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# MEDIA REPRESENTATION AND INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF KARAKALPAK ETHNOSPORT: CULTURAL HERITAGE, COMPARATIVE MODELS, AND STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE PROMOTION

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**ABSTRACT**

*Ethnosport has become an increasingly visible framework for safeguarding traditional games, strengthening cultural identity, and presenting local physical practices to wider national and international audiences. This paper examines the problem of limited and fragmented media representation of Karakalpak ethnosport and develops an academically grounded strategy for its sustainable promotion. Using qualitative comparative document analysis, the study synthesizes Karakalpak sources on traditional games with scholarship on ethnosport, intangible cultural heritage, sportification, and digital heritage communication, alongside official materials from Uzbekistan, the World Ethnosport Confederation, and the World Nomad Games. The analysis shows that successful ethnosport development depends on an interconnected system of community practice, documentation, institutional coordination, event organization, and continuous multimedia storytelling. Comparative cases from Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and international ethnosport networks demonstrate that festivals create visibility but do not substitute for year-round documentation and specialized journalism. For Karakalpakstan, the central challenge is therefore not simply increasing the quantity of sports news, but improving cultural context, terminology, archival continuity, and community participation in media production. The paper proposes a five-part media strategy: documentation, editorial specialization, multilingual digital distribution, educational integration, and institutional coordination. These measures can strengthen intergenerational transmission while preserving cultural specificity and avoiding excessive commercialization in contemporary society.*

**ACCEPTED**

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***Keywords:*** *Karakalpak ethnosport, traditional games, media representation, intangible cultural heritage, digital heritage, Central Asia.*

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## Introduction

Traditional sports and folk games are more than recreational activities. They are embodied forms of knowledge through which communities reproduce social memory, physical skills, local terminology, ethical norms, and collective identity. The concept of ethnosport has provided a contemporary vocabulary for studying and organizing such practices within modern cultural and sporting institutions. Kylasov (2011) treats ethnosport as a framework for preserving and developing traditional forms of physical activity, while Bjeljac et al. (2021) locate traditional sports and games within the broader field of intangible cultural

heritage. This perspective is especially relevant in Central Asia, where wrestling, equestrian competition, knucklebone games, archery, strength contests, and team games remain connected to historical lifeways and public festivals.

The Karakalpak case deserves separate scholarly attention. Karakalpak traditional games have been documented in ethnographic and cultural publications, including research on knucklebone games and works devoted to specific folk games such as Qasharman Top (Nurmukhamedov, 1983; Shylmanov et al., 2007). However, the existence of traditional practices does not automatically guarantee their public visibility, institutional continuity, or transmission to younger generations. Mass-media coverage is therefore a critical analytical issue: media should be understood not merely as a channel for reporting competitions, but as part of the safeguarding infrastructure of living heritage.

This paper therefore asks three questions. First, what can comparative ethnosport models in Central Asia and international organizations teach Karakalpakstan about institutional visibility? Second, what are the principal weaknesses of media representation when traditional games are covered only episodically? Third, what media and institutional strategy could increase visibility while preserving cultural specificity? The paper argues that sustainable Karakalpak ethnosport requires a coordinated cycle in which community practice is documented, interpreted by culturally informed media, circulated through multilingual platforms, connected to education and festivals, and supported by institutions that maintain archives and standards.

**Ethnosport, Heritage, and Media Representation**

Ethnosport emerges at the intersection of sport, folklore, identity, and heritage policy. Unlike standardized global sport, traditional games are often tied to particular landscapes, seasonal celebrations, family memories, ritual contexts, and locally meaningful rules. The process of turning such practices into organized competition can increase recognition, but it can also change them. Philippe (2014), in a comparative analysis that includes Uzbek kurash, shows that traditional wrestling styles negotiate between cultural uniqueness and the standardized requirements of modern sport. This tension is fundamental for Karakalpak ethnosport: codification may be necessary for tournaments and media explanation, yet over-standardization can remove the context that makes a practice culturally distinctive.

Media intensifies this tension because it selects what becomes visible. Traditional sports may be presented as spectacular competition, as folklore, as tourism content, as national symbolism, or as community heritage. Research on digital intangible heritage demonstrates that media can broaden awareness and support transmission, but representation is never neutral. Pietrobruno (2014) shows how online video can both archive and reshape living heritage, while Khalid and Chowdhury (2018) emphasize social media's potential for awareness, knowledge building, and diffusion of intangible cultural heritage. Applied to ethnosport, these findings suggest that high-quality coverage should document rules, vocabulary, participants, oral histories, equipment, local meanings, and changes in practice—not simply winners and scores.

The World Ethnosport Confederation presents ethnosport through four principles—tradition, respect, solidarity, and peace—and defines it as sporting activity that preserves elements of local identity (World Ethnosport Confederation, n.d.). This normative framing is useful because it places cultural continuity ahead of entertainment value alone. A Karakalpak media strategy should therefore evaluate success not only through views or event attendance, but also through the accuracy of cultural representation, participation of knowledge holders, youth learning, archival quality, and the continuity of local terminology.

**Method**

This study uses qualitative comparative document analysis. The source base consists of: (a) Karakalpak-focused ethnographic and cultural scholarship on traditional games; (b) scholarship on ethnosport, traditional wrestling, intangible cultural heritage, and digital heritage communication; and (c)


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official institutional materials from Uzbekistan, the World Ethnosport Confederation, and the World Nomad Games. The method is interpretive rather than statistical. It does not claim to measure the total number of Karakalpak media publications or audience responses because a systematic media corpus was not available in the source material. Instead, it identifies recurring institutional and communication patterns and uses them to formulate an evidence-informed model for future media development. This distinction is important for academic validity: the conclusions are strategic propositions grounded in comparative evidence, not results of an unreported content-analysis sample.

**Comparative Institutional Models in Ethnosport**

Comparative experience demonstrates that ethnosport becomes visible when cultural practice is connected to durable institutions and recurring public events. Uzbekistan provides an important national framework. The presidential decree of May 25, 2022 established measures for promoting ethnosport, including regular festivals, cooperation with the World Ethnosport Confederation, public participation, tourism links, and the use of traditional games in educational contexts (President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2022). The first International Ethnosport Festival in Khiva in September 2023 subsequently brought together participants, international organizations, media representatives, and multiple traditional sport formats. In his address to the festival, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev emphasized the significance of national sports and folk games and the international interest generated by the event (President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2023). These measures show that media visibility is strongest when it is attached to policy, events, educational programming, and international partnership.

The World Nomad Games provide a second model. Anarkulov et al. (2021) interpret the Games as a mechanism for cultural representation and international image-building, not only as competition. The 2024 edition in Kazakhstan demonstrated a broad program that included asyk atu, kokpar, kurash, qazaq kuresi, toguzqumalaq, traditional archery, horseback sports, and other practices (World Nomad Games Astana 2024, 2024). The sixth World Nomad Games, held in Kyrgyzstan from August 31 to September 6, 2026, again combined ethnosport, ethnoculture, and scientific programming and drew participation from more than 100 countries (World Nomad Games, 2026). Such events create concentrated media attention and make traditional sports legible to international audiences through schedules, rules, visual identities, athlete profiles, and multilingual digital content.

For Karakalpakstan, however, direct imitation of large international festivals would be insufficient. The key transferable lesson is organizational layering. Major events operate effectively because they rest on prior work: disciplines have names and rules, organizations have designated responsibilities, websites provide structured information, archives preserve results, and media teams produce repeatable formats. Karakalpak ethnosport needs the same underlying architecture at an appropriate regional scale.

**Table 1**

*Comparative Ethnosport Models and Their Media Implications for Karakalpakstan*

| Case | Institutional/event model | Representative emphasis | Media lesson for Karakalpakstan |
|---|---|---|---|
| Uzbekistan | National policy plus recurring ethnosport festivals | National sports, folk games, education, tourism | Connect regional coverage to policy, schools, festivals, and multilingual public information. |
| Kyrgyzstan | World Nomad Games and national traditional-sport ecosystem | Equestrian sports, wrestling, board games, cultural program | Use large events as peaks in a year-round documentation and storytelling cycle. |
| Kazakhstan | International mega-event with structured | Asyk atu, kokpar, qazaq kuresi, archery, toguzqumalaq | Publish clear rules, schedules, athlete profiles, results, and visual explainers. |



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| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | digital sports information | | |
| World Ethnosport Confederation | International network organized around shared heritage principles | Tradition, respect, solidarity, peace | Frame games as cultural heritage and social practice, not only competition. |
| Karakalpakstan (proposed) | Regional documentation and coordination system | Locally documented games, oral histories, school/community participation | Build a searchable archive and specialist media formats before seeking wider international recognition. |

*Note.* Comparative synthesis based on official ethnosport and World Nomad Games materials and the literature reviewed in this paper.

**The Media-Coverage Problem in the Karakalpak Context**

The central weakness in Karakalpak ethnosport coverage is fragmentation. Traditional games may appear in newspapers, cultural programs, holiday reporting, school activities, or occasional television segments, yet episodic attention does not create a coherent public knowledge system. When coverage is event-centered, audiences may see that a game exists without learning its rules, historical variants, terminology, social context, or relationship to other Karakalpak practices. This limits both educational value and archival usefulness.

A second problem is category ambiguity. Terms such as national game, folk game, traditional sport, ethnosport, children's game, and ritual competition can overlap but are not identical. Inconsistent naming makes search, cataloguing, and comparative research difficult. A third problem concerns source authority. Elder practitioners, local historians, ethnographers, teachers, coaches, and community organizers hold different kinds of knowledge; responsible journalism should identify these roles and distinguish remembered practice from recently standardized competition. A fourth issue is language. Karakalpak material that remains only in one language has limited national and international discoverability, while translation without careful terminology can flatten culturally specific meanings.

These problems are not unique to Karakalpakstan. Digital-heritage research shows that wider circulation can support cultural transmission while also simplifying context (Khalid & Chowdhury, 2018; Pietrobruno, 2014). The practical implication is that media expansion must be paired with editorial standards. More content is useful only when it increases reliable knowledge and community recognition.

**A Strategic Model for Sustainable Media Representation**

A sustainable approach should organize ethnosport communication as a continuous editorial and heritage process rather than as occasional publicity. Figure 1 presents a proposed cycle connecting community knowledge, documentation, media translation, participation, and institutional support. The model begins with living practice because ethnosport cannot be safeguarded only in archives. Documentation then records rules, names, oral histories, equipment, places, and variants. Media translation converts this material into accessible formats without stripping away cultural context. Public circulation encourages participation and recognition; institutional support then provides resources for further documentation, education, and events.

The first priority is systematic documentation. Karakalpakstan would benefit from a digital register of traditional games with standardized entries: Karakalpak name, English and Uzbek/Russian equivalents where appropriate, game type, age group, number of participants, equipment, playing area, rules, known variants, geographic distribution, source persons, historical references, photographs, and video demonstrations. Existing scholarship on knucklebone games and Qasharman Top provides a starting point (Nurmukhamedov, 1983; Shylmanov et al., 2007), but the register should be community-reviewed and expandable. Such a database could later support an encyclopedia of Karakalpak national games.


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The second priority is specialized journalism. Sports reporters often know competition structures but may not know ethnographic context; cultural journalists may understand heritage but not rules or performance technique. A small cross-disciplinary editorial group could develop a style guide for names, transliteration, historical claims, interview practice, and captions. Regular formats could include "Game of the Week," athlete and elder profiles, rule explainers, archival photographs with commentary, school demonstrations, short documentary episodes, and comparative pieces linking Karakalpak games with related Central Asian traditions. The aim would be to create continuity and recognizable public genres.

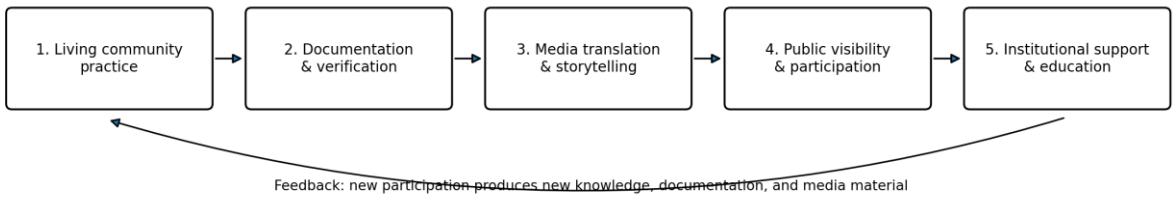
Third, distribution should be multilingual and platform-specific. Long-form newspaper or web articles can preserve historical context; television and YouTube can demonstrate movement and rules; short video can attract younger audiences; podcasts can capture oral history; social media cards can explain vocabulary and event schedules. One master research file should feed multiple formats so that accuracy is maintained across platforms. English-language summaries are especially important for international discoverability and academic exchange, while Karakalpak should remain central because heritage transmission depends on the language in which cultural meanings are locally articulated.

Fourth, media should be integrated with education. UNESCO's intangible-heritage framework defines safeguarding broadly to include identification, documentation, research, preservation, promotion, and transmission, particularly through education (UNESCO, 2003). For ethnosport, school and university partnerships can convert media materials into lesson resources, student reporting projects, interviews with elders, and practical demonstrations. Youth should not be treated only as an audience; they can become documentarians, translators, athletes, and researchers.

Fifth, institutional coordination is required. The strongest comparative cases link sport authorities, cultural institutions, educational organizations, tourism structures, federations, and media. Turdimuratov (2023) similarly emphasizes ethnosport as a mechanism for developing national sports and folk games in Uzbekistan. For Karakalpakstan, a regional coordinating mechanism—whether a dedicated association, working group, or program within existing institutions—could define documentation standards, approve event calendars, facilitate expert review, and maintain a public archive. The purpose should not be bureaucratic expansion for its own sake, but continuity of responsibility.

**Figure 1**

*Proposed Cycle for Sustainable Karakalpak Ethnosport Media Representation*




*Note.* Author-developed conceptual model based on the comparative and digital-heritage literature synthesized in this study.

**Table 2**

*Proposed Media Development Framework for Karakalpak Ethnosport*

| Current weakness | Heritage risk | Recommended action | Illustrative indicator |
|---|---|---|---|
| Episodic event coverage | No cumulative public knowledge | Create recurring ethnosport editorial series and annual coverage calendar | Number of recurring features and games covered per year |
| Inconsistent terminology | Poor searchability and confusion | Adopt a reviewed Karakalpak terminology/transliteration guide | Percentage of items using approved names and definitions |


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|---|---|---|---|
| Limited audiovisual documentation | Loss of embodied knowledge | Record rule demonstrations, oral histories, equipment, and local variants | Verified video records and interviews archived |
| Single-language publication | Low national/international discoverability | Publish Karakalpak originals with Uzbek/Russian and English summaries as appropriate | Share of core records available in multiple languages |
| Weak education-media linkage | Youth remain passive audiences | Use media assets in schools and student fieldwork | Schools/university courses using materials |
| No permanent archive/coordination | Content disperses across outlets | Assign an institution to maintain a searchable public repository | Archive completeness, stable metadata, annual updates |

*Note.* Indicators are proposed for program monitoring; they are not empirical measurements from the present study.

**Research and Policy Agenda for Karakalpak Ethnosport**

A stronger media strategy should be accompanied by a research program that produces evidence about what is currently visible, what remains undocumented, and which audiences are being reached. The first step would be a baseline content analysis of Karakalpak-language newspapers, television channels, news websites, institutional pages, YouTube channels, and major social-media accounts over a defined period, such as three to five years. Each item could be coded by game name, genre, language, source type, location, presence of historical explanation, use of expert testimony, visual documentation, and attention to rules. Such a study would transform the present diagnosis of fragmented coverage into measurable evidence and would allow future comparisons after policy interventions.

A second research priority is an ethnographic inventory. Media analysis alone cannot determine whether coverage is culturally accurate. Researchers should therefore conduct field interviews with elder practitioners, teachers, athletes, craftspeople who make traditional equipment, local historians, and families that continue to play particular games. Where accounts differ, the archive should preserve variants rather than force premature uniformity. This is especially important because folk games often exist in local versions, and variation can itself be culturally meaningful. Documentation forms should record who provided information, where the practice was observed, when it was recorded, and whether the described rules represent remembered, currently practiced, or newly standardized forms.

Third, the region needs a terminology protocol. A practical glossary could include the preferred Karakalpak spelling, alternative local names, definitions, pronunciation guidance, and equivalent or approximate terms in Uzbek, Russian, and English. The purpose would not be to replace Karakalpak vocabulary with international labels, but to make translation transparent. Media outlets, schools, museums, researchers, and sports organizers could then use the same reference system. Consistent metadata would also make digital search and future academic citation much easier.

Fourth, policy evaluation should include both media and heritage outcomes. A regional program might track the number of documented games, expert-reviewed records, hours of audiovisual material, school activities, trained journalists, published translations, and community contributors. Media metrics such as reach and engagement should be interpreted alongside these indicators rather than treated as the only evidence of success. This approach is consistent with the broader heritage principle that safeguarding concerns continuity and transmission, not merely publicity (UNESCO, 2003).

Finally, ethical governance should be explicit. Community members should know how recordings will be stored and reused, and culturally sensitive material should not be commercialized or circulated without appropriate consent. Credit should be given to practitioners and knowledge holders, especially when their demonstrations or oral histories become reusable media assets. These safeguards can help ensure that institutional promotion does not detach ethnosport from the people whose knowledge sustains it. In this sense, a Karakalpak ethnosport program should treat media production as a collaborative research


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practice: journalists make heritage visible, researchers verify and contextualize it, institutions preserve access, and communities retain an active role in defining what the tradition means.

**Discussion**

The proposed strategy has two broader implications. First, ethnosport should be treated as living cultural heritage rather than as a fixed inventory of old games. Living traditions change: rules are negotiated, equipment changes, young participants introduce new performance styles, and media creates new audiences. Sportification is therefore not automatically harmful. As Philippe (2014) demonstrates, institutionalization can help traditional practices survive, but it also produces tensions around authenticity and standardization. The appropriate goal is transparent adaptation: media and organizers should document what is historical, what is reconstructed, and what has been standardized for modern competition.

Second, visibility must be evaluated qualitatively as well as quantitatively. A video with many views may still be weak heritage communication if it omits the Karakalpak name of the game, misidentifies its origin, or presents a staged version as unchanged tradition. Conversely, a carefully documented interview with an elder practitioner may have a smaller audience but high archival and educational value. A balanced evaluation system should therefore combine reach indicators (views, shares, attendance) with heritage indicators (number of games documented, expert-reviewed entries, oral histories recorded, multilingual resources produced, school use, and participation by local communities).

Comparative festivals also show the importance of cultural diplomacy. Large ethnosport events enable communities to present themselves through embodied practice rather than through abstract national branding alone. Yet Karakalpakstan's strongest contribution to such networks would come from specificity. International recognition is more likely when practices are well documented, named consistently, visually explained, and institutionally supported. The objective should not be to label every folk activity as a sport, but to establish a defensible corpus of Karakalpak ethnosport that scholars, journalists, educators, athletes, and international organizations can understand and reference.

**Conclusion**

Karakalpak traditional games possess clear potential for cultural education, community participation, regional identity, tourism, and international ethnosport exchange. The principal challenge is not a complete absence of media attention, but the absence of a continuous system that connects documentation, interpretation, publication, education, events, and institutional responsibility. Comparative experience from Uzbekistan and the World Nomad Games demonstrates that festivals can generate powerful visibility, while research on intangible cultural heritage shows that digital media can support transmission when representation remains context-sensitive.

For Karakalpakstan, five priorities emerge: a community-reviewed digital register; specialist editorial standards and recurring media formats; multilingual distribution; integration with education; and permanent coordination and archiving. Together, these measures can support a future encyclopedia, wider ethnosport participation, and sustained cultural documentation that keeps Karakalpak knowledge central while improving national and international visibility.

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