

The Role of Place in Creative Economy: The Case of Varanasi

Deepanjan SAHA and Joy SEN



Deepanjan SAHA, Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur, India

Deepanjan Saha is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Architecture & Regional Planning at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kharagpur since 2014. His ongoing doctoral research looks into the symbiotic relationship between place and creative economy of Varanasi. Previously, he has served the Delhi Development Authority on the review of Master Plan for Delhi - 2021. His other research interests include urban conservation and architectural heritage. He is associated with the Science and Heritage Initiative (SandHI) of IIT Kharagpur. Deepanjan has been a DAAD Scholar during his post-graduate studies in city planning. Contact: saha.deepanjan@gmail.com



Joy SEN, Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur, India

Joy Sen is Professor and Head, Ranbir and Chitra Gupta School of Infrastructure Design and Management, and Professor, Department of Architecture and Regional Planning at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kharagpur. His research interests majorly include community and regional planning, history of Indian architecture, and Indology. He has authored several books on subjects ranging from *India's contribution to Global systems of Sciences, Culture and Religion* (2006), *Principles of Indian Architecture* (2009), *Sustainable Urban Planning* (TERI, 2012). He is the Principal Investigator for the interdisciplinary Project named SandHI - Science and Heritage Initiative at IIT Kharagpur (2014-17) funded by the Government of India. Contact: joysen@arp.iitkgp.ernet.in

ABSTRACT

In recent past, culture has been acknowledged as a driver for development; with creativity and innovation being accorded as new engines of growth. However, the relationship between creativity and economics through deep culture studies remains less understood. Place also plays an important role in the dynamics of cultural economics. This paper tries to explore the symbiotic inter-relationship between place, culture, and economy. For the purpose of the study, the historic city of Varanasi in India has been selected as an empirical case – it being a living repository of many cultural dimensions, particularly, traditional art and crafts. Both the measures of concentration – by share of employment and spatial clustering – have been identified for cultural and creative industries in Varanasi District. Further, their spatial distribution has been mapped broadly so as to identify the dominant clustering pattern; thus, noting the role of place in shaping the cultural and creative industrial sector.

Keywords: Creative Economy, Cultural and creative industries, Place, Spatial clustering

1. INTRODUCTION

Creativity, knowledge, and innovation have increasingly been acknowledged as drivers of sustainable socio-economic development. UNESCO, in its report on 'Creative Economy', has highlighted the need to ensure that 'culture and human rights inform the new course for sustainable development' – a kind of development which is not only economically viable, but also socially inclusive, environmentally sustainable, and brings in peace and security (UNESCO, 2013). Given this backdrop, creative economy has been identified as a growing sector of the economy. Thus, better comprehension of knowledge-driven planning process in our urban centers would require recognition of the dynamics between culture-creativity and economics, which still remains less understood (Howkins, 2002).

Creative industries have been defined as 'those requiring creativity, skill and talent, with the potential for wealth and job creation through exploitation of their intellectual property' (DCMS, 2001). However, various scholars have drawn attention to the 'semantic ambiguity' which exists due to the multiplicity of meanings attached to the terms Cultural and Creative Industries owing to differing contexts and applications (Calcagno & Panozzo, 2013; Potts, Cunningham, Hartley, & Ormerod, 2008). At times, these two terms are either used together as 'Cultural and Creative Industries' (CCI), or interchangeably when used separately. A significant difference between 'cultural' and 'creative' industries is explained by UNCTAD, namely: cultural activities are deeply rooted in the local context and community, whereas creative industries are directed at activities protected under law related to Intellectual Property Rights (UNCTAD, 2010). This distinction is important because in many developing nations, creative resources are largely rooted in local culture. Following UNCTAD's classification, cultural industries (i.e. those derived from traditional cultural activities such as performing and visual arts) make up a subset of creative industries (i.e. economic activities such

as advertising, publishing, media-related activities which derive value from low reproduction costs). Thus, the larger creative sector ranges from activities rooted in traditional knowledge and cultural heritage to more technology and services-oriented subgroups.

Culture may be defined as the continuum of ideas, customs, and social behavior of a particular group of people or community ecosystem. Over time, culture also begins to represent the arts, folk and pedagogy of manifestations of deep human intellectual achievement regarded collectively. Further, these manifestations become the fountainhead of creativity. Hence, though culture and creativity are seemingly different concepts, they are inter-related and intertwined. Moreover, for purposes of comparative research and policy development the umbrella term CCI has its own advantages.

In addition, geography does matter in the development of cultural economies (Clare, 2013). Cultural and economic policies intersect with urban planning, policy and governance; however, these relationships are still marked by ambiguities (Kong & O'Connor, 2009). Creative economy stands between the market and the society, formal and informal economies, and requires dedicated policy planning rooted in local contexts. Hence, it is important to recognize the nexus of place, culture, and economy in the discourse on CCI and the resultant socio-economic development. Thus, this paper makes an attempt to understand how place plays an important role in setting up of the creative economy sector, exemplified by the case of Varanasi District in India. Varanasi – the city and the city-region taken together – being a repository of traditional knowledge and cultural heritage has shaped its economic activities in the form of arts and crafts-induced production systems, which could broadly be classified as cultural industries. However, in the context of an Indian heritage city, as creativity springs from a strong sense of deep culture and its base of traditional knowledge, both cultural and creative industries get clubbed into a broader classification.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Creativity and Economics

In the past, relationship between culture and economy has mainly been looked as commercialization of historical heritage, and large-scale public investment in artefacts of collective cultural consumption in the interests of urban renovation, for instance, the ‘Guggenheim-effect’ in Bilbao. However, scholars have noted the need to go beyond such restricted notions, and in establishing the inherent relationship between local culture and economic systems by exploring the intertwined effects of cultural attributes of a place and the logic of the local production systems (Scott, 1997). Even, this recursive relationship is necessary for the growth of cultural and creative industries in a region. On one hand, place is the crucible of cultural and economic interactions, and on the other, cultural identity and economic order condense out to emerge as the monopoly power of place. Hence, it is important to recognize the symbiotic inter-relationships between **place**, **culture**, and **economy** so as to protect the spatial root to cultural-economic aspects (Scott, 1997). As indicated in Figure 1, place plays a very important role in the dynamics of reciprocation between culture-creativity and economics.

A variety of labels namely, ‘cultural economy of cities’ (Scott, 1997), ‘cultural economic geography’ (Flew, 2010), has been noted in the literature

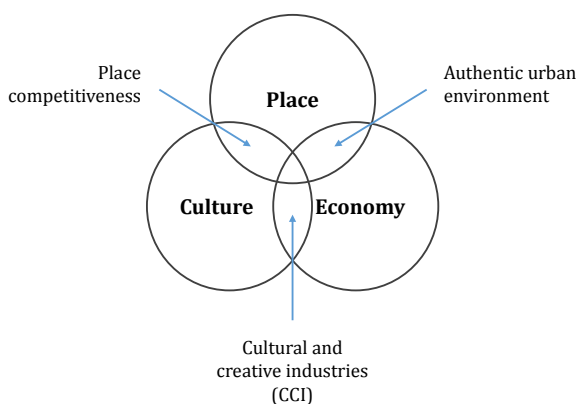


Figure 1. Triad of symbiotic relationship between place, culture, and economy
Source: Evans (n.d.)

to identity with the triad of place, culture and economy. The widely accepted theories of clustering of industries, and creative capital arising out of a diverse mix of human capital (i.e. the so-called ‘creative class’) fail to consider the framework of inherent geography. Hence, scholars have noted the need to understand and identify the historical, geographical, and demographic features that can act as catalysts to creative industries’ development (Flew, 2010).

2.2 Role of Place in Creative Economy

As has been noted in the previous section, place plays a vital role in setting up the relationship between creativity and economy, which the paper is set to explore. In this regard, associated similar terms may be noted: *creative atmosphere*, *creative environ*, *creative milieu*, and *creative city*. These have been defined as a conglomeration of cultural synergies and semiotic fields rooted in the life, work and institutional infrastructure of particular cities (Scott, 1997). Creative atmospheres have been noted to accelerate the processes of cultural entrepreneurship (Calcagno & Panozzo, 2013), thus, strengthening the linkage between creativity and economy. The creative city discourse recognises the need of urban context and infrastructure where CCI grow and develop.

The significance of place may also be noted by recognizing the intrinsic demand for creative industries to cluster. As per Michael Porter (2000), cluster is ‘a geographically proximate group of inter-connected companies and associated institutions in a particular field, linked by commonalities and complementarities’ (Boja, 2011). Besides the competitive advantages of clustering – which are accrued to any industrial cluster, a lot of creative advantages are generated when cultural industries cluster. This has been explained by the relevance of spatial proximity to allow frequent face-to-face interaction facilitating sharing and transfer of tacit knowledge – which is the seed for creativity and innovation (Karlsson, 2011).

In this context, it might be interesting to identify the attributes of a place which let it become the

‘crucible of cultural and economic interactions’. Following features have been noted as determinants of a creative environ (Scott, 2006):

- (1) Network of producers, i.e. firms and workers which are inter-related and densely packed
- (2) Markets of local labour who are highly skilled in place-specific attributes, i.e. traditional practices, tacit knowledge, and informal know-how, particularly for cultural products having high level of aesthetic and semiotic content
- (3) Presence of a creative field which is measured by the strength of inter-relationships of producers; level of institutional support complementing creativity and innovation; and diversity of cultural expressions

Florida’s hypothesis of concentration of the ‘creative class’ as the defining element for a place to achieve the benefits of creative economic development has been criticised by scholars (Pratt, 2008; Scott, 2006). Besides the values of ‘tolerance’ and ‘openness’ in a place – as found significant by Florida in attracting and retaining the ‘creative class’ in a city; job opportunities and urban amenities have also been found to be important influencing factors (Marlet & Woerkens, 2005).

The growth and evolution of creative clusters begins to shape the deeper knowledge-layers of urban morphology. Growth dynamics of such clusters have an impact on the overall planning process of the city as well, which is increasingly knowledge-driven. Given this backdrop, such clusters need be identified and mapped in cities, particularly in heritage cities considering their strength in traditional knowledge and practices, so as to prepare a roadmap for their appropriate restructuring (Saha & Sen, 2016).

In the following section, ‘how a place shapes the creative economy of a region’ will be explored by citing the case of cultural and creative industries in the district of Varanasi – the spiritual capital of India.

3. CASE: VARANASI

Varanasi with its more than 3,000 years old footprint is one of the oldest and continuously inhabited cities in the world. For centuries, the city and its sacred geography by the river Ganga has been a major Hindu pilgrimage. Besides that, this historic city is a repository of traditional art and crafts, music and dance, literature and philosophy, and many other domains of knowledge. Hence, for centuries, the economy in Varanasi has been shaped by such indigenous traditional knowledge, which has manifested itself into various cultural products, goods and services. Tradable cultural products, such as silk *sarees*¹, wooden toys, and metal-craft are the majorly manufactured items in the city, with more than half of the working population being engaged in weaving industry. Traditional knowledge employed in cultural production has been passed down across generations and within families. The craft-based cultural economy has been the mainstay of occupational base in Varanasi for centuries now. For instance, Varanasi has been known as a center for excellence in weaving traditions since 5th century CE, and still continues to be so.

A few of these products have been assigned geographical indication tags in recognizing the significance of place in local production systems based on cultural content, as a measure to protect the associated intellectual property. However, studies indicate that geographical indication tagging has not curbed the menace of fakes (Nanda, Barpujari, & Srivastava, 2013). In the weaving sector, for instance, a dramatic rise in the number of operating power-looms has led to the production in large numbers of cheap imitation products (with computerized designs) to meet the growing market demand. Though the stakeholders are aware of the negative impact of such products, the complexity of the market has not permitted enforcement of the protection measures as envisaged by regulatory bodies.

Varanasi City (i.e. area under the municipal corporation) has a population of 1,198,491 and a large

¹ *Saree* (also known as *sari* and *shari*) is the traditional female garment commonly used in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. It is a long strip of unstitched cloth, ranging from four to nine meters in length, which can be draped in various styles.

floating population of tourists—both national and international—as tourism is a dominant sector of the city’s economy. Varanasi’s economy is also hugely dependent on the informal sector, which accounts for over a third of the workforce. Small scale cottage industries form a major part of the economy. The District of Varanasi spans 1535 km² with a population of 3,676,841 (Directorate of Census Operations, 2011). Though the city-core along the river bank is the primary hub of creative economic activities, a variety of cultural and creative production units are clustered elsewhere in the district owing to locational advantages and historical evolution.

In Varanasi, creative workers learn from the master craftsmen, and thus, the creative knowledge—which is tacit in nature—is passed onto next generations within families. These largely being household industries, people from the entire family get engaged, particularly the male members including children. Such professions are deeply linked to caste-based communal structure in the society. Workers are usually do not approach for any formal professional training.

A number of government departments bear responsibility for the development and promotion of specific crafts; the focus is on export and less on the creative process. The Union Ministry of Textiles has several initiatives designed to develop artisans’ clusters into professionally managed and self-reliant community enterprises, although the outcomes to date have been paltry and fragmented. The protection of workers’ jobs, particularly those working on handloom and handicraft, is at stake with the proliferation of machine-based production systems. With increasing mechanization of cultural production, semi-skilled labor is increasingly available, along with undesirable exploitation of child-labor; thus, diluting the principle that such ‘creative industries’ might engage high-skilled individuals. Despite such threats, several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are trying to preserve traditional craft and practices. They are working with communities to introduce design innovation, thus marrying tra-

ditional methods and modern applications. Over the course of time, many design processes have adapted in order to accommodate contemporary tastes, without losing distinctive features of the products. Recently, several research institutions have taken an interest in documenting the evolution of the craft production process and new technologies, thus highlighting its deviation from the conventional industrial manufacturing system.

4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A study has been conducted on various cultural and creative industrial production units located within the Varanasi District to reveal their pattern of spatial clustering. This would help to identify the creative clusters in physical space. This would further help to work towards both their physical development and facilitation, thereby, boosting creative production and the consequent increase in their economic contribution. Most of the household creative industrial units are small to medium in size, employing about five to thirty employees each. As most of such units are informal in nature, data availability is a challenge. As has been noted by scholars, classification of creative occupations and employment is a challenging task in itself as most of the conventional standard measures of employment record only the main or primary workers, leaving aside part-time workers, volunteers, and hobbyists; thus, resulting in significant underestimation. Hence, as a proxy, the counts of production units and employees registered with the Office of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) in a particular year have been considered for this study. A set of eight industries from the district have been selected which could be classified as CCI.

However, simply noting the share and local concentration of creative employment across different types of creative industries will be inadequate unless coupled with spatial distribution of the employment generated. As has been noted by several studies on geography of creative clusters, simple concentration measures, such as location quotients, fail to map the effects of relative position and proximity of entities in a cluster (Chantelot, Peres, &

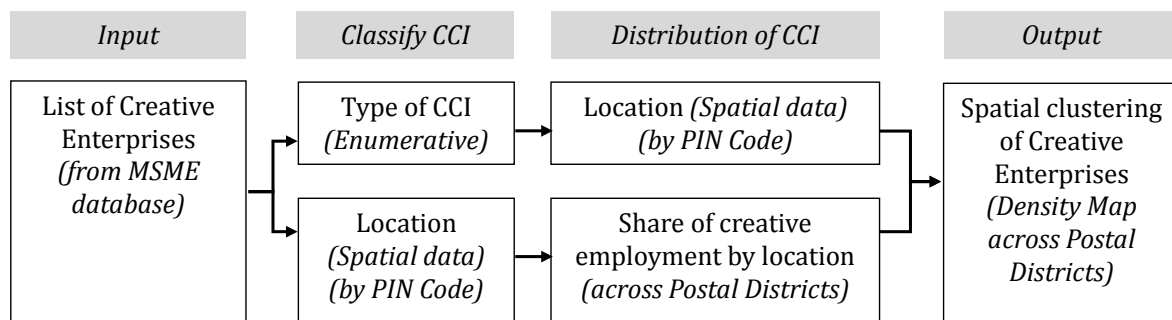


Figure 2. The methodological framework of the study

Virol, 2010). Thus, it was important to note spatial clustering tendencies of these creative industrial activities. Since the locational information of these enterprises were not classified by conventional administrative (i.e. municipal ward or village) boundaries, the six-digit Postal Index Number (PIN) codes used by India Postal Services were adopted as a proxy for their locational attribute. The boundaries by each PIN code were plotted on a map of the district. Next, the creative employment added in the year 2010-2011 was classified by PIN code of the respective enterprises, and by the type of CCI. To better understand the spatial distribution of creative industrial units, the additional creative employment was mapped as per the locations of enterprises grouped by respective PIN codes on a map of the district of Varanasi. The map was referred to identify the hot-spots of creative clusters. The broad methodology adopted is explained by Figure 2.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Of the all the entries recorded against a variety of enterprises registered with the Office of MSME during the years 2009-10 and 2010-11, only those pertaining to creative industries (eight types) were extracted based on the creative content in products manufactured, and compiled in Table 1.

In both the periods, a significantly high proportion of employment was generated in creative industries sector: about 53.29% in year 2009-2010, and 40.34% in year 2010-2011. Thus, about half of the employment in MSME sector is engaged in creative occupations. Moreover, there has been a rise in the count of creative employment added in successive years. This exhibits the prominence of creative industries in the overall economy of the district; hence, it is a preliminary indicator

Table 1. Share of cultural and creative industries to MSME Sector

Sl.	Type of Cultural & Creative Industry (CCI)	No. of enterprises registered / yr.		Employment generated / yr.	
		2009-10	2010-11	2009-10	2010-11
1	Embroidery	14	19	108	126
2	Glass beads	5	85	194	655
3	Handicraft	3	7	13	25
4	Jewellery	9	15	35	69
5	Saree	190	146	649	577
6	Wooden toys	30	17	173	79
7	Woolen carpets	14	7	166	78
8	Zari ²	2	4	13	17
Total CCI units & employment / yr.		267	300	1351	1626
% increase		--	12.36	--	20.36
Total MSME units & employment / yr.		558	563	5798	4031
Share of CCI to MSME (%)		47.85	53.29	23.30	40.34

Data Source: Small Scale Industries, Uttar Pradesh (<http://ssi.up.nic.in>), computed by author

² Zari (or Jari) is a type of gold or silver thread used decoratively on Indian clothing.

Table 2. Distribution of additional Creative Employment by PIN, Year 2010-2011

SI.	Year 2010-11 CCI type	PIN Code								
		221001	221002	221003	221004	221005	221007	221008	221010	221011
1	Embroidery	3	15	-	-	19	13	8	51	-
2	Glass beads	8	32	12	-	32	-	-	15	87
3	Handicraft	13	3	-	-	-	-	-	9	-
4	Jewellery	24	12	15	-	-	-	-	15	-
5	Saree	371	-	-	5	-	-	50	22	-
6	Wooden toys	-	-	-	-	8	7	-	66	-
7	Woolen carpets	-	-	-	-	10	-	-	8	-
8	Zari	17	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Total	436	62	27	5	69	20	58	186	87
	<i>Share of total CE (%)</i>	<i>26.81</i>	<i>3.81</i>	<i>1.66</i>	<i>0.31</i>	<i>4.24</i>	<i>1.23</i>	<i>3.57</i>	<i>11.44</i>	<i>5.35</i>

SI.	Year 2010-11 CCI type	PIN Code								
		221101	221103	221105	221106	221107	221108	221109	221204	221207
1	Embroidery	-	-	-	12	-	-	5	-	-
2	Glass beads	-	12	-	187	5	48	3	8	-
3	Handicraft	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
4	Jewellery	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-
5	Saree	11	-	-	-	-	5	-	6	-
6	Wooden toys	-	-	5	-	-	-	-	-	-
7	Woolen carpets	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8	9
8	Zari	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Total	11	12	8	199	5	53	8	22	9
	<i>Share of total CE (%)</i>	<i>0.68</i>	<i>0.74</i>	<i>0.49</i>	<i>12.24</i>	<i>0.31</i>	<i>3.26</i>	<i>0.49</i>	<i>1.35</i>	<i>0.55</i>

SI.	Year 2010-11 CCI type	PIN Code							Total by industry
		221302	221307	221311	221313	221403	221405	222146	
1	Embroidery	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	126
2	Glass beads	4	4	27	5	-	-	8	497
3	Handicraft	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	25
4	Jewellery	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	69
5	Saree	-	100	-	-	-	-	-	570
6	Wooden toys	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	86
7	Woolen carpets	-	-	-	36	7	158	-	236
8	Zari	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	17
	Total	4	104	27	41	7	158	8	1626
	<i>Share of total CE (%)</i>	<i>0.25</i>	<i>6.40</i>	<i>1.66</i>	<i>2.52</i>	<i>0.43</i>	<i>9.72</i>	<i>0.49</i>	<i>100.00</i>

Data Source: Small Scale Industries, Uttar Pradesh (<http://ssi.up.nic.in>), computed by Authors

to the strength of relationship between culture-creativity and economy. Manufacturing of *saree*, glass-beads and woolen carpets have been noted to employ higher shares of creative employment in Varanasi District.

Overall data shows the distribution of creative employment added in the year 2010-2011, classi-

fied by PIN code of the respective enterprises, and by the type of CCI (Table 2). The same has been charted across the postal districts (Figure 3). As revealed by both Figure 3, the creative employment added in the year 2010-2011 shows distinct clustering tendencies – both by location and industrial classification. Distinct city quarters are specialized in differing crafts. The historical city-core

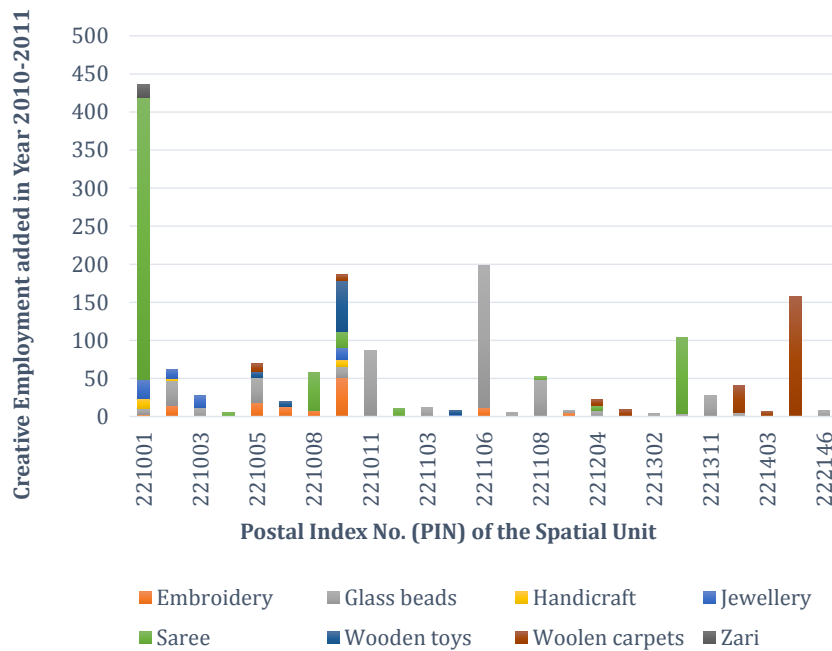


Figure 3. Distribution of Creative Employment by type of CCI and location (PIN)
Source: Authors' data

of Varanasi (PIN = 221001) has the largest share of creative employment in the district (about 27%). Out of that, traditional *saree* weavers constitute the largest share. This justifies weaving as a major strength of the city's creative economy, with about more than half of the city's working population engaged in silk-weaving.

Further from Figure 3, few other peaks could be noted which correspond to clusters of specific creative economic activities. For instance, the area corresponding to PIN = 221106 (i.e. Lahartara Industrial Estate Area) exhibit high share of glass bead manufacturing. On the other hand, the dominance of localized clusters of woolen carpets may be noted in the western periphery of the district (PIN = 221405, 221403 and 221313), which is justified as an extension of the Carpet Manufacturing Hub in Bhadohi. Interestingly, areas close to the historic city-core exhibit increasing mix of a variety of cultural and creative economic activities. In this context, the case of Khojwa (PIN = 221010) deserves a special mention. It is one of the oldest grain

markets in the city of Varanasi, and has historically been the hub for wooden toy manufacturing as a household creative activity – another specialty of the region's craft sector. Thus, creative industries in Varanasi exhibit strong clustering tendencies.

To better understand the spatial distribution of creative industrial units, postal areas were plotted on a map of the district of Varanasi (Figure 4). The map clearly indicates the high concentration of creative economic activities in the historic city-core close to river Ganga – lifeline of the City. Though the concentration drops as one moves to the periphery, parts of the district exhibit strong clustering for specific crafts. For instance, parts in the west of the district reveal medium level of concentration of creative employment owing to its proximity to the major manufacturing hub of woolen carpets in the adjoining district of Bhadohi. This reflects that clustering is shaped by multiple influences other than the typical factors of agglomeration; hence, local knowledge of the larger region is vital in examining the clustering patterns.

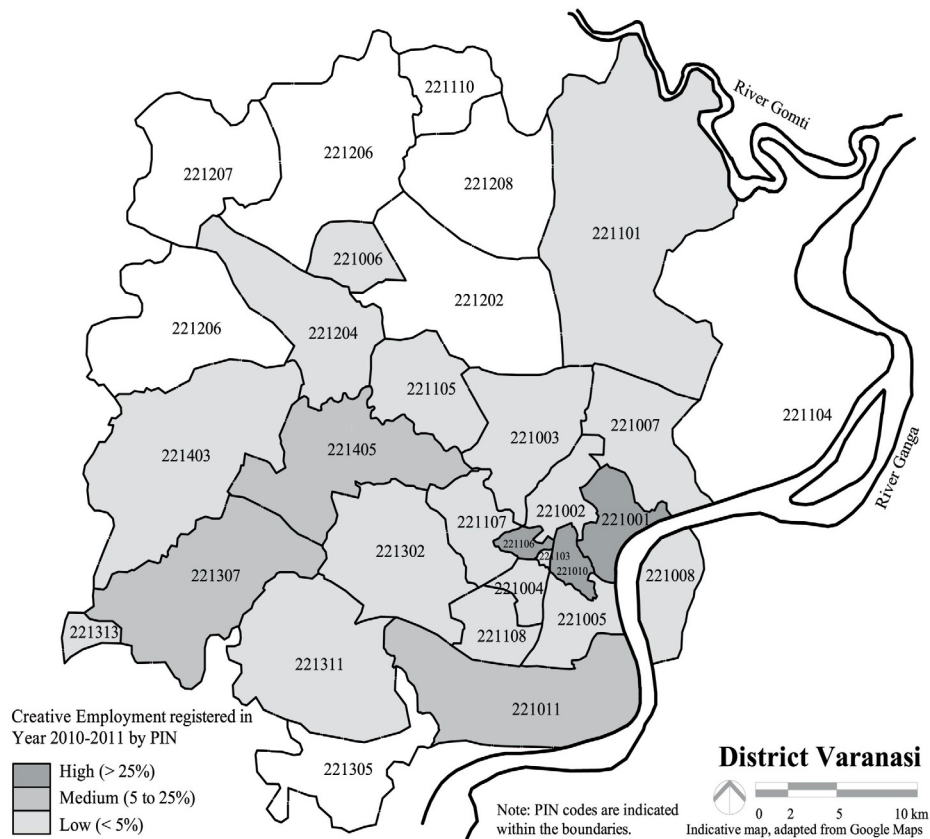


Figure 4. Spatial distribution of creative employment added in Varanasi in Year 2010-2011
Source: Authors' data

6. CONCLUSION

At the onset, the paper has discussed the wide scholarly attention received by the debate on role of place in cultural-creative economy, and the need to comprehend the symbiotic relationship between place, culture, and economy. As the definition of creative industries is liable to differ across different jurisdictions (Stapleton, 2007), one suited to local production system and governance shall be identified. The exercise of mapping spatial distribution of creative employment has revealed a pattern of clustering as exhibited by varied cultural and creative economic activities in Varanasi District – with highest concentration in the historic city-core and pockets of specialized units. This roughly revisits the relevance of ‘place’ in the relationship between creativity and economics, which the paper had set to explore. As Varanasi has been identified to be a hub of multifarious cultural and creative economic activities, colocation

of varied clusters sharing the same geographical space makes it a creative field. Consequently, on the one hand, the elements of place enter into design specification of outputs; and on the other, the output gets assimilated into cultural attributes of the place of production (Scott, 2006). Thus, the aspects of place and its creative output are subject to recursive intensification.

However, the basic methodology adopted here need to be extended by more detailed analysis supported by relevant information base – both enumerative and spatial. Owing to the lack of spatial data on creative employment by administrative boundaries of the concerned local bodies, postal addresses have been considered to delineate spatial units, although demographic and socio-economic data were not available by this classification. Therefore, boundaries of a municipal ward and/or village might be a better typology for better availability of secondary data. Further-

more, advanced tools and techniques involving geo-spatial data, such as Exploratory Spatial Data Analysis (ESDA) and spatial autocorrelation may be applied to assess the patterns of spatial association in better detail; thus, exemplifying the role of place in shaping the geography of cultural and creative economic clusters with enhanced clarity.

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