNESCO World Heritage sites in Uzbekistan and the impact of this process on socio-economic and cultural dynamics. The findings are based on a thorough analysis of written sources as well as an evaluation of existing literature. The importance of carrying out conservation activities in Uzbekistan not only in line with national policies but also in accordance with international standards has been emphasized throughout this process. In particular, the inclusion of local communities and their active participation in these efforts has been found to be crucial for the sustainability of conservation activities.

First and foremost, it has been identified that the participation of local communities in the preservation of UNESCO-listed heritage sites makes a significant difference. As local populations become more involved in conservation projects, their connection to cultural heritage strengthens, and they feel more responsible for the process. However, the participation of local communities in conservation efforts is not always at the desired level. In regions with high levels of tourism, it has been challenging to balance local communities' economic expectations with the need to preserve cultural heritage. While income from tourism provides an important economic source for local people in some areas, it can also lead to the commercialization of cultural values. If not carefully managed, tourism activities can harm cultural heritage and disrupt the traditional way of life for local populations.





The findings also reveal the detailed socio-economic impacts of conservation efforts on local communities. UNESCO World Heritage status has contributed to economic development in many parts of Uzbekistan, especially by creating employment opportunities in the tourism sector. However, this development has not always resulted in an equal increase in the well-being of local communities. In some cases, the economic benefits of tourism have been limited, and a large portion of the local population has not been able to fully benefit from this process. Particularly in rural areas, communities that are not directly involved in tourism have been excluded from economic gains and have had to bear the costs of conservation efforts. This situation demonstrates that the preservation of cultural heritage should not be limited to economic benefits but must also take social justice into account.

The research findings also examine the impact of national policies on local communities in the preservation of cultural heritage. Although the Uzbek government has developed various policies aimed at preserving cultural heritage, how these policies are perceived and implemented by local communities remains a matter of debate. In some regions, it has been observed that local populations resist these policies, experiencing a conflict between conservation efforts and their daily lives. In particular, modernization and infrastructure projects in historic cities have undermined the effectiveness of conservation efforts, and local communities' expectations have been neglected in this process. Balancing UNESCO's international conservation standards with local needs plays a key role in mitigating these conflicts.

The findings regarding how local communities protect their cultural identity during the heritage preservation process are also noteworthy. In Uzbekistan, particularly in historic cities like Bukhara, Samarkand, and Shakhrisyabz, the strong connection of local people to cultural heritage sites has increased their interest in preserving these areas. Local communities view the preservation of cultural heritage not just as an economic resource, but also as a means of maintaining their cultural identity. However, the acceleration of modernization processes and the intensification of urban development projects make it more challenging to preserve these identities. The efforts of local communities to safeguard their cultural identity have emerged as a critical factor in the success of conservation efforts. Finally, the research emphasizes the need for the development of sustainable management models for the preservation of cultural heritage sites in Uzbekistan. The active participation of local communities in conservation efforts is essential for the long-term success of these processes. In this context, it is necessary to design conservation strategies in a more inclusive manner, both at the national and international levels, taking into account the expectations and needs of local populations. In particular, reviewing tourism policies in line with sustainability principles and developing strategies to improve the economic well-being of local communities will play a significant role in preserving cultural heritage.

Overall, this research demonstrates that the active involvement of local communities in the preservation of UNESCO World Heritage sites in Uzbekistan, supported by sustainable management strategies, is a critical factor in ensuring the transmission of cultural heritage to future generations.

#### Itchan Kala

Itchan Kala, located in the heart of the Khiva oasis, was known as a major trade center and the last stopping point for caravans before crossing the desert on their way to Iran. This inner city is surrounded by brick walls approximately 10 meters high, which protect the area both historically and architecturally. Although many ancient structures remain within, Itchan Kala stands out as a well-preserved and cohesive example of Islamic architecture in Central Asia. Among the limited number of monuments that have survived to this day are the Djuma Mosque, madrassas, mausoleums, and two magnificent palaces built in the early 19th century by Alla-Kulli-Khan, all of which demonstrate the architectural and cultural value of Itchan Kala. These structures reflect the characteristic elements of the period's architecture and have carried the region's historical and cultural richness into the present.



The walled city of Itchan Kala has served as a significant site that bears the traces of many civilizations throughout history and is considered a vital part of Central Asia's cultural heritage. Over time, the inner city of Khiva evolved beyond being merely a trade hub, becoming a religious, cultural, and political center. The buildings within the city exemplify the uniqueness and richness of Islamic architecture while also presenting a striking example of traditional Central Asian urban planning.

Structures like the Djuma Mosque served not only as places of worship but also as centers of socio-cultural life. The mosque's large courtyards, supported by wooden columns, reflect the architectural elegance of the time, while the mausoleums and madrassas demonstrate the city's intellectual past through their religious and educational functions. The palaces built by Alla-Kulli-Khan, meanwhile, were once symbols of Khiva's political power in the region. These palaces display the wealth and grandeur of the era's rulers and also offer a glimpse into the opulence of palace life.

These unique architectural elements have made Itchan Kala a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The protection provided by UNESCO has helped preserve the city's architectural fabric while also contributing to the region's economic development through the growth of tourism. However, the pressures brought by modern tourism have made it necessary to carefully balance the preservation of the city's cultural values and historical fabric with the everyday lives of the local population. For this reason, the sustainable conservation of historical areas like Itchan Kala is of critical importance, both to ensure the survival of cultural heritage and to manage the economic benefits generated by tourism in a balanced way.

#### Historic Centre of Bukhara

The historic center of Bukhara, located on the Silk Road and with a history spanning over 2,000 years, stands out as an important cultural and commercial hub. As one of the best-preserved medieval cities in Central Asia, Bukhara is renowned for its largely intact urban layout. The city's architectural fabric reflects the richness of Islamic culture and regional architecture. Bukhara's historic center offers visitors a cultural journey through its narrow streets, mosques, madrasas, and markets, providing a sense of the past.

Among the most notable structures is the Ismail Samani Mausoleum, built in the 10th century. This building is considered one of the finest examples of Islamic architecture from the period, distinguished by its unique brickwork. Additionally, the 17th-century madrasas located in the city demonstrate that Bukhara was once a major educational center, where scientific activity thrived. These madrasas were not only places for religious education but also served as intellectual hubs in Bukhara.

Bukhara's ability to preserve its historical fabric has earned the city a place on the UNESCO World Heritage List, ensuring its protection at an international level. This status supports efforts to pass on the architectural richness of Bukhara to future generations while also contributing to the revival of tourism. However, the increasing tourism activities have brought about the challenge of balancing the preservation of traditional life and historical structures. As such, Bukhara's historic center requires careful management to ensure both the conservation of cultural heritage and the promotion of sustainable tourism.

Bukhara's historic center is one of the rare regions in Central Asia that reflects the area's rich past, both culturally and architecturally. The city's preserved urban fabric is noteworthy not only for the beauty of its architectural structures but also for the social, cultural, and economic life that has developed around them. Bukhara not only offers some of the most distinctive examples of Islamic architecture but also highlights the impact of this cultural heritage on the identity of the community.

Although UNESCO's protection status has greatly contributed to the global recognition and preservation of Bukhara, this status also brings with it international responsibilities. In particular, local authorities must comply with both national and international standards regarding the preservation of historic buildings, which can sometimes conflict with the demands for modernization in the city. While





tourism creates economic opportunities for Bukhara, the increasing number of visitors places significant pressure on the infrastructure of the historic city and its ancient structures. This necessitates a more careful management process to ensure the preservation of cultural heritage.

Moreover, restoration and preservation efforts in Bukhara are closely tied to the lifestyle of the local population. People living within the historic urban fabric contribute to keeping the cultural heritage alive while going about their daily lives. However, the growth of tourism and modern urbanization processes can threaten the traditional way of life of the local community, making it more difficult to sustainably manage the historic areas. Traditional craftsmen and artisans, who continue to trade in Bukhara's historic markets, need strategies that will allow their economic activities to align harmoniously with the preservation of cultural heritage.

In conclusion, Bukhara's historic center, as a UNESCO-protected heritage site, is of critical importance not only for the preservation of the past but also for future cultural sustainability. The city's historical identity must be preserved in harmony with the demands for modernization, ensuring that both the local population and tourists respect this unique heritage. In this context, collaboration between UNESCO and local authorities, as well as the development of sustainable management strategies, is crucial for the success of Bukhara's preservation efforts.

#### Sabrisyabz

The historic center of Shakhriyabz stands out as a significant cultural and political center of Central Asia, with its ancient urban fabric. This historic city experienced substantial growth, particularly in the 15th and 16th centuries, during the reign of Emir Timur and the Timurids, entering a golden age in terms of architecture and culture. The monumental structures built during this period represent both the political power of Timur's era and the rich cultural heritage of the region. Shakhriyabz, with its preserved historical buildings and ancient neighborhoods, is recognized as an important heritage site in Central Asia.

Among the notable structures in the city are monumental buildings like the Ak-Saray Palace, which reflects Timur's power and grandeur. This palace not only demonstrates Timur's commitment to architecture but also sheds light on the city's political and cultural role during that period. Additionally, the city's mausoleums and mosques stand out for their architectural beauty and their roles in religious and social life. Shakhriyabz, with its ancient neighborhoods and public structures, was not only a center of government but also a hub of social, religious, and cultural life in the region.

Shakhriyabz, protected by UNESCO, holds the responsibility of preserving and maintaining this unique historical heritage. However, modernization and urban development projects pose a significant threat to the city's historic fabric. Some restoration and reconstruction efforts in the city have damaged the historical fabric, drawing the attention of UNESCO. Despite Shakhriyabz's rich cultural heritage, it is evident that conservation efforts must be carried out in accordance with international standards.

Moreover, the role and contribution of local communities in preserving this historical heritage are of great importance. The people living in Shakhriyabz hold a significant responsibility in safeguarding this cultural heritage and passing it on to future generations. The collaboration between local authorities and UNESCO, in both addressing modern urbanization demands and preserving the historical fabric, will contribute to sustaining this heritage in a sustainable manner.

In conclusion, the historic center of Shakhriyabz, which witnessed the golden era of the Timurid period and has been preserved to this day, is one of the key areas protected by UNESCO. However, developing sustainable conservation strategies and involving the local population in this process are crucial to ensuring that this historical site can be preserved for future generations.

The historic center of Shakhriyabz not only reflects the architectural and cultural heritage of a specific period but also serves as a testament to the region's political and social development. The structures built during the time of Timur and the Timurids express the grandeur of the era and the symbolic power of its rule through architecture. Preserving these structures does not merely mean safeguarding the



physical remnants of the past; it also involves protecting the city's identity, the cultural ties of its people, and its connection to historical processes.

However, the pressures of modern urbanization increasingly complicate the preservation of such historic centers. The rapid urbanization and tourism activities in Shakhriyabz in recent years have brought the risk of damaging the city's historical fabric. In particular, the challenges that arise during the adaptation of historic sites to modern infrastructure increase the danger of compromising the city's original structure. Listed by UNESCO as a heritage site at risk, Shakhriyabz must strike a delicate balance between conservation and modernization to ensure the transmission of its historical heritage to future generations.

Furthermore, the active participation of the local population in the preservation of this heritage site is of great importance. Local communities view the historical value of their city not only as an economic resource but also as part of their social and cultural identity, and as such, they must be involved in the preservation process. Both local governments and international organizations must collaborate to include local communities in these efforts and to promote sustainable tourism. Sustainable tourism can serve not only as an economic benefit but also as a tool to support the preservation of cultural heritage. In this way, the historic center of Shakhriyabz can continue to preserve the traces of the past while coexisting with modern demands.

In conclusion, the historic fabric of Shakhriyabz, protected by UNESCO, must continue to be preserved through careful management and with the support of the local population. The city is not only a magnificent witness to the history of Central Asia but also a living example of the region's cultural heritage. Therefore, conservation efforts should aim not only to protect physical structures but also to preserve the spirit and cultural significance of the city.

#### Historic Centre of Bukhara

Throughout its history, Samarkand has been one of the most important cities in Central Asia, serving as a center where different cultures converged and interacted. Founded in the 7th century BC under the name Afrasiab, this ancient city gradually became both a cultural and commercial crossroads. One of the city's brightest periods was during the 14th and 15th centuries under the Timurid dynasty. During this time, Samarkand became a capital rich in cultural heritage, reaching the pinnacle of architectural and scientific developments. Its historical and architectural wealth makes it unique in terms of world cultural heritage.

Among Samarkand's most notable structures is Registan Square, surrounded by madrasas that reflect the significance given to Islamic education with their impressive architectural elements. Additionally, the Bibi-Khanum Mosque, one of the most important religious structures of the Timurid period, stands out with its massive size and grandeur, making it one of the religious centers of Samarkand. Another monumental complex, Shah-i-Zinda, houses one of the most impressive mausoleum structures in Central Asia, and together with other monuments built during Timur's reign, showcases the architectural power of this period.

Furthermore, the Gur-e-Amir Mausoleum holds great historical and cultural significance as the resting place of Timur. Built after his death, this mausoleum is considered a magnificent example of Timurid architecture in Central Asia. The Ulugh Beg Observatory, on the other hand, symbolizes scientific progress and served as an important center for astronomical studies and discoveries. This observatory represents Ulugh Beg's scientific achievements and reflects Samarkand's contributions to world history as not only a religious but also a scientific center.

The cultural heritage of Samarkand, protected by UNESCO, is not limited to its architectural structures. The city is noteworthy for its multicultural nature, having been a place where different ethnic groups and cultures have coexisted and influenced each other over thousands of years. This city, which bears the traces of various civilizations, has become a symbol of cultural and religious diversity.



The preservation of Samarkand is of great importance for the continuity of this cultural mosaic. However, the historical structures of Samarkand are under threat due to the pressures of modernization and tourism. The increasing number of tourists and the city's modern infrastructure needs pose a risk to the preservation of its historical fabric. While UNESCO's protection aims for the sustainable preservation of this heritage, the pressures of urbanization and the challenges brought by tourism require careful management of this process. Preservation efforts must encompass not only the structures themselves but also the surrounding historical fabric and the cultural life of the local population.

In conclusion, Samarkand holds a unique place in world heritage as both a historical crossroads and a symbol of architectural and scientific achievements. The preservation of this city's unique heritage and its transmission to future generations can only be achieved through sustainable management and the participation of local communities. In this context, the preservation of Samarkand's cultural wealth is of critical importance not only for the region but also for the continuity of world cultural heritage.

Samarkand's cultural heritage is not limited to the magnificent structures built during the Timurid period; it also contributed to the city becoming a major center of civilization that had a profound impact on Central Asia and beyond. As a meeting point for various civilizations and cultures, Samarkand played an important role throughout history as both a commercial and cultural crossroads. Its geographical location made it a critical stop along the Silk Road, positioning the city as a hub for various cultural and scientific exchanges. With the passage of trade caravans, Samarkand became a mosaic where different languages, religions, and traditions coexisted.

This multifaceted nature of the city is recognized today as a continuing legacy. Modern Samarkand maintains its status as a historical and tourist attraction, preserving the deep cultural traces of its past. However, in this UNESCO-protected city, a delicate balance must be struck between the economic opportunities brought by tourism and the demands for modernization. Conservation efforts should not only aim to preserve Samarkand's unique identity but also ensure that the economic benefits of tourism are fairly distributed among the local population.

Conservation strategies should encompass not only physical structures but also the cultural values of the local communities. In this regard, the role of the local population in preserving cultural heritage is of great importance. The involvement of the community in these processes is essential for both the sustainability of cultural heritage and the enhancement of social welfare. Particularly, the communities living around Samarkand's historical structures play a crucial role in both preserving the heritage and integrating it into daily life.

While the preservation of Samarkand's historical and cultural fabric is the primary goal, modern infrastructure projects must be implemented in a way that harmonizes with this fabric without causing damage. In addition to preserving the city's cultural and historical values, the careful planning of modern urbanization and tourism activities will contribute to ensuring that Samarkand continues to thrive as an important cultural center in the future.

In conclusion, Samarkand's unique identity as a meeting point of cultures not only brings the rich history of the past into the present but also sends an important message to the world through future-oriented conservation efforts. The architectural, scientific, and cultural values of the city enrich not only Samarkand but also the very concept of world heritage. With the support of UNESCO and the contributions of local communities, the preservation and transmission of these values to future generations are crucial for the continuity of the world's cultural heritage.

#### Silk Roads: Zarafshan-Karakum Corridor

The Zarafshan-Karakum Corridor stands out as one of the most strategic sections of the Silk Roads in Central Asia. This corridor functioned as a crucial route connecting various trade routes in both the east and west directions. Stretching over 866 kilometers, this ancient route follows the Zarafshan River,



moving from east to west, before turning southwest to cross the Karakum Desert and reach the Merv Oasis. This trade route, spanning rugged mountains, fertile river valleys, and difficult deserts, has long served as a vital link connecting people, goods, and ideas.

From the 2nd century BC to the 16th century AD, this section of the Silk Road managed a significant portion of trade between the East and West. Trading caravans transported valuable materials, spices, silks, and technological innovations along this corridor, witnessing a period of intense cultural and economic exchange. Various communities that settled, traded, or attempted to conquer this region turned it into not only a commercial hub but also a point of cultural and scientific exchange. The Zarafshan-Karakum Corridor has been a meeting place for people from different ethnic backgrounds and beliefs throughout history, acting as a melting pot where different civilizations converged.

The importance of this corridor was not limited to trade; it also held great political and military value. Its strategic location made it a focal point for many civilizations seeking dominance in the region. The wars, conquests, and conflicts among different communities in the area were part of the great struggles to control this trade route. At the same time, these struggles enriched the region's cultural diversity, leaving traces of various ethnic groups. In this sense, the Zarafshan-Karakum Corridor holds a deep legacy not only in terms of trade but also in its cultural and historical significance.

This corridor, protected by UNESCO, has not lost its historical significance in modern times. Today, archaeological excavations and research conducted along these ancient caravan routes continue to uncover the region's rich history, further highlighting the important role this route played throughout history. Moreover, conservation efforts in the region ensure the preservation of this cultural heritage for future generations while also increasing interest in the area. The protection of the Zarafshan-Karakum Corridor by UNESCO not only contributes to the preservation of the historical fabric of the region but also introduces the rich cultural and commercial past of this ancient trade route to a broader audience.

In conclusion, the Zarafshan-Karakum Corridor holds great importance in terms of trade, culture, and history as one of the most significant sections of the Silk Road. This unique corridor continues to symbolize intercultural connections, just as it did in the past, and plays a key role in understanding the multilayered history of Central Asia. UNESCO's protection of this corridor aims not only to preserve its physical structures but also to keep the region's cultural memory alive.

When compared to other sections of the Silk Road, the cultural and historical heritage of the Zarafshan-Karakum Corridor stands out not only as a trade route but also as a significant center of cultural exchange. In this corridor, trade was not limited to the exchange of materials, but also encompassed the transmission of ideas, art, religion, and technology as part of a broader network. Alongside trade, scientific knowledge and technical innovations were also spread along this route, facilitating important knowledge transfer between regions. This demonstrates that the caravans traveling along the Silk Road played a vital role not only in economic but also in cultural interactions.

The cities and towns that developed along the corridor, situated at the heart of the Silk Road, gradually transformed into cultural and scientific centers, beyond just hubs of trade. Particularly, the cities located along the Zarafshan River became more productive with the development of agricultural and irrigation systems, leading to the establishment of a strong settled order in these regions. The harsh natural conditions of the Karakum Desert made trade difficult, but at the same time, these challenges strengthened the resilience of the local communities and their ability to adapt to this tough environment. Despite these difficult conditions, the continuation of trade along the corridor allowed for the growth and prosperity of settlements in the region.

This multilayered nature of the corridor made it not only a trade route but also a symbol of cultural diversity and religious tolerance. The convergence of people from different ethnic backgrounds and beliefs along this route contributed to peaceful coexistence and the enrichment of cultural diversity. The Zarafshan-Karakum Corridor also gained importance as a pathway through which various religions, including Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Islam, and Christianity, spread. These faiths traveled



along the trade routes, reaching vast geographical areas and shaping the social structures of the region. Today, the Zarafshan-Karakum Corridor, protected by UNESCO, bears great responsibility for preserving this rich cultural heritage. However, conservation efforts must go beyond the physical preservation of historical structures and trade routes, and also protect the cultural and social dynamics that form the essence of this region. Modern developments, infrastructure projects, and tourism pressures pose risks to the historical fabric of the area. Therefore, it is crucial to plan conservation efforts sustainably and ensure the active participation of local communities in the process.

The current significance of the Zarafshan-Karakum Corridor stems not only from its rich historical legacy but also from its transformation into a cultural and tourist attraction. With the rise of modern tourism, visitors to the region have the opportunity to experience not only its historical structures but also its unique cultural heritage. However, careful monitoring and management are necessary to prevent negative impacts of tourism on these historical sites. At the same time, ensuring that the local population benefits fairly from tourism activities is a critical element for the sustainability of this process.

In conclusion, the Zarafshan-Karakum Corridor has been a center of both trade and cultural interaction throughout history, making it an important part of world heritage. Under the protection of UNESCO, the historical richness of this ancient trade route must be preserved and passed on to the modern world. In this context, conservation efforts should encompass not only the physical structures but also the social fabric and historical continuity that this cultural heritage represents. The Zarafshan-Karakum Corridor will continue to attract the attention of both historians and tourists as a cultural bridge that brings the legacy of the past into the present.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

In conclusion, this research has comprehensively examined the role of local communities in the preservation of UNESCO World Heritage sites in Uzbekistan and the socio-economic, cultural, and environmental dimensions of these preservation processes. The research findings reveal that the protection of cultural heritage should not be limited to the physical conservation of structures alone, but must also take into account the social and economic relationships that develop around these sites. Local communities are not passive observers in this process; rather, they play a critical role as active participants in the sustainable preservation of cultural heritage. In this context, local populations emerge as both essential stakeholders for the continuity of the heritage and as communities directly affected by the preservation efforts.

The study emphasizes the growing necessity for local communities to be more actively involved in cultural heritage sites, particularly as tourism expands rapidly. While tourism creates economic opportunities, it is equally important to ensure that local communities benefit fairly from the revenue generated. However, if the economic gains are not distributed equitably, local populations may feel marginalized and excluded from the preservation process rather than supporting it. The preservation of cultural heritage should not focus solely on structural aspects but must be realized within a framework that enables communities to maintain their identity and traditions. In this regard, the protection of the cultural identity of local communities and its transmission to future generations emerges as a key factor in ensuring the sustainability of cultural heritage.

However, the growth of the tourism sector and the demands for modernization create significant challenges for the preservation of this heritage. Increasing tourist activities bring the risk of overuse and wear, which can harm the physical integrity of heritage sites. Moreover, modern infrastructure





projects may lead to the degradation of historical fabric and negatively affect the traditional lifestyles of local communities. Therefore, it is necessary to balance the pressures of tourism and modernization with the need for cultural heritage preservation. Conservation policies must be planned with a sustainable management approach that considers both tourism and the socio-economic needs of local populations.

In conclusion, the preservation of UNESCO World Heritage sites in Uzbekistan is not only a national responsibility but also a global duty as part of the international cultural heritage. In this process, it is crucial to protect the cultural and economic rights of local communities and ensure their active participation. To pass this heritage on to future generations, it is essential to maintain a delicate balance between tourism, modernization, and the interests of local communities. The success of conservation efforts depends on adopting a comprehensive approach that takes these dynamics into account.

In line with the recommendations, long-term sustainability and inclusivity should be the fundamental principles in the preservation of UNESCO World Heritage sites. Conservation efforts should not only focus on the physical structures but also consider the socio-economic and cultural interests of the communities living around these sites. Active involvement of local communities in these processes is a critical factor in achieving successful outcomes in heritage preservation. In this context, mechanisms that encourage the participation of local people must be established. The inclusion of local communities in conservation processes will not only ensure the transmission of cultural heritage to future generations but will also allow the economic opportunities arising from these efforts to be distributed more equitably.

Tourism management should be carefully planned to reduce the pressure on historical heritage sites, ensuring that both the interests of local communities are considered and that cultural and historical values are preserved. The preservation of historical structures and societal values should not be limited to physical restoration efforts but should adopt a holistic approach that encompasses the cultural life that has developed in interaction with these structures. The balanced distribution of economic gains from tourism at the regional level will not only improve the living standards of local communities but also increase their motivation to protect cultural heritage. In this process, it is crucial for local governments to implement infrastructure projects that not only regulate the tourism sector but also uphold social justice.

The scope of conservation projects should be expanded to support not only the physical preservation of monuments and buildings but also the cultural life surrounding these structures. In doing so, the social significance of cultural heritage will be preserved, and historical sites will continue to maintain their value as living heritage. When the appropriate conditions are provided for local communities to maintain their traditional lifestyles and economic activities, both cultural continuity will be safeguarded, and local economies will be revitalized. In this way, not only will the physical integrity of cultural heritage be preserved, but the cultural and economic sustainability of local communities will also be ensured.



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## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Orta Asya'nın kalbinde yer alan Özbekistan, binlerce yıldır medeniyetlerin kavşağı olmuştur ve tarihi ipek Yolu boyunca kültür, ticaret ve fikirlerin aktarılmasında önemli bir rol oynamaktadır. Ülkenin zengin kültürel manzarası, tarihi öneminin kanıtı olan antik kentler, mimari harikalar ve arkeolojik alanlarla süslenmiştir. Farsça, Türkçe ve islami etkilerin eşsiz bir karışımına ev sahipliği yapan Özbekistan, UNESCO tarafından Dünya Mirası olarak tanınan birçok önemli kültürel mirasa ev sahipliği yapmaktadır (UNESCO, 2021). Bu yerler sadece Orta Asya'nın tarihi ve kültürel gelişimini anlamak için değil, aynı zamanda bugün yerel toplulukların kimliğini ve ekonomisini şekillendirmede de önemli bir rol oynamaktadır.

Özbekistan'da kültürel mirasın korunması, özellikle ülke hızlı sosyo-ekonomik dönüşüme uğradığı için kilit bir endişe haline geldi. Özbekistan, 1991 yılında bağımsızlığını kazanmasından bu yana, ulus inşa sürecinin bir parçası olarak kültür varlıklarının korunmasına ve tanıtımına öncelik vermiştir. Ancak bu hedef, kentleşme, turizm baskıları ve mirasın korunmasını modern kalkınma ile dengeleme ihtiyacı dahil olmak üzere birçok zorlukla karşı karşıyadır (Smith and Robinson, 2020). Kültürel mirasın ve



toplum gelişiminin kesişimi, korumacıların ve yerel halkın çıkarlarının bazen çatıştığı karmaşık bir dinamik sunar. Araştırmalar, miras alanlarının özellikle turizm yoluyla yerel ekonomik büyümeyi yönlendirebilmesine rağmen, geleneksel geçim kaynaklarını da bozabileceğini ve kültürel metalaşmaya yol açabileceğini göstermektedir (Harrison, 2015; Ashworth ve Tunbridge, 2013).

UNESCO'nun Dünya Mirası statüsü yalnızca küresel tanınırlık sağlamakla kalmaz, aynı zamanda bu alanların korunması için daha fazla sorumluluk getirir. Şu anda Özbekistan'da beş UNESCO Dünya Mirası Alanı bulunmaktadır: Buhara'nın Tarihi Merkezi, Shakhrisyabz'ın Tarihi Merkezi, Itchan Kala, Semerkant - Kültür Kavşağı ve Batı Tien-Shan Dağları (UNESCO, 2021). Bu yerler bölgenin çeşitli kültürel ve doğal mirasını temsil eder ve ipek yolu medeniyetlerinin karmaşık tarihine bir pencere sunar. Bununla birlikte, Dünya Mirası Listesine dahil edilmesi, koruma politikaları, kaynak tahsisi ve toplum katılımı açısından yeni dinamikler getirmektedir (Labadi, 2017). Sürdürülebilir koruma çabalarının sadece teknik uzmanlık gerektirmediği, aynı zamanda miras alanlarında ve çevresinde yaşayanların da katılımını ve işbirliğini gerektirdiği kabul edildiğinden, son yıllarda yerel toplulukların mirasın korunmasına katılımı vurgulanmıştır (Meskell, 2018).

Özbekistan'ın mirasını koruma çabalarına rağmen, turizme dayalı ekonomik kalkınmanın kültürel bütünlüğün korunmasıyla dengelenmesinde zorluklar devam etmektedir. Turizm ekonomik faydalar sağlarken, tarihi alanların bozulmasına da yol açabilir ve yerel kaynaklar üzerinde önemli bir baskı yaratabilir (Timothy ve Nyaupane, 2009). Ek olarak, hızlı kentleşme ve altyapı gelişimi geleneksel kentsel dokuyu tehdit etmekte ve yerel nüfusun yer değiştirmesine neden olabilmektedir (Dani and Alcock, 2016). Bu nedenle, bu miras alanlarının uzun vadeli sürdürülebilirliğini sağlamak için katılımları kritik öneme sahip olduğundan, yerel toplulukların koruma sürecindeki rolünü dikkatlice incelemek önemlidir. Bu çalışma, Özbekistan'ın UNESCO Dünya Mirası alanlarındaki kültürel mirasın korunması ile yerel topluluklar arasındaki karmaşık ilişkiyi araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu araştırma, mirasın korunmasının yerel halk üzerindeki sosyo-ekonomik ve kültürel etkilerini analiz ederek, topluluk çıkarlarını ulusal ve uluslararası koruma çabalarıyla bütünleştirmenin hem faydalarını hem de zorluklarını belirlemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bunu yaparken, sürdürülebilir miras yönetimi konusundaki daha geniş söylemlere katkıda bulunur ve miras alanlarının hem kültürel koruma hem de yerel kalkınma için nasıl bir temel oluşturabileceğine dair içgörüler sunar.

Özbekistan, tarihi boyunca önemli medeniyetlere ev sahipliği yapmış, kültürel ve ticari mübadelelerin merkezi olmuştur. Bu bölgede ortaya çıkan zengin kültürel miras, Orta Asya'nın tarihsel gelişiminin anlaşılmasında büyük önem taşımaktadır. Ülkenin kültürel varlıkları geçmiş Pers, Türk ve İslam medeniyetlerinin izlerini taşıırken, modern Özbekistan'ın ulus inşa sürecinde de kritik bir rol oynuyor. Bu bağlamda kültürel mirasın korunması sadece geçmişin anılarının yaşatılması ile ilgili olmayıp, gelecek nesiller için kültürel sürekliliğin sağlanmasında da önemli bir gereklilik olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır (Abdullaeva, 2020). Ancak Özbekistan gibi gelişmekte olan ülkelerde bu kültür varlıklarının korunması, ekonomik kalkınma, kentleşme, turizm gibi modern dinamiklerle uyumlu bir şekilde yönetilmelidir. Bu, kültürel miras yönetimi alanında karşılaşılan zorluklara daha fazla karmaşıklık katar.

UNESCO Dünya Mirası Listesi'nde yer alan siteler, uluslararası farkındalığın artırılmasına ve bunların korunması için gerekli kaynakların sağlanmasına önemli ölçüde katkıda bulunmaktadır. Bununla birlikte, bu statüyle gelen ulusal ve uluslararası sorumluluklar göz ardı edilemez. Özbekistan'da, bu miras alanları yerel toplulukların yaşamlarıyla yakından iç içe geçmiştir ve bu da sürdürülebilir sonuçlara ulaşmak için koruma çabaları sırasında sosyal hassasiyetlerin dikkate alınmasını çok önemli kılmaktadır. Gerçekten de yerel topluluklar sadece gözlemci olarak değil, aynı zamanda bu kültürel alanların korunmasında aktif katılımcı olarak hareket etmelidir (Mansurov and Ergaşev, 2019). Özellikle Buhara ve Semerkant gibi tarihi kentlerde yerel halkın ekonomik ve sosyal yaşamları doğrudan kültürel mirasla iç içe geçmektedir. Koruma çabaları, yerel toplulukların günlük yaşamlarını aksatmadan bu alanların kültürel bütünlüğünü korumayı amaçlamalıdır.



Ancak turizmin bu miras alanlarının korunmasındaki rolü hem fırsat hem de tehdit olarak görülebilir. Turizm ekonomik kalkınma yaratırken ve yerel halk için bir gelir kaynağı sağlarken, yoğun ziyaretçi trafiğinin baskısı nedeniyle bu hassas alanların fiziksel ve kültürel olarak bozulmasına da yol açabilir (Toshev ve Kamalov, 2018). Bu nedenle Özbekistan'ın kültürel miras alanlarının sürdürülebilir turizm politikaları çerçevesinde korunması esastır. UNESCO statüsü turizm faaliyetlerini artırırken, bu süreçler dikkatli bir şekilde yönetilmezse hem yerel ekonomi hem de kültürel yapı zarar görebilir. Bu bağlamda, yerel toplulukların turizme dahil edilmesi ve bu süreçlerden yararlanmalarının sağlanması, koruma çabalarının başarısında çok önemli bir faktördür (Mirsuljanova ve Saidakbarov, 2020).

Ek olarak, kentleşme ve modernleşme süreçleri Özbekistan'daki kültürel mirasın korunması için önemli zorluklar doğurmaktadır. Özellikle Shakhrisyabz gibi tarihi şehirlerde, modern altyapı projelerinin tarihi dokuya zarar verdiği ve UNESCO tarafından nesli tükenmekte olan miras alanları listesine dahil edilmesine yol açtığı bilinmektedir (Dünya Miras Merkezi, 2021). Bu durum, miras alanlarının korunmasında uluslararası standartlara bağlı kalmanın kritik öneminin bir kez daha altını çizmektedir. Özbekistan gibi tarihi açıdan zengin bir ülkede, bu tür projeler, modernleşme ihtiyaçlarının karşılanması ile tarihi dokunun korunması arasında hassas bir denge gerektiren ulusal kalkınma hedeflerine uygun olarak gerçekleştirilmelidir.

## Ek bilgiler

**Çıkar çatışması bilgisi:** Araştırmada herhangi bir çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.

**Destek bilgisi:** Araştırmadan herhangi bir kurum veya kuruluştan destek alınmamıştır.

**Etik onay bilgisi:** Araştırmada etik onay gerekli görülmemiştir.

**Katkı oranı bilgisi:** Araştırma katkı oranı tüm yazarlara eşit dağıtılmıştır.