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HISTORICAL URBAN SQUARES OF SAMARKAND, FORMATION AND MODERN FUNCTIONS

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Abstract: This article explores the historical urban squares of Samarkand, focusing on their formation and contemporary functional roles. The study analyzes the significance of these squares within the city's structure, as well as their social, cultural, and architectural importance. Special attention is given to the adaptation and preservation of these spaces under modern urbanization. As a result, recommendations are provided for integrating historical heritage with the dynamics of contemporary urban life.

Keywords: City center, architectural structure, cultural heritage, urban environment, public spaces, functional organization, compositional integrity, historical context.

Аннотация: В данной статье рассматриваются исторически сложившиеся городские площади Самарканда, процесс их формирования и современные функциональные особенности. В ходе исследования изучено значение площадей в структуре города, их социальная, культурная и архитектурная роль. Особое внимание уделено вопросам адаптации и сохранения этих пространств в условиях современной урбанизации. В результате предложены рекомендации по гармоничному сочетанию исторического наследия с потребностями современного городского пространства.

Ключевые слова: Городской центр, архитектурная структура, культурное наследие, урбанистическая среда, общественные пространства, функциональная организация, композиционная целостность, историческая среда.

Annotatsiya: Mazkur maqolada Samarqand shahrining tarixiy shakllangan maydonlari, ularning paydo bo'lish jarayoni va bugungi kunda bajarib kelayotgan funksiyalari tahlil qilingan. Tadqiqot davomida maydonlarning shahar tuzilishidagi o'rni, ijtimoiy, madaniy va me'moriy ahamiyati o'rganilgan. Shuningdek, zamonaviy urbanizatsiya sharoitida ushbu maydonlarning moslashuvi va saqlanish masalalariga e'tibor qaratilgan. Natijada, tarixiy merosni asrab-avaylash bilan bir qatorda, uni zamonaviy shahar hayotiga uyg'unlashtirish bo'yicha tavsiyalar ishlab chiqilgan.

Kalit so'zlar: Shahar markazi, arxitektura tuzilmasi, urbanistik muhit, madaniy meros, funksional tizim, asosiy ko'chalar, kompozitsion yaxlitlik, tarixiy muhit.

Introduction. Samarkand is one of the oldest cities in Central Asia, with an urban structure that has developed over centuries and embodies a rich historical heritage. The city's squares have always been an integral part of this process, serving not only as architectural landmarks but also as social and cultural centers. The historical squares of Samarkand have traditionally been the heart of community life centers for trade, religious ceremonies, political gatherings, and social activities. Among them, Registan Square occupies a unique place not only in Uzbekistan but in the entire history of Eastern architecture.



Formation of Samarkand's City Squares. The formation of Samarkand's squares is closely connected with the stages of urban development. The earliest squares appeared as early as the Afrasiab period, serving mainly as venues for trade and public gatherings. During the Timurid era, these squares were enriched architecturally and surrounded by grand madrasas, mosques, and caravanserais. Historical city squares represent the central, historical, cultural, and socially significant public spaces of a city. These spaces, often surrounded by architectural monuments, have witnessed historical events and have long served as centers of assembly, commerce, religion, and administration. Their importance lies in their role as carriers of urban memory and historical identity, as well as sources of tourism, economic activity, and urban value. [1]

Squares are an integral part of urban planning, serving as the main functional centers of cities, with markets often located in front of them. They not only facilitated various trade and service activities but also served as places where some craftsmen produced their goods. For example, blacksmiths made axes and sold them in the market.¹ [7]

Registan Square The Heart of Historical Samarkand. Registan Square represents the historic core of Samarkand. It formed the main part of the Timurid city center and achieved architectural harmony through the ensemble of the Ulughbek, Tilla-Kari, and Sherdor madrasas. This complex functioned as a religious, educational, and social center in its time. Additionally, the areas surrounding the Bibi-Khanym Mosque, Siyob Bazaar, and the Shah-i-Zinda complex also developed as important centers of social life. **Functional Structure of Historical Squares.** Historically, city squares served several main functions:

- Commercial function – markets, caravanserais, and trading rows were arranged around the squares.

- Administrative-political function – official decrees, public assemblies, and state ceremonies were held here.

- Religious-educational function – madrasas, mosques, and khanqahs made the squares spiritual and educational centers.

- Cultural-social function – festivals, poetry gatherings, and theatrical performances took place in these spaces.

Modern Registan Square (Panoramic View) Today, these squares retain their historical significance while serving tourism and cultural events. As a city listed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, Samarkand is currently working to harmonize its historical centers with modern urban structures. The main goal of contemporary urban planning is to ensure the preservation of historical areas while reintegrating them as active public spaces. The Bibi-Khanym complex, a UNESCO World Heritage site, is an example of the harmony between historical and modern architecture. For instance, around Registan, pedestrian zones have been expanded, car traffic has been restricted, and lighting and landscaping improvements have been implemented. These changes have not only enhanced convenience for visitors but also preserved the compositional integrity of the historical environment.

Preservation and Integration of Historical Urban Areas. The preservation zones of Samarkand include not only historical buildings but also open squares, alleys, street networks, and public spaces around them.[3] Such protected areas are no longer seen as restrictions on modern construction but as creative zones of integration. While maintaining historical spatial identity, new functional centers cultural venues, galleries, and tourist facilities are being developed. Furthermore, compositional harmony and functional integration between the historical and modern parts of the city represent a crucial criterion of

¹ <https://uz.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maydon>



urban coherence. In Samarkand, this harmony is expressed through. The preservation of historical scale and proportions in architectural ensembles and new developments along the main city axis, The creation of pedestrian-friendly public spaces between Registan and Amir Temur Street.

As a result, the city has managed to adapt to the pace of modern life without losing its historical identity. From Modernist Planning to Human-Centered Urbanism. From the mid-20th century onward, modernist urban planning theory began to dominate, viewing cities as mechanisms divided into functional zones. In this approach, human life, social interaction, and personal needs were secondary to organizational efficiency and transport logistics. A new professional class transport engineers emerged, whose primary focus was optimizing vehicular movement rather than creating comfort for pedestrians or public users. Thus, technical logic replaced human-centered values, pushing human activity and needs to the background.

Only later did research reveal that neglecting the human factor in urban planning had negative consequences. Over the past 50 years, numerous problems have been observed in urban development. City life became detached from traditions and was not sufficiently recognized as an essential element of professional planning. Today, extensive research demonstrates the relationship between physical urban form and human behavior. Cities and their residents increasingly demand human-centered urban design. In recent years, many cities around the world have made serious efforts to realize the idea of “cities for people,” aiming to make them safer, more sustainable, and healthier.

Towards Sustainable and Livable Cities. A sustainable city is one where a large part of the transportation system is based on “green mobility” walking, cycling, and public transport. These modes of movement are economically and environmentally beneficial, reducing resource use, waste, and noise pollution. Another key aspect of sustainability is making public transport more attractive by ensuring safe and convenient pedestrian and cycling access to buses, trams, and trains. A good public space and an efficient public transport system complement one another. Promoting walking and cycling as natural parts of daily life is essential for achieving a healthy city.

Case Study: Melbourne’s Experience Between 1993 and 2004, the city of Melbourne, Australia, implemented a comprehensive urban renewal program to improve city life. According to a 2005 study, the number of pedestrians increased by 39% since 1993, while the number of people spending time in the city tripled. These changes were achieved through improvements in the quality of urban spaces. Federation Square, a famous central plaza in Melbourne, serves as a modern public hub for cultural and social events. It is one of Melbourne’s most successful city squares, transforming previously neglected streets and alleys into vibrant recreational areas. From 1994 to 2004, the number of residential buildings in the city center increased tenfold, the population rose from 1,000 to nearly 10,000, and student enrollment grew by 67%. New public spaces, including the architecturally significant Federation Square, were built, and pedestrian routes along the Yarra River were restored and converted into leisure areas.[3]

Conclusion. Preserving historical squares is not only about architectural protection but also about revitalizing the surrounding social and cultural environment. Modernization efforts must be conducted carefully, without disrupting historical balance. The integration of local experience with international best practices ensures sustainable development. It has been over twenty years since Uzbekistan gained independence. During this period, many positive transformations have taken place in the country. This relatively short historical stage has laid the foundation for the development of a new architectural, landscape, and urban planning style in Samarkand a post-independence approach that differs fundamentally from previous eras. Preserving historical



heritage and integrating it into contemporary urban planning is not only an aesthetic task but also one of economic and cultural importance. Thus, the compositional harmony between historical and modern spaces in Samarkand creates a sustainable model for urban development.

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