ICOA1902: COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT & EXAMINING ITS IMPACT ON BUILT HERITAGE CASE: MATHURA/ VRINDAVAN (THE BRAJ REGION)

Subtheme 01: Integrating Heritage and Sustainable Urban Development by engaging diverse Communities for Heritage Management

Session 3: World Heritage, Regulations and Guidelines, Authenticity and Integrity
Location: Gulmohar Hall, India Habitat Centre
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Abstract: All over the world empowering the community is the buzz word. It's the new way forward being propagated by most agencies world over. This paper would like to address the role of community and the role of a conservation expert vis-a-vis the built heritage. It would also like to emphasise the role that cultural heritage plays within urban development. Based on the experience of Braj studies, this paper wants to explore this contrast between the community empowerment approach vis-a-vis technical expertise approach. It wants to put forth through the case study of Braj the pros and cons of both the approaches. This paper explores the different approaches of heritage conservation between experts and local people. It wants to emphasise that various stakeholders, local authorities, experts, local citizens have to participate, communicate and then reach a consensus on their heritage. Only then does heritage become inseparable from its people. The question to be debated is "what is good for heritage and what is good for the community?"

Key words: Community Empowerment, Sustainability, Urban Development, Cultural Heritage

"HERITAGE IS ONLY RELEVANT, WHEN IT IS RELEVANT FOR THE PEOPLE."

Community involvement in Urban Heritage

THE TOPIC OF PARTICIPATION AND INVOLVEMENT OF THE PUBLIC IN HERITAGE MANAGEMENT IS A CURRENT ONE.

IN 2007, THE WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE ENLARGED THE ALREADY ADOPTED FOUR POINTS OF A STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: CREDIBILITY, CONSERVATION, CAPACITY BUILDING AND COMMUNICATION WERE AMENDED WITH THE SO-CALLED "FIFTH C"- COMMUNITIES.

SINCE THEN, COMMUNITIES ARE GIVEN A NEW FOCUS IN ALL HERITAGE WORK AND ESPECIALLY ALL UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITES. TO IDENTIFY, RECOGNIZE AND VALUE THE LOCAL COMMUNITY AS KEY ACTOR IN THE PROCESS OF A SUSTAINABLE HERITAGE MANAGEMENT, TO ENFORCE CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOG METHODS BETWEEN ALL STAKEHOLDERS, AND TO ENCOURAGE A MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING AND COLLABORATION HAS BECOME THE CHALLENGE OF A SUCCESSFUL HERITAGE MANAGEMENT.[1].

Co-creation for smart investments in Culture

NEW APPROACHES INTEND TO INVOLVE LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN THE PROTECTION AND PRESERVATION OF URBAN HERITAGE, INCREASING THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES AND FEELING OF OWNERSHIP. COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT CAN BE A DRIVER FOR CHANGE. CITIES PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN ENCOURAGING CULTURAL ORGANISATIONS AND COMMUNITIES TO COLLABORATE, SHARE RESOURCES, GROUP TOGETHER AND EXPLORE INNOVATIVE FORMS OF PARTNERSHIPS.EXPERIENCES FROM CITIES REVEAL THAT IT IS NOT JUST IMPORTANT TO ASK LOCALS FOR THEIR IDEAS, BUT TO SHAPE PROGRAMMES WITH THEM AND INVOLVE THEM DIRECTLY. CO-CREATION CAN BE AN IMPORTANT CULTURE FOR CITIES AND REGIONS.THE CULTURAL ADMINISTRATIONS OF THE CITIES CAN FACILITATE THIS PROCESS BY ACTING AS BROKERS TO MAKE LOCAL CULTURAL ORGANISATIONS AND DIFFERENT AUDIENCE GROUPS MEET AND DISCUSS HOW TO WORK TOGETHER.[2].

The Braj Mandal

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[1] OWHC Guidebook, 2017

[2] OWHC Guidebook, 2017

Braj is the land of Krishna and is known world over today due to its associations with krishna lilas (religious annecdotes). It is an extremely vibrant region with immense historical, religious, social and cultural significance. This land of Krishna consists of thousands of historic water bodies (kunds), forests and grooves (van/ upvan), hills and hillocks, temples and other built structures, all related to various aspects of Krishna. All these natural and built heritage (tangible & intangible) treasure has been undergoing assault in the hands of over enthusiastic communities at places and in other places being falling apart due to apathy and neglect of the community.

The land of Braj, in India, is spread across three states of UP, Rajasthan & Haryana, held together by the legends of Krishna and signifying the area as the 'Lila Kshetra' of Krishna.

The Historical associations of Braj can be traced beyond the popular association of Krishna. It has been a centre of learning, trade and many religions like Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism have flourished here and impacted the cultural development of the area.

The Braj Mandal has been a place of pilgrimage for thousands of years. During the Bhakti movement of 16th century, Chaitanya Maha Prabhu and Swami Haridas revived the essence of the land of Krishna's birthplace and childhood. In the recent times ISCKON was instrumental in spreading Krishna consciousness internationally and spread the glories of Mathura & Vrindavan globally. Braj today is established as a major Vaishnavite pilgrimage destination not just nationally but globally.

The Cultural Landscape of Braj has a distinct character because there is a unique symbolic relationship between the Natural surroundings, physical built and the numerous myths and legends related to the Krishna. Leelas Myths, Legends, history and stories all intermix and co-exist in this region, giving it that unique character.

Fig.1 – the Mathura District

THE NAME BRAJ CONJURES UP THOUSAND IMAGES OF THE RICH CULTURAL, MYTHOLOGICAL, ARCHITECTURAL, ECOLOGICAL AND SPIRITUAL HERITAGE. MATHURA IS THE NUCLEI OF THE BRAJ LAND WHERE BEAUTY LIES IN IT ENVIRONMENT, THE MYTHOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE OF THE REGION AND ITS PEOPLE. THE BRAJBHOOMI IS THE PLACE WHERE LORD KRISHNA WAS BORN AND WHERE HE SHOWS HIS DIVINE POWERS IN DESTROYING DEMONS, THEREBY RESTORING PEACE. IT IS ALSO A LAND WHERE KRISHNA HAD SPENT HIS CHILDHOOD AND PERFORMED DIVINE LEELAS.

THE BRAJ REGION IS KNOWN FOR ITS RICH CULTURAL, ARCHITECTURAL, ECOLOGICAL AND SPIRITUAL HERITAGE.
THERE USED TO BE OVER 1000 SPLASHING WATER BODIES (KUNDS) IN THE ENTIRE REGION WITH VERY HIGH ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE.OVER 137 LUSH GREEN FORESTS USED TO ADORN THIS FABLED LAND. MORE THAN 18000 ACRE OF HILLY TERRAIN USED TO PROVIDE THE NATURAL BARRIER FOR THE SPREAD OF THE THAR DESERT. HUNDREDS OF BEAUTIFUL MANSIONS AND TEMPLES HAVE BEEN BUILT IN THE ENTIRE REGION DURING THE COURSE OF HISTORY.
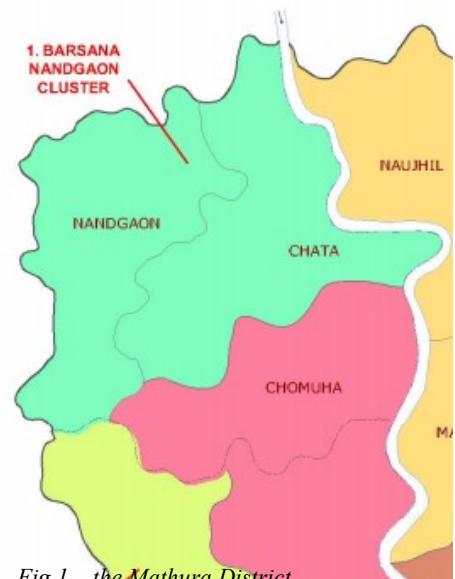
BRAJ IS ONE OF THE MOST VISITED REGIONS IN UP BECAUSE OF ITS RICH RELIGIOUS & CULTURAL HERITAGE. THE REGION'S TRUE CULTURE LIES IN ITS RURAL BELT AND NOT THE URBANIZED AREAS. IT IS IN THESE RURAL VILLAGES THAT THE TRUE ESSENCE OF BRAJ AND *RADHA-KRISHNA LEELAS CAN BE EXPERIENCED.*

TANGIBLE RESOURCE CATEGORIES

• RELIGIOUS RESOURCES
• TEMPLES
• PARIKRAMA MARGS

• HISTORICAL RESOURCES
• ARCHITECTURAL MASTERPIECES
• ARCHAEOLOGICAL REMAINS

1 Krishna Janmbhoomi , Mathura city

Fig.2 – the cultural resource of Braj region

• NATURAL RESOURCES
    • RIVER YAMUNA
    • FORESTS & GROVES
    • KUNDS

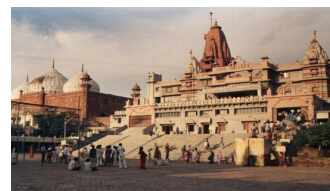**INTANGIBLE RESOURCES**

FESTIVALS
CUISINE
POETRY & LITERATURE
MUSIC & DANCE

ART & CRAFT

Fig.3 – the tangible resource of Mathura

The Hriday Model

The Government of India scheme of HRIDAY, as per its mandate was to Preserve and revitalise soul of the heritage city to reflect the city's unique character. The scheme statement emphasised to undertake strategic and planned development of heritage cities aiming at improvement in overall quality of life with specific focus on sanitation, security, tourism, heritage revitalization and
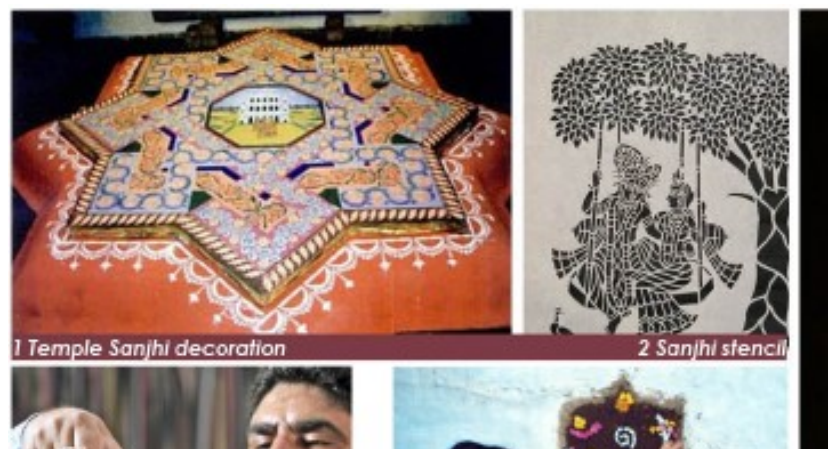

1 Temple Sanjhi decoration   2 Sanjhi stencil

Fig.4– the Intangible resource of Mathura

livelihoods retaining the city's cultural identity

Mathura was one of the 12 cities undertaken within the first phase of this scheme. The project involved identification of heritage assets (tangible & intangible), classification of the Assets and further prioritisation of the assets leading to the selection of the identified Zones of implementation within the city. The zones identified were studied in detail, issues identified and solutions proposed for the same. The approach towards the above study being the Top down heritage model - preparing a heritage plan with overall vision with full technical expertise and little community participation and empowerment
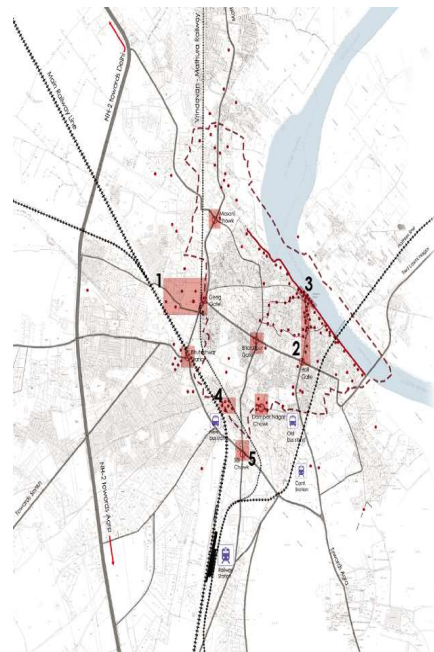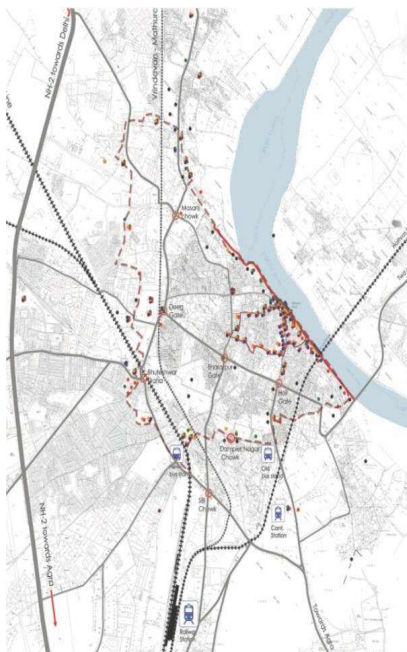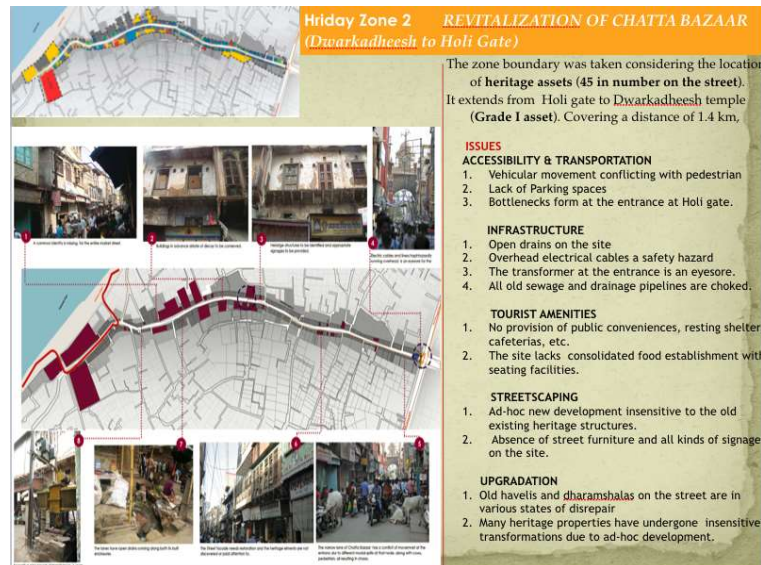
HRIDAY ZONES IDENTIFIED FOR INTERVENTION

-     ZONE 1: KRISHNA JANMBHOOMI AREA
  GRADE I ASSET KRISHNA JANMBHOOMI TEMPLE LOCATED IN THE AREA
-     ZONE 2: CHATTA BAZAAR
  45 IDENTIFIED HAVELIS, TEMPLES & DHARAMSHALAS IN A SINGLE STRETCH
-     ZONE 3: VISHRAM GHAT
  VISHRAM GHAT IS A GRADE I ASSET
-     ZONE 4: SHIV TAL KUND
  THE KUND IS A GRADE II ASSET AND LIES ON THE MATHURA PARIKRAMA PATH
-     ZONE 5: CHOWKS (MASANI, BHARATPUR, BHUTESHWAR, SBI)
  THE CHOWKS ARE A REPRESENTATION OF THE 4 FABLED MAHADEVS (GUARDIANS) OF MATHURA
-     ZONE 6: VRINDAVAN PARIKRAM - THE PARIKRAMA IS AN IMPORTANT COMPONENT OF PILGRIMAGE

SELF MANAGEMENT MODEL - VARIED PERCEPTIONS
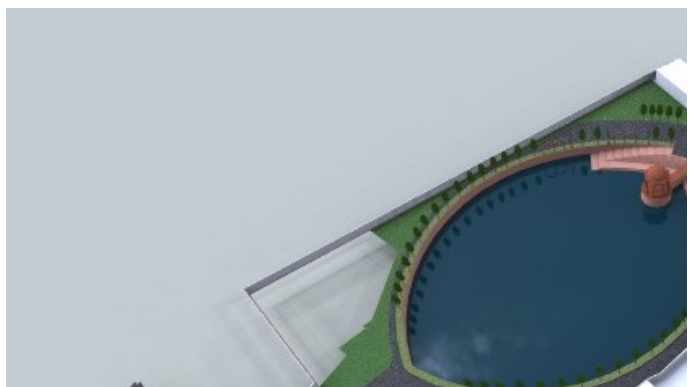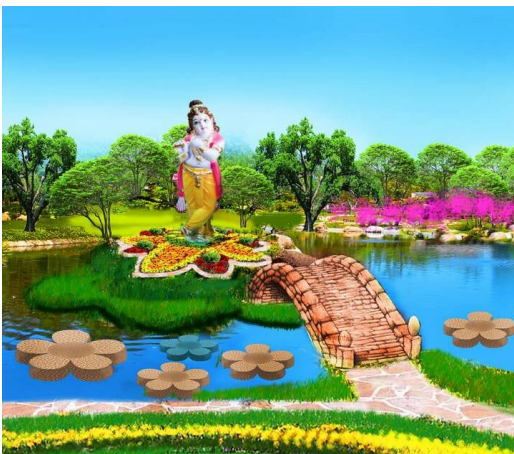
IN MANY INSTANCES OF COMMUNITY LED MODELS, IT WAS OBSERVED THAT DUE TO VARYING PERCEPTIONS OF CONSERVATION, HERITAGE PLANS WERE MOSTLY TREATED AS BEAUTIFICATION PLANS. IN MANY CASES SUBSTANTIAL DAMAGE TO HERITAGE WAS OBSERVED DUE TO LACK OF PROFESSIONAL INVOLVEMENT. LITERAL TRANSLATIONS OF ANECDOTES WERE OBSERVED AS DESIGN INTERPRETATIONS IN MANY CASES. PERCEPTION OF BEAUTIFICATION EQUATED TO CONSERVATION / RESTORATION LOCAL COMMUNITY PERCEPTION IN CONTRAST WITH THE PROFESSIONAL PERCEPTION LITERAL TRANSLATION OF ANECDOTES INTO DESIGN LANGUAGE

THE ABOVE CASE SHOWS THATINVOLVING LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN THE MANAGEMENT, UPKEEP AND PROMOTION OF A CITY'S CULTURAL HERITAGE IS NOT ALWAYS A SIMPLE AND OBVIOUS PROCESS FOR MUNICIPALITIES.

SEEING CULTURE AS AN ENABLER FOR THE LOCAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF A CITY HAS AN OBVIOUS AND DIRECT IMPACT ON THE DAILY LIVES OF THE INHABITANTS OF THE CONCERNED NEIGHBOURHOODS.

THE QUESTION THEN IS WHAT PARTICIPATORY ROLES CAN BE GIVEN TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES TO ASSIST THE MUNICIPALITIES IN THEIR OBLIGATIONS?

PROS & CONS OF THE TWO APPROACHES

APPROACH 1 (SELF MANAGEMENT MODEL)
ENTHUSIASM AND GOOD WILL TO DO GOOD TO THE COMMUNITY AT LARGE, SOMETIMES BACK FIRES DUE TO LACK OF PROFESSIONAL EXPERTISE FOR SPECIFIC TASKS ON HAND, CREATING ADVERSE AND DAMAGING RESULTS FOR THE BUILT HERITAGE IN QUESTION.

APPROACH 2 (THE HRIDAY MODEL)
LACK OF PROPER STAKE HOLDER CONSULTATION WITH ALL PARTIES INVOLVED LEADS TO DECISIONS NOT SO CONDUCIVE TO THE CURRENT SITUATIONS LEADING TO INSENSITIVE INTERVENTIONS SOMETIMES.

The emphasis is that various stakeholders, local authorities, experts, local citizens have to participate, communicate and then reach a consensus on their heritage. Only then does heritage become inseparable from its people.

The question to be debated is "what is good for heritage and what is good for the community ?"

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