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# Overcrowding of Tourists in Historical Sites and its Impact on Local Communities in Samarkand

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**Abstract**

This article aims to study the connection between overcrowding tourist flow in the historical sites of Samarkand and the decreasing quality of local Samarkand people. Popular monuments like Registan, Shah-i-Zinda, and Gur-Emir attract a large number of visitors, however, most of the come to the same places at the same time. This will create the first issue, overcrowding, and it causes the to the second one, which is families in the old mahallas (neighborhoods) around the monuments face noise, traffic, higher prices and changes in their life. These problems are described by using academic literature and reports. The article suggest that Samarkand should spread tourist flows in time and space, additionally, involve their local people in tourism.

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**Introduction.**

Samarkand is one of the most historical cities in the world, and for many ages it has been a crucial crossroad on the Great Silk Road trade way. In 2001 Samarkand's historic part was included in the UNESCO World Heritage List as "Samarkand – Crossroad of Cultures" [1]. After visa rules were made easier and the government started to pay more attention in tourism, the numbers grew very fast into the city. Tourism, definitely, gives jobs to young people, helps small businesses and gives money for restoration. But tourism can also bring some problems, when too many people come to one small place. This situation is called "overtourism" which means the impact of tourism that negativelyinfluences the quality of life of citizens and the experience of visitors [2].

The idea that that overcrowded tourists can make issues Is not new for local people. Doxey [3] created the "Irridex" model, which shows the attitude of residents changes step by step.

1. Euphoria
2. Apathy
3. Annoyance
4. Antagonism.

When people openly show they are against tourists which is normally happened in the last step, antagonism. Butler [4] also explained that if the number of tourists goes beyond the carrying capacity of a place, the destination can stagnate or even decline.

The word "overtourism" became popular around 2017, when residents in Barcelona, Venice and other cities started protests against mass tourism [5]. Koens et al. [6] argue that overtourism is not only about the general number of touritsm, but about their concentration in a few places and at a few minutes, and a similar view is found in the review by Capocchi et al. [7]. In the study of Krakow, Szromek et al. [8] found that residents who live near the main attractions feel the negative effects more strongly, such as noise, crowded streets, rising prices and local shops turning into souvenir and gift stores. Dodds and Butler [9] add that residents and their opinions are usually not involved in decision-making process of tourism.

Crowding is also a problem for tourists. Sanz-Blas et al. [10] proved that when visitors feel a place is too crowded, their satisfaction level becomes lower. Acharya et al. [11] found that destination satisfaction has a direct effect on revisit intention, which means whether a person wants to come back again to the same place. About Samarkand, Rahmatilloyeva [12] writes that the current visitor management cannot hand peak crowds and that some residents of the historic center face displacement.

So the research model is simple, which requires the concentration of tourists (problem one) leads to a lower quality of life of residents ( problem two), and both can be solved by better management model.

Most research connected to overtourism is written about European cities such as Venice and Barcelona [13]–[15], while Samarkand case is not studied much enough. This is why this article describes two interconnected problems in Samarkand. The former one is overcrowding in the main heritage sites, and the letter one is the decreasing quality of life of local residents which stems from the former one. At the end some simple solutions are also recommended.

**Methodology.**

In this study a literature-based, qualitative approach was used. No surveys or statistics were applied. The article is based on theoretical sources such as academic articles, books and UNESCO and UN Tourism reportsm which were compared with real situation of Samarkand. The analysis higlights three main points, they are as following:

1. Tourists are concentrated in a few famous monuments, mostly in the same seasons and hours.
2. This creates overcrowding, which puts pressure on old buildings and sacred places.
3. Overcrowding affects the daily life of citizens in the old mahallas.

**Results and discussion.**

The first problem is overcrowding in the main historical sites. Almost every tour that is planned to travel to Samarkand includes the same places: Registan, Gur-Emir, Bibi-Khanum, Siyob market, Shah-i-Zinda, and all of them are close to each other. Many toursits come only for one day by the high-speed train (Afrosiyob) from Tashkent, so big groups arrice at the same time, especially in spring, and autumn in the evening when the light and 3D shows are started in Registan square. Shah-i-Zinda is a good example. It is a narrow necropolis with steep stairs [16], so even a few groups make it feel full. Especially due to its additional active masjid (mosque) function, on Fridays, tourists will not be entered until the Friday prayer finished cause people pray on the legendary steep stairs of the complex, and those who have entered till the beginning of the prayer cannot go out the complex as it is full of stairs and respecting the religion of local people. As it is a holy place where local people come to pray [16], and when it is crowded with tourists taking photos, pilgrims cannot also feel the spiritual atmosphere.

Overcrowding is also dangerous for the monuments themselves. Many of these buildings are more than five hundred years old, and their titles, walls and floor are very fragile. When large groups walk, touch the walls and stand for a long time in small rooms, the damage becomes faste. Tour buses parking

close to the monuments also add vibration and pollution. As Koens et al. [6] explain, the main problem is not only how many people come, but they all come to the same place at the same time, and Samarkand shows this very clearly.

The second problem is the decreasing quality of life of the local community, and it comes directly after the first one. Around the monuments there are old mahallas where families have lived for generations. When crowds come every day, streests become busy and traffic jams appear. Prices in shios near the touristic zone increase, and simple shops of grocery are replaced by souvenir stors, like in Krakow [8]. Some families sell or rent their houses for guest houses, neighbours move away and the traditional mahallas become weaker. As Rahmatilloyeva [12] notes, local people often carry costs of tourism, but the main profit goes to big hotels and tour companies.

Looking through Doxey's model [3], most people in Samarkand are still at the stage of Euphoria or apathy, because Uzbek people are famous for their hospitality. But the experience of Barcelon and Venice shows that if problems are ignored, the residents can move to annoyance and antagonism [5], [14]. Also crowded places make tourists less satisfied, so they are less likely to recommend the city to others and come again [11].

**Solutions and recommendations.**

Samarkand does not need to stop tourism. Instead it can use simple and cheap managing methos, tailored to the destination and prepared together with its stakeholders [15]:

1. Spreading tourists in time. Online tickests with time slots for Registan and Shah-i-Zinda ( unavailability during the Friday prayers), early morning and eveing visits, quiet hours for pilgrims and winter festivals.

2. Spreading tourism in space. Promoting places like Afrasiyab museum, the Ulugh Bek observatory, the Konigil paper workshop, St Daniel tomb, Hazrati Hizr masjid (mosque) and Islam Karimov mausoleum, Ishrathona and other medieval century built historical places in the City, and Mountain resorts in Urgut and Shahrisabz, the place where Amir Timur was born and raised, so tourists stay two or three days instead of one. This boosts local economy and income to all.

3. Involving local people. Supporitng family guest houses, local guides and handicrafts, returning part of ticket money to the mahallas and holding regular meetings with residents [9].

**Conclusion.**

In conclusion, Samarkand has two connected problems. Most tourists visit the same few monuments at the same time, which causes overcrowding, and this overcrowding makes the daily life of residents

harder with more noise, traffic, and higher prices, while the old mahallas slowly lose their community life. Samarkand should not limit tourism, but manage it better. Spreading visitors in time and space and including local people can help the city keep both its heritage and its living community, because without its residents Samarkand would be just a museum, not a live city.

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