Leveraging National Schemes to Support a Heritage Agenda

MUKTA NAIK AND KIMBERLY M. NORONHA

ABSTRACT

Looking at India’s urban planning policy framework, there emerges the difficulty of arriving at reconciliation between the desire to develop world class cities and the need to conserve and restore cities as spaces where heritage, both intangible and built, is intertwined with the functional city. The question whether the slew of Five Year Missions devised by the Ministry of Urban Development, such as the Swachh Bharat Mission, Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana, the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation, and the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, have been able to achieve this reconciliation has been explored here. Out of these, two such schemes, Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation, and the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana have been taken up to investigate the question - where and how does the issue of heritage get addressed in the intent, content and governance of the two national schemes.

INTRODUCTION

Urban India presents an interesting conundrum within the current policy framework. On the one hand, there is the desire to develop competitive, equitable world class cities that act as aggregators of capital, with
technology-based service provision and business environments conducive to healthy job creation for India’s demographic dividend and entrepreneurial spirit. On the other hand is India’s heritage, situated in her cities in the form of archeologically significant sites, in spaces where the arts and crafts continue to be practised or where built heritage is intertwined with the functional city. All of this is couched within a framework of conservation and preservation for the future. Reconciling these two viewpoints is like solving a math problem usually given to twelve year olds: two cars are travelling in opposite directions at a given speed, when will they meet in the middle? Do the Government of India’s recently developed urban programmes hasten towards that meeting point?

Between 2014 and 2015, the urban sector witnessed a slew of freshly minted five year missions, including the Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban) with a Central Government contribution of ₹146,230 million for five years and a total estimated cost of ₹620,090 million, the Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana (HRIDAY) with an outlay of ₹500 billion, the Smart Cities Mission of ₹480 billion (roughly ₹1 billion per city for 100 cities), the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) with an outlay of ₹5000 billion, and the Housing for All (Urban) mission, also known as the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) with an objective of creating 20 million homes by 2022.

This pentalogy of urban sector schemes represents a certain vision and conception of India’s urban agenda. How does heritage fit within this agenda? While it is far too early to assess the efficacy of any of these schemes, we reflect on this question. Specifically, how is heritage situated within the intent, content and governance of AMRUT and PMAY? How does an agenda as specific and yet as inter-disciplinary as heritage get addressed in a system that is habituated to function in silos rather than in a coordinated and convergent fashion.

**CONTENT AND INTENT**

The vision of urbanisation manifest in the design of these schemes is one where infrastructure creation and service provision are paramount. AMRUT will fund infrastructure improvement in 500 cities, chiefly water, sewerage, drainage, pedestrian and non-motorised mobility solutions, and public amenities like parks and open spaces. PMAY focuses on housing inclusion, and will fund in-situ slum redevelopment, affordable housing (either through credit-linked subsidy or in partnership with the private sector), and beneficiary led individual house construction.

AMRUT and PMAY are city wide schemes in that the infrastructure provision is planned for the entire city. HRIDAY however has funding tied to sites within cities. Both PMAY and AMRUT cover all cities in India, but for the period co-terminus with HRIDAY both schemes will concentrate on 500 cities with a population above 100,000. While some of the 12 HRIDAY cities do fall within the PMAY and AMRUT coverage up to 2017, other smaller cities do not.

Policymakers have been wise in mandating that all cities classified as Heritage Cities under the HRIDAY scheme are eligible for AMRUT funding. The expectation that AMRUT funding will be leveraged by these cities to dovetail with the infrastructure elements of the heritage revitalisation projects is obvious. The PMAY guidelines do not mention heritage or HRIDAY, but since PMAY covers all cities, it would appear that convergence of PMAY and HRIDAY funding should not be proscribed.

However, the schemes are unclear on how this will take place, despite both schemes (HRIDAY and AMRUT) being under the aegis of the Ministry of Urban Development (MoUD). PMAY is being managed by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation.

**GOVERNANCE**

The devil is to be found in the details of governance of these schemes. In the newly minted spirit of cooperative federalism (AMRUT’s guidelines even cite the phrase), both AMRUT and PMAY will approve broad plans of action prepared by cities and states. However, projects will be approved by the State, not the Union Government. States, Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) and private sector players are expected to contribute funds, and ULBs are expected to execute the proposed projects.

By contrast, HRIDAY is far more centralised. Although there is a convergence framework for all three tiers of government, decision-making is concentrated at the Union Government level through a National Empowered Committee (NEC). Further the Mission Directorate is directly responsible for the creation of Heritage Management Plans (HMPs) and project-specific reports. Project execution responsibilities are with the Mission Directorate, which operates at Union and ULB level. ULBs also play a monitoring role.
States are peripheral to the organisational structure; however, given the emasculated state of ULBs, without states stepping into the planning, execution and monitoring roles, it is hard to see HRIDAY take-off. If HRIDAY projects are expected to dovetail with AMRUT and PMAY, synergies must be achieved at the level of the State Government. This is a challenge given the drastically different roles for the States in these schemes. Luckily, at present, the same official is in charge of both AMRUT and HRIDAY in the Union Government and therefore achieving this scheme synergy is still possible.

WHERE ELSE IS CONVERGENCE POSSIBLE?

What we have highlighted so far is how the schemes may be converged on overlapping objectives. Beyond the confines of the schemes, we see potential for convergence in two other areas.

First, these schemes provide an opportunity to mainstream heritage and heritage tourism as an urban development concern. Beyond the narrow scope of HRIDAY, heritage could be an advantageous focal point for the urban development of several AMRUT funded cities. However, AMRUT is not geared for a focus on heritage preservation or management. Moreover, infrastructure deprived cities, especially small and medium towns can leverage AMRUT funding to make general improvements in sanitation and development of open spaces that could support a tourism plan. For example, Bhubaneswar has been allocated ₹1.13 million from the central scheme, which will be matched by the State Government of Odisha. A focus on developing more green spaces, improving urban transport and storm water drainage system would benefit residents and visitors alike. Additional efforts at aligning the projects with the tourism and culture departments at State and ULB level could sharpen this overall focus.

A word on the Smart Cities Mission might be prudent here. More than AMRUT and PMAY, the area based component of this scheme lends itself well to a heritage focus. In spite of the apparent contradiction of ‘smartness’, widely interpreted as technology enabled and modern improvements to urban planning and governance, it seems feasible to address the needs of a heritage precinct or inner city core under the Smart Cities Programme. In fact, as part of the initial proposals, Udaipur’s Smart City proposal specifically mentions heritage.

Second, is integrating living heritage with the development of local urban economies. HRIDAY’s stated objective is to document living heritage. By strengthening linkages to two other urban sector schemes, we feel that this objective can be broadened to promoting living heritage as an integral part of a vibrant local urban economy.

The preservation of archaeological sites is often plagued by encroachments resulting in degenerating historical cores. Because historical monuments are viewed as stand-alone built environments divorced from their living heritage, the slums surrounding these monuments are treated as eyesores to be removed with no consideration of the living heritage that is being destroyed in the process. Historical monuments need to also be viewed as sites of local economic development for the informal sector.

Two components of PMAY, in-situ slum redevelopment and subsidy for beneficiary-led house construction, as well as elements of the National Urban Livelihoods Mission, could be leveraged to support communities of artisans and craftspeople that are valuable to the heritage and identity of a city. Providing improved housing and security of tenure would protect livelihoods. With parallel efforts of the government and non-government actors to support crafts communities with design and marketing, this could have substantial economic impact as well.

Converging the agendas of heritage conservation and enhancement with improved infrastructure, inclusive and affordable housing and economic growth would require innovative thinking and an intense familiarity with local context. It is imperative that ULBs, and indeed multiple stakeholders in the city, be brought on the table to shape these agendas.