



GENEALOGICAL TOURISM AND YOUTH DIPLOMACY: STRENGTHENING MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING THROUGH CULTURAL HERITAGE

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Abstract

This article explores the role and significance of genealogical tourism in youth diplomacy. Using the example of the Fergana Valley, it highlights the potential of genealogical heritage in strengthening international dialogue, diaspora relations, and intercultural understanding. The study is based on the historical-comparative method, the theory of collective memory, and tourism studies approaches. Special attention is given to the alignment of genealogical tourism with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The findings demonstrate that genealogical tourism serves not only as a means of preserving cultural heritage but also as a strategic platform for youth diplomacy.

Keywords: Genealogical tourism; youth diplomacy; Fergana Valley; diaspora; family tree; cultural heritage.

Introduction

In the 21st century, one of the key trends in international politics, economics, and social life is the globalization of international communication and the transition to multipolarity. In this process, not only states and international organizations, but also youth diplomacy has begun to play an increasingly important role. In academic literature, youth diplomacy is often interpreted as the active



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participation of young people at the international level in the promotion of peace, cooperation, and mutual understanding.

At the same time, tourism has become an important socio-cultural instrument of contemporary diplomacy. Tourism is not only a sector that generates economic benefits, but it is also regarded as a vital means of strengthening cultural dialogue between nations. In recent years, genealogical tourism (travel based on ancestry and family heritage) has emerged as a growing segment of international tourism. Genealogical tourism refers to the practice of traveling motivated by an individual's interest in their ancestral roots and the desire to understand family heritage. Most often, this phenomenon manifests itself in visits of diaspora members to the homeland of their ancestors. As P. Gilroy emphasizes, "this type of tourism is not only about nostalgia and the preservation of cultural heritage, but also serves to connect young members of the diaspora with their homeland and to enable them to play an active role in international relations" [4].

The Fergana Valley, and Central Asia more broadly, is particularly rich in genealogical sources, where merchant, artisan, religious, and political elites have documented their genealogies for centuries. Therefore, exploring genealogical tourism in the context of the Fergana Valley and linking it with youth diplomacy is both scientifically and practically relevant.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the role and potential of genealogical tourism within youth diplomacy and to demonstrate how it can serve as a mechanism for strengthening international mutual understanding. Since the late 20th century, genealogical tourism has developed as an independent direction within tourism studies. Its essence lies in journeys motivated by individuals' interest in their family trees, ancestors, places of birth, and family history. E. S. Mills defines genealogical research as "the art and science of collecting, evaluating, and reconstructing the lives of past people" [3]. This perspective demonstrates that genealogical tourism is not merely a form of travel, but also a process of scholarly and historical inquiry.

Genealogical tourism holds particular significance among diasporas. As P. Gilroy has emphasized, appeals to ancestry and historical roots serve to strengthen the global identification and transnational connections of diaspora communities [4]. This dimension directly intersects with youth diplomacy.



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The theory of youth diplomacy has been advanced by numerous international organizations. In the United Nations resolutions on “Youth and Sustainable Development,” it is specifically highlighted that young generations are regarded as a vital and leading social force in the development of international communication, in strengthening mutual understanding among peoples, and in establishing peace. These documents interpret youth participation in contemporary global processes not merely as a promising factor, but as an indispensable condition for ensuring sustainable development. Similarly, D. Nash views tourism as an effective instrument of youth diplomacy [1].

Within Central Asia, genealogical heritage has occupied an important place in the socio-cultural structure of society. O. Ismagulov notes that Kazakh genealogies make it possible to reconstruct not only kinship relations but also the broader social structure of society [7]. Uzbek scholars have likewise studied genealogical heritage in depth, particularly in the context of the Fergana Valley. Karimov demonstrates that the genealogies of Margilan merchant families serve as crucial sources for analyzing economic activity and international trade relations [5]. Yo‘ldoshev, meanwhile, examines the genealogies of Kokand khans and sayyids as instruments of political legitimation [8].

Y. Zerubavel interprets ancestral memory as “a means of reinforcing social time and collective memory”[2]. Accordingly, through genealogical tourism, young people study their roots and thereby define their place not only at the national but also at the global level. A number of scholars highlight that cultural tourism plays a significant role in promoting international cooperation. From this perspective, genealogical tourism should be understood not merely as a process of restoring personal or familial memories, but as an innovative form of tourism that contributes to the creation of new arenas of intercultural communication. Through ancestral journeys, individuals not only engage with the histories of their forebears but also strengthen ties with other cultural communities, sharing historical heritage on an international scale. In this sense, genealogical tourism constitutes one of the contemporary forms of cultural tourism and makes a substantial contribution to fostering intercultural cooperation and global integration.



METHODS

This study applies a combination of the historical-comparative method, collective memory theory, a tourism studies approach, and diplomatic theory. Together, these methodological tools provide a basis for identifying the role of genealogical tourism in youth diplomacy.

The analysis draws on genealogical sources from the Fergana Valley, including the genealogies of Margilan merchants, the lineages of Kokand khans and sayyids, and the genealogical records of the ulama of Andijan and Namangan. These sources are central for genealogical tourism as they facilitate the reconstruction of historical realities, provide insights into the social positioning of local elites, and shed light on religious and political legitimacy. Source analysis, particularly within a comparative-regional framework, is applied across the cases of Margilan, Kokand, and Andijan.

From a methodological perspective, genealogical tourism operates in youth diplomacy through three primary mechanisms:

1. **Engagement of diaspora youth.** For generations living abroad, genealogical heritage strengthens the motivation to reconnect with their homeland. As Karimov notes, the genealogies of Margilan merchant families reveal not only the economic history of the region, but also serve as a vital resource for restoring identity and patriotism among diaspora youth [10]. The study of this mechanism employs sociological surveys, observation of diaspora associations, and assessments of the cultural and psychological outcomes of return journeys.
2. **Intercultural dialogue.** The second mechanism of genealogical tourism lies in fostering cultural integration among youth from different countries. As Zerubavel highlights, ancestral memories and genealogical traditions provide an essential arena for understanding other peoples and comparing historical experiences [2]. This dimension is analyzed using the **comparative method**, ethnographic observation, and interview-based analysis. Through genealogical travel, young people gain awareness of diverse cultural roots and shape multi-layered identities.
3. **Alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).** The compatibility of genealogical tourism with global objectives further



reinforces its methodological foundations. As emphasized in UN resolutions, youth participation in peacebuilding and sustainable development is a critical factor. Genealogical tourism directly contributes to SDG 11 (“Sustainable Cities and Communities”) and SDG 16 (“Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions”). To substantiate this alignment scientifically, methods such as indicator analysis, cross-national comparison, and linking sustainability indicators with the practices of genealogical tourism are applied.

Overall, the methodological study of genealogical tourism requires a **multidimensional approach**. Within this framework, source studies, sociology, ethnography, historiography, and international relations intersect. As a result, genealogical tourism emerges not only as a means of preserving local cultural heritage, but also as an effective conceptual model for actively involving youth in international diplomacy and peace initiatives.

RESULTS

The research reveals that genealogical tourism in the Fergana Valley can be conceptualized as a bridge between cultural heritage preservation and youth diplomacy. The analysis demonstrates that genealogical sources not only provide valuable historical and cultural insights but also foster youth engagement in international cooperation.

- The genealogies of Margilan merchant families strengthen diaspora youth identity and encourage return travel.
- The lineages of Kokand khans and sayyids illustrate how genealogy legitimized political authority, which today provides opportunities for heritage-driven dialogue.
- The genealogical records of Andijan and Namangan ulama highlight religious and intellectual continuity, making them resources for intercultural dialogue.

Moreover, genealogical tourism initiatives align with UN Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in promoting sustainable communities (SDG 11) and peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG 16).



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DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that genealogical tourism holds significant potential as a soft-power instrument in youth diplomacy. By attracting diaspora youth, it contributes to the restoration of collective memory and the strengthening of national identity. Through intercultural dialogue, genealogical tourism offers a platform for mutual understanding among young people of different cultural backgrounds. Its alignment with global agendas such as the SDGs positions genealogical tourism as a modern tool for peacebuilding and sustainable development.

The Fergana Valley case study illustrates how regional genealogical sources can be transformed into international diplomatic resources. Practical applications include organizing youth expeditions, digitizing genealogical archives for diaspora access, integrating genealogical tourism into cultural festivals and youth diplomacy forums, and establishing university-level modules on “Genealogical Tourism and International Dialogue.”

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, genealogical tourism in today’s era of globalization is not merely a means of preserving cultural heritage or fulfilling nostalgia; it is also emerging as an effective instrument of youth diplomacy. By linking national roots with global contexts, it fosters new forms of international cooperation. Particularly in heritage-rich regions such as the Fergana Valley, genealogical tourism can serve as a practical and academic laboratory for youth. In this process, the engagement of diaspora youth contributes to the restoration of collective memory and identity, while simultaneously broadening opportunities for intercultural dialogue.

Through genealogical tourism, young people become active participants in international cooperation and play a direct role in strengthening global peace and mutual understanding. Therefore, initiatives based on the genealogical resources of the Fergana Valley—such as youth expeditions, joint research projects, and international programs—can be highly effective both regionally and globally. Incorporating such initiatives into the frameworks of organizations like the United Nations and UNESCO would elevate genealogical tourism as a key



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component of peacebuilding, sustainable development, and intercultural diplomacy.

Thus, genealogical tourism not only reconnects young people with their ancestral roots but also integrates them into the global community as active actors. It aligns with the **UN Sustainable Development Goals** (SDG 11 – “Sustainable Cities and Communities” and SDG 16 – “Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions”), thereby functioning as a constructive platform for international diplomacy and intercultural peace initiatives [6].

Based on the above analysis and conclusions, several practical recommendations can be proposed for the sustainable development of genealogical tourism in the Fergana Valley. First, it is advisable to organize **international research expeditions and student exchange programs** based on the region’s genealogical heritage. Such initiatives would not only deepen the study of genealogical sources but also actively involve youth in international dialogue processes that strengthen both national and global identities.

Second, it is essential to **digitize genealogical records in Kokand, Margilan, and Andijan** and make them accessible as open information resources for diaspora youth abroad. This would ensure the preservation of genealogical heritage while transforming it into a valuable asset of youth diplomacy and global heritage diplomacy.

Third, to further promote genealogical tourism, it is necessary to **integrate it into international cultural festivals and youth diplomacy forums**. This would expand the global reach of genealogical tourism and enhance the role of youth in international cooperation.

Fourth, to create a strong academic foundation, universities should introduce **modules on “Genealogical Tourism and International Dialogue.”** Such programs would prepare young generations to study genealogical heritage while linking it with tourism and diplomacy.

Fifth, it is important to **develop joint genealogical tourism programs with Uzbek diaspora associations abroad**. These programs would strengthen the ties of diaspora communities with their homeland while reinforcing intercultural dialogue and peace initiatives.



Overall, these recommendations highlight that genealogical tourism, under modern conditions, is not only a tool for cultural heritage preservation and nostalgic connection, but also a significant instrument for youth diplomacy, international dialogue, and the achievement of sustainable development goals. Consequently, the genealogical resources of the Fergana Valley should be regarded not only as a unique repository of regional history, but also as an effective foundation for global peace and cooperation initiatives.

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