EXPLORING THE TOURIST ATTRACTIVENESS
OF CULTURAL SITES: THE CASE OF KAZAKHSTAN

Dinara KADYRBEKOVA
Kazakh Academy of Sports and Tourism, Tourism Faculty, Tourism and Services Department,
Almaty, Kazakhstan, e-mail: 6537275@mail.ru

Aza YEVLOYEVA
Sh. Ualikhanov Kokshetau University, Graduate School of Business and Law, Business and Service Department,
Kokshetau, Kazakhstan, e-mail: aevloeva@shokan.edu.kz

Albina BEIKITOVA
Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University, Faculty of Natural Sciences and Geography, Department of Geography and Ecology,
Almaty, Kazakhstan, e-mail: ban_1985@mail.ru

Yerkegul DYUSSEKEYEVA
Kazakh Academy of Sports and Tourism, Tourism Faculty, Tourism and Services Department,
Almaty, Kazakhstan, e-mail: erkegul-94@mail.ru

Bakyt AKTYMBAYEVA
Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Faculty of Geography and Environmental Sciences,
Almaty, Kazakhstan, e-mail: b.aktymbaeva@mail.ru

Adil MOLDAGALIYEV
Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Faculty of Geography and Environmental Sciences,
Almaty, Kazakhstan, e-mail: adil_info@mail.ru

Yerlan ISSAKOV
Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University, Faculty of Natural Sciences and Geography, Department of Geography and Ecology,
Almaty, Kazakhstan, e-mail: erlan.issakov@gmail.com

Lóránt Dénes DÁVID[*]
John von Neumann University, Faculty of Economics and Business, Kecskemét, Hungary; Hungarian University of Agriculture
and Life Sciences, Institute of Rural Development and Sustainable Economy, Gödöllő, Hungary; Eötvös Loránd University,
Faculty of Social Sciences, Savaria University Centre, Savaria Department of Business Economics, Szombathely, Hungary;
Széchenyi István University, Győr, Hungary, e-mail: dr.david.lorant@gmail.com

Abstract: The article examines the components contributing to the tourist appeal of cultural sites in the Republic of Kazakhstan, exploring the intricate relationship between their attractiveness and cultural significance. This is vital for promoting sustainable tourism, fostering cultural exchange, and preserving shared cultural heritage for future generations. Understanding what makes a place attractive to tourists is crucial for destination marketing, sustainable tourism planning, and revenue generation. The study was conducted in the context of the search for ways to popularize cultural heritage in domestic tourism. Fifteen distinct variables were identified to delineate the allure of these sites, encompassing criteria such as historical significance, aesthetic and architectural value, integration of a cultural object with the natural landscape and environment, involvement of the local community in the promotion and preservation of cultural heritage, among others. A comprehensive questionnaire was devised based on these variables, serving as the foundation for a survey where participants rated the significance of each variable on a 5-point scale. The survey garnered responses from 1,728 residents spanning all regions of Kazakhstan. Through correlation analysis, the acquired ratings were scrutinized, unveiling interconnections among variables and elucidating the primary factors shaping the attractiveness of cultural sites, namely safety and security at the site, the historical significance, accessibility for people with special needs, aesthetic and architectural value, as well as the availability of amenities such as restrooms, information centers, and guided tours.

Keywords: Tourist attractions, cultural heritage, cultural tourism, tourism attractiveness, correlation analysis

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INTRODUCTION
The tourism industry represents a vast and intricate network of interconnected sectors. The diverse array of industries directly and indirectly influencing tourism not only shapes the uniqueness of tourist offerings but also enhances the value of

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* Corresponding author

tourist experiences (Bacsi, 2017). Cultural tourism stands out as one of the most prevalent forms of travel, with cultural elements featured in nearly half of all tourist excursions (UNWTO, 2018), underscoring the special relationship between tourism and culture. Indeed, culture stands as a cornerstone in the development of tourism, mutually benefiting from its expansion. Both tourism and culture serve as primary drivers of regional allure and competitiveness (OECD, 2008; Zhu et al., 2023). The integration of various cultural sites into tourism initiatives has fostered the rise and development of distinct tourism niches, including cultural heritage tourism, urban cultural excursions, ethnic tourism, event-based tourism, and creative tourism (Richards, 2018). Cultural heritage, encompassing both tangible and intangible aspects, holds a distinct position within tourist activities. Given its delicate nature, cultural heritage demands careful stewardship within the realm of tourism (Oppio and Dell'Ovo, 2020). The journey of a cultural object from mere existence to a fully-fledged tourist attraction is a multifaceted process. This transformation involves the development of tourist infrastructure, construction of accommodations, and ultimately, strategic promotion within the tourism market. However, not all cultural sites garner equal popularity among tourists. While cultural significance is paramount, the attractiveness of a site to tourists hinges on a multitude of factors, including accessibility, tour expenses, aesthetic allure, historical significance, availability of infrastructure, and event offerings. Tourist attractiveness in a broad sense implies a set of images that attract visitors to a specific destination, and accordingly reflects more the specifics of tourist demand, reflecting the interests, tastes and preferences of tourists. Existing literature on attractiveness within the tourism context predominantly focuses on the attractiveness of destinations themselves (Reitsamer et al., 2016; Mikulić et al., 2016; Khairi and Darmawan, 2021; Koshim et al., 2023; Moldagaliyeva et al., 2024), as well as the indicators used to measure it (Hu and Ritchie, 1993; Krešić and Prebežac, 2011; Kim et al., 2020; Cheng et al., 2023), many of which align with the factors shaping it. Culture invariably holds a prominent position as one of the primary resources shaping attractiveness (Islam and Chaudhary, 2021). However, only a limited number of scholarly works delve into the attractiveness of individual components of the tourist offering, notably the cultural dimension (Kirillova and Lehto, 2015; Ouariti and Jebrane, 2020; Tiberghien et al., 2018).

In the Republic of Kazakhstan, much like in other tourist destinations worldwide, cultural sites alongside natural wonders constitute the keystone of the tourism experience. Kazakhstan's cultural landscape boasts remarkable diversity, owing to its expansive territory and rich history, each turn of which has left its mark on the cultural identity of the country. The country's most significant cultural sites find their place among the esteemed 250 historical and cultural monuments of national importance (State list of historical and cultural monuments of national importance, 2020). Upon examining these objects from the perspective of domestic tourism development, the authors of this study encountered striking differences between the cultural sites listed. While some enjoy well-developed infrastructure, prominent placement on maps, and ample informational resources, others, equally significant on a national scale, remain unknown, being in hard-to-reach conditions without the necessary tourist amenities. Thus, the study aims to find an answer to the following questions:

1) What factors contribute to the tourist attractiveness of cultural sites?
2) Can all cultural sites become tourist attractions?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of tourist attractiveness is in a constant state of evolution and refinement, as it hinges on a multitude of factors that vary depending on the time, location, and purpose of travel. A common approach to defining attractiveness in tourism is to conceptualize it as a set of elements or a system of factors that contribute to its formation (Formica and Uysal, 2016). Broadly speaking, attractiveness encompasses a variety of factors that determine the forces influencing the ultimate choice of the consumer – tourist. The overall appeal of tourism is shaped by factors such as natural beauty, cultural heritage, recreational opportunities, accessibility and tourist infrastructure, including airports, roads, and accommodation facilities. Moreover, it encompasses opportunities for outdoor activities for the entire family, levels of hospitality and service, the destination's image, tourist satisfaction with services, as well as the economic stability and security of the destination. In essence, both natural landscapes and cultural attractions, as well as man-made structures and dynamic events such as carnivals, festivals, and concerts, can contribute to attractiveness (Kruczek, 2010). These factors of attractiveness serve as the driving force and are the primary determinants influencing tourists' decisions to embark on a journey.

Culture holds a vital role in tourism, influencing destination choices, shaping travel experiences, and fostering interactions with local communities. It often serves as the primary motivator for travel, enticing tourists with rich cultural experiences, whether through visits to historical sites, participation in traditional festivals, or exploration of local cuisine. Various forms of tourism revolve around the exploration and appreciation of cultural heritage sites, including UNESCO World Heritage Sites, historical landmarks, and cultural centers of indigenous peoples (Vecco and Caust, 2019; Whitford and Ruhanen, 2019; Carr et al., 2016; Issakov et al., 2023a). These sites not only showcase a destination's history and artistic achievements but also contribute to its identity and sense of place.

In response to the growing demand for cultural experiences, the tourism industry has diversified its offerings to include cultural tourism products. These can range from guided tours and cooking classes to craft workshops and performances featuring traditional music, dance, and theater. Cultural tourism holds immense potential to benefit local communities by generating economic opportunities, preserving cultural traditions, and instilling pride in cultural heritage. Community-based tourism initiatives empower local residents to share their culture with visitors on their own terms, ensuring a more equitable distribution of tourism benefits. Moreover, tourism serves as a platform for cultural exchange and mutual understanding between visitors and host countries. Through interactions with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, tourists gain insights into different lifestyles, values, and perspectives, fostering mutual respect and

appreciation. In essence, culture plays a multifaceted role in tourism, driving destination choices, shaping travel experiences, and facilitating cultural exchange. Recognizing and celebrating cultural diversity, while promoting responsible tourism practices, are crucial to ensure that cultural tourism continues to enrich both travelers and host communities worldwide.

Cultural sites offer tourists distinctive experiences and the chance to delve into the history, traditions, and lifestyle of a particular destination (Ritonga et al., 2019). The tourist attractiveness of cultural sites, which serve as fundamental resources for tourists, comprises a myriad of components. The identification of variables contributing to the tourist attractiveness of cultural sites drew upon existing research. Historical significance stands as a fundamental category within the cultural aspect of tourism, bridging the past to the present and fostering enduring interest across diverse segments of tourists drawn to cultural experiences (Biranvand, 2018; Alberti and Giusti, 2012). Architecture similarly exerts a considerable influence on tourist appeal, directly intertwining with aesthetics and authenticity – crucial criteria for selecting and appraising tourist attractions. Numerous studies underscore the pivotal role of architecture in the advancement of cultural tourism (Genc and Gulertekin Genc, 2023; Gholitabar et al., 2018; Costa and Carneiro, 2021).

The interplay between culture and tourism manifests in various ways, giving rise to distinct sectors within the tourist landscape. Educational tourism, for instance, emphasizes the educational value of cultural sites, emerging as a significant draw for cultural enthusiasts (McGladdery and Lubbe, 2017; Collins-Kreiner and Tueta Sagi, 2011; Issakov et al., 2023b; Zhoya et al., 2024). Equally crucial are the connections between culture and nature across different dimensions. For instance, a cultural site often integrates seamlessly into the habitat of its cultural stewards, becoming intrinsic to the landscape and irreplaceable to them. The natural landscape surrounding a cultural site can greatly enhance its attractiveness to tourists. Stunning natural features, such as mountains, beaches, rivers, and forests, can create a picturesque backdrop for cultural exploration and add to the overall appeal of the site. A new generation of travelers is increasingly motivated by experiential journeys, driven by the desire to witness firsthand the intricate interplay between culture and nature, comprehend their interdependence, and appreciate the beauty of their coexistence (O'Donnell, 2023; Romão et al., 2013; Wei et al., 2020).

Interactive components in tourism manifest in various ways, with one of the most prevalent being the engagement of tourists in the co-creation process – wherein they actively contribute to the formation of their experiences. This collaborative approach enables tourists to derive exciting and meaningful experiences from the services, locales, and cultures they encounter during their journeys (Kastenholz and Gronau, 2020; Ross, 2020; Scott et al., 2010). In cultural tourism, such experiences entail fostering creative interactions between tourists and cultural artifacts, both tangible and intangible. This is achieved through gamification, master classes, storytelling, improvisational activities, theatrical presentations, and quests (Roque, 2022; Ariza-Colpas et al., 2023; Campos et al., 2023).

Numerous ways of engaging tourists and fostering their creativity are directly linked to the continuous development and differentiation of tourist offerings, in other words – the various approaches of interpreting a cultural site as a tourist attraction. Additionally, the organization of cultural events and festivals significantly impacts the attractiveness of cultural sites (Ogutu et al., 2023). By catalyzing the flow of cultural tourists to community gatherings, such events facilitate cultural exchange between tourists and local residents (Io, 2019). Many cultural events are intertwined with traditional celebrations, which themselves become distinct objects of tourist interest. For instance, the grand Nauryz celebrations in Central Asian countries exemplify this phenomenon (Zamani-Farahani, 2013).

Hosting cultural events vitalizes local communities, who serve as the custodians of culture itself. Their active involvement in the tourist process holds significant implications for the preservation, dissemination, and promotion of cultural sites. The opportunity for tourists to engage with local populations, communicate with them, learn from them, and partake in their daily lives serves as a catalyst for tourist flow. Such interactions offer the chance to acquire authentic experiences through collaborative exploration of art, heritage, or the unique ambiance of a place or specific tourist site alongside locals within the community (Ratten et al., 2019; Sarmento and Brito-Henriques, 2013). This phenomenon is also reflected in emerging forms of tourism, such as creative tourism, which pivots on creativity and creation and is gaining traction in numerous cultural tourist destinations worldwide (Lim, 2016; Aktymbayeva et al., 2023). Additionally, the warmth and hospitality of the local community can profoundly influence tourists' perception of cultural attractions and their overall satisfaction. Tourists often seek authentic experiences and value interactions with locals, making their receptions from the community a significant factor.

Tourists' interest in authentic tourism products, coupled with shifts in tourism paradigms towards prioritizing environmentally friendly destinations and products, underscores the evolving landscape of tourism preferences (Girard and Nijkamp, 2009; Tang et al., 2019). Consequently, efforts to promote sustainable tourism and safeguard the environment surrounding cultural heritage sites emerge as another pivotal component of the attractiveness of cultural destinations and individual sites. The tourist infrastructure, comprising a well-developed transport network and accessibility for all categories of visitors, alongside the quality and availability of online information about a cultural site, are foundational elements shaping its tourist appeal. Tourist infrastructure encompasses a comprehensive array of services essential for meeting the diverse needs of visitors during their stay in a destination. Current research underscores that the future trajectory of tourism hinges on substantial investments in infrastructure and its continual modernization, as it stands as a crucial factor driving the development and competitiveness of the tourism sector (Santos et al., 2014). Safety and security considerations are of high importance to tourists, both at the level of a tourist destination and individual sites. Safety serves as a fundamental prerequisite for tourists' positive perception of a destination, influencing the duration of their stay and shaping their overall impression (Kordić et al., 2015; Tasci and Boylu, 2010). Tourism attractiveness comprises a multifaceted synergy of various factors and conditions, collectively ensuring sustained tourist interest and,

Dinara KADYRBEKOVA, Aza YEVLOYEVA, Albina BEIKITOVA, Yerkegul DYUSSEKEYEVA,
Bakyt AKTYMBAYEVA, Adil MOLDAGALIYEV, Yerlan ISSAKOV, Lóránt Dénes DÁVID

consequently, the competitiveness of a tourist destination or specific site. When discussing the cultural significance of these objects, it is crucial to highlight that it primarily encompasses historical, architectural, educational, and aesthetic values, each contributing to the formulation of tourist appeal. Below, we present the findings of the data analysis derived from the survey, reaffirming the intricate nature of the components comprising tourist attractiveness.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The article employs a combination of the questionnaire method and correlation analysis to evaluate the factors contributing to the tourist attractiveness of cultural sites within the Republic of Kazakhstan. This integration of methodologies aims to offer a thorough examination of the research topic. The methodology of this study is a set of sequential steps involved in the research process, starting from defining the problem statement and research questions, followed by conducting a literature review to identify existing knowledge. Then, it progresses to identifying variables and developing a questionnaire, conducting the survey, analyzing the data, and interpreting the results. Finally, it concludes with discussing the findings and drawing conclusions. The flow chart of methodology is presented in Figure 1.
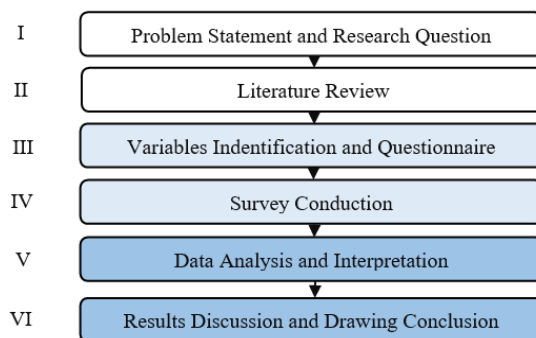

Figure 1. Flow chart of the methodology

The study was carried out in October-November 2023, including all five economic regions of the Republic of Kazakhstan: North, Central, East, West, and South. This extensive geographical coverage ensured the representativeness of the data and improved the study's reliability. Convenience sampling was employed, with participation extended to residents of the country who are active consumers of cultural offerings. The questionnaire consisted of two main parts: the first assessed the importance of certain factors, the second was designed to obtain demographic information (gender, age, region). The questionnaire questions were presented in three languages – Kazakh, Russian, and English.

Initially, respondents were tasked with evaluating the importance of various components contributing to tourist attractiveness. 15 variables were identified, namely historical significance (V1), aesthetic and architectural value (V2), the presence of cultural events, festivals at the heritage site (V3), accessibility, transportation facilities, and overall infrastructure (V4), cultural sites educational value (V5), availability of amenities such as restrooms, information centers, and guided tours (V6), cultural site integration with natural landscapes and scenic beauty (V7), availability of interactive experiences (V8), involvement of the local community in promoting and preserving the cultural heritage (V9), cultural site tourist interpretation (V10), cultural sites elements diversity (V11), accessibility for people with special needs (V12), safety and security at the site (V13), quality and accessibility of online information about cultural site (V14) and efforts to promote sustainable tourism and environmental conservation at the site (V15). The assessments were conducted based on the Likert scale, where respondents rated the significance of factors from 1 to 5. Here, 1 indicated "not important at all", 2 denoted "slightly important", 3 signified "moderately important", 4 represented "very important", and 5 indicated "extremely important". Furthermore, the questionnaire featured an open-ended question inviting respondents to provide additional insights or preferences concerning tourist cultural heritage sites. The survey was facilitated through Google Forms, providing convenient participation and efficient data collection. The sample group encompassed diverse age and gender categories, ensuring a representative cross-section of respondents (Figure 2a, 2b). The Southern regions boasted the highest participation rate, with 1020 respondents, comprising 57.3% of the total sample (Figure 2c).
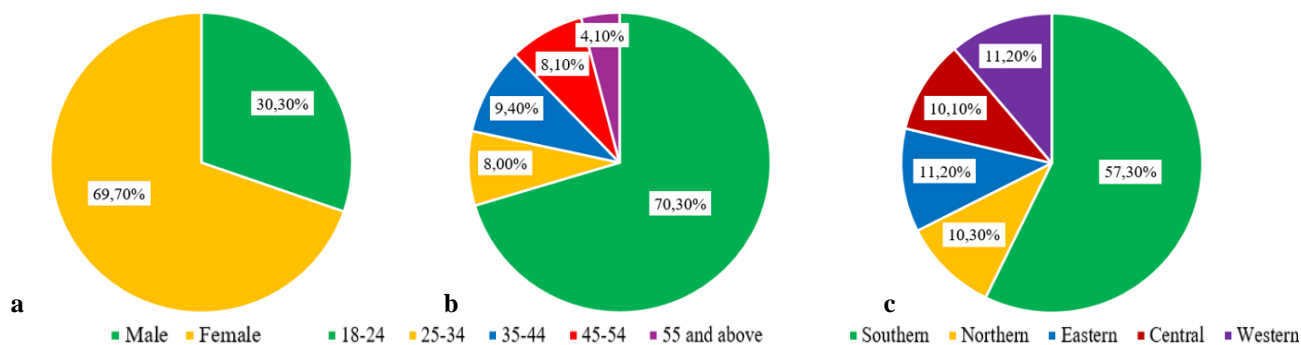

Figure 2. General information about the respondents: a) gender, b) age, c) place of residence

Quantitative data acquired from the survey underwent correlation analysis. This analysis identified the most significant variables contributing to the tourist attractiveness of cultural sites, based on average values, while also tracing correlations between these variables. Statistical processing of the quantitative data was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 29.0.2.0.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As mentioned earlier, the obtained data underwent statistical processing. Primarily, a reliability analysis was conducted, revealing that 1.728 responses (95.9%) were eligible for analysis (Table 1). The obtained Cronbach's Alpha (0.954) indicates the reliability and internal consistency of the collected data (Table 2). The constructive ranking of variables based on their average importance is given below in table 3 with the corresponding standard deviation.

Table 1. Case Processing Summary (Source: authors' data analysis results)

		N	%
Cases	Valid	1728	95.9
	Excluded	73	4.1
	Total	1801	100.0

Table 2. Reliability Statistics (Source: authors' data analysis results)

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.954	.954	15

Table 3. The average value of the importance of the tourist attractiveness variables (Source: authors' data analysis results)

Observed Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Safety and security at the site	4.40	.969
Cultural sites historical significance	4.32	1.009
Accessibility for people with special needs	4.30	.999
Cultural sites aesthetic and architectural value	4.28	1.001
Availability of amenities such as restrooms, information centers, and guided tours	4.28	1.042
Cultural site tourist interpretation	4.25	.975
Cultural sites educational value	4.23	1.012
Quality and accessibility of online information about cultural site	4.23	1.034
Efforts to promote sustainable tourism and environmental conservation at the site	4.23	1.056
Cultural site integration with natural landscapes and scenic beauty	4.21	1.042
Accessibility, transportation facilities, and overall infrastructure	4.20	1.028
Involvement of the local community in promoting and preserving the cultural heritage	4.17	1.036
Cultural sites elements diversity	4.16	.997
Presence of cultural events, festivals at the heritage site	4.08	1.043
Availability of interactive experiences	4.08	1.007

Thus, the most significant components contributing to the tourist attractiveness of cultural sites were safety and security at the site (4.40), the historical significance of the object (4.32), accessibility for people with special needs (4.30), aesthetic and architectural value (4.28), as well as the availability of amenities such as toilets, information centers, and guided tours (4.28). The obtained results support findings from prior studies and can be attributed to the following:

Prioritizing safety and security addresses visitors' fundamental need to feel secure while exploring cultural sites. Moreover, the emphasis on historical significance suggests that many tourists are drawn to locations steeped in rich history and cultural heritage. Accessibility considerations may stem from the increasing promotion of inclusive tourism aimed at individuals with disabilities (Rita and António, 2020).

Perceived value, particularly in terms of aesthetic appeal, architectural significance, and the availability of amenities, profoundly influences visitors' overall impressions. Sites boasting well-maintained aesthetics and comprehensive amenities tend to offer more satisfying experiences, leading to higher levels of visitor satisfaction and positive word-of-mouth recommendations. The presence of facilities such as toilets, information centers, and guided tours reflects the quality of the tourist infrastructure at cultural sites. Well-developed infrastructure often attracts more visitors and garners higher ratings for attractiveness (Mamirkulova et al., 2020).

Cultural sites that effectively promote safety measures, historical significance, accessibility features, architectural beauty, and affordable amenities are likely to receive higher ratings from visitors. Effective marketing and promotion efforts can shape visitors' perceptions and expectations even before they arrive at the site. Engaging the local community in the promotion and preservation of cultural heritage can enhance the visitor experience and bolster perceptions of safety (Issakov et al., 2023c). Visitors tend to feel a stronger sense of trust and connection with cultural sites when they witness active community involvement and leadership. Government and institutional support, particularly initiatives aimed at promoting sustainable tourism and preserving the environment, as well as investments in infrastructure and enhanced accessibility, are poised to elevate ratings on safety, accessibility, and overall attractiveness.

An analysis of the correlation between variables was also conducted. It revealed the highest correlation between accessibility for people with special needs (V12) and safety and security at the site (V13); safety and security at the site

(V13) and the quality and accessibility of online information about the cultural heritage site (V14); the quality and availability of online information about the cultural heritage site (V14) and efforts to promote sustainable tourism and environmental protection at the site (V15) (Table 4).

Table 4. Inter-Item Correlation Matrix (Source: authors' data analysis results)

	V1	V2	V3	V4	V5	V6	V7	V8	V9	V10	V11	V12	V13	V14	V15
V1	1.000	.695	.550	.526	.571	.527	.567	.462	.556	.535	.535	.542	.564	.544	.582
V2	.695	1.000	.626	.598	.585	.551	.609	.522	.595	.564	.551	.555	.575	.570	.596
V3	.550	.626	1.000	.583	.581	.501	.548	.543	.545	.547	.538	.505	.498	.523	.536
V4	.526	.598	.583	1.000	.598	.597	.584	.481	.560	.547	.556	.584	.579	.580	.567
V5	.571	.585	.581	.598	1.000	.569	.589	.501	.599	.553	.567	.565	.573	.557	.583
V6	.527	.551	.501	.597	.569	1.000	.671	.540	.598	.572	.558	.619	.647	.592	.627
V7	.567	.609	.548	.584	.589	.671	1.000	.605	.641	.601	.595	.586	.591	.589	.637
V8	.462	.522	.543	.481	.501	.540	.605	1.000	.623	.544	.543	.487	.484	.506	.516
V9	.556	.595	.545	.560	.599	.598	.641	.623	1.000	.672	.615	.609	.605	.612	.656
V10	.535	.564	.547	.547	.553	.572	.601	.544	.672	1.000	.651	.610	.595	.588	.605
V11	.535	.551	.538	.556	.567	.558	.595	.543	.615	.651	1.000	.656	.606	.580	.592
V12	.542	.555	.505	.584	.565	.619	.586	.487	.609	.610	.656	1.000	.728	.636	.636
V13	.564	.575	.498	.579	.573	.647	.591	.484	.605	.595	.606	.728	1.000	.701	.682
V14	.544	.570	.523	.580	.557	.592	.589	.506	.612	.588	.580	.636	.701	1.000	.706
V15	.582	.596	.536	.567	.583	.627	.637	.516	.656	.605	.592	.636	.682	.706	1.000

The observed correlations provide valuable insights into the interrelationships among factors influencing the attractiveness of cultural sites. First, there is a high correlation (.728) between accessibility for people with special needs (V12) and safety and security at the site (V13). Tourist demand has always been sensitive to security concerns, but in today's world, these considerations have taken on even greater importance. This is explained by the fact that people are concerned about the situation in the world as a whole, which is complicated by wars, political conflicts, viruses, and natural disasters. In such times, people, when choosing a tourist product, first of all want to be sure of their safety and security. Also, there's a heightened awareness of human rights, particularly the right to movement, leisure, and travel. Consequently, there's a growing emphasis on ensuring that recreational opportunities are accessible to all. This explains the correlation between the accessibility for people with special needs (V12) and safety and security at the site (V13). The host communities need to be aware of the importance of ensuring not only physical accessibility, but also a sense of safety at the destination or at a specific site. Installing amenities like ramps, tactile paths, and accessible facilities, coupled with attentive staff capable of delivering quality services, can enhance the appeal of a site and, by extension, the destination itself, making it more attractive to tourists.

Moreover, safety and security at the site (V13) have high correlation (,701) with and the quality and accessibility of online information about the cultural heritage site (V14). This relationship confirms the fact of how the travelers are convinced of the safety of the place/destination. Total digitalization has provided a person with the freedom in finding the necessary information about products and services, places and countries, therefore, the abundance of the information, its accuracy, reliability and relevance are important for a person. A lack of information can breed uncertainty and insecurity. Recognizing this, leading tourism suppliers understand the importance of communication with the consumer, and use the best and most convenient channels for this, in particular digital ones. Thus, the most attractive tourist sites are those that provide tourists with the accurate, up-to-date, and easily accessible information, including safety measures, emergency procedures, and visitor guidelines. The quality and accessibility of online information about the cultural heritage site (V14), in turn, correlates with the efforts to promote sustainable tourism and environmental protection at the site (V15).

This correlation (.706) is reasonable in the light of one of the latest tendencies, when the most appealing products and destinations are green ones. It means that tourists searching information first ensure their safety and security and then turn their attention to the environmental impact of the cultural site or destination. This concern stems from the sustainability issues. The most of the tourism generator countries are those with this new green mindset, when good physical and mental health is directly linked to the pristine nature, conscious consumption, good waste management. In other words, travelers are willing to see the engagement of the site or destination regarding environmental conservation initiatives. Comprehensive information about sustainability practices and environmental conservation efforts demonstrates how responsible and environmentally conscious cultural tourism sites are. It not only makes them more attractive to tourists, but also encouraging visitors to support and participate in conservation efforts.

Additionally, according to Table 4, a moderate correlation was observed between several variables. In particular, historical significance (V1) correlates with the aesthetic and architectural value of the object (V2) (.695). Historical significance fills attractive aesthetic objects with life and significance. Each pattern on the walls of architectural facade s, each contour carries its own meaning. Culture serves as a bridge between the past and the present, imbuing any tourism object with profound significance. Cultural sites are popular among tourists, maintaining a stable leading position in the tourist offer, precisely because the past and present meet in them, where narratives come alive, enriching these sites with meanings that resonate deeply with visitors. Next, cultural site integration with the natural landscape and scenic beauty (V7) correlates moderately (.641) with the involvement of the local community in promoting and preserving cultural heritage (V9). Nature is an inseparable backdrop of every tourism activity.

Somehow, nature surrounds people in the most of their travels and along with culture stands as one of the ultimate resources shaping tourism attractiveness in general. Cultural narratives are often woven within the tapestry of the surrounding landscape which makes it mysterious and intriguing. However, there is another missing element – people, representing host communities, the primary custodians of a particular culture. Through their involvement in tourism practices they promote and preserve cultural heritage. Thus, cultural sites seamlessly integrated with their natural environment may benefit from greater community engagement and stewardship, which as a result enhance visitors' experiences and perceptions of authenticity. Furthermore, cultural site integration with the natural landscape and scenic beauty (V7) correlates with availability of amenities such as toilets, information centers, and guided tours (V6) (.671). Tourists value natural beauty when visiting cultural sites but they also seek convenience. Tourism infrastructure is transformed because of the demand from the conscious travelers who seek convenience built into the tourism product in a natural manner. Consequently, well-equipped amenities contribute to visitor comfort and satisfaction, while integration with the natural landscape enhances the site's ambiance and attractiveness.

Cultural site tourist interpretation (V10) has moderate correlation with the involvement of the local community in the promotion and preservation of cultural heritage (V9) (.672) and cultural sites elements diversity (V11) (.651). These relationships once again highlight the importance of enriching a cultural tourism product with a diverse array of elements and ways of interpretation aimed at unveiling culture and enhancing tourists' experiences and impressions. In this regard, the involvement of the local community, inherently custodians themselves, proves to be invaluable, particularly in cultural tourism offerings. Local communities often play a crucial role in developing interpretive programs and guiding visitor experiences, enriching tourists' understanding and appreciation of the site's cultural significance. Lastly, the efforts to promote sustainable tourism and environmental conservation at the site (V15) correlate with cultural site integration with the natural landscape and scenic beauty (V7) (.637) and involvement of the local community in promoting and preserving cultural heritage (V9) (.656). The first correlation raises from the basic idea of sustainability in tourism, encouraging natural and cultural resources preservation for the future generations. Environmental conservation is one of the most significant sustainability issues.

The efforts to promote sustainable practices, such as minimizing environmental impact and preserving natural habitats, reflect how cultural sites are designed and managed within their natural landscapes. Sites that prioritize environmental conservation and sustainability principles are highly sought after, particularly those seamlessly integrated into their surrounding landscapes. The correlation between involvement of the local community in promoting and preserving cultural heritage (V9) and efforts to promote sustainable tourism and environmental conservation at the site (V15) suggests that community involvement often aligns with initiatives to promote sustainable tourism and environmental conservation. Engagement of local communities often advocate for sustainable practices and participation in conservation efforts, contributing to broader sustainability objectives for cultural tourism destinations.

It is also noteworthy to consider the responses to the final open-ended question in the questionnaire: "Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your preferences for cultural heritage tourism sites?" Respondents who chose to share their insights provided 103 comments, covering a range of topics including infrastructure development, diversity of the tourist product, education of future generations, regional development, and the cultural enrichment of individuals. Respondents highlighted the importance of basic tourist infrastructure emphasizing its vital components – safety, cleanliness, and accessibility of cultural facilities. These aspects were deemed essential for ensuring a positive and comfortable visitor experience. Furthermore, respondents expressed a desire for diverse and enriching experiences, including access to high-quality and reasonably priced tours, as well as comprehensive information about the facilities available at cultural sites. This reflects a demand for a range of options to cater to different interests and preferences. Environmental stewardship, including waste collection and recycling in tourist areas, was also mentioned. Many of the environmental concerns highlighted in respondents' comments were advocating for sustainable practices such as waste collection and recycling in tourist areas. This demonstrates a growing awareness of the importance of environmental conservation and an aspiration for cultural tourism to minimize its ecological footprint.

Many respondents emphasized the role of cultural heritage sites in driving regional development, particularly in rural areas. The potential for these sites can be used to stimulate economic growth, create employment opportunities. However, it's crucial to approach their utilization with care, ensuring a deep understanding of the importance of preserving local traditions and identities. Besides, cultural sites are seen as valuable assets for fostering cultural awareness and appreciation, with visitors recognizing the inherent value of preserving national heritage and promoting cultural identity. This underscores the role of cultural tourism in safeguarding cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, and promoting cultural diversity. Additionally, respondents emphasized the educational value of cultural sites in shaping the worldview of future generations. Many advocated for free and widespread access to cultural excursions for schoolchildren and students, recognizing the importance of instilling a sense of cultural heritage and identity from a young age.

Therefore, the assessments provided by the respondents, coupled with their insightful comments, have enabled discovery of the most crucial factors and facets influencing the attractiveness of cultural sites to tourists. Through this comprehensive examination, several key themes have emerged, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of cultural tourism and the diverse preferences and expectations of visitors. The conclusions drawn from the assessments and comments of the respondents amplify the intricate interplay of various factors in shaping the attractiveness of cultural sites for tourists. By recognizing and addressing these factors, stakeholders in the cultural tourism sector can better cater to the diverse needs and expectations of visitors, ensuring the continued vitality and sustainability of cultural heritage destinations.

Dinara KADYRBEKOVA, Aza YEVLOYEVA, Albina BEIKITOVA, Yerkegul DYUSSEKEYEVA,
Bakyt AKTYMBAYEVA, Adil MOLDAGALIYEV, Yerlan ISSAKOV, Lóránt Dénes DÁVID

CONCLUSION

Numerous components contribute to the tourist attractiveness of cultural sites, each carrying varying degrees of significance depending on diverse conditions, including the preferences of tourists. Nevertheless, the primary findings of the study underscore the following:

- safety and security at the facility emerge as paramount factors in attracting tourists. Visitors seek comfort and reassurance while exploring cultural sites, particularly amidst the backdrop of spreading viruses, conflicts, and political instability.

- the historical significance of the object plays a significant role, adding depth and intrigue to its allure. Tourists are inherently drawn to locations steeped in rich history, adorned with ancient artifacts, and intertwined with narratives from the past.

- accessibility for individuals with special needs, particularly physical accessibility – such as ramps, elevators, Braille signage, and audio guides – emerges as a crucial consideration.

- aesthetic and architectural value are also important, with tourists gravitating towards visually appealing objects characterized by unique architecture, well-preserved structures, and picturesque landscapes.

- the availability of facilities such as toilets, information centers, and guided tours significantly contributes to visitor satisfaction, enhancing the overall convenience and enjoyment of the visit.

The results from both the structured survey and open comments offer valuable insights into the diverse preferences of tourists regarding cultural heritage. The emphasis on safety, cleanliness, and accessibility underscores the pivotal role of tourism infrastructure in shaping visitor experiences. Furthermore, the demand for a variety of offerings, including excursions and informational resources, underscores the importance of developing cultural facilities that cater to a wide array of interests and preferences. The recurring theme of environmental stewardship reflects visitors' increasing awareness of the importance of sustainable tourism practices. Initiatives such as waste management and recycling signify a concerted effort to minimize the environmental footprint of cultural tourism. Additionally, the recognition of cultural heritage sites as catalysts for regional development underscores their potential to stimulate economic growth, preserve local traditions, and bolster community resilience, particularly in rural areas. Moreover, comments highlighting the role of cultural sites in promoting cultural awareness, value, and identity underscore the profound significance of these sites as custodians of national heritage and identity. Visitors acknowledge the importance of safeguarding cultural heritage and advocate for initiatives that celebrate cultural diversity and heritage preservation. Lastly, the emphasis on the educational value of cultural tourism for future generations underscores the enduring impact of these experiences on shaping individuals' worldviews and fostering a deeper understanding of cultural heritage and identity.

In light of these findings, it is evident that cultural heritage tourism holds immense potential not only for providing enriching and memorable visitor experiences but also for achieving broader societal objectives such as environmental sustainability, economic development, and cultural preservation. Moving forward, it is imperative for stakeholders in the cultural tourism sector to heed and incorporate these preferences into their strategies and initiatives to ensure the continued success and sustainability of cultural heritage tourism destinations. By doing so, we can ensure that cultural heritage sites remain sources of inspiration, education, and cultural exchange for generations to come.

Thus, while cultural significance forms an integral condition for the tourist attractiveness of objects, it is the "tourist" conditions that predominantly influence the degree of appeal for visitors. Therefore, a well-established tourist infrastructure and a welcoming, amiable atmosphere should remain the primary indicators of success for tourist facilities in drawing visitors. Additionally, it is crucial to maintain a balance between the preservation of cultural sites and their accessibility. Sustainable development of cultural sites, appreciated by a broad spectrum of visitors, necessitates this equilibrium. Simultaneously, it's crucial to acknowledge that these conditions don't materialize in isolation.

They stem from the direction of tourist flows, drawn by specific attractions. Without such allure, neither infrastructure nor other amenities can be effectively developed. Hence, the process by which cultural objects evolve into tourist resources raises pertinent questions for further investigation, paving the way for new research to explore the underlying factors contributing to the formation of tourist cultural resources.

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