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Analysis of tourism features and development strategy for memorial complex “Imam Al Bukhari Mausoleum”, Samarkand region, Uzbekistan[☆]



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Abstract The Imam Al Bukhari Complex is a unique pilgrimage site in Hartang, Samarkand region, Uzbekistan. This site is requiring a better visitation flow by its present administration as unique stakeholder. The goal of this article is to spot the solutions that could further increase the experience at the site as well as the benefits to the local community. The main study methods used were the qualitative observation during fieldwork, the interview with visitors and stakeholders as well as the analysis of online resources. The analysis of the demand and offer of this tourist attraction has highlighted an imbalance towards a wide range of weaknesses that could be fixed in a short-term perspective. The solutions envisage several measures to increase the accessibility and online visibility of the Complex, to enhance the experience of the visitors, to involve the community in order to obtain larger benefits.

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1. Introduction

Religion and tourism share a close relationship in which the former motivates travel and is a source of assorted visitor attractions, with pilgrimage being one of the ties between the two (Henderson, 2011). Trying to plan Muslim holy sites

and integrate them into international tourism is of great interest, as one can consider that holy Muslim cities hospitality market is “exceptional in terms of enjoying the benefits of an effective indefinite demand” (Colliers International, 2014). However, there are a series of present geopolitical issues for travellers and pilgrims related to these destinations that generate uncertainty.

The present study deals with planning a holy site in Uzbekistan with the aim of boosting religious motivated tourism. More specifically, the study focuses on “Imam Al Bukhari Complex” (hereinafter IABC), which represents an ensemble hosting the tomb of Imam al Bukhari, a famous

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personality of the world Islamic religious history, situated in the little town of Hartang, Samarkand region. The new administration at IABC, with the support of the Department of Geography at Samarkand State University, has commissioned a research on the possibilities of development at IABC, which generated the present study.

As Ebadi (2016) points out, research dealing with pilgrimages in developing countries is few compared to research dealing with pilgrimages in developed countries. Furthermore, the author argues that although much has been discussed on the planning and management of mandatory Muslim pilgrimage (*hajj* – at Mecca), a lot less attention has been given to management of the voluntary ones (*ziyarat* – such as the one at IABC). Our research contributes thus to the emerging discussions on the planning of voluntary pilgrimage destinations. Following a detailed diagnosis, our paper aims at highlighting the current situation of a less known pilgrimage destination, thus bringing into discussion empirical evidences for how one of the central Asian Muslim tourism destinations functions nowadays.

Furthermore, our paper considers existing principles and models developed in literature with the aim of defining an action plan for boosting tourism development at IABC. In doing so, we analyzed both the peculiarities of local context and the importance of having “a structured management approach to succeed in achieving the goals of local tourism development” (the importance of the latter being highlighted by scholars such as Cerutti & Piva, 2015).

The paper is structured in seven sections. The second section deals with the theoretical and methodological background related to both pilgrimage/religious tourism continuum and principles of tourism planning analyzed by the existing research in the field topic. The third section briefly highlights the geographical location and infrastructure amenities of the study area. The fourth section deals, firstly, with tourism features of IABC (it discusses in detail aspects related to actors, policies, tourism demand, tourism resources, tourist experience, tourism products, and image) and, secondly, with its impact on local development. Building upon the results presented in the fourth section, the fifth section presents a SWOT analysis as a basis for sound solutions for a development strategy (sixth section). Finally, the seventh section highlights the main conclusions of our research.

2. Theoretical and methodological background

2.1. Pilgrimage vs. tourism

Pilgrimage and tourism share common practices for millenniums and the interdependences between the two never

ceased to increase their complexity. Therefore, the relationship in question needs clear clarifications in order to really understand how to deal with practices related to visiting holy sites. The question attracted significant attention from scholars, who either advanced or discussed interesting models aimed at clarifying the concepts we are operating with (Cohen, 1992; Raj & Morpeth, 2007; Rinschede, 1992; Ross, 2014; Smith, 1992).

While Smith (1992) pinpoints the position of religious tourism as somewhere between two extremities defined by pilgrimage and tourism, Cohen (1992) underlines the importance of distinguishing between *traveller pilgrim* belonging to the culture of the Temple and the *traveller tourist* not belonging to it.

IABC pilgrims and tourists' motivations highlight the existence of a destination situated somewhere between sacred and profane knowledge-based benchmarks (Fig. 1). As a consequence, the current services and amenities correspond more to a pilgrimage than a religious oriented tourism (aspect which has to be dealt with in a future strategy). Furthermore, according to Cohen (1992) definitions, one may consider that IABC is almost an exclusive destination for traveller pilgrims.

From a different perspective, Rinschede (1992) brings into discussion the differences between short and long-staying travellers, considering the act of the former as being a pilgrimage and the act of the latter as being a pilgrimage journey. Furthermore, the author argues on the differences between religious and social pilgrimage. Religious tourism, in developing countries, has a strong affinity with social and group tourism, being important to travel with a group of believers who think similar or to travel with the family, being a traditional activity, especially in Central Asia.

Religious tourism and pilgrimage do manifest interesting trends at the beginning of the third millennium, as the forms of their manifestation are constantly evolving towards (Kaelber, 2006). Therefore, theoretical and conceptual debates are still open to discussions.

2.2. Planning pilgrimage sites

From a theoretical point of view, our research grounds on two different perspectives of planning sites: (1) the conclusions Woodward (2004) extracted from empirical researches on religious sites and (2) the principals of Hough (1995) originating from researches in urban landscape design. We argue that the two views could be integrated and took into consideration in planning holy sites.

When it comes to planning sites situated at the crossroads between pilgrimage and tourism, Woodward (2004) argues that there is a need to accommodate the desires of those

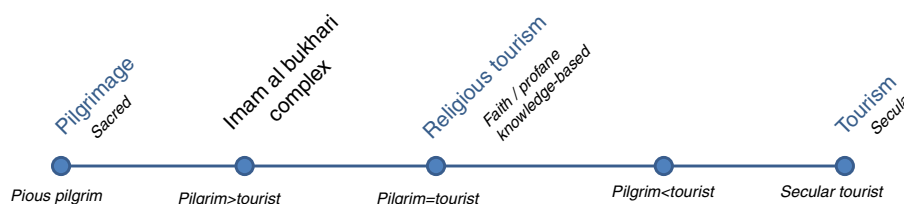


Figure 1 IABC position on the Smith model.

who seek to use the particular sites as places of worship and those who visit as sightseers and not pilgrims. The same author concludes on the existence of three important issues to deal with in this process: (1) the absence of substitutes for holistic urban planning (despite the fact that there is very little opportunity for this type of approach in relation to most locations); (2) the necessity for micro-level management responses applied to local circumstances, reflecting cultural traditions and market realities; and (3) the necessity for action plans and objectives for the site or event in question in order to ensure that all stakeholders are conversant with the planning aspirations.

On the other hand, Hall (2008) suggests that the three principles presented by Hough (1995), underlining good sites design (process, diversity and connectedness), could be applied to tourism sites. We argue that the same principles could be taken further into consideration in the case of holy sites such as IABC, along with respecting sense of place and the peculiarities of Muslim destinations. *Process* refers to shifting from a static view of phenomena to a more dynamic one, where everything is seen as a continuum in time. *Diversity* implies more choices, but also more health in ecological terms, and the same may be true in case of tourism planning. Finally, *connectedness* is even more important in the case of tourism, where the activity itself asks both for a good integration into the broader context and for a great accessibility of sites.

2.3. Data collection

Due to absence of any statistical data, the research methodology is primarily based on the gathering and interpretation of qualitative data, which were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and on-field observations during the month of May 2015.

Semi-structured interviews have targeted a significant number of stakeholders inside Imam al Bukhari Complex (Director of the Complex, vice-Director, tour guides at IABC, souvenir shop seller, sellers along the alley). A great emphasis has been put on the demand side – the interviews with visitors inside the complex. Questions for offer-side stakeholders have targeted their image of the IABC product and various sub-products offered, perception of the experience that visitors receive at IABC, current management and marketing issues, perception on IABC's actual and future role on local development, proposals for development. Interviews with visitors have mainly focused on their geographical origin, motivations for travel and for choosing IABC as a stop along the itinerary, perception of the offer of IABC, tourist behaviour (activities chosen and time spent for each one), etc.

The focus group organized with the policy makers – newly appointed director, the vice-director of the IABC and three professors (Tourism studies) from Samarkand State University – have mainly targeted their vision on the action plan for tourism development.

2.4. Research methods employed

The research employed two categories of research methods: (1) exploratory methods aimed at extracting as much

as possible knowledge from collected data and (2) an operating method aimed at guiding the process of defining an action plan for the holy site of IABC.

The first category consists of:

- SWOT analysis;
- Google Web Search for evaluating the online image of IABC.

To what concerns the second category of methods we opted for defining a matrix consisting of 9 types of measures that results from the three recommendations from Woodward (2004) and three principles from Hough (1995).

3. Overview upon accessibility and resources

3.1. Geographical location

The complex is situated 23 km from the Centre of Samarkand city, the regional capital of Samarkand region (Oblast), situated in the centre of Uzbekistan, in the town of Hartang (or Imam al Bukhari), Payaryk district and it has been built in 1998, at the initiative of the President of Uzbekistan, following some particular interest of Muslim personalities from Uzbekistan and around the world (Fig. 2).

Accessibility can be an important factor in religious destinations, as it can influence the number of visitors and the capitalization of marketing initiatives. From this point of view, the IABS has a good connectivity with main cities, having a central position inside the country, therefore having a high accessibility for native pilgrims. Despite its central position, the signalling for the cars is missing, there are no panels indicating the direction towards IABC from Samarkand, one should know that for 8 km, the direction is Bukhara. However, after 5 km, the IABC is indicated as straight forward but when exiting the main Samarkand-Bukhara national road towards Chelak (the administrative town of IABC), there is no sign indicating the IABC.

3.2. Infrastructure description

The IABC has a surface of 1.4 ha and a perimeter of 550 m. It has a central position inside of the town, being surrounded by residential houses.

The structure of the IABC includes 3 wings. The front wing (South) is hosting the entry hall, the souvenir shop, the Conference hall and the Administration offices. The right wing (East) contains the Museum and the Library (with rare handwritten and lithographed books on Islamic theology, gifts from government officials of various states and a piece of the "kisva" the cloth that covers Kaaba in Mecca). The left wing (West) includes a mosque, "honaka" and gallery area of 786 sq.m. where 1500 people can pray simultaneously. The northern part does not have a covered wing and hosts the actual Mausoleum (with the Tomb), along with a training centre for the study of hadith.

The outside park has a surface of 3 ha and it contains a majestic access alley (with higher trees at the left side) ending with a fountain (at the entry to the Complex) and a new designed park with grass and little (new planted) trees.

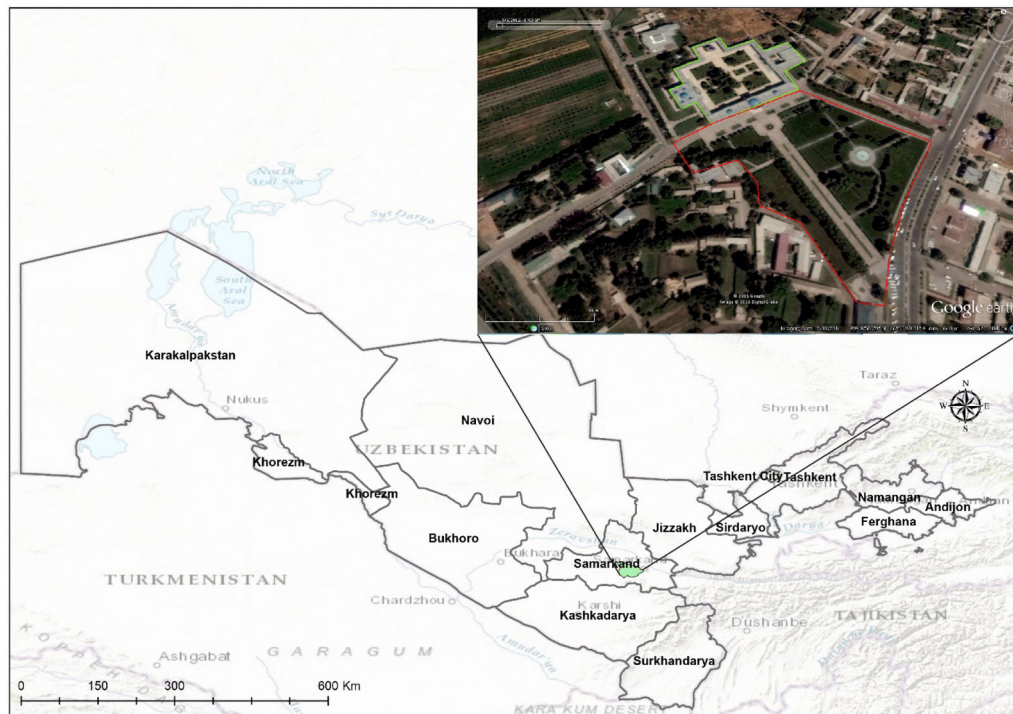


Figure 2 Geographical location of IABC inside Uzbekistan country. (Photo – The Structure of the Imam Al Bukhari Complex. Data source: Google Earth imagery.)

3.3. Analysis of cultural resource

The tourism industry in Uzbekistan has a significant potential for development. It is associated with the presence of a large number of unique natural sites and a rich cultural and historical heritage (Olimovich, 2015). Among other attractions from Uzbekistan, IABC is offering a unique and imperishable religious tourism resource – the Tomb of Imam al Bukhari, one of the first scholars of Hadith studies. Although only two of his hadith works have survived – “al-Adab al-Mufrad” about respect and property and “Sahih al-Bukhari” about the life of the Prophet – the latter “came to be considered the most prestigious of Islam” and “acquired a holiness only second to the Quran” (Juynboll, 2007). This fame is a genuine resource as it makes the IABC the epicentre of the ancient authentic history of Muslim religion. According to the legends, Imam al Bukhari had collected hundreds of thousands of hadiths, of which he knew 300,000 by heart. Therefore, the religious and cultural existent material and immaterial resources are impressive enough to create a world religious destination, creating a spiritual sense of belonging among pilgrims.

Apart from the spiritual value of the Tomb, as well as the immaterial heritage of the legends and historical facts about Imam Al Bukhari, there are also a few resources to develop and to valorize in terms of tourism attractiveness for creating hedonist reasons among tourists:

- The architectural value of the IABC – the most impressive pieces of art that are cherished by visitors – high value of materials used (such as marble and mosaic work, use of precious stones like majolica, alabaster, onyx and granite, with floral and geometric patterns, light green onyx at the

- centre of the Tomb), the excellent wood paint work at the ceiling of the complex, the decoration of the domes, etc.
- The leisure features of the inner garden and outside park.
- The collection of books and of international gifts in the Museum.
- The values of the local community (hand crafts, miniaturist craftsman, homemade food makers, etc.).
- The proximity to the tourist city of Samarkand (the Complex is part of the cultural heritage of Samarkand area).

Despite current tendencies of pilgrimage routes to gain secular features (Raj & Bozonelos, 2015), IABC remains mostly a pilgrimage destination due to: (1) low development of tourism marketing in Central Asia; (2) the importance of the religious resources that make a world religious destination in the Muslim world.

4. Features of tourism at IABC and its impact on local development

4.1. Features of tourism at IABC

One can hardly speak about tourism as there are no accommodation facilities around the complex and visiting IABC only takes the form of a 2–3 h stop on a day-trip towards other destinations. For local and regional visitors (excursionists) the IABC may also be a recreational (leisure) target.

The majority of visitors are pilgrims (performing a *pilgrimage*) as their visit has a spiritual significance for their quality of Muslims. The visitation of IABC has, indeed, religious causes, pushed by the traditional society and by existing social values, especially for visitors that come from

Table 1 Tourism activities possible at IABC.

Nr. Crt.	Activities	Time spent by tourists
1	Observes and admires the beauty of the construction of the Complex	10-20 minutes
2	Participates in prayers organized by the local imam inside the Mosk (masjid) or near the Tomb, sitting on the benches	Up to 1 hour
3	Participates at the explanations given by the local guide next to the Mausoleum/Tomb	10-20 minutes
4	Visits the museum	Max 15 minutes
5	Spends time in the inner garden, mostly under the group of trees situated in the middle of the garden, drinking water from the fountain (no possibilities to sit down in this area)	10-20 minutes
6	Little walks in the alley connecting the main road and the proper Complex	10 minutes
7	Observing and/or buying souvenirs from the local non-professional sellers in this alley	10-20 minutes

outside the region (tourists). This moral significance plays a role in the determination (motivation) of potential tourists to visit the IABC.

For the general case of tourism holy sites, the spiritual motivation is important, but there are also other situations such as the ones highlighted by Keeling (2000): impulse visits (as part of a day out); social connections (presence of relatives, friends in the region or participation to ceremonies); connections with famous people (as graves of saints or illustrious religious people); and personal interest in the architecture.

4.1.1. Actors, policies, and goals

IABC has no designed strategy. As a consequence, the new administration of IABC has set clear intentions for developing tourism by taking actions to (a) increase the number of visitors and (b) increase the attractiveness of the complex.

Following interviews taken during the field research, solutions envisaged by IABC administration (director, guide) have been outlined. These include simple and not integrated measures such as: (1) better advertisement and publicity through new, customized brochures and flyers and an official website; (2) embellish the walls with marble panels containing excerpts from Imam Al Bukhari texts in Uzbek, English

and Russian; (3) proposition of new activities such as film projection in the premises. Focus groups also revealed the absence of a long-term vision for the development of IABC from the part of the administration.

4.1.2. Potential demand for IABC

Semi-structured interviews with the main actors involved in planning the tourism site of IABC revealed that the actual demand is mainly composed of: (a) inhabitants of Samarkand city and region (the biggest majority – approximately 50%); (b) people coming from great Uzbek cities, such as Bukhara, Tashkent, and Namangan; (c) rural population from traditional areas, mainly consisting of pilgrims coming from Fergana valley – a more traditional and conservative region. The international visitation is not very strong and may be estimated at around 5% of the total visitors (although as the national visitors do not pay a ticket, it is impossible to estimate the amount of the daily visitation).

There is no possibility to determine a relation between tourism origin and their behaviour. Nevertheless, some general observations could be discussed. When entering the site, the general grouping of people might be noticed – 4–6 people including children and sometimes up to 10 people, most often in 1 or 2 personal vehicles or minivans. Very

Table 2 Services and goods sold at or around IABC.

Services	Goods
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The possibility to visit the site (free for nationals and 7500SUM/2USD for the non-nationals). • Prayer offered by local imam. • Explanations provided by local custodian near the Tomb. • Tour guiding services provided by the two employees (of which one speaks English at a medium-advanced level and both speaking Uzbek and Russian) at a fare of 10,000SUM (2.8USD) per service. • Possibility to visit the museum. • Sale services in the own souvenir-shop (mostly bookshop) of the Complex. • Photography services by local photographers with little experience and medium range DSLR photo cameras. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The souvenir (book) shop offers only a variety of religious books in Uzbek language, with no concern for travel books, tourist information or local typical souvenirs. At the time of the visit, only 2 books were in English, both of little importance for international visitors, even for Muslim visitors. • Local traders sell the souvenirs in the walking alley in non-organized conditions (sometimes affecting dignity at workplace, as in the image below). The majority is of little quality (mostly mass imported) and is either of religious importance or kitsch objects. Very few souvenirs are handmade or of high quality made in Uzbekistan. At a quick look, none of them are crafted in the village or in the nearby area (raion) of Payaryk or Samarkand Oblast. • The gastronomic goods offered by the two restaurants/choyxonas.

Table 3 The most important seven web sites promoting IABC.

Web page/platform	Volume of information (words, images, videos)	Content (message, type of tourists involved, languages of communication)
<i>Wikipedia – Muhammad al Bukhari</i>	~1200 Words 2 images 0 video	It presents only the life of Muhammad al Bukhari but does not make any written reference to the existence of the mausoleum (there is only one little image of the IABC in the right hand side of the page, with no connection to the text). The text is only 2 pages long and its translation in other languages (more than 25 languages) is sometimes shorter and less structured. Moreover, the translation in Russian or Italian, for example has removed the picture of the Mausoleum so the reader from the countries speaking these languages is completely unaware of the Memorial Complex.
<i>Wikipedia – Baha-ud-Din Naqshband Bukhari</i>	~1000 words 2 images 0 video	This result is a sort of “error” as it presents similarly the life of another Islamic personality that has a Mausoleum in Bukhara. This may create confusion for the traveller but in the same time this can be an asset when forming a couple of pilgrimage destinations in the axis Samarkand-Bukhara.
<i>Advantour Travel Agency – info about IABC</i>	~180 words 1 image 0 video	The text is limited (less than 20 lines) to the biography of the theologian but it does not give any information about the architectural and visual attractiveness of the site (apart from one little picture of the Mausoleum).
<i>VisitUzbekistan.travel official national website</i>	190 words 3 images 0 video	The text is relatively short (15 lines) but it gives a better description of the aspect of the Complex. No reference to the Museum and to the actual experience that the traveller might have there is made, and it gives information about a small shop selling local crafts that was not observed during the study visit. The two images are too small and repetitive – both showing only the Mausoleum itself (the Dome building) as a cropped image (the internet user cannot make oneself an image about the beauty of the Complex. The entrance fee is presented as “free” although a fee of 7500SUM is required actually to foreign visitors (the origin being based only by the look of the visitor). This incongruence can affect negatively the experience of the visitor. There is no reference to the access to the site (road indications). The page also promises to show “pictures” (only one is available in big format) or “reviews” of tourists (which are totally absent).
<i>Asia Adventures – centralasia-adventures.com</i>	700 words 12 images 0 video	Agency specialized in the countries from Central Asia – rich in information (very conclusive text) and with some more pictures than other websites.
<i>Samarkandtour.com – Travel Agency</i>	1650 words 5 images 0 video	It is probably the richest in information (over 60 lines) with 6 pictures that are better depicting the beauty of the Complex. The information goes beyond the biographic aspects or the description of the Mausoleum and it gives more appealing information about the contemporary era (Soviet times) and phrases that invites people to visit the place, recommending it like a similar place to Mecca.
<i>TripAdvisor</i>	X words X images X video	The famous <i>TripAdvisor</i> reviewing site appears only in the 3rd page of Google searches, and it provides the confusing name of “Imam <u>Bokhari</u> Mausoleum” and only 33 reviews (compared to 44 reviews for Bakhautdin Naqshband Mausoleum in Bukhara). Most of the reviews (20) are in Russian, 10 in English, 1 Spanish, 1 French and 1 Dutch. The positive aspects in the non-Russian reviews are about “quiet time during winter”; “heater under the praying carpet”; “prayer area well taken care of”; “kind guide”; “shadow”, “beautiful buildings”, “genial miniaturist”. The very few negative sides are about “lack of access to the underground burial area”; “undergoing renovation work in April 2014”; “the complex is too new”. The Russian comments (10) belong to users from Russia (5), Uzbekistan (3), Kyrgyzstan (1) and unknown origin (1). The positive aspects of the Russian users mention “clean”; “good furniture”; “green park”; “story of the life and death of Imam al Bukhari”; and the negative sides are few, mostly related to “obligation to wear traditional clothing” or “not entertaining place”; “far from the city”. The Uzbek and Kyrgyz reviews do not offer any critical (positive or negative) opinions about the site, they only invite visitors.

large groups are rare and no large tourist buses have been observed during the fieldwork. As the religious tourism in Uzbekistan does not have a strong development, the individual forms of travelling are the ones observed at the IABC.

International visitation to Uzbekistan is strongly seasonal, with a peak between August and October, low season from November to March and a second peak in spring (April–May) then unpopular June and July when temperatures reach 47 degrees in the shade (Airey & Shackley, 1997). At IABC there is a slight difference compared to the national pattern, the first peak being observed in April–May and then the autumn having a lower importance because of the involvement of the potential pilgrims in agriculture activities (especially cotton pick-up). Visitors avoid traditional summer months as temperatures in Samarkand region exceed the average of 34°C, whilst precipitation does not

exceed 4 mm per summer month (SCT, 2015), therefore, the thermal comfort index being a setback for trips at IABC.

4.1.3. Experience at IABC

The motivation of the tourist when visiting IABS is strongly related to faith or other religious reasons. Therefore, the visitor at the Complex has relatively few touristic activities to perform, being involved almost only into religious specific acts. The spiritual and religious purpose of travel of mainly national visitors does not create great expectations in terms of leisure activities. Nevertheless, cultural activities are expected but the offer is not very rich. Table 1 provides an overview of the activities that visitors could take part in.

Table 4 SWOT matrix for the tourism at IABC.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Important cultural-religious resources. • Strong motivation of the new administration to develop tourism at IABC (mostly increasing the number of tourists). • Unique feature of the resource – the importance of Imam Al Bukhari in the whole Muslim world “second authentic book after the Quran”. • Medium–High value of the architectural complex. • Large capacity for receiving pilgrims. • Strong spiritual experience at IABC. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor signalization of road access to IABC. • Poor parking conditions, weak management of open spaces. • The complex is too new and has little historical value (mostly spiritual) for non-Muslim visitors. • The pre-eminence of the religious aspect in front of the tourism. • Very little leisure possibilities in the Complex. • The values of the community are not valorized within or around the complex. • Stay of visitors does not exceed 3 h. • Little range of products to be accessed by the visitors, with low productivity and value and only two tour guides are available. • The information about the complex in the first results-pages on Google is either very poor, either needs to revisit the English language. • The advertisement of the Complex is globally poor on the Internet (also lack of official website and promotional materials) and does not give a good image about the Complex or about the activities. • The reviews show that there is very little learning experience at the facility.
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The growing demand for religious forms of tourism. • Centrality and high transport connectivity at regional context. • Closeness to main cultural tourism attraction of Uzbekistan- Samarkand. • The possibility to plan leisure activities in the outside park. • Large scale of national and international potential demand for IABC. • The information about Imam al Bukhari personality on Wikipedia is translated in over 25 languages. • Private Travel Agencies perform a good advertisement of the Complex on their promotional pages. • Reviews are mostly positive and the assets are–clean place, good care, kind welcome, and spiritual experience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The excessive dependence on domestic tourism demand. • The attraction is ex-nihilo (it is not part of a series of local attractions). • Lack of other non-cultural resource (such as leisure or nature-based attractions). • Lack of other local tourism actors (associations, NGOs, Tourism Info Centre etc.) that can support the administration to apply its strategy. • Few eating possibilities and no accommodation facilities nearby IABC. • The absence of commercial facilities for locals.

Outside the Complex there are a few possibilities to spend some more time in the two local tea houses (*choyxonas*) where they can have a meal. Although there are souvenirs to buy, these are neither local products nor promoting local values. Furthermore no accommodation offer is available in the town or in the neighbouring towns. The closest hotel or guesthouse is available in Samarkand. Therefore, there is not a surprise that interviews with pilgrims have revealed that the time spent inside the complex is around 2 h (with an average of 60–80 min). The few activities outside the complex may extend the stay of the visitor to up to 3 h, which happens rarely and usually characterizes the visitors coming from long distances.

4.1.4. Products

The IABC offers generally little variety of products, in terms of goods and services. There is no clear list of services displayed and there is generally little assistance provided to the customers. The main services offered at IABC are highlighted in Table 2.

The low diversity of products and almost the absence of local goods to be sold to visitors hinder positive externalities IABC could have on the local economy.

4.1.5. Online image

To evaluate the presence and the visibility that IABC has on the online media, we took use of Google search engine, which returned over 40,000 results for “Imam al Bukhari Complex”/“Muhammad al Bukhari Mausoleum”. Nevertheless, IABC has no official site and tourists have to rely on information provided by a small number web pages not dedicated to the Complex. Table 3 offers a synthesis of the

quality and quantity of information provided by these web pages.

The IABC has a good image in the country but there is also a good international image as the personality of Imam Al Bukhari is among the top 4 in the world that have studied (Hadith studies), interpreted, rewritten and spread in the world the lines of the Quran and his books are considered second after Quran in terms of authenticity. Many international potential visitors know the person but they do not know about the Complex.

The analysis of the first results in the Google search engine provides us a useful image about the actual low quality of the advertisement at IABC. The internet user has limited possibilities to find out about IABC and even for the traveller that knows the place, the information is limited, hard to find and with a poor structure.

4.2. Impact on local development

IABC is a single isolated attraction that provides low benefits to the surrounding area, especially because of the lack of accommodation infrastructures. The offer of services is limited to two restaurants and to a dozen of self-employed informal non-local souvenir sales. Thus, local employment is limited and precarious and impact on local taxes is almost close to zero due to the lack of formal taxing. Moreover, the complex is state-owned and directly governed by the National Ministry of Culture and Sports. Policy making and taking needs to be directly supervised by the national government and ideas of local collaboration and governance has been seen as difficult to implement during the focus group because of the overcentralized system.

Table 5 Proposal Hough-Woodward matrix.

Woodward's 3 recommendations	Hough's 3 principles		
	Process	Diversity	Connectedness
Holistic approach	Increasing economic benefits and monitoring of demand (symbolic entrance fee). Increasing visibility of the site (online & TV, branding process, etc.).	Developing the resource and enlarge the experience of visitors (diversity of activities, more learning experience, impact events, increase of length of stay).	Improving accessibility to tourist site (road signalization, regular public transportation, larger parking, etc.).
Integrating local circumstances with market realities	Involving and supporting the community (support presence and monitoring of local products, training local guides, local household accommodation, design of selling stands).	Developing biodiversity and protecting the environment (better dendrologic composition, solar panels etc.).	Integration of the site in a pilgrimage network (a “pilgrim road”, similar to the Silk Road concept).
Inclusive approach (ensure that all stakeholders are conversant with the planning aspirations)	Involving local actors and stakeholders in the planning design and application in order to achieve support and success.	Implementing forms of governance (multiple stakeholders, community participation to projects as organizers and beneficiaries, slow decentralization, etc.).	Creation of a network of stakeholders (geographical or theme-related).

5. Diagnose

In order to give a correct diagnosis of the situation of tourism at Imam Al Bukhari Complex, the following SWOT matrix gives an overall image about this phenomenon (Table 4).

The strengths and weaknesses show a little imbalance towards the weaknesses. The good side is that most of these weaknesses can be easily overcome through little efforts or investments. Furthermore, the main assets evolve around the strength of the resource. Instead, the deficiencies are centred on the quality and the diversity of the overall offer.

The IABC must identify the *Unique Selling Point* that can provide a strong advantage and that can be easily used in the strategy of development of tourism. IABC relies on the unique personality of Imam Muhammad al-Bukhari that is known for over-dimensioned deeds (for example it is believed to have known by heart over 300,000 hadiths) and its books are considered as second authentic after the Holy Book of Quran, the latter playing a central role in any discussion of tourism in Islam (Jafari & Scott, 2014). The promotional campaign and the slogans and any other "promises" appended to the "product" should take into consideration these assets.

6. Solutions for IABC

When considering developing tourism, the general features of the sustainable development must be taken into consideration. It refers to an attentive growth of tourism phenomenon, through a balanced enhancement of economic, social, and environmental aspects. The principles stated in the WTO's report – "Roadmap for recovery" at the 18th session in Astana, Kazakhstan in October 2009 are key elements to consider in this respect (WTO, 2009). That is, the new administration at IABC must not only improve the tourism demand and offer (such as more tourists and more activities and thus more benefits) but also to take into consideration the social improvements (such as more jobs or better quality of life for employees at IABC or for local residents) and an improvement of the biodiversity and overall living environment.

The number of elements that need to be taken into consideration for assuring sustainability could be high; therefore, we argue that one can foster sustainability by defining actions plans that take into consideration both Woodward (2004) and Hough (1995) principals discussed in Section 2.2. For this reason, we developed a matrix that combines the two sets of principles (Table 5).

7. Conclusions

Based on a detailed qualitative diagnosis, the paper aimed at highlighting the current situation of a less known pilgrimage destination (at Imam Al Bukhari Complex in Uzbekistan), thus bringing into discussions empirical evidences for how one of the central Asian Muslim tourism destinations functions nowadays.

Pilgrimage and religious tourism is one of the fastest growing forms of tourism (Timothy & Olsen, 2006) and IABC faces with a higher number of visitors. As for Uzbekistan, tourism is a relatively new form of economic development

tool, unknown to local stakeholders. We cannot speak about cultural or leisure forms of tourism for native tourist as rather pilgrimage and religious tourism. Therefore, the emergence of tourism is slightly different than in a developed country, missing the basic infrastructure. The uppermost form of tourism with an important growth is still the religious tourism. Even so, we cannot speak about tourism as there are not any overnights recorded in the area and rather we can speak about daylight visits. Results bring into light important cultural resources that are not at all integrated in a long-term vision concerning tourism valorization. Tourism at IABC takes the dominant form of domestic short-term pilgrimages (one day visit without overnights), with a strong seasonality and a low impact on local development. As a consequence, IABC administration manifested its intention to transform the site into a well-known tourism destination. Nevertheless, the initiative of the IABC administration has few chances to produce significant results and foster local development without involving local and regional actors in tourism. Still, some easy and smart solutions can be applied for extending the length of the journey.

Taking into consideration the scarcity of financial resources from the part of the administration, the present study has also offered a solution-oriented approach on tourism dimension, based on simple and inexpensive actions that could be easily implemented.

Further researches could involve more stakeholders and time (and observations) and could also bring concrete solutions, such as layout of promotional materials, mapping visitors' origin, draw-branding strategy etc. Furthermore, researches could also explore ways to foster IABC positive externalities on local development.

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