

UNIVERSAL DESIGN IN THE WORLD HERITAGE CITIES OF UZBEKISTAN TRAVELOGUE OBSERVATION

ASIAH ABDUL RAHIM

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KAED Universal Design Unit (KUDU)

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PREFACE

The cities of Uzbekistan; Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva are steeped in history, culture, and architectural grandeur, recognized globally as World Heritage sites that reflect the rich legacy of Islamic civilization and the Silk Road. However, as these historic cities welcome increasing numbers of tourists from around the world, there is a growing need to assess whether their treasured landmarks are accessible to all, including Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) and the elderly.

This publication, *Universal Design in the World Heritage Cities of Uzbekistan: Travelogue Observation*, is the result of a field-based research journey conducted by a multidisciplinary team of architects, scholars, and accessibility advocates. The travel took place from 18th September to 2nd October 2023, traversing Uzbekistan's most iconic heritage cities. The research adopts a unique approach that blends academic inquiry with experiential observation, where scholars themselves, some of whom are elderly or persons with limited mobility, simulated real-world accessibility challenges faced by travelers in historic settings.

As Uzbekistan strengthens its global presence through initiatives such as membership in the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage, this work seeks to support its aspirations by exploring how universal design principles can be integrated into the preservation and promotion of its cultural assets. The analysis aims to evaluate the usability and accessibility of heritage sites, identify gaps, and provide recommendations to improve connectivity and inclusivity for all visitors.

This travelogue is more than a record of architectural exploration, it is a call for inclusive cultural tourism. It underscores the importance of balancing heritage conservation with the needs of diverse users. We hope that this contribution will serve as a valuable reference for policymakers, urban planners, architects, and all stakeholders committed to creating an accessible environment that celebrates both historical integrity and universal access. We extend our gratitude to the individuals and institutions who supported this endeavor.

We would like to extend our heartfelt appreciation to Design PAC Sdn. Bhd. for their generous sponsorship and support, without which this research journey and publication would not have been possible. Their commitment to advancing knowledge in universal design and accessibility has played a crucial role in bringing this project to fruition.

We also express our gratitude to the individuals and institutions that supported this endeavor.

Prof. Dato' Sri Ar. Dr. Asiah Binti Abdul Rahim

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Asiah Abdul Rahim, Nur Amirah Abd Samad, Srazali Aripin

1.1 Introduction

Uzbekistan declared its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 as a Muslim-majority country. Islam spread into Uzbekistan in the 8th century. Islamic influence began initially from the southern part of Turkestan, and gradually spread to the north. Located in Central Asia, Uzbekistan was part of the historical trade silk route surrounded by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Turkmenistan. There are four historical cities, namely Kiva, Tashkent, Bukhara, and Samarkand. Samarkand and Bukhara are known as old cities that gave birth to many great Islamic scholars such as Imam Bukhari-Hadith Bukhari—and Ibnu Sina (Avicenna), the father of medicine. The city of Samarkand was founded in 700 BC and is now stand as the second largest city in Uzbekistan after Tashkent, the capital city. Meanwhile, in the old city of Bukhara, there is a madrasah called Mir Arab, 500 years old. The madrasah had produced very influential world Muslim figures, which made Uzbekistan nicknamed "The Land of the Imams."

According to Pew Research Centre data in 2021, the population of Uzbekistan was 34 million and the Muslim population in Uzbekistan was about 96%. The rich history and culture of Uzbekistan are highly appreciated by the world community. In 1990, among the ancient monuments in Uzbekistan, the ancient fortress of Ichan-Kala, located in modern Khiva, was listed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. In 1993, Uzbekistan eventually became a

member of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). In 2022, Uzbekistan became a member of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

In 21-22 March, 2013, UNESCO, under World Heritage Convention, in collaboration with International Council of Monument and Sites (ICOMOS) convene a symposium, 'European Symposium: Heritage and Accessibility', to discuss on how to balance the ethical issues of equal opportunity, the acceptance of social diversity, the demand for accessibility and the duty of remembrance, of preserving and promoting heritage sites and landscapes, without risking altering this built heritage or participating in the artificialisation of natural areas. It is in pursuit of the balance approach giving equity to persons with disabilities to access heritage sites that this access audit of the heritage area are conducted.

This publication addresses access audit that examines an existing building against predetermined criteria designed to measure the "usability" of the building for disabled people."Usability" ranges from getting in and around, to exiting the building. Depending on the measurement criteria, the assessment examines the percentage of the facilities that can be used independently by disabled people (Holmes-Siedle, 1996). The research attempts to analyse the accessibility of external spaces of heritage sites in Uzbekistan as travellers only.

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