

Participatory Approach to Heritage Conservation

By Sajith Shaik

Public participation in heritage conservation initiatives is critical as the process helps sustain the significance of tangible and intangible heritage. As per the Constitution of India, protection of heritage is one of the fundamental duties of each and every citizen, but the efforts made by the local authorities are not always proven significant. With the advent of programmes like HRIDAY and Smart City Mission, several new and innovative efforts are being made by state and local governments across the country towards promoting people-centric heritage conservation practices.

An Urban Symposium on 'Harmonizing Heritage and Innovation in Cities' was hosted by UN-Habitat in partnership with GIZ during 19th - 20th December 2019 in Jaipur, India. In the session, 'People Centred Heritage and Conservation', urban planning, design, heritage and conservation professionals representing various government and private agencies across India shared their experiences, discussed challenges, strategies, and successful case studies about community participation and public private partnerships in heritage and conservation. Four case studies and key lessons learnt in the session are highlighted below.

1. **Public-private partnerships for heritage and conservation.** The vision of promoting art and culture, followed by systematic efforts from the state governments to involve heritage and conservation experts, and not-for-profit agencies, has breathed life into historical monuments. Museologist Ms. Noelle Kadar presented the sculpture park located at Madhavendra palace at Nahargarh Fort, Jaipur. The site is India's first contemporary art public sculpture park, which is a successful public private collaboration. The addition of sculpture park to the historical fort has led to promotion of Rajasthani and Indian contemporary art, created livelihood, facilitated tourism and recognition internationally. Since its launch in December 2017, there have been about 39% increase in the number of visitors to the fort. The money for operation and maintenance of The Sculpture Park is raised majorly through patron donations, CSR funding thus creating a new mode of corporate social responsibility towards contemporary art.

Similarly, Ms. Priya Pall shared her experiences of working as a Curator Director during the transformation of a century old Bikaner House, a Grade II heritage building located in New Delhi, into a globally renowned new age cultural institution. The harmonious collaboration of the Government of Rajasthan, experts in the area of art and culture, artisans from Rajasthan and across the country made efforts to meticulously restore the Bikaner House during 2013-14 and open the building to the public in November 2015 by introducing various activities such as conducting cultural fairs, art exhibitions, film festivals, music performances, celebrating festivals, Sunday market. Through these activities, Rajasthani, Indian art and culture is being promoted by involving local artisans. Bikaner house in no time has gained international recognition and is also a sought after venue for various international meetings, and exhibitions. The financial model of Bikaner house operation and management is self-reliant. The revenue is generated from hiring charges of venues and leasing out spaces to commercial outlets in the house.

2. **Combating community apprehension through creating awareness.** Agra city under Smart City Mission and other programmes has been implementing projects such as Taj Ganj improvement, linkage of Kachhipura with Mehtab Bagh, heritage walks, that involve road widening, resettlement of a few houses to make room for pedestrians, promoting non-motorised transport and parking facilities, enhancing road ambiance, etc. Ms. Devina Agarwal, Urban Designer, Agra Smart City Limited informed that though the purpose of these projects is to promote tourism and benefit the citizens, the projects are not always seen as such by the local communities, as they are not immediately or directly benefiting them. In fact, 11% of Agra city area is in heritage protected zone, and a considerable share of the population of the city see heritage as a synonym of regulations.

It has become difficult for city officials to involve people in heritage conservation related activities because the fear of regulations brought on by formal recognition of heritage. Therefore, there is a need to initiate heritage advocacy with a goal of making citizens aware and proud of their heritage. With an objective of raising public awareness, build, increase and maintain respect and appreciation for the city's heritage, the city of Agra is currently exploring several options such as heritage awards to citizens and undertaking various Information Education Communication activities.

3. **Public-centered approach is critical for heritage conservation and management.** Ms. Mayura Gadkari, Heritage Conservation Expert, NIUA explained various participatory models applied for undertaking consultations with different stakeholder groups such as one-to-one consultations with government officials, local associations and professionals; socio-economic surveys with artisans, vendors and businessmen in the markets; participatory heritage appraisal; focussed group discussions with local communities. Based on these comprehensive consultations, the city vision, design, operation and maintenance interventions are prepared linking local artisans, craftsmen, and local businesses. Further, based on public priorities, socio-economic condition, recommendations for improving institutional framework, strengthening infrastructure, financial incentives and marketing support are proposed with an objective to revive the art, build a sense of ownership, belongingness among communities and engage them in heritage conservation, tourism development activities. Currently, the two state governments are in the process of implementing the proposed interventions, recommendations to demonstrate the inclusive nature of heritage based development.
4. **Promoting sustainable and responsible tourism is the need of the hour.** Involving local communities is an effective way to achieve sustainability. Amer, located near Jaipur, is one of the top tourist attraction areas in the country because of the UNESCO World Heritage Site, Amer Fort, and several natural scenic attractions. Tourism related activity has been impacting the natural environment of Amer by causing soil erosion, increased pollution, natural habitat loss, decline of flora and fauna. Dr Rashmi Dickinson and Dr. Edward Dickinson, founders of NGO, Amer Trust, over the last two decades have undertaken several awareness campaigns such as 'Clean Up Amer' and undertaken various activities by engaging local people such as building check dams, cleaning hills, introducing measures to reduce soil erosion. Currently, Amer, in addition to excess tourism activity is facing enormous stress due to insufficient infrastructure, and rapid urban growth.

To understand the existing problems faced by the local people and as well to understand the future priorities, Amer trust has undertaken a comprehensive stakeholder exercise involving residents, artisans, businesses, and tourists. Priority actions requiring attention emerged as regulating the movement of tourists in Amer Fort during peak timings; preparation of traffic management plan to bypass the unwanted traffic entering the town; creation of parking facilities; guiding tourists by placing route maps; conserving green areas and lakes. As a next step, an action plan will be prepared to figure out the ways for implementing these priority aspects.

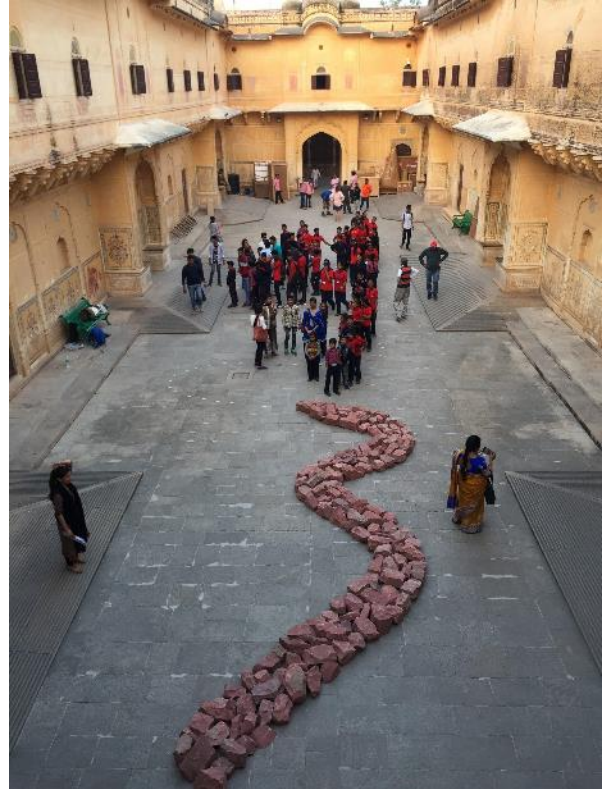


Figure SEQ Figure * ARABIC 1: Views of contemporary art, sculpture installations in The Sculpture Park at Nahargarh Fort

Source: Ms. Noelle Kadar, The Sculpture Park, Jaipur - Presentation “The Sculpture Park, Madhavendra palace, Nahargarh Fort”



Figure 2: Sunday Market at Bikaner House, New Delhi

Source: Ms. Priya Pall, Saat Sath Foundation, Jaipur - Presentation “Rajasthan Art & Cultural Interventions (2014-18)”



Figure 3: Before and after pictures of a road section developed under Taja Gunj Project in Agra

Source: Ms. Devina Agarwal, Agra Smart City Limited – Presentation “Heritage Management Approaches in Agra”



Figure 4: Session Chair and Speakers (From left to right): Session Chair: Mr. Shriman Narayan, Technical Expert, GIZ and Mr. Divay Gupta, Principal Director, INTACH; Speakers: Ms. Priya Pal, Director, Saat Saath Arts Foundation; Ms. Noelle Kadar, Head, Sculpture Park, Madhavendra Park, Jaipur; Dr. Rashmi Dickinson, Founder and Director, Amer Trust and Amer Eco-Trail; Dr. Edward Dickinson, Director, Amer Arts; Ms. Mayura Gadkari, Heritage Conservation Expert, National Institute of Urban Affairs; Ms. Devina Agarwal, Urban Designer, Agra Smart City Limited