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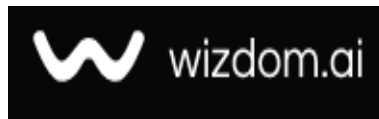
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Theoretical And Methodological Foundations Of Cultural And World Heritage Studies: Landasan Teoretis dan Metodologis Studi Warisan Budaya dan Warisan Dunia

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Abstract

General Background Historical and cultural heritage serves as a foundational resource for maintaining national identity and ensuring cultural continuity within globalized frameworks. **Specific Background** Traditional evaluation models often prioritize a materialistic and nation-oriented interpretation of monuments, which shapes how cultural memory is managed and represented. **Knowledge Gap** However, post-Soviet scholarly traditions, particularly in the Republic of Uzbekistan, face an insufficient conceptual and methodological integration into the international discursive fields of heritage studies. **Aims** This study aims to systematize theoretical approaches to world heritage, evaluate the applicability of values-based methodologies, and analyze the institutional transformation of heritage studies within Uzbek universities. **Results** Content analysis reveals a fivefold increase in specialized university courses alongside the establishment of three conservation laboratories between 2010 and 2025, signaling an institutional shift toward modern technologies. Concurrently, utilizing non-invasive archaeological methods, geographic information systems, and remote sensing proves essential for documenting outstanding universal value while navigating urban development risks as demonstrated by the endangered status of Shakhriyabz. **Novelty** The study establishes a novel synthesis of values-based heritage assessment and digital humanities tools within the context of Central Asian academic frameworks. **Implications** These findings imply that safeguarding regional archaeological landscapes requires the formal integration of local management practices and digital monitoring systems into urban planning policies to maintain long-term integrity and ensure sustainable heritage preservation.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage, Values-Based Approach, Sustainable Preservation, Digital Humanities, Uzbekistan

Key Findings Highlights

Academic heritage courses in regional higher education experienced a fivefold increase accompanied by advanced infrastructure development.

Non-invasive digital documentation technologies mitigate data fragmentation across geographically isolated archaeological landscapes.

Insufficient integration of outstanding universal value criteria into municipal governance increases long-term conservation vulnerabilities.

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1. Introduction

Historical and cultural heritage constitutes one of the fundamental resources for maintaining cultural continuity and national identity in the context of globalization. In contemporary academic literature, the concept of heritage is increasingly interpreted not as a static collection of material artifacts from the past but as a dynamic social and cultural construct that is shaped in the present through processes of selection, interpretation, and representation of the past [1]. This conceptual shift, which became firmly established within heritage studies during the 1980s, necessitates a reconsideration of the theoretical and methodological foundations for studying historical and cultural heritage and its place within the system of historical scholarship.

The relevance of this research is determined by several interrelated factors. First, the accelerating processes of globalization and urbanization create unprecedented risks for heritage sites, requiring the development of new strategies for their preservation and monitoring. Second, the digital transformation of the humanities opens opportunities for applying innovative methods of documentation, analysis, and interpretation of archaeological and architectural heritage. Third, the strengthening of international cooperation within the framework of UNESCO conventions highlights the need to harmonize criteria for assessing the cultural significance of heritage properties and to integrate national research traditions into the global academic discourse.

The research gap addressed in this study lies in the insufficient theoretical and methodological development of approaches to heritage studies within post-Soviet scholarly traditions, particularly in the Republic of Uzbekistan [2]. Despite the substantial empirical material accumulated through the archaeology and history of Central Asia, the conceptualization of heritage as an object of interdisciplinary research and its integration into the international framework of heritage studies remain fragmented.

The purpose of this article is to systematize theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of cultural and World Heritage, to substantiate the applicability of values-based methodology and interdisciplinary research strategies using the example of Uzbekistan, and to demonstrate the scholarly significance of Outstanding Universal Value criteria for assessing national heritage within a global context.

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To examine the evolution of the concept of “cultural heritage” and its contemporary content within the system of historical knowledge.
2. To analyze the methodological potential of the values-based approach and interdisciplinary strategies in the study of heritage properties.
3. To examine the criteria of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) within the context of procedures for the inscription of properties on the UNESCO World Heritage List.
4. Using the example of Uzbekistan’s historical and cultural heritage, to demonstrate the possibilities of applying contemporary archaeological methods and digital technologies for the identification and assessment of sites possessing potential World Heritage significance.
5. To analyze the transformation of educational disciplines in the field of cultural heritage in higher education institutions of Uzbekistan as an indicator of institutional change [3].

2. Methods

The methodological framework of this study is based on the synthesis of several scientific approaches, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of the research object.

The **historical-comparative method** is employed to analyze the evolution of the concept of cultural heritage in international law and national research traditions, as well as to comparatively assess the criteria of significance attributed to heritage sites in different cultural contexts. This method makes it possible to trace the transformation of heritage understanding from the predominantly materialistic and nation-oriented approaches of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to a more inclusive model that incorporates intangible dimensions and a plurality of interpretations.

The **systems approach** is used to examine historical and cultural heritage as a complex and organized system comprising both tangible and intangible components, together with the social practices involved in their identification, preservation, and interpretation. Heritage properties are analyzed not in isolation but within the broader context of cultural landscapes, historical environments, and settlement systems, in accordance with contemporary approaches reflected in UNESCO’s Operational Guidelines.

The **Values-Based Approach**, developed within the field of heritage studies and implemented in the practices of ICCROM and ICOMOS, constitutes the conceptual core of the research. This approach assumes that heritage does not possess intrinsic value; rather, value is constructed through processes of social and scholarly communication, depends on cultural context, and may change over time. In relation to World Heritage properties, this means that Outstanding Universal Value is determined not only by the physical characteristics of a site but also by its capacity to represent cultural narratives that are significant for humanity as a whole.

The **interdisciplinary approach** integrates methods from archaeology, historical geography, cultural anthropology, and

digital humanities. Among the instrumental methods employed, particular attention is given to the use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) for the spatial analysis of archaeological sites; remote sensing techniques, including aerial photography and multispectral satellite imagery, for the identification of previously unknown monuments; and digital documentation technologies such as 3D laser scanning and photogrammetry for recording the current condition of heritage properties and monitoring their changes over time.

The selection of these methods is driven by the need to overcome disciplinary boundaries between historical and natural-scientific knowledge, as well as by the demand for more objective and verifiable procedures for assessing the condition of heritage sites. Contemporary UNESCO requirements for nomination dossiers necessitate the application of a broad range of methods—from stratigraphic analysis to geophysical survey and digital mapping—to substantiate the authenticity and integrity of a property.

In accordance with international standards established by UNESCO, ICCROM, and ICOMOS, the study also incorporates the methodological principles of **Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA)**. These include requirements for strategic environmental assessment during the nomination stage in order to forecast potential impacts of territorial development on the Outstanding Universal Value of heritage properties.

To analyze the transformation of educational disciplines in the field of cultural heritage, **content analysis** of university curricula and academic programs in Uzbekistan for the period 2010–2025 was conducted, alongside a comparative analysis of the structure and content of specialized courses. The quantitative indicators presented in Section 3.5 are based on the author's analysis of publicly available curricula and official university materials. These indicators should be regarded as illustrative rather than exhaustive statistical data and therefore require further verification through dedicated sociological research.

3. Results

3.1. Evolution of the Concept of Cultural Heritage and Its Contemporary Conceptualization

In contemporary academic discourse, cultural heritage is understood as the totality of tangible and intangible artifacts created by previous generations that have retained historical, aesthetic, scientific, or spiritual significance and are transmitted to future generations as a resource of cultural memory and identity. However, this definition, which captures only the essential characteristics of heritage, does not fully reveal its processual nature.

As the analysis of theoretical approaches demonstrates, the understanding of heritage has undergone significant evolution. During the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, a materialistic interpretation predominated, whereby heritage was identified primarily with movable and immovable monuments subject to state protection within national institutions [4]. Museums, legislation on the protection of antiquities, and specialized agencies were responsible for the selection, systematization, and preservation of heritage objects, while the public acted as a passive recipient of predetermined narratives [5].

From the mid-twentieth century onward, under the influence of decolonization processes and critiques of Eurocentrism, a gradual shift occurred toward a more inclusive understanding of heritage. The 1972 UNESCO Convention became the first international document to establish the concept of "World Heritage" and the principle of its collective protection as the common property of humanity. Nevertheless, as emphasized in critical heritage literature, the Convention's definition of cultural heritage (monuments, groups of buildings, and sites) maintained a distinctly European focus on tangible and monumental objects, thereby excluding many forms of intangible heritage that are significant for non-European cultures [6], [7].

A conceptual breakthrough emerged in the 1980s with the institutionalization of heritage studies as an independent academic discipline. Scholars, particularly L. Smith and R. Harrison, proposed interpreting heritage not as a collection of material objects but as a cultural process in which meaning is assigned to objects in the present through practices of selection, interpretation, and representation [8]. According to this perspective, "heritage is not what exists, but what we do with what remains from the past." This approach broadens the field of inquiry to include not only canonical monuments but also unofficial heritage, local memory practices, and the narratives of marginalized groups.

The contemporary understanding of heritage, reflected in UNESCO documents of the 2000s, integrates both tangible and intangible components while emphasizing their inseparable relationship. The 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and subsequent Operational Guidelines recognize that, in certain cases, "tangible and intangible interpretations cannot be separated" [9]. This is particularly relevant to Central Asian heritage sites, where architectural monuments and cultural landscapes are closely connected with living traditions, religious practices, and oral narratives.

3.2. Methodological Potential of the Values-Based Approach

The values-based approach represents one of the most developed methodological frameworks for the study and conservation of heritage sites and has gained recognition in international documents of ICCROM and ICOMOS. Its central premise is the acknowledgment of the plurality and dynamic nature of values attributed to heritage objects by different social groups. Unlike traditional approaches focused exclusively on expert assessments of historical and artistic significance, the values-

based approach incorporates the full spectrum of social, cultural, economic, and symbolic meanings into the analysis [10].

With regard to World Heritage properties, this approach is operationalized through the concept of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV). As defined by the World Heritage Committee, OUV refers to “cultural and/or natural significance which is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity” [11].

The identification of OUV requires a three-level assessment. A property must satisfy at least one of the ten established criteria (for example, being “a masterpiece of human creative genius,” “a unique testimony to a cultural tradition,” or “an outstanding example of a type of building illustrating significant stages in human history”); demonstrate integrity (the completeness of the elements necessary to express its value) and authenticity (the credibility and genuineness of its form, materials, function, and traditions); and possess an adequate system of protection and management [12].

Of particular relevance to this study is the comparative analysis required as an obligatory component of a nomination dossier. This analysis must demonstrate that a property possesses characteristics that distinguish it from sites already included on the World Heritage List. Such a requirement stimulates the development of interdisciplinary research aimed at identifying the unique attributes of regional heritage sites within a global comparative framework.

3.3. Contemporary Methods for the Study of Archaeological Heritage

Significant progress in the study of archaeological heritage has been driven by the adoption of non-invasive methods and digital technologies. The use of remote sensing techniques, including multispectral and hyperspectral satellite imagery as well as aerial photography obtained through unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), enables researchers to identify previously unknown archaeological sites, particularly in remote and inaccessible regions, while minimizing destructive interventions into cultural layers [13].

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) provide opportunities for the spatial analysis of archaeological monuments in relation to topography, hydrography, communication routes, and historical landscapes. This is especially important in Central Asia, where many archaeological sites are located at considerable distances from one another and their interpretation requires the reconstruction of settlement systems and patterns of territorial development.

Geophysical methods, including magnetometry, ground-penetrating radar (GPR), and electrical resistivity surveying, allow the detection of subsurface structures without excavation. These techniques provide valuable information about settlement layouts, fortification systems, and production complexes. Combined with digital documentation technologies such as laser scanning and photogrammetry, they form the basis for creating detailed three-dimensional models and virtual reconstructions of heritage sites [14].

In the context of Uzbekistan, the application of these methods is particularly relevant due to the extensive geographical distribution of archaeological sites—from the monuments of the Fergana Valley and the Bukhara Oasis to settlements located on the Ustyurt Plateau and in the region of ancient Chach (the Tashkent Oasis). According to contemporary research, the latter possesses a three-thousand-year history of cultural development, allowing it to be regarded as an important center in the formation of the historical and cultural landscape of Central Asia.

3.4. Historical and Cultural Heritage of Uzbekistan in the Context of World Heritage

The territory of Uzbekistan is home to four properties inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List: the Historic Centre of Bukhara, Itchan Kala in Khiva, Samarkand - Crossroads of Cultures, and the Historic Centre of Shakhristabz. It should be noted that since 2016, the Historic Centre of Shakhristabz has been included on the List of World Heritage in Danger due to extensive urban development interventions that disrupted the visual integrity of the site. This case serves as a significant example of the conflict between territorial development interests and the requirements for preserving Outstanding Universal Value, highlighting the necessity of conducting Heritage Impact Assessments at all stages of planning. The remaining three sites demonstrate a unique combination of architectural traditions, urban planning solutions, and cultural interactions characteristic of the Great Silk Road.

The inscription of these sites on the UNESCO List was the result of many years of work aimed at substantiating their Outstanding Universal Value. In the case of Samarkand, the key arguments were based on evidence of intercultural exchange at the crossroads of civilizations, corresponding to Criterion (ii) (“to exhibit an important interchange of human values in architecture, technology, monumental arts, town-planning, or landscape design”). The authenticity of the monuments has been confirmed through stratigraphic and archival research, while their integrity is supported by the preservation of key elements of the historic urban fabric [15].

Of particular importance for the development of scholarly approaches is the inclusion of elements of Uzbekistan’s intangible cultural heritage in UNESCO’s Representative Lists, including Navruz, Shashmaqom, the Cultural Space of Boysun, and Pilaf Culture. This reflects international recognition of the comprehensive nature of the region’s cultural heritage, which extends beyond tangible monuments to encompass living traditions, musical practices, and culinary codes.

As noted in the study by Sharipova and Rozikova, Uzbekistan’s cooperation with UNESCO is not limited to nomination processes but encompasses a wide range of activities, including restoration work using traditional materials and skills (in accordance with the Committee’s recommendations on authenticity conservation), digitization of heritage sites,

modernization of museum activities, and the organization of international cultural forums. This cooperation serves as an instrument of cultural diplomacy, strengthening the country's position within the global cultural landscape.

3.5. Transformation of Cultural Heritage Disciplines in Higher Education Institutions of Uzbekistan (2010–2025)

An important indicator of institutional change in the field of cultural heritage is the transformation of educational programs and academic disciplines in higher education institutions. An analysis of university curricula in Uzbekistan during the period 2010–2025 demonstrates a steady trend toward the expansion and deepening of specialized training in the field of heritage studies.

As shown in Figure 1, over the past 15 years the number of specialized courses has increased fivefold, three new laboratories have been established, and all educational programs have undergone significant improvement. Key changes have been identified in five major areas. The presented data are based on the author's content analysis of publicly available university curricula and should be regarded as indicative in nature.



Figure 1.

Figure 1. Evolution of Cultural Heritage Subjects: Dynamics of Disciplines in Higher Education Institutions of Uzbekistan, 2010–2025

The chronology of key events reflects the phased nature of institutional transformations:

- Before 2010 - the infrastructure of cultural heritage disciplines was virtually absent.
- 2012 - the first references to specialized cultural heritage topics appeared in educational programs.
- 2016 - cultural heritage disciplines were introduced as elective courses.
- 2018 - the separate specialization "Restoration of Architectural Monuments" was established.
- 2020 - GIS technologies and digital methods were integrated into the educational process.
- 2022 - a Manuscript Conservation Laboratory was opened.
- 2025 - a comprehensive training system in the field of cultural heritage was formed.

Quantitative indicators confirm significant progress: a fivefold increase in the number of specialized courses, the establishment of three new laboratories, the creation of two academic specializations from scratch, and improvements across all areas of training. This dynamic demonstrates the systematic development of a professional education system by higher education institutions in Uzbekistan, integrating theoretical knowledge (from general courses to the study of world civilizations), practical skills (through laboratories and restoration and conservation specializations), and modern technologies (GIS, digital archives, and 3D scanning).

4. Discussion

The findings indicate the necessity of reconsidering the theoretical and methodological foundations of cultural heritage studies in Uzbekistan and other post-Soviet countries. While traditional historical scholarship in these countries retains substantial empirical potential and well-developed field research methodologies, its conceptual framework is often

insufficiently integrated into contemporary academic debates within the field of heritage studies.

From this perspective, the application of the **Values-Based Approach** acquires particular scholarly significance. This approach makes it possible to move beyond exclusively state-centered and elite-oriented models of heritage evaluation. As Smith argues, the traditional model of heritage conservation, known as the **Authorised Heritage Discourse**, frequently marginalizes local communities and their interpretations of the significance of cultural objects. In the context of Central Asia, this implies the necessity of actively involving local communities, custodians of oral traditions, and practitioners of intangible cultural heritage in both research and management processes.

A comparison of Uzbekistan's experience with international practices reveals a number of common challenges. Documentation concerning the state of conservation of Uzbekistan's World Heritage properties identifies issues also observed in many other countries, including the impact of tourism infrastructure, shortages of qualified specialists for routine conservation work (for example, the maintenance of adobe walls in Khiva), salt crystallization, and biological deterioration. Furthermore, the case of Shakhrisyabz clearly demonstrates that insufficient integration of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) requirements into urban development policies may result in a property's inclusion on the List of World Heritage in Danger. Such a situation creates both reputational and management risks for the State Party. The World Heritage Committee recommends the implementation of preventive conservation measures, the development of monitoring programs in accordance with international standards, and the use of traditional materials and craftsmanship skills in restoration activities.

Particular attention should be paid to the identified transformation of educational disciplines. The fivefold increase in the number of specialized courses over fifteen years, together with the establishment of new laboratories, demonstrates that Uzbekistan's higher education system is responding to contemporary challenges related to heritage conservation. However, comparative analysis suggests that the incorporation of interdisciplinary approaches, particularly GIS technologies and digital documentation methods, into the curricula of Central Asian universities remains uneven. While leading universities actively employ modern techniques, institutions located in peripheral regions often face shortages of technical equipment and qualified specialists.

One of the most promising directions for future research is associated with the application of digital technologies for monitoring the condition of heritage sites and documenting changes in their structures and surrounding environments. This issue is especially relevant under conditions of climate change, which generates new risks for heritage properties, including erosion, fluctuations in groundwater levels, and extreme temperature conditions. GIS technologies and remote sensing methods may become effective tools for the continuous monitoring of these processes. As illustrated in Figure 1, the integration of such methods into educational programs represents an important step in training a new generation of heritage professionals.

Future research prospects are associated, first, with the development of methodologies for incorporating intangible heritage dimensions into the justification of Outstanding Universal Value for archaeological sites. Second, expanding comparative analyses of Central Asian heritage properties within a global framework would facilitate the identification of the unique characteristics of regional heritage. Third, it is necessary to strengthen the integration of local scholarly schools and research traditions into the international heritage studies community through publications in peer-reviewed journals indexed in international citation databases.

The scientific novelty of this study lies in the systematization of theoretical approaches to cultural heritage research within the context of the post-Soviet academic space and in substantiating the applicability of values-based methodology and digital technologies to the study of Uzbekistan's archaeological heritage. The practical significance of the research is determined by the potential use of its findings for improving nomination and monitoring methodologies, as well as for developing educational programs in the field of cultural heritage.

5. Conclusion

Historical, cultural, and World Heritage represent a multifaceted phenomenon whose study requires the integration of theoretical approaches from historical scholarship, cultural anthropology, and heritage studies, together with the application of contemporary instrumental research methods. The analysis of the evolution of the cultural heritage concept demonstrates a transition from a material and nationally oriented model toward a dynamic and process-oriented understanding that recognizes the socially constructed nature of values and the plurality of interpretations.

The Values-Based Approach and UNESCO's concept of **Outstanding Universal Value (OUV)** provide a methodological foundation for the objective and comparative assessment of heritage properties. At the same time, these approaches encourage the development of interdisciplinary research and promote the involvement of local communities in the identification and preservation of heritage. Uzbekistan's experience, particularly the case of Shakhrisyabz, demonstrates that maintaining World Heritage status requires not only the initial justification of OUV but also the consistent integration of heritage conservation requirements into urban planning and governance policies.

The application of contemporary archaeological research methods—including non-invasive technologies, GIS, and digital documentation—combined with traditional historical approaches creates new opportunities for the identification, investigation, and monitoring of heritage sites. This provides a more reliable empirical basis for nomination processes and heritage management decisions.

The analysis of the development of cultural heritage disciplines in Uzbekistan's higher education institutions during the period 2010–2025 reveals a stable pattern of institutional growth, characterized by a fivefold increase in specialized courses, the establishment of new laboratories and educational programs, and the introduction of digital methods such as GIS and 3D scanning. These changes reflect a transition from fragmented instruction toward systematic professional training in heritage studies and constitute an important factor in the sustainable development of cultural heritage management.

Future research should focus on developing methodologies for the global comparative analysis of Central Asian heritage sites, integrating local and intangible heritage dimensions into the justification of Outstanding Universal Value, and expanding the application of digital technologies in the monitoring and management of cultural heritage properties.

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