

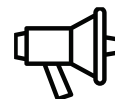
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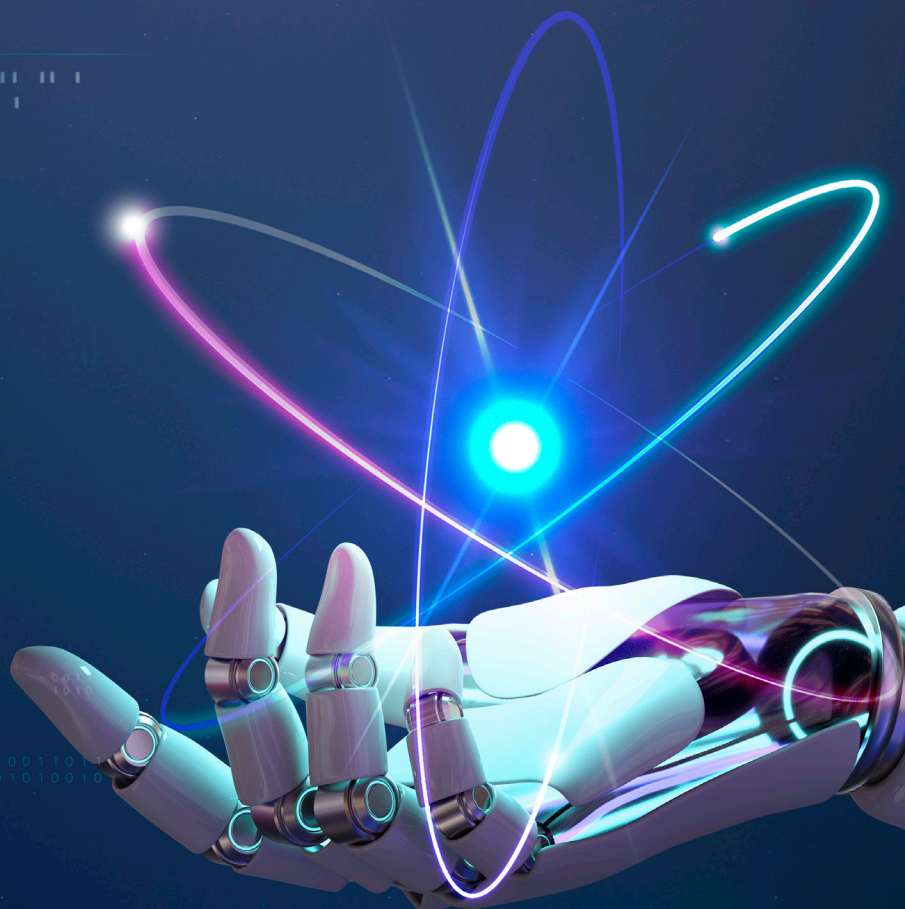
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Abstract. This article reports the results of an original expert survey (N = 53 respondents) designed to assess meso-level (intra-national, regional) tourism competitiveness within Uzbekistan. The survey instrument asked respondents to (1) rate the relative importance of four proposed components of a regional tourism competitiveness index, and (2) rate the comparative attractiveness of Uzbekistan's fourteen administrative regions across seven distinct tourism-type dimensions — ecological, historical-cultural, pilgrimage, agritourism, ethnographic, mountain-extreme, and recreational tourism — together with separate ratings of each region's attractiveness as a destination for domestic and for inbound (international) tourists. All ratings were collected on a five-point Likert scale. The derived weights for the four meso-level components cluster narrowly between 0.243 and 0.254, indicating that experts regard tourism resource potential, regional attractiveness, demand stability, and infrastructure development as comparably important rather than sharply differentiated. The composite ranking across the seven tourism-type dimensions places Samarkand region first (composite mean 4.40 of 5), followed by Tashkent region (3.98) and Qashqadarya region (3.89), while the Republic of Karakalpakstan and Syrdarya region occupy the lowest two positions (3.17 each). A comparative analysis of dimension-level scores further reveals a structural distinction between 'generalist' regions that score consistently across all seven dimensions (notably Samarkand and Tashkent region) and 'specialist' regions whose competitiveness is concentrated in a narrow set of dimensions — Bukhara and Khorezm regions rank among the top three nationally in historical-cultural and pilgrimage tourism alone, despite ranking only sixth and seventh on the seven-dimension composite. A further comparison of domestic versus inbound destination-attractiveness ratings shows that the regions hosting Uzbekistan's UNESCO World Heritage corridor (Samarkand, Bukhara, Khorezm) and the capital (Tashkent city) are rated relatively more attractive to foreign visitors than to domestic tourists, whereas regions with stronger nature-, mountain-, and agritourism profiles are rated relatively more attractive to the domestic market. These regional findings are also discussed in relation to a companion macro-level (national) survey conducted by the author, in which Uzbekistan's pilgrimage tourism attractiveness was found to rank third of thirteen countries surveyed — the present study identifies Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khorezm as the specific regional sources of that national-level strength.

Keywords: meso-level competitiveness, regional tourism, expert survey, Likert scale, indicator weighting, destination attractiveness, tourism specialization, Uzbekistan.

Аннотация. В данной статье представлены результаты оригинального экспертного опроса (N = 53 респондента), проведенного для оценки мезоуровневой (внутринациональной, региональной) туристской конкурентоспособности в Узбекистане. Анкета опроса предусматривала оценку респондентами: (1) относительной значимости четырех предложенных компонентов индекса региональной туристской конкурентоспособности и (2) сравнительной привлекательности четырнадцати административных регионов Узбекистана по семи отдельным видам туризма — экологическому, историко-культурному, паломническому, агротуризму, этнографическому, горно-экстремальному и рекреационному туризму, а также отдельную оценку привлекательности каждого региона как направления для внутренних и въездных (международных) туристов. Все оценки были собраны по пятибалльной шкале Лайкерта. Полученные веса четырех мезоуровневых компонентов находятся в узком диапазоне от 0,243 до 0,254, что указывает на то, что эксперты рассматривают туристско-ресурсный потенциал, региональную привлекательность, устойчивость спроса и развитие инфраструктуры как сопоставимые по значимости компоненты, а не как резко дифференцированные факторы. Сводный рейтинг по семи туристским направлениям ставит Самаркандскую область на первое место (среднее значение 4,40 из 5), за ней следуют Ташкентская область (3,98) и Кашкадарьинская область (3,89), тогда как Республика Каракалпакстан и Сырдарьинская область занимают две последние позиции (по 3,17). Сравнительный

анализ показателей по отдельным направлениям также выявляет структурное различие между «универсальными» регионами, демонстрирующими стабильные результаты по всем семи направлениям (особенно Самаркандская и Ташкентская области), и «специализированными» регионами, конкурентоспособность которых сосредоточена в узком наборе направлений. Так, Бухарская и Хорезмская области входят в тройку лидеров по историко-культурному и паломническому туризму, несмотря на то что в сводном рейтинге по семи направлениям занимают лишь шестое и седьмое места. Дополнительное сравнение оценок привлекательности регионов для внутренних и въездных туристов показывает, что регионы, входящие в коридор объектов Всемирного наследия ЮНЕСКО в Узбекистане (Самарканд, Бухара, Хорезм), а также столица (город Ташкент), оцениваются как относительно более привлекательные для иностранных посетителей, чем для внутренних туристов. В то же время регионы с более выраженным природным, горным и агротуристским профилем оцениваются как относительно более привлекательные для внутреннего рынка. Полученные региональные результаты также рассматриваются в связи с сопутствующим макроуровневым (национальным) опросом, проведенным автором, в котором привлекательность паломнического туризма Узбекистана заняла третье место среди тринадцати исследованных стран. Настоящее исследование определяет Самарканд, Бухару и Хорезм как конкретные региональные источники данной национальной конкурентной позиции.

Ключевые слова: мезоуровневая конкурентоспособность, региональный туризм, экспертный опрос, шкала Лайкерта, взвешивание индикаторов, привлекательность дестинации, туристская специализация, Узбекистан.

INTRODUCTION

National-level tourism competitiveness indices, including the World Economic Forum's Travel & Tourism Development Index (TTDI), provide a single aggregate score for an entire country and are therefore poorly suited to identifying which sub-national regions actually generate a country's tourism competitiveness and which show comparatively lower performance. This limitation is particularly consequential for geographically and culturally heterogeneous countries such as Uzbekistan, where a small number of regions — most visibly Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khorezm, the three regions hosting the bulk of the country's UNESCO World Heritage sites — are widely assumed to make a relatively strong contribution to the national tourism product, while the remaining eleven regions have been less frequently examined in empirical tourism competitiveness studies. Meso-level (regional, intra-national) competitiveness assessment is the natural analytical response to this gap: it disaggregates the national tourism system into its constituent administrative units and allows each to be benchmarked against the others using a common set of indicators and a common respondent pool.

This article addresses that gap with primary data from an original expert survey of 53 respondents, who rated (a) the relative importance of four indicators proposed for inclusion in an integral meso-level tourism competitiveness index, and (b) the comparative attractiveness of Uzbekistan's fourteen administrative regions (the Republic of Karakalpakstan, eleven provinces (*viloyatlar*), and the city of Tashkent) across seven distinct tourism-type dimensions, together with separate domestic- and inbound-market attractiveness ratings for each region. The aim of the study is to derive expert-validated weight coefficients for the meso-level competitiveness model and to produce an empirically grounded, multi-dimensional ranking of Uzbekistan's regions that can both inform regional tourism policy and be directly compared with the national-level findings of a companion macro-level survey conducted by the same author using an equivalent methodology.

The specific objectives of this study are: (1) to compute descriptive statistics and normalized importance weights for the four surveyed meso-level competitiveness indicators; (2) to compute comparative attractiveness scores, composite rankings, and dimension-level rankings for all fourteen regions across seven tourism-type dimensions; (3) to compare regions' domestic-market and inbound (international)-market attractiveness ratings and to identify systematic differences between the two; (4) to distinguish, on the basis of the resulting data, between regions whose competitiveness is broadly distributed across dimensions ('generalists') and regions whose competitiveness is concentrated in one or two dimensions ('specialists'); and (5) to relate these regional findings to the national-level (macro) survey results reported in the author's companion study, in particular regarding the source of Uzbekistan's comparatively strong national pilgrimage-tourism position. The remainder of the article is organized as follows: Section 2 reviews the theoretical literature on regional tourism competitiveness, destination clustering, and survey-based weighting methods; Section 3 describes the survey instrument, sample, and analytical procedure; Section 4 presents and discusses the results; and Section 5 concludes with policy recommendations and directions for further research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical foundation for disaggregating national tourism competitiveness into a regional (meso) level rests on a long tradition in tourism geography and regional development theory. Gunn (1988) introduced the concept of the tourism destination zone as the appropriate spatial unit of analysis below the national level,

arguing that resource endowment, attraction clusters, and access infrastructure vary too sharply within most countries for a single national assessment to be analytically meaningful. Pearce (1989) extended this argument within a regional-geography framework, showing that tourism development typically proceeds unevenly across a country's regions, concentrated initially around a small number of 'growth poles' before diffusing — if at all — to peripheral areas. Leiper's (1990) tourism systems model formalized the idea that a destination region functions as a bounded subsystem with its own generating, transit, and destination characteristics, providing further conceptual justification for treating Uzbekistan's fourteen regions as distinct, separately measurable competitive units rather than as undifferentiated parts of a single national product.

Porter's (1990) diamond model of national competitive advantage, and its subsequent elaboration into cluster theory (Porter, 1998), is equally applicable below the national level: tourism clusters — geographically concentrated groups of complementary attractions, accommodation, transport, and service firms — typically form around specific resource endowments, producing exactly the kind of regional asymmetry this study sets out to measure empirically. Krugman's (1994) critique of national 'competitiveness' as an analytically loose concept, more properly applied to firms or to specific economic activities than to entire economies, lends additional support to a regional (rather than purely national) unit of analysis for tourism: a region's tourism cluster competes for visitors in a manner closer to firm-level competition than an entire national economy does. Ritchie and Crouch's (1999, 2003) destination competitiveness model and Dwyer and Kim's (2003) integrated model both identify resource endowment, supporting infrastructure, and destination management capacity as core determinants of competitiveness — constructs that this study operationalizes at the regional level through the indicators of tourism resource potential, infrastructure development, demand stability, and overall regional attractiveness.

Butler's (1980) tourist area life cycle (TALC) model provides a complementary temporal perspective, suggesting that individual destination regions move through distinct stages of exploration, development, consolidation, and (potentially) stagnation or rejuvenation, often at different paces within the same country; this implies that a cross-sectional regional comparison such as the present study captures regions at different points along their own life cycles rather than a single, uniform national trajectory. Murphy's (1985) community-based approach to tourism planning and Inskeep's (1991) integrated and sustainable regional tourism planning framework both emphasize that competitiveness at the regional level depends as much on local governance, community participation, and planning capacity as on raw resource endowment — a point of direct relevance to the 'regional attractiveness' and 'infrastructure development' indicators surveyed in this study. Hall (2008) further argues that regional tourism policy operates within a multi-level governance structure in which national strategy, regional administration, and local stakeholders interact, often unevenly, to produce the kind of regional competitiveness differentials this survey is designed to detect and quantify.

On the methodological side, expert-elicitation approaches to indicator weighting are well established. Saaty's (1980) Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) formalized the derivation of relative importance weights from structured pairwise expert comparisons; the simpler procedure used in this study — converting mean Likert-scale (Likert, 1932) importance ratings into normalized weights that sum to unity — is a more easily administered alternative suited to larger, less specialized respondent pools, and is the same procedure applied in the author's companion macro-level survey, allowing the two studies' weighting structures to be directly compared. Survey-based comparative destination-attractiveness assessment draws on the tourist-satisfaction and destination-image literature, including Vavra (1992) and Pizam and Milman (1993), whose expectancy-disconfirmation framework for destination quality underlies the present study's decision to disaggregate regional attractiveness into multiple, separately rated tourism-type dimensions rather than collecting a single undifferentiated attractiveness score per region. Finally, the World Economic Forum's Travel & Tourism Development Index (WEF, 2024) and Uzbekistan's national 'Tourism-2040' development strategy together provide the policy and macro-level benchmarking context against which the present meso-level findings are interpreted in Section 4.4, while the author's own companion macro-level survey (N = 117) supplies a directly comparable national-level dataset collected using an equivalent instrument and analytical procedure, enabling the cross-level comparison undertaken in Section 4.5 of this article.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data were collected via a structured online questionnaire completed by 53 respondents (regional tourism-industry practitioners, academics, and public-sector officials). The instrument comprised two parts. Part 1 asked respondents to rate the relative significance of four indicators proposed for inclusion in an integral meso-level tourism competitiveness index — stability of tourist demand, development of tourism infrastructure, tourism resources potential, and the region's general attractiveness for tourists — on a five-point scale (1 = low importance, 5 = high importance). Part 2 asked respondents to rate all fourteen of Uzbekistan's administrative regions (the Republic of Karakalpakstan; Andijan, Bukhara, Jizzakh, Navoiy, Namangan, Samarkand, Syrdarya, Surkhandarya, Fergana, Qashqadarya, and Khorezm provinces; Tashkent province; and the city of Tashkent) on the

same five-point scale across seven separate tourism-type dimensions — ecological, historical-cultural, pilgrimage, agritourism, ethnographic, mountain-extreme, and recreational tourism — and, in two further items, on the region's attractiveness specifically as a destination for domestic tourists and, separately, for inbound (foreign) tourists.

One data-coverage feature of the instrument should be noted explicitly. The ecological-tourism item, which appeared earliest in the questionnaire, lists thirteen of the fourteen regions, omitting Namangan province; all eight subsequent items (historical-cultural through inbound destination attractiveness) list all fourteen regions. This asymmetry is treated in the present analysis as a feature of the original survey instrument rather than as missing data to be imputed: ecological-tourism results are reported and ranked across the thirteen regions for which data exist, while all other dimensions, the seven-dimension composite restricted to the six dimensions other than ecological tourism where relevant, and the domestic/inbound comparison are reported across the full set of fourteen regions. All 53 respondents provided complete ratings for every item analyzed ($n = 53$ for each indicator and each region–dimension pair, except the ecological-tourism item, $n = 53$ across thirteen regions).

For Part 1, the mean and population standard deviation were computed for each of the four indicators, and a normalized weight coefficient was derived for each as its mean score divided by the sum of all four mean scores, so that the four weights sum to unity — the identical procedure used in the author's companion macro-level survey. For Part 2, the mean attractiveness score was computed for each region within each of the seven tourism-type dimensions; a composite competitiveness score was then calculated for each region as the unweighted mean of its seven dimension-level scores (using the thirteen-region ecological-tourism value where available, and the six remaining dimensions for Namangan), and regions were ranked by this composite score. Separately, the mean domestic- and inbound-destination-attractiveness scores were computed and compared for each region, and the gap between the two (inbound mean minus domestic mean) was calculated as an indicator of a region's relative orientation toward the international versus the domestic tourism market. To characterize regions as 'generalist' or 'specialist', the dispersion of each region's seven dimension-level scores around its own composite mean was inspected qualitatively, following the approach used to identify destination specialization patterns in the comparative case-study literature (see Section 2). Limitations of the dataset include its cross-sectional, single-wave design, the absence of respondent-level demographic or sectoral background variables that would permit subgroup analysis, and the noted thirteen- versus fourteen-region asymmetry in the ecological-tourism item; these limitations are addressed further in the concluding section.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1. Weighting of meso-level competitiveness indicators

Table 1

Importance ratings and derived weights of meso-level competitiveness indicators ($N = 53$)¹

Meso-level indicator	Mean (1–5)	SD	Rank	Normalized weight
Tourism resource potential	4.13	0.87	1	0.254
Regional attractiveness for tourists	4.13	0.97	1	0.254
Stability of tourist demand	4.08	0.99	3	0.250
Development of tourism infrastructure	3.96	1.10	4	0.243

As Table 1 shows, the four meso-level indicators were rated with a remarkably narrow range of importance: mean scores run from 3.96 (infrastructure development) to 4.13 (resource potential and regional attractiveness, which are statistically indistinguishable at this precision), yielding normalized weights clustering between 0.243 and 0.254. Tourism resource potential and the region's general attractiveness for tourists were rated jointly highest — resource potential carries the lower standard deviation (0.87 versus 0.97), indicating somewhat greater consensus among respondents on its importance — while infrastructure development, though still rated above the scale midpoint by a comfortable margin, was rated marginally least important of the four. This near-uniform weighting profile closely mirrors the equally flat structure obtained for the six macro-level indicators in the author's companion national survey (normalized weights there ranging from 0.162 to 0.173 across six indicators), reinforcing the conclusion that respondents at both the national and regional level resist assigning sharply differentiated importance to individual competitiveness components, and that future index-construction work at either level should treat near-equal weighting as an empirically defensible default rather than imposing pronounced a priori differentiation.

4.2. Composite ranking of regions across seven tourism-type dimensions

¹ Source: computed by the author from primary survey data ($N = 53$).

Table 2

Composite tourism attractiveness of Uzbekistan's regions across seven tourism-type dimensions (N = 53, mean scores 1–5)²

Rank	Region	Composite score (1–5)	
1	Samarkand region	4.40	
2	Tashkent region	3.98	
3	Qashqadarya region	3.89	
4	Fergana region	3.86	
5	Surkhandarya region	3.82	
6	Bukhara region	3.80	
7	Khorezm region	3.80	
8	Jizzakh region	3.79	
9	Namangan region	3.71	
10	Tashkent city	3.60	
11	Andijan region	3.60	
12	Navoiy region	3.34	
13	Syrdarya region	3.17	
14	Republic of Karakalpakstan	3.17	

Samarkand region occupies the top position by a clear margin, with a composite score of 4.40 — roughly four-tenths of a point above the second-ranked Tashkent region (3.98) and more than a full point above the lowest-ranked regions. Qashqadarya (3.89), Fergana (3.86), and Surkhandarya (3.82) occupy positions three through five, while Bukhara and Khorezm regions are statistically tied at sixth and seventh places (3.804 and 3.804 respectively, to three decimal places). The Republic of Karakalpakstan and Syrdarya region occupy the two lowest positions (3.17 each), roughly 1.2 points below Samarkand on the same five-point scale. Two results merit particular attention. First, Bukhara and Khorezm — together with Samarkand, the three regions most closely associated internationally with Uzbekistan's Silk Road heritage brand — do not occupy the top tier of the seven-dimension composite ranking; this apparent paradox is addressed directly in Section 4.3. Second, several mid-sized provinces not typically foregrounded in Uzbekistan's tourism marketing — Qashqadarya, Fergana, and Surkhandarya — rank above Bukhara and Khorezm on this broader, seven-dimension measure, indicating a more diversified base of regional tourism competitiveness than a focus on the three best-known heritage destinations alone would suggest.

4.3. Generalist versus specialist regional competitiveness profiles

To examine why Bukhara and Khorezm regions rank only sixth and seventh on the composite measure despite their international heritage reputation, Table 3 presents the dimension-level scores of the seven highest-composite-ranked regions, together with Khorezm, the eighth-place region by Table 2's broader logic but a region of direct comparative interest here.

Table 3

Dimension-level attractiveness scores for seven leading regions (N = 53, mean scores 1–5)³

Region	Ecologi-cal	Hist.-cultural	Pilgri-mage	Agritou-rism	Ethno-graphic	Mountain-extreme	Recrea-tional
Samarkand	4.28	4.81	4.66	4.08	4.51	4.23	4.26
Tashkent region	4.08	3.74	3.70	4.04	3.87	4.32	4.13
Qashqadarya	3.83	3.72	3.57	3.87	4.08	4.28	3.87
Fergana	3.85	3.53	3.55	3.90	4.00	4.08	4.13
Surkhandarya	3.79	3.64	3.49	3.68	4.15	4.09	3.89
Bukhara	3.53	4.51	4.47	3.44	4.25	2.81	3.62
Khorezm	3.57	4.57	4.21	3.38	4.34	3.08	3.49

Table 3 shows a clear structural distinction between two competitiveness profiles. Samarkand and Tashkent region behave as 'generalists': their seven dimension scores are tightly clustered around their composite means (Samarkand's scores range from 4.08 to 4.81, a spread of 0.73; Tashkent region's range from 3.70 to 4.32, a spread of 0.62), indicating broadly distributed competitiveness rather than dependence on one or two strong dimensions.

² Source: computed by the author from primary survey data (N = 53).

³ Source: computed by the author from primary survey data (N = 53). Bold values denote scores of 4.40 or higher.

Bukhara and Khorezm, by contrast, behave as ‘specialists’: both regions post their two highest national-level scores in this entire study in historical-cultural tourism (4.51 and 4.57 respectively) and pilgrimage tourism (4.47 and 4.21), each ranking among the top three of all fourteen regions on these two dimensions, yet both regions post their lowest scores of any region in the sample in mountain-extreme tourism (2.81 and 3.08, the lowest and third-lowest national values for that dimension) and below-median scores in agritourism. The wide internal spread of these two regions’ profiles — Bukhara’s scores range from 2.81 to 4.51 (a spread of 1.70), while Khorezm’s scores range from 3.08 to 4.57 (a spread of 1.49) — is more than double the spread observed for Samarkand and Tashkent region, and is the direct statistical signature of specialization: high competitiveness concentrated narrowly in heritage- and pilgrimage-related dimensions, offset by markedly weaker positions in nature- and adventure-based dimensions for which these regions’ predominantly arid, low-relief topography offers comparatively little resource base.

This distinction has a direct strategic implication that mirrors Porter’s (1990, 1998) observation that competitive advantage is typically built on focused specialization rather than uniform strength across all possible dimensions of competition. Bukhara and Khorezm’s comparatively low composite rank in Table 2 is therefore not evidence of weak overall competitiveness so much as an artifact of averaging a genuinely narrow, deep specialization together with dimensions in which these regions have relatively limited potential. A composite index that weights all seven dimensions equally systematically understates the competitiveness of focused specialist regions relative to generalist regions — a methodological caution directly relevant to how regional tourism competitiveness indices, including any future refinement of the author’s own meso-level (MTRI) model, should be constructed and interpreted; dimension-specific rankings, not only the aggregate composite, should be reported alongside one another, exactly as Table 2 and Table 3 are presented jointly here.

4.4. Domestic versus inbound destination-attractiveness comparison

Table 4

Domestic- versus inbound-market destination attractiveness by region, sorted by gap (N = 53, mean scores 1–5)⁴

Region	Domestic mean	Inbound mean	Gap (inbound – domestic)
Samarkand region	4.43	4.74	+0.30
Bukhara region	4.25	4.53	+0.28
Syrdarya region	2.93	3.21	+0.28
Republic of Karakalpakstan	3.23	3.42	+0.19
Khorezm region	4.38	4.47	+0.09
Tashkent city	4.34	4.40	+0.06
Surkhandarya region	3.91	3.85	–0.06
Fergana region	3.79	3.72	–0.08
Navoiy region	3.45	3.36	–0.09
Qashqadarya region	4.04	3.94	–0.09
Tashkent region	4.21	4.04	–0.17
Jizzakh region	3.96	3.79	–0.17
Andijan region	3.51	3.34	–0.17
Namangan region	3.72	3.60	–0.11

Table 4 reveals a systematic pattern rather than a random scatter of small differences. The six regions with a positive gap — rated more attractive to inbound (foreign) tourists than to domestic tourists — are Samarkand (+0.30), Bukhara (+0.28), Syrdarya (+0.28), the Republic of Karakalpakstan (+0.19), Khorezm (+0.09), and Tashkent city (+0.06). Three of these six (Samarkand, Bukhara, Khorezm) form precisely the UNESCO World Heritage corridor identified in the literature review and in the author’s prior comparative case-study research as the backbone of Uzbekistan’s inbound tourism product, while Tashkent city’s positive gap is consistent with its role as the country’s primary international air-transport gateway. The remaining eight regions all show negative gaps — rated relatively more attractive to domestic than to inbound tourists — led by Tashkent region, Jizzakh, and Andijan (each –0.17). These are predominantly regions whose strongest dimensions in Table 2 and Table 3 are nature-, mountain-, or agritourism-related (Tashkent region’s highest dimension score is mountain-extreme tourism at 4.32; Qashqadarya’s is also mountain-extreme at 4.28), market segments that, in Uzbekistan’s current tourism product, are disproportionately consumed domestically rather than marketed internationally.

The two outlier cases — Syrdarya region and the Republic of Karakalpakstan, both low-composite regions in Table 2 yet both showing a positive inbound–domestic gap — warrant separate comment. For the Republic

4 Source: computed by the author from primary survey data (N = 53).

of Karakalpakstan, this is plausibly explained by the international visibility of the Aral Sea environmental crisis zone, a niche but internationally recognized attraction that draws specialized foreign interest disproportionate to the region's otherwise low domestic profile. Syrdarya region's positive gap requires further explanation through additional qualitative evidence and more likely reflects the low absolute base of both ratings (domestic mean 2.93, the lowest in the entire sample) combined with sampling variance in a region for which relatively few respondents may have had direct first-hand exposure; this case is flagged here as a candidate for closer qualitative investigation in future research rather than as a robust substantive finding.

4.5. Cross-level comparison with national (macro-level) survey findings

The author's companion macro-level survey (N = 117), reported in a separate article in this series, compared Uzbekistan's national-level tourism attractiveness against twelve other countries across four dimensions and found that Uzbekistan ranked sixth of thirteen destinations on a composite measure but third of thirteen specifically in pilgrimage tourism attractiveness (mean 3.55) — its strongest relative position of the four dimensions measured, and ahead of every other Central Asian destination surveyed in that study. The present, regionally disaggregated survey makes it possible to identify precisely which parts of Uzbekistan generate that national-level pilgrimage strength: Samarkand (4.66), Bukhara (4.47), and Khorezm (4.21) post the three highest pilgrimage-tourism scores of all fourteen regions surveyed here, each well above the national pilgrimage mean implied by the macro-level study, while the remaining eleven regions — with the partial exception of Tashkent city (3.89) — score below 3.6 on the same dimension. In other words, the country-level pilgrimage-tourism advantage identified in the macro-level study is not a broadly distributed national characteristic but is concentrated almost entirely in three regions, with the remaining eighty percent of the country's administrative regions showing a more limited contribution to that particular competitive strength.

This cross-level finding has two implications. First, it methodologically validates the two surveys against one another: an independent, regionally disaggregated dataset reproduces, at finer spatial resolution, exactly the pattern that the national-level dataset implied, lending convergent credibility to both studies' results despite their being based on different respondent pools and collected as part of separate survey waves. Second, it sharpens the policy implication of the macro-level finding considerably: national-level tourism marketing built around Uzbekistan's 'pilgrimage tourism' strength is, in practice, marketing three specific regions, and policy efforts to diversify or to extend pilgrimage-tourism competitiveness to additional regions — several of which (Qashqadarya, Surkhandarya, Fergana) possess their own, less internationally visible, religious-historical heritage sites — would need to be evaluated as a distinct regional-development objective rather than assumed to follow automatically from the country's aggregate national position.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study derived expert-validated weight coefficients for four meso-level tourism competitiveness indicators and comparatively assessed Uzbekistan's fourteen administrative regions across seven tourism-type dimensions, plus separate domestic- and inbound-market attractiveness ratings, using an original 53-respondent survey. Four findings stand out. First, as at the national level, the surveyed experts perceive the four meso-level indicators as having closely similar importance (normalized weights ranging narrowly from 0.243 to 0.254), reinforcing the case for near-equal weighting as a defensible default in regional index construction. Second, Samarkand region is the clear overall leader on the seven-dimension composite measure (4.40 of 5), followed by Tashkent region, Qashqadarya, Fergana, and Surkhandarya, while the Republic of Karakalpakstan and Syrdarya region occupy the lowest positions. Third, a structural distinction emerges between 'generalist' regions whose competitiveness is evenly distributed across dimensions (Samarkand, Tashkent region) and 'specialist' regions whose competitiveness is concentrated narrowly in historical-cultural and pilgrimage tourism while comparatively weak elsewhere (Bukhara, Khorezm); this distinction means composite rankings alone understate the true competitive strength of focused specialist regions and should always be reported alongside dimension-specific rankings. Fourth, regions hosting Uzbekistan's UNESCO heritage corridor and the capital are rated relatively more attractive to inbound than to domestic tourists, while regions with stronger nature-, mountain-, and agritourism profiles show the opposite pattern — a market-orientation asymmetry with direct relevance for differentiated regional marketing strategy. Finally, cross-referencing these regional results against the author's companion national-level survey shows that Uzbekistan's national pilgrimage-tourism advantage is generated almost entirely by three regions — Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khorezm — rather than being a broadly shared national characteristic.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are proposed for regional tourism policy and for future refinement of meso-level competitiveness models. First, regional tourism development strategy should explicitly distinguish generalist from specialist regions and apply different policy instruments to each: generalist regions such as Samarkand and Tashkent region are well placed to pursue further diversification across dimensions, whereas specialist regions such as Bukhara and Khorezm are better served by strategies that deepen and protect

their existing heritage- and pilgrimage-tourism strengths rather than by undifferentiated attempts to raise their scores across all seven dimensions equally. Second, given the demonstrated concentration of pilgrimage-tourism competitiveness in three regions, national strategy documents (including 'Tourism-2040') should consider region-specific targets for extending religious-historical tourism development to Qashqadarya, Surkhandarya, and Fergana, which possess relevant but less internationally visible heritage assets, as a deliberate diversification objective. Third, the domestic-inbound market-attractiveness asymmetry identified in Section 4.4 suggests that nature-, mountain-, and agritourism-oriented regions (Tashkent region, Qashqadarya, Jizzakh, Andijan) would benefit from dedicated inbound-market promotion specifically targeting international ecotourism and adventure-tourism segments, which appear not yet sufficiently promoted relative to these regions' demonstrated resource attractiveness. Fourth, future survey waves should collect respondent-level professional, sectoral, and regional-origin data to permit subgroup analysis, and should resolve the thirteen- versus fourteen-region asymmetry noted in the ecological-tourism item by including Namangan region in all subsequent survey instruments. Finally, the cross-level validation demonstrated in Section 4.5 — in which an independently collected regional dataset reproduced the pattern implied by a separately collected national dataset — supports extending this same paired macro-meso survey methodology to other countries in the Central Asian region as a basis for future comparative research.

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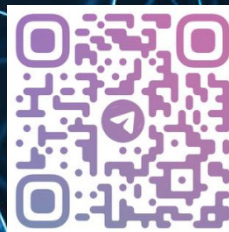
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