



# **THE TRANSFORMATION OF FERGANA VALLEY CITIES: SOCIO-POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGES (1926-1945)**

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**Abstract.** The period between 1926 and 1945 was transformative for the cities in Uzbekistan's Fergana Valley, as Soviet policies fundamentally altered the region's social structure, economy, and urban landscape. This paper investigates these changes, focusing on cities like Fergana, Namangan, and Andijan. The study draws on Soviet urban policy analysis, economic shifts due to forced collectivization and industrialization, and the impacts of World War II on local urban life. The findings reveal significant changes that contributed to the modernization of the region within the Soviet socio-political framework, with implications that would resonate in the Valley's post-war period.

**Keywords:** Fergana Valley, Soviet Union, urban history, industrialization, World War II, socio-political transformation

The Fergana Valley, a fertile and culturally rich region shared between Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, has been historically significant due to its strategic location and agricultural productivity. By the 1920s, following the Russian Revolution and the establishment of Soviet power, the Valley became a focus for the Soviet Union's ambitious socio-political and economic reforms aimed at transforming Central Asia. Before Soviet rule, Fergana, Namangan, and Andijan thrived as centers of trade and cultural exchange. This study examines how Soviet policies from 1926 to 1945 reshaped these cities, analyzing economic policies, urban restructuring, and social engineering efforts that reshaped both physical and socio-cultural landscapes.

## **Early Soviet Policies and Urban Transformation (1926-1932)**

In 1926, Soviet administration implemented policies that restructured local governance in the Fergana Valley, effectively dissolving traditional power structures. The Soviet regime centralized political control, replacing indigenous elites with officials loyal to Moscow. This administrative overhaul included the establishment of local Soviet councils (Soviets) in cities like Fergana and Andijan, which were tasked with implementing Soviet policies and ideals at the grassroots level.

The early 1930s marked the onset of forced collectivization under Stalin's directive, which had profound effects on the Valley's cities. Traditional farming methods and privately-owned lands were reorganized into collective farms (kolkhozes) and state farms (sovkhozes), drastically changing the urban-rural economic dynamic. Many rural inhabitants were relocated to cities for work in collective farming initiatives. This migration contributed to the urban population boom and shifted the economic base in cities from trade-oriented to state-controlled agriculture and small-scale industry.

The Soviet regime pursued a campaign of social engineering to align Central Asian society with communist ideals. For instance, the Hujum movement sought to dismantle patriarchal structures, pushing for gender equality and secularism. This campaign encouraged



women to remove their traditional veils (paranja), promoting a shift toward Soviet-defined gender roles in cities. Educational reforms, such as the establishment of Soviet-style schools, also aimed to create a “new Soviet citizen,” effectively aligning local populations with the values of atheism, collectivism, and loyalty to the Soviet state.

As part of the First and Second Five-Year Plans, the Soviet government initiated industrialization efforts in Central Asia. The Fergana Valley, particularly Andijan and Fergana cities, saw significant infrastructure development aimed at integrating the region into the Soviet industrial framework. Factories for textile production, food processing, and light machinery were established, accompanied by extensive irrigation projects to support agriculture. Railways were constructed to connect these urban centers with the broader Soviet network, facilitating resource distribution.

Industrialization accelerated the migration of rural populations to urban centers, fundamentally altering the labor structure. New labor demands meant that residents of Fergana, Namangan, and Andijan increasingly relied on state employment, with many workers transitioning from agrarian roles to industrial labor. The influx of new residents led to urban expansion, and the Soviet state invested in housing projects, though often these developments struggled to keep up with the population growth, resulting in crowded living conditions.

The Soviet egalitarian vision aimed to eliminate traditional hierarchies, but urban labor structures often favored Russian-speaking individuals from European Soviet territories who were viewed as more skilled or ideologically aligned. This created social tension as indigenous populations felt sidelined in their own cities. Nevertheless, these policies successfully laid the groundwork for integrating the Fergana Valley cities into the Soviet socio-political framework.

### The Impact of World War II on the Fergana Valley Cities (1941-1945)

The Valley gained strategic importance during World War II as the Soviet Union mobilized its resources to support the war effort. Cities like Fergana and Namangan became essential for wartime production due to their location away from the frontlines and the pre-existing industrial infrastructure developed during the 1930s.

The onset of the war brought about the evacuation of populations from western parts of the Soviet Union to Central Asia, including the Fergana Valley. Cities in the region saw an influx of evacuees, including factory workers, skilled laborers, and cultural figures, adding to the Valley’s workforce and cultural diversity. This population shift, however, also strained the already limited urban resources and housing, leading to challenges in managing social services and supplies.

The war placed tremendous strain on the Soviet economy, and the Fergana Valley was no exception. Local industries had to adapt to wartime production requirements, focusing on materials like textiles and food processing essential for the Red Army. This shift temporarily altered the economic composition of these cities, as factories redirected production to meet military demands. The cities also faced food shortages, as agricultural production was diverted to support the war effort, placing further strain on urban populations.

The Soviet education system, aimed at eradicating illiteracy and instilling communist values, became central to transforming Fergana Valley’s urban culture. Russian-language schools were established, gradually replacing traditional madrasahs. This shift fostered a generation proficient in Russian, familiar with Soviet ideologies, and distanced from local religious and cultural traditions.



In line with Soviet secular policies, religious institutions faced repression. Mosques were repurposed for secular uses, and religious leaders were marginalized or persecuted. The decline of these institutions significantly altered the cultural landscape of cities, eroding traditional practices that once formed the social fabric of urban life in the Fergana Valley.

By the 1940s, Soviet identity had taken root among younger generations in urban areas. The state's social engineering policies promoted Soviet values and marginalized ethnic or religious identities, which were seen as backward. This generational shift was especially prominent in urban centers, where state-run educational and social institutions had the strongest influence.

This study underscores the transformative impact of Soviet policies on Fergana Valley cities between 1926 and 1945. Soviet administrative control, forced collectivization, and industrialization drastically altered the economic and social foundations of cities like Fergana, Namangan, and Andijan. World War II intensified these changes, bringing new populations and economic challenges to the region. Ultimately, the Soviet era laid the groundwork for a modern, albeit Soviet-centric, urban identity that would continue to shape the region long after the war's end. Further research on post-war development could offer deeper insights into the long-term effects of these changes.

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