

Original Article

Public Art as Soft Infrastructure: Sustaining Intangible Cultural Heritage in Urbanising Mysore

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Abstract - Cultural practices thrive in urban environments due to the sensory aspects of daily experiences and ordinary urban life. These conditions, however, will be lost as rapid urbanisation continues. Heritage policy preserving documents and structures has not prevented heritage loss due to emphasising past preservation over practice continuation into the present. This critical gap highlights the urgent necessity of grounded empirical inquiry into how spatial, material, and sensory shifts directly disrupt living cultural practices. This research develops a theory that public art functions as "soft" infrastructure to support cultural practice by providing practitioners control over design and governance. By positioning public art squarely within urban governance and municipal planning, the paper establishes a novel conceptual bridge between cultural policy and municipal infrastructure provision. The argument rests on eight months of ethnographic fieldwork in Mysore involving interviews with artisans and public art stakeholders. Additionally, comparative case studies from India's Madhubani region, Morocco's Fez, Mexico's Oaxaca, and Indonesia's Yogyakarta illustrate heritage infrastructure failures across spatial, environmental, social, institutional, and material dimensions. These empirical observations directly support a clear analytical model that conceptually links physical space, artisan agency, and living heritage. These failures informed a framework focused on multisensory experience, community co-creation, and transforming physical space. Artisan governance directly determines whether public art promotes living practices or becomes an aesthetically pleasing spectacle. The study provides a transferable model for safeguarding ICH in secondary global South cities.

Keywords - Artisan governance, Intangible cultural heritage, Public art, Soft infrastructure, Urbanisation.

1. Introduction

Mysore is uniquely situated among India's cities in terms of its history. For hundreds of years, the city was ruled by royalty and had a plan to govern urbanisation that endured after the demise of the monarchy. As a result, Mysore has maintained a high population density of crafts and performances like silk weaving, Ganjifa painting, Yakshagana performance, Kolam drawing, sandalwood carving, and agarbatti making -- all of which were abandoned by larger cities many years ago due to the advent of mass manufacturing. In every phase of the city's growth -- from Commission Rule (1831-1881), through the patronage of the Wodeyars, and during the industrial ambitions of Visvesvaraya, each successive wave of city-building created the physical connections among artisan cluster locations, marketplace areas, pilgrimage paths, and neighbourhoods that supported the continuation of those traditions. Neighborhoods and pilgrimage paths supported traditions financially and socially [15, 16, 20]. The living heritage of Mysore continues to exist because its physical layout preserved the continuation of practice through each subsequent wave of changes. That environment is now facing steady deterioration, and thus,

there is today a fractured landscape of heritage in Mysore as depicted in Figure 1.



Fig. 1 Heritage landscapes in Mysore showing contemporary urbanisation pressures (Source: Author, fieldwork documentation)

Urbanization in Mysore does not occur through large-scale displacement of artisan groups but through the gradual degradation of everyday urban improvements. Such



degradation includes new buildings breaking up workshops that have existed along the same streets for multiple generations; removal of thresholds for artisans to attract passersby by way of road widening; introduction of municipal LED streetlights that alter the colour spectrum on which quality assessments for silk and paintings are based; replacement of earth floors necessary for Kolams with concrete flooring; zoning restrictions prohibiting furnace use in residential areas that artisans used for multiple decades [21]. While no individual action appears damaging by itself, they cumulatively reduce the soft infrastructure - including the spatial, sensory, and relational basis upon which living traditions depend - that formal heritage policies have repeatedly failed to preserve [2, 26]. This micro-level physical erosion demands clear qualitative analysis to demonstrate how specific municipal interventions directly compromise the operational mechanics and material continuity of traditional craftsmanship.

Soft infrastructure is a term used across urban studies and cultural economies to describe exactly what preservation strategies fail to capture [2, 3, 17]. For the purposes of this study, soft infrastructure is operationally defined as the ensemble of spatial, sensory, material and relational conditions that enable living craft practices to continue as viable livelihood systems. It comprises two analytically distinct layers: (a) physical soft infrastructure – threshold spaces, daylight spectra, acoustic envelopes, earth floors, street furniture and cluster-scale lighting – and (b) social/relational soft infrastructure – apprenticeship chains, guild hierarchies, neighbourhood visibility and casual walk-in trade networks. Preservation efforts have traditionally relied on documentation, cataloging, and architectural preservation as ways to protect monuments rather than workshops, curricula rather than apprenticeships, museum experiences rather than day-to-day commerce related to artisans selling their products [18, 28]. There is more than a conceptual difference. Traditions whose practitioners' livelihoods have been destroyed, whose physical spatial co-location has been disrupted, and who have lost their ability to interact with an apprenticing public on a regular basis will not be protected by documentation alone. They will be protected for archival purposes only [20]. Visibility from neighbourhood proximity and opportunity for casual interaction and walk-in trade comprise the economic foundation of tradition. Disruption to either jeopardise the livelihoods involved [16].

As a response to these disruptions, public art has been sporadically utilised. However, many of the existing public art initiatives intended to mitigate these issues have essentially replicated the problems they attempted to resolve. Murals, craft villages, and heritage trails in secondary cities throughout South Asia have predominantly represented traditions visually while failing to restore the functional conditions required for those traditions to endure. Thus, public art has provided visibility but not vitality. The purpose of this

article is to identify another potential method for conceiving of public art. If properly conceived and governed by artisan communities as opposed to being managed for them, public art can serve as effective maintenance of soft infrastructure: restoring the sensory environments in which traditions convey information; creating space for intergenerational transmission of tradition; and situating heritage within the quotidian spatial rhythms of urban life as opposed to relegating it to designated cultural zones [7, 17, 23].

Data collected from Mysore fieldwork and comparative cases support one key finding: Artisan governance — defined as meaningful authority held by practitioners over the design, placement and long-term management of public art — determines if public art supports ongoing practice or simply represents it. Given its unique concentration of living traditions and clear demonstration of the structural threats to those traditions posed by rapid urbanisation in secondary Indian cities, Mysore presents a particularly illustrative example through which to articulate and test this assertion [15, 16].

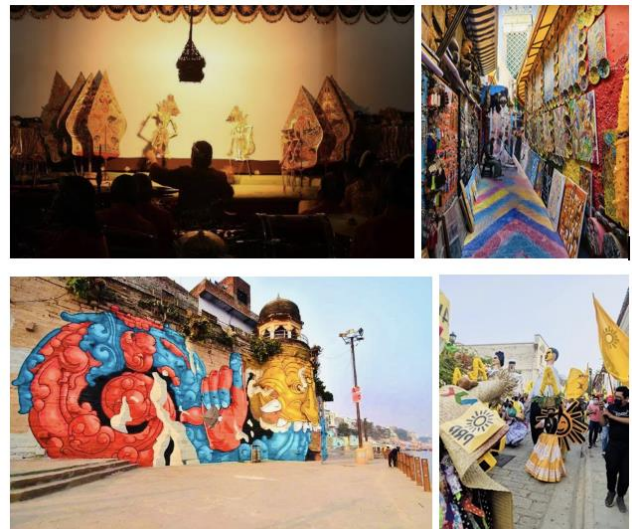


Fig. 2 Comparative international precedents of public-art-led heritage interventions (Source: Author, compiled from secondary literature, project reports and published case documentation)

The research gap that this study addresses is therefore threefold: (1) the absence of an empirically grounded typology of the precise spatial, sensory, social, institutional and material mechanisms through which urbanisation erodes living craft heritage; (2) the lack of an operational definition of soft infrastructure that distinguishes physical from relational layers; and (3) the missing analytical link between artisan governance of public art and the restoration of those soft-infrastructure conditions. The central research question guiding the inquiry is: Under what governance arrangements can public art function as soft infrastructure that sustains rather than merely represents intangible cultural heritage in rapidly urbanising secondary cities of the Global South?

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Rethinking Heritage as Urban Infrastructure*

Heritage scholars have long treated intangible cultural heritage primarily as a repository of cultural memory that must be documented, listed, and institutionally protected [13, 14, 23]. The 2003 UNESCO Convention reflects this emphasis by treating identification and archiving as the principal means of protecting heritage [23]. Although helpful in establishing standards for pedagogical instruction and formal legal protection, this type of focus has misrepresented the economic and social roles heritage plays as a source of livelihoods rather than knowledge objects [1, 4].

Throsby emphasised performance - i.e., weaving a sari or performing Yakshagana - as forms of cultural capital that generate heritage value [15, 22]; yet he also did so solely from a valuation perspective rather than considering the spatial and sensory contexts necessary for practice. This is the exact gap identified here: the present study measures heritage value while also identifying which urban settings must be maintained to generate that value.

Amin & Thrift viewed social practices, knowledge systems, and cultural exchanges as part of the functioning structure of urban systems rather than as supplements to such systems [2, 3]. Building upon this foundational framework, Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space further illuminates how physical and relational spatial configurations directly shape social practice, spatial rights, and cultural continuity [29]. Thus, informal heritage networks — e.g., apprenticeship chains — and market proximities — e.g., nearby markets — may be viewed as "infrastructure" in the technical sense: i.e., systems that produce identifiable outcomes when they fail. Similarly, Larkin extended this view by emphasising experience-related aspects of infrastructure [16] while Simone demonstrated how people functioned as infrastructure through relational networks of human proximity/exchange in Global South cities [21]. Complementing these spatial views, Amartya Sen's capability approach underscores how access to functioning physical and social infrastructure directly enables individuals and artisan collectives to sustain their cultural capabilities, creative freedoms, and economic autonomy [30]. Watson reinforced this view, demonstrating how informal urban systems provided adaptable livelihood/social cohesion functions unreplicable by formal planning processes [25]. Collectively, these perspectives indicate that heritage must be seen as something requiring maintenance, i.e., not simply as a cultural amenity.

2.2. *Critical Heritage Discourse*

Critical heritage scholarship explores how power works in heritage discourse - specifically with respect to recognition and authority. Smith's discourse on heritage recognises how Eurocentric frameworks emphasise monumental/material/static heritage while ignoring relational

networks/apprenticeship hierarchies/communal markets that carry craft knowledge [5]. Bandarin & Van Oers extended this critical discourse regarding planning by using Historic Urban Landscapes as an analytical tool — arguing that preserving living heritage requires managing dynamic urban change as opposed to fixing fabric [4]. AlSayyad's work on urban informality similarly illustrated that Global South heritage survives only through informal systems most susceptible to disruption by formal development plans [1].

Collectively, these discourses establish that heritage is not an object collection but a complex network of social relationships/practices/contested authority [25]. However, neither these discourses nor others have established a detailed account of specific ways in which urbanisation erodes these systems or an empirically tested framework for how public art can help preserve them. The study accomplishes both objectives through the application of these concepts within specific urban pressures found in secondary Indian cities. Earthen floor Kolam designs require natural light for accuracy. Public art interventions focusing solely on visual representations risk turning heritage into aestheticised displays while neglecting multisensory conditions necessary for continuation.

2.3. *Public Art beyond Representation*

Hall and Robertson's 2001 survey of public art projects illustrates how the focus on urban regeneration tends to position existing local communities as obstacles to be overcome [12]. When public art is designed to promote regeneration in areas with a strong craft heritage, its emphasis on visual spectacle often results in upgraded physical environments that ultimately displace the practices that these environments represent. For example, public art initiatives focused on enhancing the appearance of artisan neighbourhoods often increase land prices and accelerate the displacement of low-income residents who create and sell crafts. Therefore, this critique of regeneration-focused public art projects applies equally well to craft heritage sites. Zebracki and De Bekker provide evidence that public art can alter how people use and experience public spaces and interact socially [18]. Similarly, Zebracki and Palmer argue that community engagement and knowledge transfer can occur through public art if appropriate governance mechanisms exist [27]. However, few authors analyse either the governance of public art or the transmission of cultural heritage.

The sensory turn in architecture adds another layer of complexity to the way that architects understand buildings and environments. Specifically, Degen connects sensory environments to cultural memory and behaviour [9] while Pallasmaa argues that all senses are activated when engaging with a building environment. For example, the artisans of Mysore use their senses to inform their craft. Silk weavers use daylight to determine colour accuracy, Kamsale dancers measure acoustic resonance, and sandalwood carvers

determine texture based on tactile sensations. If public art interventions ignore multisensory aspects of craft heritage, then they may end up aestheticising heritage rather than preserving the conditions necessary for long-term practice continuation. Contemporary debates on tactical urbanism and Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) implementation in South Asia further underscore the need for low-cost, reversible spatial interventions that restore sensory and threshold conditions without triggering displacement. Spatial-economic analyses of heritage clusters demonstrate that the density and contiguity of artisan workshops generate positive externalities that formal zoning routinely destroys. This literature remains under-integrated into public-art scholarship and are therefore addressed directly by the present framework.

2.4. Comparative Evidence and Governance

There are multiple examples of successful applications of public art in relation to craft heritage. In addition to providing income opportunities and mentorship for artisans in Madhubani, India, through murals [11], similar programs in Fez, Morocco, provided cooperative governance models [24]. Both models ensured the continued practice of artisans by providing sustainable livelihoods and economic empowerment. Similar benefits were reported in Oaxaca, Mexico, where an indigenous committee governed a programme to maintain traditional weaving skills and access markets [6]; however, this was achieved through direct control by local communities. In contrast, hybrid models combining traditional techniques with digital media in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, provided evidence that heritage can be preserved through innovation if governance remains locally controlled [7].

However, many examples demonstrate systematic failures of public art-based programs intended to protect and promote craft heritage. In particular, the Kashi Art Trail in Varanasi, India, attracted tourists and generated revenue for vendors selling crafts [19] but excluded other important sensory components of crafts (such as sounds and smells) from consideration. Additionally, this trail bypassed the need for artisans to govern themselves in terms of decision-making and revenue generation. Furthermore, several Indian government policies aimed at supporting independent artisans have instead resulted in the transformation of independent artisans into supervised demonstrator/teachers [25]. The latter outcome demonstrates that effective governance structures are crucial in determining the success or failure of public art initiatives in protecting craft heritage.

2.5. Identified Gaps

Current literature recognises two key shortcomings related to the protection of living craft heritage:

1. **Failure Typology:** Despite recognition that threats to craft heritage exist, current literature does not clearly break down these threats into discrete categories, including spatial; sensory; social reproduction; institutional; and

material modes of loss. It follows that different types of losses will require differing solutions.

2. **Governance Structures:** Although community ownership is recognised as being beneficial in protecting craft heritage, little theoretical consideration is given to informal governance structures that could facilitate community ownership. Such informal structures would include family/kinship relationships; hierarchical structures within workshops; women's groups, etc.
3. **Integrated Frameworks:** Separate literatures document: 1) the importance of designing public arts for sensory experiences; 2) the value of co-creating public arts; and 3) the transformative power of public arts on spaces. However, no attempt has been made to develop an integrated framework linking together these concepts as part of an overarching framework for maintaining soft infrastructure for craft heritage.

These gaps were addressed through fieldwork conducted in Mysore, India and comparative case-study methods. The resulting study provides a practical framework for understanding what constitutes effective governance in maintaining living practices. Relative to existing frameworks - which either treat heritage as a static inventory to be documented (the 2003 UNESCO Convention) or manage urban change without specifying sensory, spatial or governance mechanisms (the Historic Urban Landscape approach) - the present study's contribution is to name the discrete infrastructural mechanisms of loss and to tie their restoration to enforceable artisan-governance arrangements, a level of causal and operational specificity absent from prior heritage-infrastructure scholarship.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Research Design and Theoretical Orientation

The study is grounded in qualitative, participatory fieldwork within a single embedded case. This design was chosen because the phenomenon under investigation, specifically how living heritage functions as urban infrastructure, is inseparable from the specific social and spatial context of Mysore [10, 26, 29]. From an architectural perspective, close attention was paid to threshold locations, workshop layouts and sensory conditions. Equal attention was given to the economic/social dimensions by (1) weighting the interview protocol towards livelihood/income-related questions; (2) applying negative case analysis to the thematic coding process to identify cases that deviated from the main trend; and (3) conducting discussions with an expert in informal economies throughout the analytical process regarding emerging interpretations.

Mysore was chosen for several reasons: 1) Rich documentation exists about its numerous heritage clusters; 2) Mysore is classified as a secondary city; 3) Limited formal cultural infrastructure exists in Mysore compared to larger cities; 4) Ongoing pressures from IT/tourism; and 5) A

sufficiently sized community of practitioners for diverse sampling opportunities and sufficient time for ongoing engagement.

3.2. Comparative Case Selection

Four cases from around the world were selected as comparisons using a strategy that maximised variation among comparable conditions. All four cases involve a living craft/performance tradition facing challenges related to tourism/urbanisation in a secondary city located outside of Europe/Western North America; each includes documented evidence of a public-art-led/publicly displayed heritage intervention; and each features a distinct model for governance: practitioner-led (Madhubani); cooperative (Fez); indigenous-committee-led (Oaxaca); practitioner-digital-hybrid (Yogyakarta). Cross-case analysis comparing governance as an independent variable was possible as a result. Structured matrices detailing type(s) of heritage involved; type(s) of urbanisation-related pressure(s); design elements of intervention(s); governance mechanism(s); economic benefits (or lack thereof) experienced by practitioners; evidence of successful intergenerational

transmission processes were developed for each case study. Clarification of data sources for comparative cases: Primary ethnographic fieldwork was conducted exclusively in Mysore. The four international cases (Madhubani, Fez, Oaxaca, Yogyakarta) were analysed through systematic secondary-source synthesis of peer-reviewed literature, project reports and published governance evaluations.

Figure 2, therefore, presents comparative precedents synthesised from secondary documentation rather than primary fieldwork by the authors; this distinction is stated explicitly to avoid any misrepresentation of secondary synthesis as primary data. Table 1 makes explicit the governance variable that Section 2.4 discusses narratively: across all four secondary-source cases, practitioner or community retention of design and programming authority co-occurs with sustained livelihoods and transmission, while the Mysore fieldwork (Sections 4.3–4.4) and the Varanasi counterexample (Section 2.4) show the same pattern operating in the primary data. The matrix is therefore an analytic synthesis of published secondary evidence rather than a fifth primary case.

Table 1. Comparative governance matrix for international case studies

Case (Country)	Governance Model	Public-Art / Design Intervention	Economic & Transmission Outcome	Source
Madhubani, India	Practitioner-led	Community murals designed and executed by artisans	Income opportunities and mentorship sustained; practitioner-led transmission	[11]
Fez, Morocco	Cooperative	Cooperative-governed workshop and display spaces	Sustainable livelihoods and economic empowerment; continuity of practice	[24]
Oaxaca, Mexico	Indigenous-committee-led	Committee-directed weaving programme and market access points	Maintained traditional weaving skills and market access under direct community control	[6]
Yogyakarta, Indonesia	Practitioner-digital hybrid	Traditional performance paired with digital media platforms	Heritage preserved through innovation under locally controlled governance	[7]

3.3. Sampling, Participants, and Data Collection

Purposive sampling with maximal variation and snowball referral were used to recruit 42 participants representing a wide variety of roles within craft traditions to capture a diverse group of practitioners working within various craft traditions. The sampling approach targeted diversity in terms of role (e.g. master/journeyman/apprentice/etc), age, gender, and craft tradition cluster. The sample included individuals practising 16 different craft traditions, ranging in age from 26-72 years old. The number of participants per cluster was not even across all craft clusters, with participant numbers ranging from $n = 7$ (Performers & Culinary) to $n = 10$ (Rosewood & sandalwood); see Table 2. The differences in participant numbers reflect differences in the number of available practising artisans willing to engage in the research project at

the time the data were collected and are acknowledged by the researchers as a study limitation: results for those craft clusters having fewer participants are considered suggestive rather than representative. Structured interviews with audio recordings were completed with participants in Kannada with participant consent. Post-interview fieldnotes were taken immediately after each visit to record additional contextual information and sensory details/interactions observed during visits that did not make it into the interview recording/transcript.

3.4. Analysis and Rigor

Thematic analysis was performed utilising Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines for Reflexive Thematic Analysis. The coding process began by repeatedly reviewing the data

until 187 codes had been manually assigned via a line-by-line review method. Candidate themes emerged after iterative comparison between coded data segments/codes, followed by further refinement once candidate themes were established through comparison with data sets/narratives developed during analysis. During analysis, negative cases were continuously sought, and their implications for analytic conclusions were reflected upon.

The sample of transcripts was reviewed again to increase awareness of whether emerging interpretations were consistent across individual transcripts and cross-checked against those from other participants. No qualitative analysis software was utilised during this phase of analysis; all manual coding/theme development was carried out using annotated

transcripts/fieldnotes/comparison matrices. The above research method is shown as a flow chart in Figure 3.

Three measures were employed to establish rigor/trustworthiness in this study:

1. Triangulation: Each interview was triangulated along with sensory walks/observation records/comparative case studies.
2. Prolonged Engagement/Reflexive Journaling/Member Checking: Extended engagement with participants was maintained through repeated visits/interviews; a reflexive journal was maintained throughout data collection/analysis; select members of the participant pool were engaged in member-checking activities.

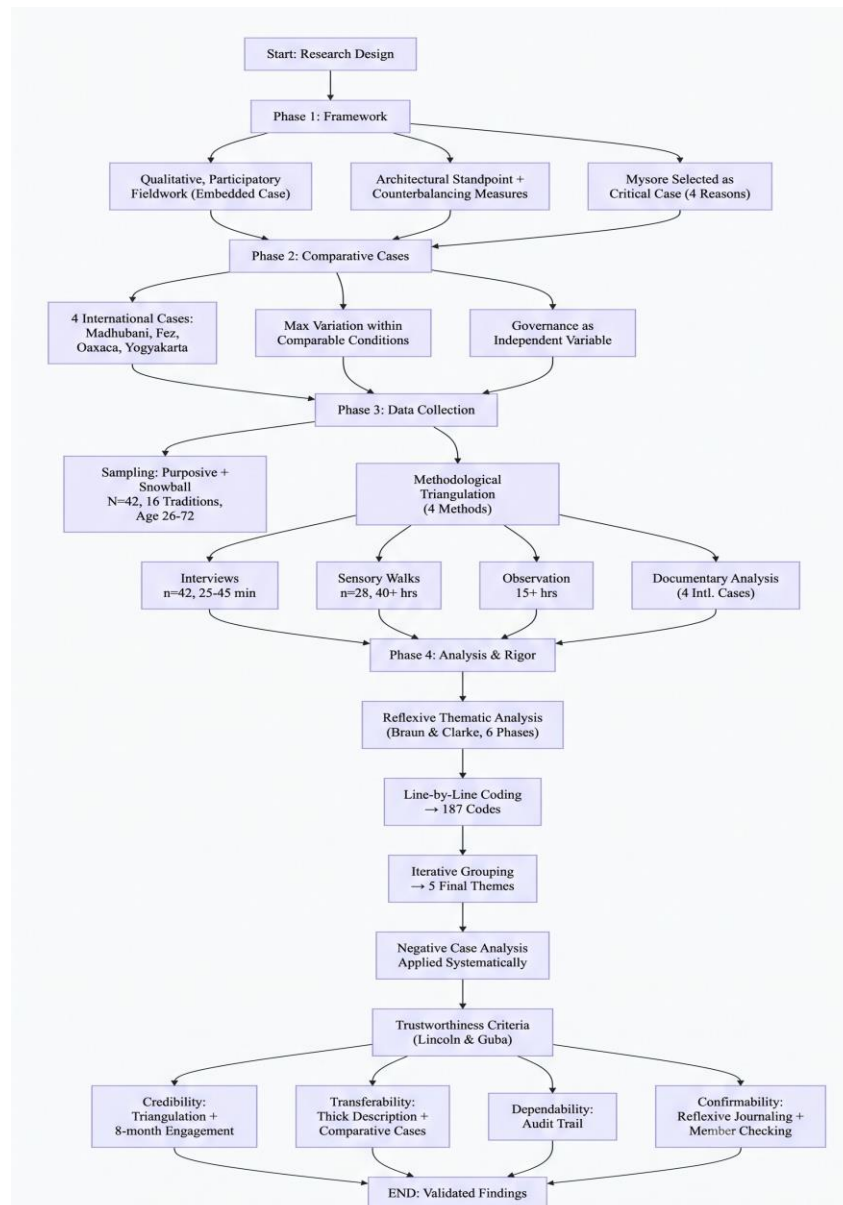


Fig. 3 Workflow of multimethod qualitative research design and reflexive thematic analysis (Source: Author)

Table 2. Respondent overview by tradition cluster

Tradition Cluster	n	Gender (M/F)	Age Range	Primary Heritage Traditions
Silk Weaving	8	5/3	35–68	Silk weaving, zari, Dasara saris (Ashokapuram)
Rosewood & Sandalwood	10	9/1	26–65	Sandalwood carving, rosewood inlay (Sayyaji Rao Rd)
Ganjifa & Painting	8	3/5	48–72	Ganjifa card painting, Mysore painting (Mandi Mohalla)
Devaraja Market & Agarbatti	9	6/3	41–53	Agarbatti, flower vendors, Kolam, Mysore Pak
Performers & Culinary	7	6/1	28–65	Yakshagana, Kamsale, Somana Kunittha, Vedic chanting
Total	42	29/13	26–72	16 traditions across Mysore

Note on sampling representation: While 42 participants across 16 craft traditions were engaged, seventeen participants (P6–P8, P14–P18, P21–P26 and P31–P33) participated exclusively in cluster group sessions and are therefore omitted from the individual demographic listing in Appendix 1 in accordance with the consent terms under which their participation was obtained. Quotes attributed to these participants appear only as anonymised group-session excerpts and are not intermingled with individually coded semi-structured interview attributions.

4. Results and Discussion

Five thematic categories were developed through reflexive analysis of 42 interviews, 28 sensory walk field notes, more than 40 hours of observation records, and four

comparative case studies. Each section will first provide analytical explanations of each theme using participant voice as evidence to demonstrate theoretical claims. Table 3 offers a summary view.

Table 3. Thematic framework derived from participant interviews

Theme	Sub-theme	Quote	Codes	Freq.
1. Loss of physical workspace	Workshop demolition, rent escalation, spatial invisibility, displacement	"Workshops becoming invisible, you cannot see us anymore because we are hidden behind concrete." (P1)	P1, P3, P4, P9, P12, P16*, P27, P35, P38	37/42 (88%)
2. Erosion of sensory heritage	Noise pollution, light distortion, fragrance loss, acoustic degradation	"Traffic noise has destroyed the resonance of Kamsale." (P40)	P1, P2, P12, P28, P29, P36, P37, P40, P41	34/42 (81%)
3. Intergenerational disconnect	Youth prefer urban jobs, lack of apprentices, social stigma, attentional fragmentation	"My son works in IT. He says painting doesn't pay rent." (P20)	P3, P11, P19, P20, P21–P26*, P28, P38	35/42 (83%)
4. Demand for participatory spaces	Open-air stages, heritage zones, Katte spaces, live demonstrations	"Public and children should see the live process. That is how heritage survives." (P9)	P9, P19, P27, P35–P42	32/42 (76%)
5. Physical infrastructure deficiencies	Gutter overflow, poor lighting, potholes, electrical failures	"Gutter overflow damages silk and rots wooden frames. Heritage roads are ignored." (P4)	P2, P4, P12, P30, P34, P36, P40	28/42 (67%)

Note on Table 3 codes: Codes marked with an asterisk (*) or falling within an asterisked range denote participants engaged exclusively through cluster group sessions (see Appendix 1); the quote and codes retained for these participants reflect anonymised group-session excerpts rather than individually attributable semi-structured interview data, consistent with the consent terms described in Section 3.3.

Quantification note on Table 3: Frequency percentages (e.g., 88 %, 81 %) are reported solely as descriptive indicators

of theme prevalence across the 42 transcripts and are not intended to imply statistical generalisation. In keeping with reflexive thematic analysis [8], no inter-coder reliability coefficient is claimed; thematic saturation was monitored iteratively through negative-case analysis and member checking rather than through quantitative saturation metrics.

Matrix cross-tabulations by craft cluster were examined during analysis but are not presented as primary findings to preserve the interpretive character of the study.

4.1. Spatial Displacement and Infrastructure Failure

Eighty-eight percent of interviews indicated that artisans lost their workspace, resulting from situations that could be defined as neither relocation nor the type of infrastructure failure. Workspaces included looms, display areas, rehearsal areas and courtyards. Losing these elements of practice erases dimensions of practice itself. These findings support Simone's account of informal productive systems functioning as infrastructure through everyday urban proximity [21] and align with Watson's account of the collateral damage informal livelihoods sustain under formal planning regimes [25].

To precisely model this structural phenomenon, spatial reduction can be understood as a direct function of compounding urban redevelopment pressure over time, leading to a measurable net loss of functional workspace for local artisan clusters. Although the present study remains qualitative, the observed pattern of threshold contraction, workshop fragmentation and road-widening severance of pedestrian-workspace interaction is documented empirically through the street-transect diagrams presented in Section 4.7, which record this erosion along fixed section lines in three heritage districts.

Historic cluster boundaries (Mandi Mohalla, Ashokapuram, Sayyaji Rao Road), when overlaid with contemporary zoning and redevelopment footprints, illustrate the progressive erosion of contiguous artisan streetscapes.



Fig. 4 Spatial compression and change of artisan workspaces under redevelopment pressure (Source: Author, fieldwork documentation)

Spatial constraints have also resulted in repertoire compression. Craft output had to become simpler due to spatial limitations. Space limitations generated by smaller looms or workshop footprints eliminated the potential for producing complex, large-format motifs (such as ceremonial temple hangings). Artisans are now working with smaller formats and thus producing simple vocabularies. On the other hand, a progressive erosion of technical knowledge occurs, which is a blind spot in documentation-based policy [14]. This theme corresponds to the spatial transformation component of

the framework. Urban projects' failure to structurally integrate heritage spatial requirements undermines traditions. Figure 4 represents the spatial compression.

4.2. Sensory Degradation and Communicative Conditions

This theme ties directly to the multisensory engagement component of the framework. Public art interventions restoring acoustic, visual and olfactory environments are not merely decorative but serve as infrastructural repairs. If these restorative actions do not take place, traditions lose their medium for communication and transmission mechanisms collapse. Figure 5 depicts how sensory degradation manifests in heritage clusters. For instance, the acoustic degradation caused by ambient traffic noise is inversely related to the acoustic resonance required for traditional performance arts like Kamsale, demonstrating how environmental noise directly impairs communicative performance thresholds.

4.3. Intergenerational Disconnect

Eighty-three percent of respondents reported declining interest in apprenticeships among young people who moved into information technology or service jobs, and the growing stigma associated with artisanal occupations. The generational divide represents both an economic and infrastructural issue. It disrupts hierarchical relationships within workshops, teacher/student relationships and neighbourhood exposure to artisanal activity. The invisibility of the workshop generates perceptions of lower social status relative to the highly visible office locations of the IT sector.

There is a call for community led co-creation. Public art interventions creating open-air stages, live demonstrations and Katte platforms create visibility and legitimacy for younger generations of artisans. Research conducted in Oaxaca and Yogyakarta demonstrates that practitioner-led programs sustain apprenticeships when artisans are presented as cultural leaders, while external programs diminish artisans to 'museumified' demonstrators [6, 7, 11]. Therefore, government structures decide if intergenerational transmission is sustained or undermined.

4.4. Demand for Participatory Spaces

Seventy-six percent of participants emphasised the requirement for public spaces where there is direct participation in observing live processing. "Children and the public should see the live process. That is how heritage lives." (P9). Participants recognise that traditions require continuous visibility and not isolation in museums.

This theme reinforces the community-led co-creation component. Public art interventions that create participatory spaces restore the relational infrastructure of heritage. Comparative cases confirm that when artisans retain design authority, participatory spaces generate income, mentoring, and transmission [11, 27]. When governance is external, outcomes are reduced to spectacle [21]. This reinforces the

necessity of "tactile urbanism"—an approach emphasising physical, haptic engagement with the built environment through materiality, texture, and sensory interaction—designing spaces that encourage physical interaction with materials and processes [28].

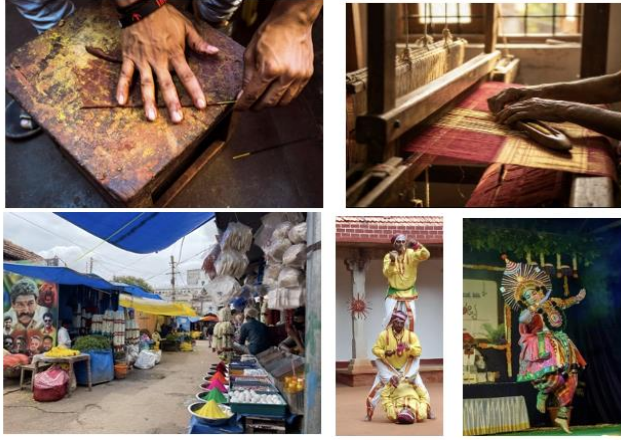


Fig. 5 Sensory environments integral to heritage transmission and their degradation under urbanisation pressure (Source: Author, fieldwork documentation)

4.5. Physical Infrastructure Deficiencies

Physical infrastructure deficiencies have disrupted accessibility. These are not coincidental issues but represent material failures in infrastructure affecting the viability of heritage. This theme ties back to spatial transformation. Heritage preservation requires integrating basic urban infrastructure with cultural practice needs. Neglect of drainage, lighting and accessibility routes causes cumulative damage that documentation cannot compensate. When public art is incorporated into repairing infrastructure (e.g., artist-designed drainage covers or custom artisan cluster street lighting) it can restore functional conditions instead of aestheticising decline.

4.6. Integrative Discussion

Mysore's heritage losses result from infrastructure failures, not from memory loss or cultural decline. There are five types of failure modes that correspond exactly to the five themes and to the five-part typology developed in Section 5.2: spatial failure; environmental/sensory failure; social-reproductive failure; institutional failure; and material failure. The correspondence is direct: spatial failure maps to the spatial displacement/infrastructure-failure theme (4.1); environmental/sensory failure maps to the sensory degradation theme (4.2); social-reproductive failure maps to the intergenerational disconnect theme (4.3); institutional failure maps to the demand for participatory spaces theme (4.4), since that unmet demand is itself evidence that existing governance structures have failed to institutionalise everyday venues for practice and demonstration; and material failure maps to the physical infrastructure deficiencies theme (4.5). Comparative cases indicate that these failure modes are

primarily the result of government/governance decisions, not budgetary/scale issues. Government structure determines success/failure; for example, artisan authority over placement/design/programming/stewardship is positive, while external governance produces spectacle.

Findings confirm the three main components of the framework. A multisensory approach assists in mitigating the sensory loss caused by urban development. Multisensory approaches assist in addressing intergenerational disconnection, which co-creation can also help address. Co-creating with communities assists in resolving material loss and facilitates spatial change. These findings present several challenges for tokenistic heritage policy. The issue is no longer just "what" to conserve but "how" to maintain practices in-situ. Additionally, these findings challenge the dominant methodological approach of listing/archiving — a method central to UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage 2003.

In terms of policy, methods of listing/archiving have value, as well as providing tangible resources to aid in maintaining traditional practices. However, this model does not establish the requisite conditions needed for practising activities during periods of rapid urban growth. Restoration of infrastructure in Mysore — as demonstrated — is required by safeguarding practices. The Historic Urban Landscape approach — which does not clearly articulate what forms this should take — does provide a focus on preserving heritage.

Mysore's experience has refined the Historic Urban Landscape approach by specifying sensory environments, spatial proximity and apprentice training systems as examples to protect. Further, Mysore's experience expands upon the Historic Urban Landscape approach, as it is the artisans and their guilds that manage the art. Compared with these prior approaches - documentation-based listing, which specifies no restoration mechanism, and the Historic Urban Landscape approach, which specifies no operational detail — the five-part typology and three-component framework developed here achieve greater explanatory and practical precision by naming discrete failure mechanisms and tying each directly to an artisan-governed intervention.

Documentation will play a lesser role in preserving living heritage, and more emphasis will be placed on soft infrastructure to achieve preservation goals for Mysore's living heritage. By utilising a multi-method qualitative research methodology and a cross-study comparative analysis, fieldwork identifies five modes of heritage failure — spatial failure, environmental/sensory failure, social-reproductive failure, institutional failure, and material failure — matching the typology developed above and in Section 5.2. An effective response to these modes of failure involves a three-part framework consisting of multisensory engagement, community-led tools for co-creation and a spatial intervention

strategy. Increasingly important for all five case studies is the concept of artisan governance. Public art can function as an infrastructural repair rather than an aesthetic spectacle when heritage is embedded within the sensory, spatial and social mechanisms composing urban worlds. Incorporating heritage needs into daily urban infrastructures will determine whether heritages will persist through urbanisation or transition into archives.

As a qualitative, theory-building study, this comparison is made in terms of explanatory and operational specificity rather than measurable performance gains against a quantitative benchmark. Where documentation-based indices and the HUL approach offer general guidance, the five-part typology and three-component framework developed here yield testable, intervention-level predictions - for example, which governance arrangement is likely to sustain apprenticeship transmission - that future comparative fieldwork can evaluate directly.

4.7. Urban Morphological Patterns and Spatial Failure Maps for Mysore's Heritage Districts

Urban morphological patterns in the heritage districts were illustrated using street-transect diagrams based upon the data gathered during the 28 sensory walks and workshops. The use of street-transect diagrams was appropriate to the qualitative nature of the field work. Street-transects were created in each of the three areas that have been studied in

greatest detail — Mandi Mohalla (Ganjifa and Mysore paintings), Ashokapuram (silk-weaving) and the Sayyaji Rao Road corridor (rosewood and sandalwood) by walking a defined strip line down the middle of an area and documenting workshop frontage widths, threshold depths and the view from within a workshop to the exterior street at a series of intervals.

Each of these transects was made twice on the same strip line one historically, as recalled by participants and from photographs in archives, and one contemporaneously, directly from the field observations - to allow both historical and current conditions to be visually compared. Prior to their transformation into modern shopping strips or office complexes, historic artisan districts like Mandi Mohalla, Ashokapuram, and the Sayyaji Rao Road corridor had characteristics of high densities of workshops along streets, continuous threshold spaces separating the street from workshops and relatively small pedestrian “catchment” areas that allowed informal trade and peer observation. The diagrammatic representation of this decline is evident in the transect representations for each of the three areas: (1) segmentation of previously contiguous workshop frontages due to multi-level retail insertions; (2) removal of earth floor thresholds resulting from widening roads or replacing pavement which is shown diagrammatically as a contraction of threshold space at the strip line; and (3) blockage of views from pedestrians to workshop interiors due to wall enclosures and elevated podiums.

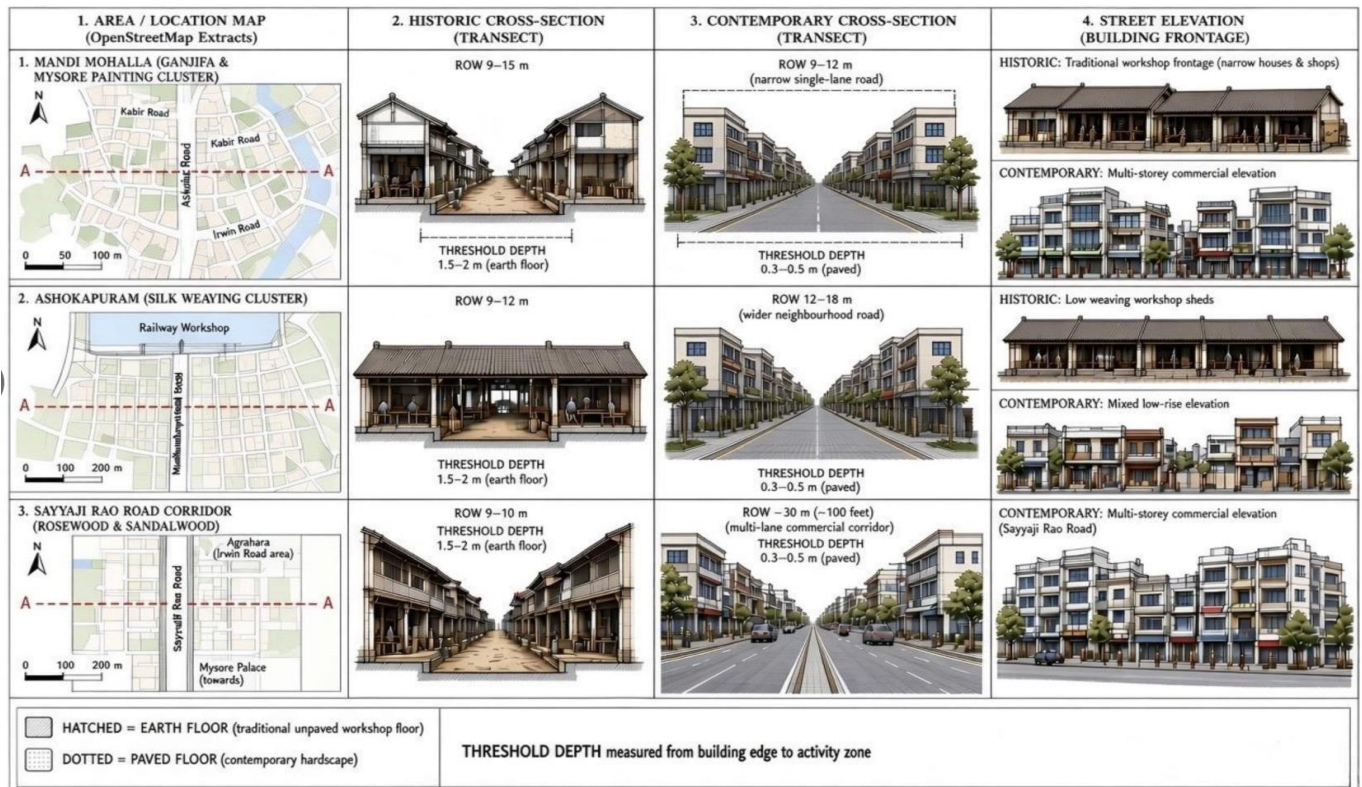


Fig. 6 Historic-versus-contemporary street-transect diagrams for Mandi Mohalla, Ashokapuram and the Sayyaji Rao road corridor
(Source: Author generated, fieldwork documentation)

4.8. Policy and Regulatory Framework Analysis for Secondary Cities

The tools used for urban development in Mysore, primarily through the master plan and building ordinances developed under the aegis of the Mysore Urban Development Authority (MUDA), have historically treated artisan workshops as residual residential and/or commercial land use instead of treating them as an essential means of living for artisans. Direct contradictions exist when comparing zoning regulations restricting furnace use in residential areas, specifications regarding colour rendering index of the light from the new LED streetlights being altered so that it cannot be accurately assessed for silk and paint, and proposed road widening that would eliminate threshold spaces. Therefore, absent is a formal requirement for assessing impacts on the sensory experiences of artisans, their apprenticeships, etc., which would be mandated according to the UNESCO Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) guidelines. As such, soft infrastructural needs are treated as externality and not as planning parameters.

4.9. The Artisan-Led Soft Infrastructure and Governance Action Matrix

Building on the Five Failure Modes and Three-Component Framework, a practical matrix is developed to pair specific physical design strategies (the first component) with the corresponding co-management protocols (the second and third components). The physical strategy options are acoustically buffered "Katte" stages used as performance transmission; colour spectrum calibrated streetlights that preserve daylight equivalent for assessing paintings and silks; clay threshold preservation zones where the earth floor is maintained for practising Kolam; and artist designed drains to protect silks and timbers from water. Each of these interventions will be paired with a governance provision that clarifies who retains decision-making authority - the practitioner or local government. All four interventions will have a single revenue-sharing model applied to them. This shared model will pay a predetermined percentage of any tourism income or demonstration money received by each household back to that household.

Table 4. The Artisan-Led soft infrastructure and governance action matrix

Physical Design Intervention	Co-Governance Clause
Acoustically buffered Katte platforms for performance transmission.	Performance scheduling and use approved by practitioners; municipality handles structural upkeep and safety checks
Colour-spectrum-calibrated street lighting that preserves daylight-equivalent rendering for silk and painting assessment.	Lighting specifications set and certified by artisans; municipality funds installation and maintenance

Clay-threshold preservation zones that maintain earth-floor conditions for Kolam practice.	Protected zones designated and enforced by the craft community; municipality restricts conflicting road or utility work nearby
Artist-designed drainage covers that prevent silk and timber damage.	Cover designs and placement approved by artisans; municipality responsible for drainage repair and upkeep

The matrix thereby converts the theoretical critique into a transferable planning and design toolkit for secondary cities facing analogous pressures.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Summary of the Argument

This study originated from an empirical contradiction: Mysore's recognised intangible cultural heritage exists as a vibrant and thriving cultural asset while experiencing systematic deterioration of conditions supporting the continued existence of its traditions. The main contributions included naming the conditions underpinning these declines precisely, categorising them into a five-part typology, and illustrating how public art (conceptualised as soft infrastructure maintenance) can assist in responding to these conditions in ways that mainstream heritage policy cannot.

The five themes developed throughout analysis — spatial displacement/infrastructure failure (88%); sensory degradation (81%); intergenerational disconnect (83%); demand for participatory spaces (76%); physical infrastructure deficiencies (67%) — collectively illustrate that heritage loss in Mysore is not fundamentally an issue related to decline in cultural memory. Rather, it is an issue related to infrastructural decline.

The loom, the threshold display, the acoustically resonant rehearsal room, the courtyard for drying or firing objects, and the Katte space for demonstrating techniques — these are not interchangeable productive spaces but unique infrastructural systems whose removal eliminates dimensions of practice.

5.2. Theoretical Contributions

The five-part typology - spatial failure, environmental/sensory failure, social reproductive failure, institutional failure and material failure constitute the central theoretical contribution to heritage studies. It extends heritage studies beyond undifferentiated categories of "heritage threats", identifies the separate mechanisms whereby urban development erodes systems of living traditions and specifies policy responses relevant to each.

Spatial failure refers to losing configurations of workshops, threshold spaces, and neighbourhoods that serve as production systems for craftsmanship; learning systems for apprenticeship; and trading systems for commerce.

"Repertoire compression" — introduced here — describes how spatial constraints force craft producers to simplify products they manufacture and gradually diminish technical knowledge.

Environmental/sensory failure refers to the degradation of sonic, visual and olfactory environments required for practice. Traffic-related acoustic blurring; distortion due to municipal LED lighting; loss of material fragrance are not quality-of-life issues but direct attacks on transmission mechanisms. Sensory heritage infrastructure constitutes a novel analytical category warranting policy consideration.

Social reproductive failure refers to the breakdown of apprentice systems; guru-shishya relationships; intergenerational transmissions inherent in hierarchical workshop structures; and neighbourhood visibility. Losing visibility of workshops creates a perception of loss in social stature compared to highly visible corporate offices of IT sectors.

Institutional failure refers to ineffectiveness of governance structures - state, cooperative, and digital - supporting heritage practices. Comparative cases illustrate that outcomes depend less on financing than on governance: when artisans retain authority over design, programming, and stewardship, interventions always support practice, whereas external governance typically reduces practice to representation.

Material failure refers to failures in basic urban services - drainage; lighting; roadways - that directly affect viability of heritage. Overflowing gutters damaging silks; inadequate lighting hindering workshop productivity; roadways deteriorating access - these failures are not casual but material failures in basic infrastructure producing cascading impacts on heritage production.

5.3. The Three-Component Framework

Three Component Approach of Multisensory Engagement (replacing the lost senses), Community-Led Co-Creation (restoring participation) and Spatial Transformation (preserving space) constitute an applied reversal of the documentation-led approach to heritage protection and thus offer a working alternative to archival preservation as the main means of safeguarding heritage. Multisensory engagement is focused on recovering the sensory environment that is critical to the practice of artisans. Artistic interventions with public art functions, i.e., acoustic barriers, daylight-preserving lighting design, and material-sensitive environmental controls, are not decorations but rather components of the infrastructure. Community-led co-creation addresses intergenerational disconnection and the need for participative spaces. By establishing artisans in outdoor stages, live demonstrations, and Katte platforms, this facilitates transparency and legitimacy for young people. Hereby, the image of the artisan

changes from being a museum-demonstrator of artefacts to a public intellectual and cultural leader.

In addition, spatial transformation will deal with spatial displacement and material deficiency by incorporating heritage spatial demands into urban development. For this purpose, the spatial system of heritage needs to be mapped together with transport, housing and commerce so that urban renewal does not lead to elimination of the material conditions of practising.

Most importantly, however, the study shows that artisan cooperative governance must be established as a prerequisite for all proposed sites as well as all similar projects anywhere else. If artisans retain design authority and control over programs, interventions create income, mentorship and transmission. On the contrary, if interventions are governed externally, these interventions tend to produce spectacle instead of sustainability.

5.4. Policy Implications

The implications go far beyond the city of Mysore to include all living heritages of rapidly growing secondary cities in the Global South, such as Ahmedabad, Varanasi, Jogja, Fez, etc., plus numerous other comparable cases.

Since the question here is not how to document what traditions have been practised but how to preserve what continues to be practised, for urban planners and policymakers, there are 5 key implications derived from the results:

1. Heritage spatial demands need to be incorporated into urban redevelopment instead of treated as externalities.
2. Sensory environments require official attention. As part of municipal planning, assessments need to be made regarding impacts on heritage practices by regulations governing lighting, traffic management and noise pollution.
3. Participative spaces need to be incorporated into urban design. Every day visibility is required; museum isolation is insufficient.
4. Governance structures should centre on artisan authority. Documentation based policies should be replaced with practical ones.
5. Basic infrastructure maintenance constitutes heritage policy. Infrastructure failures in drainage, lighting, access routes directly impact on heritage viability.

5.5. Concluding Remarks

Conservation of heritage, correctly defined, is not just about managing decline. It is about maintaining the conditions in which living traditions can evolve, adapt and therefore remain worthwhile to continue practising. Therefore, the goal of urban policy should be to provide support for the next generation in making a living – not just a performance - out of what they inherit. Mysore provides both a warning and a

model. The warning is that urban development which neglects heritage infrastructure leads to cumulative damage that no cultural policy can undo. The model demonstrates that conditions first, artisan-led and spatially integrated approaches can maintain heritage as a living practice - and not as a museum artefact - but as an urban infrastructure supporting livelihoods, transmitting knowledge and giving cities their individual character. Thus, the task for planners, policymakers and practitioners is to recognise heritage as a type of urban infrastructure that, when preserved, adds to economic resilience, social coherence and urban identity. Recognising heritage in this way requires planners to switch from documenting heritage to creating the conditions necessary for its continued existence; from applying external forms of governance to allowing artisans to take charge of designing and implementing their own heritage; and from conducting separate or isolated interventions to integrate these interventions into holistic plans for urban spatial design. The heritage of Mysore - and hundreds of similar secondary cities in the Global South - depends on this. This research provides three related contributions. In theory, intangible cultural heritage could be viewed as urban fabric demonstrating how living practice endures through spatial proximity and tangible sensual environments and daily sociality.

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In practice, it appears that it is the design, programming and stewardship of artisans that is responsible for preserving living practice through the concurrent existence of tangible and intangible heritage; or relegating it to aestheticised displays. The three-part framework serves as a model for secondary cities in the Global South experiencing rapid urbanisation, where similar concerns exist at the level of transfer regarding infrastructure. Through the soft infrastructure of re-imagining the heritage fabric through restoration as continuity's core, this research sharpens heritage policy beyond notions of documentation.

Conflicts of Interest

The author(s) declare(s) that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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Appendix 1: Participant Demographics

Table A1. Demographic Characteristics of Study Participants

Code	Name	Gender	Age	Cluster	Role
P1	Ramaiah	M	58	Silk Weaving	Weaver
P2	Lakshmamma	F	48	Silk Weaving	Spinner
P3	Suresh	M	34	Silk Weaving	Technician
P4	Shivu	M	45	Silk Weaving	Weaver
P5	Kempanna	M	61	Silk Weaving	Warping Expert
P9	Mahadevappa	M	65	Rosewood/Sandalwood	Senior Inlay Artist
P10	Farooq	M	42	Rosewood/Sandalwood	Cutter
P11	Syed	M	26	Rosewood/Sandalwood	Inlay Apprentice
P12	Girish	M	50	Rosewood/Sandalwood	Sandalwood Carver
P13	Manju	M	39	Rosewood/Sandalwood	Polisher
P19	Meera	F	62	Ganjifa & Painting	Ganjifa Card Artist
P20	Ashwath	M	63	Ganjifa & Painting	Traditional Painter
P27	Shreyas	M	43	Devaraja Market	Flower Vendor
P28	Meena	F	41	Devaraja Market	Agarbatti Roller
P29	Chandan	M	45	Devaraja Market	Perfumer
P30	Khader	M	53	Devaraja Market	Fruit Seller
P34	Afzal	M	51	Devaraja Market	Spice Merchant
P35	Lakshmi	F	49	Devaraja Market	Vegetable Vendor
P36	Sridhar	M	40	Performers & Culinary	Yakshagana Artist
P37	Sharada	F	52	Performers & Culinary	Kolam Practitioner

P38	Somanna	M	65	Performers & Culinary	Bronze Caster
P39	Venkataraman	M	59	Performers & Culinary	Mysore Pak Confectioner
P40	Mahesh	M	31	Performers & Culinary	Kamsale Dancer
P41	Srinivas	M	28	Performers & Culinary	Vedic Chanter
P42	Dr. Rao	M	65	Performers & Culinary	Heritage Activist

Note: Participants coded P6–P8, P14–P18, P21–P26 and P31–P33 were engaged as part of cluster group sessions and are not individually listed in accordance with the consent terms under which their participation was obtained.