

# Enhancing local development through interface of culture, heritage and economy

By Imran Basha

Culture is primarily associated with the arts, ideas, customs, social behaviour and other human intellectual interactions in an area. Culture and heritage play significant roles in enhancing local livelihood and economy, hence different initiatives are being undertaken by respective cities or areas in the promotion of the local economy through culture and heritage conservation. With rapid urbanization, cities are transforming into engines of growth. This, in turn, has implications on local urban culture and traditions. Cultural and heritage conservation is being side-lined and is struggling to compete with the pace of urban concretisation or mass production tools and technologies. The session on '**Development, Economy, Livelihood and Culture**' during the Urban Symposium on 'Harmonizing Heritage and Innovation in Cities' hosted by UN-Habitat in partnership with GIZ on 19th - 20th December 2019 in Jaipur, examines how culture and heritage can be leveraged for local economic development.



*Figure 1: Session Chair: Ms. Parul Agarwala, Country Programme Manager a.i. UN-Habitat; Panellists: Associate Urban Designer, DRONAH; Ms. U. Sarada Devi, Additional Commissioner, Vijayawada Municipal Corporation; Ms. Deepanshi Singhal, Manager, Fabindia Operations, Rangсутra Crafts India Limited; Mr. Vijay Chaturvedi, Director, The Asian Heritage Foundation; Mr. Vikram Aditya Malik, Chief Operating Officer, Varanasi Smart City Limited; Ms. Ritika Khanna, Heritage Researcher and Consultant, INTACH.*

The session demonstrated the role of culture, traditions, artisan's craftsmanship, in enhancing local economic development and the impacts of different initiatives undertaken by respective cities in the promotion of tourism and conservation. The key outcomes of this session were:

- 1. Limited cultural and heritage resources can also function as a catalyst in enhancing local livelihood.** Not all cities have large cultural and heritage resources to enhance their local economic development, but still there are many means to capture and link the limited cultural resources available in different areas with improvement in local economic development. This was demonstrated by Ms. Sarada, Additional Commissioner Vijayawada, by presenting the city of Vijayawada as an opportunity for boosting the local economy and livelihoods that have not been explored in the perspectives of tourism, heritage conservation, and natural resources. Cultural wealth developed in the state of Andhra Pradesh is reflected in feasts and festivals; literature, music, dance, drama, arts and crafts, attitude and actions, educational pattern and mode of life of the people. Existing heritage sites in the city like Kondapalli Fort (1360 AD), Undavalli Caves (420 AD), and Moghalarajpuram Caves, can be tapped to link cultural aspirations of the respective area and integrate with economic development by organising cultural festivals and local livelihood improvement programs. For instance, wooden Toys locally known as Kondapalli toys are world-famous finely created figurines that can be integrated with

existing Kondapalli Fort. Integrating limited cultural and heritage resources would help protect economically valuable physical assets, preserve its practices, history, and environment, and a sense of cultural identity to local areas.



Figure 2: Wooden Painted Toys locally known as Kondapalli toys and Kondapalli Fort can be integrated for local cultural identity and economic development of Kondapalli.

Source: Ms. Sarada Devi, Additional Commissioner; Mr. Imran Basha, UN-Habitat; City Presentation: 'City as an opportunity Vijayawada City, Andhra Pradesh'

2. **Safeguard policies for culture-based economic development are the need of the hour.** Culture and heritage can be leveraged for local economic development through empowerment of local artisans and promote their livelihoods. But weak policies and toolkits neglect promotion of culture/tourism-based economic development interventions. Heritage and Livelihoods in India case study presented by Ms. Ritika Khanna, Heritage Researcher, and Consultant, INTACH, shared the research carried out by 'Asia-Europe Network of Urban Heritage for Sustainable Creative Economies' on different evaluation tools, need for economic-based tourism policies, ways to integrate knowledge, culture, creativity, and technology to offer solutions for local communities. Efficient cultural/tourism toolkits and policies must be formulated to safeguard the interests of the artisans along with facilitating investments in the intangible traditional skills. In turn, tools and policies will keep alive the tradition of artisans' craftsmanship in a rapidly changing urban market along with complementing their livelihoods with development and growth.



Figure 3: Heritage and Livelihoods in India research case study examples by INTACH.

Source: Ms. Ritika Khanna, Researcher, INTACH, presentation: 'Heritage and Livelihood in India'.

3. **Weak market linkages lead traditional crafts traditions to decline:** Market linkages promote a balance between demand and supply for traditional crafts and skill sets. Moreover, it also promotes constant practices of skill development and upgradation. The linkages between changing market scenarios, craftsmanship and traditions were demonstrated through the Jaipur case study by Rangсутra Crafts India Limited and Craft Cluster Development presented

design-led livelihood skilling initiatives undertaken by the Asian Heritage Foundation. The interventions and strategies focused on how to keep alive the tradition of artisan's craftsmanship in a rapidly changing urban market.



*Figure 4: Hand Embroidery, Handloom Weaving, Block Printing, Tie-Dye, artisan's craftsmanship.  
Source: Ms. Deepanshi Singhal, Manager, Rangсутra Crafts India Limited, presentation: 'Rangсутra'.*

**4. Compatible technological interventions would leverage culture and heritage for economic development.** The discussion in the session also focused on the potential to capture and retain the benefits of tourism-based economy for local communities, through investments in technological strategies in tapping intangible heritage like traditional skills and artisans, and developing tourism models that expand the influence zone beyond the city to other areas and magnify the benefits. Mr. Malik from Varanasi Smart City Limited, demonstrated technology-oriented project proposals like virtual museums, digital library and emphasized various challenges faced in project implementation, strategies adopted and public consultations as part of their participatory approach. Formulation of area-specific technological driven tourism and culture models will magnify the benefits of the artisans as well as enhance local economic development. These models will improve social, cultural heritage, enable partnering with local groups and turn old traditions and crafts into the new technological lifestyle.



*Figure 5: Man Mandir Virtual Museum with digital technology and demonstrated light and laser shows.  
Source: Mr. Vikram Aditya Malik, Varanasi Smart City Limited, presentation: 'Varanasi Project Documentary'*

Many local cultures, customs, traditions, practices along heritage potentials are ignored in this era of rapid technological advancements. Innovative application of technology can leverage culture and heritage for the economic development of local areas with an improvement of quality of life, infrastructure in the vicinity and enhance development potential of a city. Culture and heritage should be the story from past to future considering technology as a facilitating tool for local economy and development.