

A Look at the History of Cultural Centers

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Abstract: *This article presents sources related to the history of cultural centers in Uzbekistan. It discusses not only historical aspects but also the political processes involved in the formation of cultural centers. Definitions of the term club are examined. In addition, the article offers brief suggestions for the development of cultural centers. The article highlights the stages of development of cultural centers based on historical sources and contemporary legislation, while also emphasizing their social, educational, and cultural significance.*

Keywords: *cultural center, club institution, cultural and educational activities, social reforms, cultural workers.*

Introduction

In Uzbekistan, the emergence of cultural and educational institutions began in the 19th century. Clubs, cultural palaces, houses of culture, libraries, cinemas, museums, parks, mobile performance gatherings, troupes, agitation circles, and open-air public events were the main mass venues where people gathered most frequently to relax and enjoy cultural leisure. These institutions served not only to elevate the cultural and educational level of the population but also to widely promote the dominant ideology of their time. When studying the activities of cultural centers in our republic today, it is essential first to examine clubs as their historical roots from a scholarly perspective. This is because clubs represent the initial stage of the cultural and educational processes that later shaped the history of cultural centers. It is true that cultural and educational spaces existed before clubs, but this study focuses specifically on the history of clubs.

Only through a complete and systematic study of such a great legacy can we truly understand it and, through that understanding, shape the moral and cultural identity of young people. Without this, progress is impossible. This is because history sharpens our thinking, builds national pride, and teaches us to recognize our past mistakes and avoid repeating them. As the great 18th-century German Enlightenment thinker Friedrich Schiller said, “To study history is to illuminate our minds and kindle our hearts with noble devotion. It prevents our spirit from approaching moral issues with vulgarity and triviality” [1:75]. In the history of club institutions, there were also ideological mistakes. Our historians have demonstrated this. We will focus on its creative and, to some extent, political aspects, and provide a brief historical analysis. Until 2013, what are now called cultural centers were commonly known among the public as clubs or houses of culture. During the Soviet period, clubs were established in localities to more effectively communicate the official ideology, policies, and cultural and educational processes to the masses. Because there was no modern technology or internet at that time, and these places served as creative centers, clubs held a unique place in social life. In fact, cultural and educational venues existed in our country even earlier, although they were known by other names. Nevertheless, the genealogy of

the term cultural center has not been thoroughly documented in any field literature or sources to date. Through the study of explanatory dictionaries of the Uzbek language, we have attempted to investigate the root basis of this term.

Analysis and Discussion

In 1981, under the editorship of Z.M. Ma'rufov, the "Explanatory Dictionary of the Uzbek Language, Volume I: Letters A-R" (632 pages), published by the Russian Language publishing house, defined the term club as follows: A club is an English word referring to a cultural-educational, political, or other type of social organization or institution engaged in enhancing the political awareness, culture, and general level of the first laborers, as well as organizing their leisure. Secondly, the term also refers to the building where such an institution is located, e.g., a factory club, a collective farm club, a weavers' club. Since the process of organizing club activities began rapidly, it was initially not possible to construct buildings specifically for clubs. Therefore, clubs were established alongside institutions, organizations, and educational establishments.

The later-published Uzbek National Encyclopedia, issued by the State Scientific Publishing House in the entry "Letter K" (900 pages; www.ziyouz.com library), provided an even more detailed description of the term club, which further intrigued us. A club (Eng. club) is a cultural-educational institution or public organization where people united by a common goal (colleagues or like-minded individuals) engage in political, scientific, artistic, sports, and other activities, and where they can voluntarily spend their leisure time. It is noted that clubs first appeared in England in the 16th century, and later became widespread in France during the bourgeois revolution of the 18th century. During those times, clubs, mainly for like-minded individuals (e.g., Jacobins), were places where political issues were discussed. The first clubs in Russia were established in St. Petersburg in 1770 under the name "English Club." Workers' clubs were initially established in England in 1800, and later in Russia between 1905 and 1907. In Uzbekistan, the first clubs were organized in 1869 for wealthy Russians, military personnel, officials, and others. They hosted balls, masquerades, dances, as well as vocal and literary evenings and dramatic performances for club members and their families [2:445].

In his scholarly research, Doctor of Philosophy and Professor V.A. Alimasov analyzed the views of both foreign and Uzbek scholars on the institution of the club and summarized them as follows: A.V. Sasikhov, Y.A. Strel'sov – Educating individuals ideologically and politically, enhancing their knowledge and creative abilities, and organizing their leisure and recreation. S.A. Belyakov, Z.A. Petrova – Creating favorable conditions to develop public amateur activities and serving as a base for various circles and hobby associations. E.P. Genelitsa – Conducting educational activities based on individuals' amateur pursuits, communication, and initiative during leisure time. N.F. Maksyutin – Organizing workers' collective amateur activities and promoting their social engagement; conducting educational work based on collective amateurism; arranging artistic amateur activities; organizing the collective emotional life of workers through mass events. T.I. Kudrina – Educating and enlightening workers; supporting the development of individuals' diverse creative abilities through amateur activities and initiatives; organizing reasonable leisure and recreation. L.N. Kogan, R.K. Shemetilo – Performing cultural and educational functions assigned by society; fostering creativity aimed at meeting personal needs; organizing recreation and communication. D.M. Genkin – Organizing individuals' communication, leisure, and recreation to influence them ideologically. V.Ye. Triodin – Educating and enlightening people, organizing their creative activity and communication, and shaping social opinion. X.Y. Asletdinova – Conducting educational and promotional work. Sh.K. Berdiyev – Enlightenment; developing individual creative and social activity; facilitating broad communication and shaping public opinion; ensuring cultural leisure and entertainment. A. Muhammedov – Meeting individuals' diverse spiritual needs, enhancing their abilities, increasing their political, labor, and social activity, and

cultivating qualities and character traits necessary for society. B. Esonov – Ideologically and politically educating the public, enhancing knowledge, organizing workers' leisure, and developing amateur creativity and abilities. U. Qoraboyev – Providing continuous education and upbringing, engaging individuals in amateur creativity, and organizing meaningful leisure and recreation. M. Oltinov – Developing a scientific-materialist worldview in individuals; fostering respect and interest in all areas of culture and art; cultivating aesthetic taste, artistic amateur activity, and creative initiative.

F. G'afurov, N. Hakimov, B. Aliyev – Serving national independence, educating individuals to be cultured and enlightened, and organizing leisure and amateur activities. A. Jalolov – Shaping national ideology and culture based on historical and cultural heritage. M. Abdullayev – Educating individuals, supporting their socialization and individualization, and helping them achieve heuristic goals [3:65].

In Uzbekistan, the first clubs, specifically workers' clubs, were established on May 7, 1918, in Tashkent under the auspices of the Turkestan People's University and at the Muslim Club in the Qushhovuz neighborhood of Samarkand. (There are also sources mentioning that clubs were established in 1869; however, those clubs did not serve the general public.) At the same time, during the 1920s, clubs emerged as central hubs for promoting political ideology. Their numerical growth was remarkably rapid. Between 1920 and 1928, their number increased from 40 to 531. In the 1920s, club institutions represented a centralized form of cultural-educational and political-ideological activities. They primarily hosted lectures, organized meetings, and conducted various reading sessions. Such activities were particularly well established in urban areas. For example, the club located in the workers' district of Tashkent, where 60,000 people resided, serves as a clear illustration of this. The club offered lectures, dramatic performances, music and vocal activities, artistic events, literary programs, and sports sections. During the winter, about 500 people actively participated in the club's activities daily, while in the summer, the number rose to 2,500 participants [4:88].

Subsequently, clubs developed rapidly in New Urganch, Toshhovuz, and the Karakalpak ASSR. By 1923, there were eight clubs in Khorezm. In Tashkent, workers' clubs were first established in 1924. In 1926, the First Congress of Club and Library Workers was held in Uzbekistan. From the 1930s, youth and workers' clubs began to be constructed at factories, plants, collective farms, and state farm centers based on standardized designs. These clubs included auditoriums (with stages), rooms for circle activities, libraries, and other facilities. Additionally, it should be noted that there were also larger cultural institutions, such as palaces and houses of culture, which differed fundamentally from regular clubs. Firstly, in terms of scale, and secondly, because professional artists performed there rather than amateurs. To define the genealogy of this term more comprehensively, the Uzbek National Encyclopedia, entry "Letter M" (975 pages), provides a description of palaces and houses of culture. While they can also be considered clubs, it is important to remember that they represent large-scale club institutions. Many people often equate clubs with palaces and houses of culture, but this is not entirely accurate.

Palaces and houses of culture are large-scale club institutions designed to organize cultural leisure for the public. They feature multi-purpose auditoriums and lecture halls, permanent cinema facilities, libraries, rooms for circle activities, and dedicated spaces for visual arts and other creative endeavors. In these institutions, exhibitions are held, thematic evenings and lectures are organized, meetings with outstanding workers and notable figures are conducted, and holiday celebrations and various ceremonies take place [5:56].

Initially, teahouses served as the primary centers for cultural and educational activities, and later, clubs began to be established. In 1918, the first workers' club was opened in Tashkent, followed by the first women's club in 1924. These clubs carried out propaganda and educational work, efforts to eradicate illiteracy, and organized activities for celebrating national holidays [6:52]. A state program was

developed to transform club institutions within the Ministry of Culture and Sports into “Centers of Culture, Art, and Public Leisure” through reconstruction, comprehensive renovation, and equipping of the facilities. Institutions previously referred to as clubs were renamed “Centers of Culture and Public Leisure” after June 25, 2013. Specifically, according to Clause 65 of the State Program “Year of a Prosperous Life”, attached to Resolution No. 1920 of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated February 14, 2013, the task was assigned to develop a state program for reconstructing, thoroughly repairing, and equipping club institutions within the Ministry of Culture and Sports to establish Centers of Culture, Art, and Public Leisure based on these clubs. Furthermore, pursuant to Resolution No. PD–1920 of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated March 14, 2013, and in compliance with Clause 65 of the “Year of a Prosperous Life” State Program, the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 178 dated June 25, 2013, titled “Measures for the Establishment of Modern Centers of Culture and Public Leisure for 2013 – 2018”, approved a scheme for the establishment and placement of 894 centers of culture and public leisure (including 38 for persons with disabilities) based on 1,777 cultural houses and club institutions across the Republic of Karakalpakstan, the regions, and the districts (cities) of Tashkent. This scheme ensured that a wide segment of the population could benefit from the cultural and public services provided by these centers. As a result, cultural houses and club institutions were converted into Centers of Culture and Public Leisure.

Consequently, the term “club” began to be legally removed from official sources. Notably, on September 13, 2013, the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan, in accordance with the amendments and additions to certain decisions of the Government of Uzbekistan (related to Resolution No. 178 dated June 25, 2013, “Measures for the Establishment of Modern Centers of Culture and Public Leisure for 2013–2018”), introduced changes outlined in Appendix No. 249, further formalizing the transition from clubs to modern culture and leisure centers [7:33].

In the amendments and additions to certain decisions of the Government of the Republic of Uzbekistan: a) In Clause 23 of Section 1, the term “clubs” is to be replaced with “Centers of Culture and Public Leisure”; b) In Clause 1 of Section 3, the phrase “clubs, cultural houses, and palaces” is to be replaced with “Centers of Culture and Public Leisure”. Furthermore, in the Cabinet of Ministers Resolution No. 177 dated June 24, 2009 (Collection of Legislation of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2009, No. 6, Article 51), which approved the Rules for Mandatory Civil Liability Insurance of Employers, the following amendment was made: in Appendix 9, “Palaces and cultural houses, permanent and mobile clubs (autoclubs, club carriages, floating cultural bases, etc.)” was replaced with “Centers of Culture and Public Leisure” in Clause 29 regarding the classification of occupational risk levels and insurance tariff coefficients. Consequently, after these legislative changes, the term “club” remains only in the historical literature of our field. Based on Decree No. 4038 of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev dated November 28, 2018, “On Approving the Concept for the Further Development of National Culture in the Republic of Uzbekistan”, it was decided to establish cultural centers based on the existing Centers of Culture and Public Leisure operating in the country. The Concept specifies: “Cultural centers shall be established based on the Centers of Culture and Public Leisure operating in the Republic of Karakalpakstan, the regions, and the city of Tashkent.” It also outlines prospective tasks and programs for the functioning of these cultural centers.

Conclusion

However, comprehensive methodological guidelines for these changes have not yet been fully developed by our scholars. These articles can be considered as preliminary studies concerning the activities of cultural centers, providing insight into their early stages and subsequent developments. A cultural center is recognized as a state institution established to study the cultural needs of the population and to carry

out activities in the field of cultural-educational and recreational services. It functions as a legal entity engaged in artistic creation, applied arts, and amateur activities [8:1].

The process of the emergence of the term “cultural center” – its developmental genesis – has been described above. However, unfortunately, today, some cultural centers demonstrate a certain sluggishness in their growth. At the same time, there are still considerable problems in the field. Reflecting on some shortcomings noticed during the process of writing about the genesis of this term, it seems that the notion of spending free time meaningfully, which has been emphasized for over 100 years, no longer fully meets the demands of contemporary society. The reason is that, nowadays, people hardly have free time. Even when they do, they spend it on a single device, such as a phone, to watch not only local but also the latest international films or access social networks, thus spending their leisure virtually. In other words, people can have cultural leisure through virtual experiences. Sometimes, I even wonder whether the time of cultural centers has passed. Previously, clubs managed to promote not only cultural-educational but also political-ideological processes to the public. Why, then, have the clubs, which once successfully carried out these tasks in practice while even five political parties now strive to do the same, become sluggish? Currently, media products available online ensure that people’s cultural leisure is being provided. However, live interaction and the desire of the public to participate in creative processes underscore the continuing necessity of cultural centers.

It would be valuable for field specialists to read this article and share their positive or negative feedback. I recall a friend who worked at a cultural center and decided to leave, saying, “I’ve had enough, I’m not working here anymore.” I reminded him that jobs are scarce, and he had barely managed to get this position. He replied in frustration, “We work like everyone else in government institutions, but the salary is low. Apparently, one must be ‘dedicated’ to this field”. Indeed, our teachers taught us that only the dedicated should work in this sphere. But why didn’t we say back then, “Then why don’t you work in a cultural center?” Isn’t it ironic that we gained knowledge from teachers who themselves never worked – or still do not work – in cultural centers? Yet, there were some teachers who did work in cultural centers and taught, while others had no such experience. This is not to generalize the activities of all centers or dismiss the contributions of some non-specialist teachers. We believe that in the future, cultural centers will continue their activities more dynamically, and, in fact, they are already making efforts in this direction [9:48].

This may explain why employees of cultural centers continue to work creatively and remain active despite receiving low salaries. As Mahmud Sa’diy notes in his wisdom: the ruler of the Seljuks once asked Alp Arslan, “Why did such a powerful empire fall apart?” Alp Arslan replied: “The reason is that we assigned small tasks to capable people and gave large responsibilities to incompetent ones. The latter could not handle these tasks, and the former resented doing the menial work of others.” In this context, it is necessary for the Ministry of Culture to organize annual competitions for young people who demonstrate outstanding activity in cultural centers. This would allow for effective monitoring and analysis of personnel performance. History shows that people work passionately, invent, and create unique works of art when they are rewarded according to their talent and labor. Therefore, the future development of the spiritual and educational sphere should be recognized according to the laws of pragmatism, and not seen as a tragedy, but rather as a form of entrepreneurship. Based on an analysis of cultural center activities, I would propose the following recommendations:

Create a printed and book-form manual titled “Cultural Centers of the Republic of Uzbekistan”, which would comprehensively cover the activities of all centers across the country.

Facilitate direct collaboration between students conducting research in this field and the Ministry of Culture by providing access to statistical data, as the ministry is currently not easily accessible to young researchers.

Introduce the position of Press Secretary in cultural centers to enhance communication and documentation.

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