

Stages of Development of Museum Activities in Samarkand Region During the Years of Independence (1991–2025)

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Abstract: This article analyzes the stages of development of museum activities in Samarkand region during the years of independence from 1991 to 2025. The study examines the institutional, cultural, educational, scientific and touristic transformation of museums in the region. Special attention is paid to the activity of the Samarkand State Museum-Reserve, the State Museum of Cultural History of Uzbekistan, the Afrasiab Museum, local history museums, memorial museums and museum objects connected with the preservation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. The article shows that the development of museums in Samarkand during the independence period passed through several stages: institutional stabilization in the 1990s, legal and organizational renewal in the 2000s, modernization and tourism-oriented development in the 2010s, and digital transformation and international integration in 2020–2025. The research concludes that museums in Samarkand region have become important institutions for preserving national identity, developing historical consciousness, supporting cultural tourism and strengthening Uzbekistan's international cultural image.

Keywords: Samarkand region, museums, independence, cultural heritage, museum activity, museum-reserve, historical memory, modernization, tourism, digitalization.

Introduction: Museums occupy a special place in the cultural, educational and scientific life of society. They preserve the material and spiritual heritage of the people, systematize historical memory and present cultural values to present and future generations. In the years of independence, the Republic of Uzbekistan paid increasing attention to the preservation of national heritage, the restoration of historical monuments and the modernization of cultural institutions. In this process, Samarkand region has a special position, because Samarkand is one of the oldest cultural centers of Central Asia, a city closely connected with the history of Sogdiana, the Great Silk Road, the Timurid Renaissance, Islamic civilization and the development of science, architecture and art.

The topic of museum development in Samarkand region during 1991–2025 is important for several reasons. First, museums in this region are directly

connected with nationally and internationally significant heritage sites. Second, after independence, museum activity was no longer limited to the Soviet ideological model and began to serve the tasks of national self-awareness, restoration of historical truth and popularization of the cultural achievements of the Uzbek people. Third, the development of tourism, especially cultural and pilgrimage tourism, increased the practical importance of museums as centers of education, communication and cultural diplomacy.

The relevance of the research is also determined by the fact that modern museums are no longer only places where exhibits are stored. They have become complex cultural institutions that combine scientific research, educational programs, conservation, restoration, exhibition activity, digital technologies and tourism services. In Samarkand region, this transformation is especially visible, because the region attracts both local

visitors and international tourists. Therefore, the study of the development stages of museum activity in the years of independence makes it possible to understand the broader processes of cultural policy, heritage management and historical education in Uzbekistan.

The aim of this article is to analyze the main stages of development of museum activities in Samarkand region during the years of independence from 1991 to 2025. The object of the research is the museum activity of Samarkand region, while the subject is the institutional, functional and cultural changes that took place in museums during the independence period.

The research is based on the principles of historical analysis, comparative study and systematization of museum development processes. The chronological framework of the article covers the years 1991–2025. This period begins with the independence of Uzbekistan and continues until the stage of contemporary modernization, digitalization and international integration of museum activity.

The methodological basis of the article includes historical-comparative, analytical and descriptive methods. The historical-comparative method made it possible to divide the development of museum activity into separate stages and to identify the specific features of each period. The analytical method was used to examine the relationship between cultural policy, museum legislation, tourism development and the practical activity of museums. The descriptive method was applied to characterize the role of the main museums of Samarkand region in preserving and presenting cultural heritage.

The sources of the study include legal documents of the Republic of Uzbekistan related to museums and cultural heritage, official information of museum institutions, materials on the Samarkand State Museum-Reserve, data on the cultural heritage of Samarkand, and scientific literature devoted to museum studies, cultural heritage and tourism development. Special attention was paid to the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On Museums”, adopted in 2008, because this legal act created an important basis for regulating museum activity, preserving museum collections and strengthening the role of museums in society.

The development of museum activities in Samarkand region during the years of independence can be divided into four main stages. Each stage reflects not only changes in the museums themselves, but also broader changes in the cultural policy of the state, the understanding of national heritage and the place of museums in public life.

The first stage covers the years 1991–2000 and may be

described as the stage of institutional stabilization and ideological renewal. After independence, museums in Uzbekistan, including those in Samarkand region, faced the task of revising the content of exhibitions and adapting their activity to the new national and historical context. During the Soviet period, many museum expositions were influenced by ideological interpretations of history. After 1991, the main attention shifted to the objective study of national history, the role of great ancestors, the heritage of Amir Timur and the Timurids, the history of statehood, Islamic civilization and the cultural contribution of the Uzbek people.

In Samarkand region, this process had particular importance because the region contains monuments and museum collections related to different historical periods. The State Museum of Cultural History of Uzbekistan, the Afrasiab Museum and other institutions preserved rich archaeological, ethnographic, numismatic and artistic materials. In the 1990s, museum activity was aimed at maintaining collections, protecting museum objects and gradually changing exhibition narratives. Although financial and material resources were limited in the early years of independence, this period laid the foundation for further renewal. Museums began to function as institutions that supported national identity and historical consciousness.

The second stage covers the years 2001–2010 and is characterized by legal and organizational strengthening. During this period, the state began to pay more systematic attention to the legal foundations of museum activity and the preservation of cultural heritage. The adoption of the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On Museums” in 2008 was an important event in this process. The law defined the legal status of museums, museum objects and museum collections, and strengthened the principles of preservation, registration and use of museum values. This was significant for Samarkand region, where many museum objects have not only local but also national and world cultural value.

At this stage, the activity of museums became more organized. The role of museum funds, scientific registration, restoration work and educational activity increased. Museums in Samarkand region gradually expanded their functions. They were not only exhibition spaces, but also scientific and educational institutions. Museum employees conducted research on archaeological findings, historical documents, ethnographic materials and works of art. Local history and memorial museums contributed to the study of regional history and the preservation of the memory of outstanding figures connected with Samarkand.

The third stage covers the years 2011–2019 and may be defined as the stage of modernization, tourism integration and strengthening of the material and technical base. During this period, the development of tourism in Uzbekistan gave new importance to museums. Samarkand, as one of the main tourist centers of the country, became a space where museums were closely connected with the tourist routes of Registan, Shah-i-Zinda, Gur-i Amir, Ulugh Beg Observatory, Afrasiab and other historical sites. Museum activity began to be viewed not only as a cultural and educational sphere, but also as an important component of tourism infrastructure.

The program for improving the activity and strengthening the material and technical base of state museums for 2017–2027 gave a new impulse to museum development. This program focused on reconstruction, repair, equipment and modernization of state museums in the regions of Uzbekistan. For Samarkand region, such measures were important because the quality of museum services directly influenced the impression of visitors and the effectiveness of heritage presentation. Modern museums required improved exhibition halls, better storage conditions, updated information materials, guides, technical equipment and more active communication with the public.

During this stage, the educational function of museums became stronger. Museums organized exhibitions, thematic events, lectures, meetings with researchers, cultural programs and excursions for schoolchildren and students. This increased the role of museums in the formation of historical thinking among young people. In Samarkand region, where historical monuments and museum collections are part of everyday cultural space, museums became important partners of educational institutions.

The fourth stage covers the years 2020–2025 and is connected with digital transformation, international cooperation and the search for new forms of museum communication. The COVID-19 pandemic showed that museums must develop not only traditional exhibitions but also digital resources, online communication and virtual forms of presentation. This situation accelerated the need for digitalization of museum activity. In Samarkand region, as in other regions of Uzbekistan, attention increased to electronic catalogues, online information, virtual excursions, digital promotion and multimedia interpretation of exhibitions.

The period of 2020–2025 also strengthened the international importance of Samarkand as a cultural center. The city's status as a UNESCO World Heritage site and its role in international cultural events

increased attention to the preservation and presentation of heritage. Museums became part of a broader system of cultural diplomacy. They presented the historical depth of Uzbek civilization, the multicultural character of Samarkand and the continuity of cultural traditions. This stage also showed that the future of museums depends on their ability to combine scientific reliability, modern technologies and visitor-oriented services.

The results of the study show that museum activity in Samarkand region developed from preservation-oriented work to a multifunctional cultural system. In the early years of independence, the main task was to preserve collections and renew the ideological content of exhibitions. Later, the legal basis and institutional mechanisms were strengthened. In the 2010s, museums became closely connected with tourism and modernization. In 2020–2025, digitalization and international integration became key directions of development.

The development of museum activities in Samarkand region reflects the transformation of cultural heritage policy in independent Uzbekistan. Museums have become not only repositories of historical objects, but also active participants in the construction of national historical consciousness. This is especially important for Samarkand, because the region's historical heritage includes ancient urban culture, archaeological monuments, Islamic architecture, the Timurid period and examples of traditional crafts.

One of the main features of the independence period is the reinterpretation of historical heritage from the point of view of national values. In the Soviet period, many aspects of national history were interpreted through ideological schemes. After independence, museums received an opportunity to present history more fully and to emphasize the role of local civilization, national statehood and cultural continuity. This process influenced the content of exhibitions, the themes of scientific research and the educational work of museums.

Another important feature is the connection between museums and tourism. Samarkand region is one of the most visited regions of Uzbekistan, and museums play an important role in deepening the tourist experience. Architectural monuments attract visitors visually, while museums explain the historical, cultural and social context of these monuments. For example, the Afrasiab Museum helps visitors understand the ancient history of Samarkand and the significance of archaeological discoveries. The State Museum of Cultural History of Uzbekistan presents materials that show the development of culture, art, crafts and everyday life

over a long historical period. Thus, museums transform tourism from simple sightseeing into cultural learning.

At the same time, the development of museum activity also revealed certain problems. Among them are the need for continuous modernization of exhibitions, improvement of storage conditions, training of museum specialists, expansion of restoration laboratories, development of multilingual information materials and broader use of digital technologies. These issues are especially important in Samarkand because the number of visitors is high and the cultural value of the collections is significant. A modern museum must be able to work with different audiences, including local residents, schoolchildren, students, researchers and foreign tourists.

The educational role of museums also deserves special attention. During the years of independence, museums in Samarkand region became important institutions for the spiritual and educational upbringing of young people. Through exhibitions and educational programs, museums help develop respect for national heritage, historical memory and civic responsibility. In this sense, museum activity is directly connected with the broader educational policy of the country.

Digitalization is one of the most important directions of the latest stage. The introduction of digital technologies allows museums to preserve information about collections, expand access to materials and attract younger audiences. However, digitalization should not be understood only as creating websites or social media pages. It also includes electronic cataloguing, digital restoration, virtual exhibitions, interactive screens, audio guides, QR codes, databases and online educational programs. For Samarkand museums, this direction is especially promising because it can connect local heritage with the international academic and tourist community.

International cooperation is another important factor. Samarkand's historical status and its connection with UNESCO create favorable conditions for cooperation in conservation, research, exhibition exchange and specialist training. International projects can help museums improve restoration methods, develop modern exhibition design and promote collections abroad. At the same time, such cooperation should preserve the national interpretation of heritage and serve the interests of Uzbekistan's cultural policy.

The analysis shows that the stages of museum development in Samarkand region are not isolated from each other. Each stage prepared the basis for the next one. Institutional stabilization in the 1990s created conditions for legal strengthening in the 2000s. Legal and organizational development made possible

modernization in the 2010s. Modernization and tourism growth created the need for digital transformation and international integration in 2020–2025. Therefore, museum development should be understood as a continuous historical process.

The development of museum activities in Samarkand region during the years of independence passed through several important stages. In 1991–2000, museums focused on institutional preservation and renewal of historical content in accordance with the ideas of national independence. In 2001–2010, the legal and organizational foundations of museum activity were strengthened, especially through the adoption of the Law “On Museums”. In 2011–2019, museums entered a stage of modernization, improvement of material and technical conditions, and integration with cultural tourism. In 2020–2025, digitalization, new communication methods and international cooperation became defining features of museum development.

The study shows that museums in Samarkand region have become important centers for preserving cultural heritage, developing historical consciousness, supporting education and promoting tourism. Their role has expanded from simple preservation of exhibits to scientific, educational, cultural, communicative and diplomatic functions. The experience of Samarkand demonstrates that regional museums can play a strategic role in the development of national culture and international cultural dialogue.

Further development of museum activity in Samarkand region requires systematic modernization of exhibitions, professional training of museum workers, expansion of digital technologies, strengthening of restoration and conservation work, and development of educational programs for different groups of visitors. It is also necessary to increase cooperation between museums, universities, tourism organizations and international cultural institutions. Such measures will help transform museums into more active, open and innovative institutions while preserving their main mission: protection and transmission of cultural heritage to future generations.

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