culture 21
UCLG Committee

Good practice 2024
MASHHAD
AN INCLUSIVE
CITY FOR ALL
(IMMIGRANTS
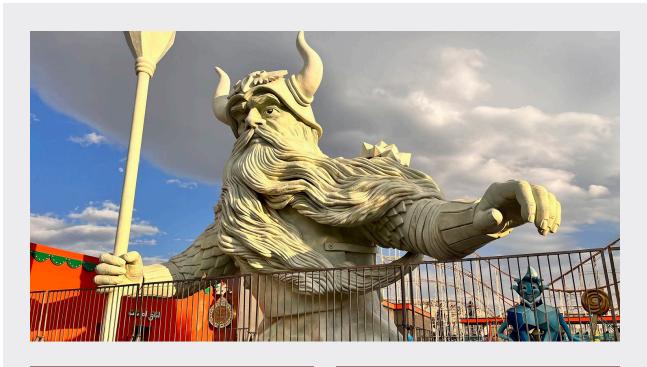AND CITIZENS)

UCLG – MEXICO CITY – CULTURE 21
INTERNATIONAL AWARD

REGIONAL PLANNING FOR THE MASHHAD GLOBAL CITY: AN INCLUSIVE CITY FOR ALL (IMMIGRANTS AND CITIZENS)

AGENDA 2030 - SDGs

1 NO POVERTY

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

4 QUALITY EDUCATION

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

CULTURE 21 ACTIONS - COMMITMENTS

1. **CULTURAL RIGHTS**
6. **CULTURE, EQUITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION**
9. **GOVERNANCE OF CULTURE**

COMMUNITY, SUPPORT, GOVERNANCE, MANAGEMENT, INCLUSION, IDENTITY, INTERCULTURAL, DIVERSITY, MINORITIES, MIGRATION, CRISIS

1. Mashhad and culture

The northern bank area of Mashhad spans approximately 5,000 hectares and is inhabited by 150,000 residents of the Mashhad metropolis. The predominant issue within this region is the prevalence of informal settlements, which not only contribute to unsafe urban environments but also impede the development of essential services and access to facilities. These areas, characterized by economic fragility, lack effective strategies for wealth creation and are entrenched in poverty-related challenges. The primary source of income within this framework is derived from financial activities associated with narcotics production and distribution. Consequently, the social dynamics within this area remain insular, hindering opportunities for social participation and cultural exchange.

Moreover, the challenges confronting immigrant communities are multifaceted, particularly for individuals arriving from foreign nations, where gaining acceptance and integration within the host immigrant society stands out as a primary challenge. The strategic and operational planning initiative for the northern bank of Mashhad operates within the framework of a complementary cultural policy, aiming to establish a robust identity shaped by the urban brand of Mashhad. Simultaneously, the project places emphasis on recognizing distinctions and harnessing the potential of these cultural differences as compelling indicators for cultural and social development.

THE PROJECT PLACES EMPHASIS ON RECOGNIZING DISTINCTIONS AND HARNESSING THE POTENTIAL OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCES AS COMPELLING INDICATORS FOR CULTURAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT.

2. Objectives and implementation of the project

2.1. Main goal and specific objectives

The primary objective is to foster a conducive environment for achieving sustainable socio-economic development by enhancing the engagement of all societal groups providing services within the Mashhad metropolis. The aim is to cultivate a sense of mutual benefit among city stakeholders, thereby promoting prosperity and enhancing citizen satisfaction. Mashhad aspires to be recognized as a livable metropolis and a frontrunner in the provision of amenities and quality of life improvements within the Central Asian region, transcending national and regional boundaries. Moreover, given its cultural significance as a hub of Persian art and language, Mashhad serves as a unifying cultural center for both immigrant (from Afghanistan) and host (Iranian) communities. This fosters a continuous exchange of skills and knowledge, elevating societal dignity and cohesion.

Specific project objectives are:

» 1. Enhance citizen satisfaction through the provision of effective solutions and desirable services, thereby elevating their quality of life and enhancing urban livability.

» 2. Facilitating platforms for the integration of diverse citizen ideas and creativity to enhance living standards and foster societal advancement.

» 3. Advancing towards sustainable development and cultivating a joyful and dynamic society.

THE AIM IS TO FOSTER A CONDUCIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BY ENHANCING THE ENGAGEMENT OF ALL SOCIETAL GROUPS PROVIDING LOCAL SERVICES.

2.2. Development of the project

The city management of Mashhad is committed to facilitating social and economic transformation by understanding and addressing the challenges faced by the Foreign immigrants community and fostering an environment that is welcoming to immigrants. This community, despite its rich cultural heritage, has been grappling with economic hardships stemming from past wars and mismanagement of resources, leading to the normalization of poverty as a way of life. To effectively address this challenge, it is imperative to intervene at the level of childhood education.

Collaboration between city management, educational institutions, and universities, particularly in the social sciences, is crucial in designing and implementing skill-building programs tailored to individual needs. Initiatives such as "Mashakh Houses," which provide a safe space for children to study and develop skills under the guidance of experienced teachers, have shown promise in marginalized communities. Ongoing support structures are needed to nurture and showcase the talents of these children, fostering a sense of pride and self-confidence. Periodic festivals and cultural events serve as platforms for recognizing and celebrating their achievements, further boosting morale and motivation.

Strategies:

1. Eschewing short-term, palliative approaches.

2. Establishing a sustainable environment and employing natural resources judiciously.

3. Cultivating a job market and economic milieu grounded in individual creativity and education.

Actions:

» Establishment of local community institutions tailored to the needs of children and women, providing targeted training sessions.

» Development of specialized educational entities focusing on skill training in social and economic domains, with active involvement from the private sector and philanthropic organizations.

» Utilization of school and conservatory resources to conduct intensive training programs fostering the production of economic or cultural goods, such as handicrafts.

» Organization of festivals and art events, including folk music performances, to foster social identity and cohesion, with a particular emphasis on honoring the contributions of immigrants and marginalized communities.

» Hosting seasonal exhibitions to showcase cultural and economic products, as well as to highlight the talents of individuals engaged in project-related courses.

Phases:

1. Establishing a research and development team to streamline problem-solving processes.

2. Conducting training sessions for managers and experts pertinent to the project's subject matter.

3. Institutionalizing partnerships between governmental authorities and the private sector, including charitable organizations and non-governmental entities.

4. Identifying the target community and contextualizing strategies to engage their participation.

5. Educating and training the target demographic, while preparing to disseminate project objectives and influence residents of designated neighborhoods.

6. Assessing progress and soliciting feedback to refine project approaches.

7. Overcoming obstacles and transitioning responsibility to the target community.

Partners:

- » Ministry of Agriculture and experts in agricultural methodologies.

- » Ministry of Education - Technical & Vocational Training Organization.

- » Ministry of Health and Medical Education.

- » Welfare Organization.

- » Ministry of Interior.

- » Environmentally-conscious charitable organizations and non-governmental entities, including advocates of KashafRoud.

- » Advocates for working children.

- » Support groups for individuals recovering from addiction.

- » Organizations combating poverty.

3. Impacts

3.1. Direct impacts

Within this space, interactions are devoid of notions of social hierarchy or political strife, instead emphasizing human connection across all races, ethnicities, genders, and colors, both with one another and with the surrounding built and natural environment.

The most significant impact of this project on the residents and landscape of Mashhad's north bank is the rediscovery of a cherished and intimate connection with nature, embodied by the Kashafroud River, which serves as the area's distinctive urban identity. However, there are other outcomes:

1. Empowerment and education of children as the primary focus of the initiative.

2. Enhancement of hope, security, and human dignity within the immigrant community.

3. Disruption of the cycle of behaviors and the perpetuation of poverty culture.

3.2. Evaluation

A significant aspect of monitoring and evaluation involves the creation of roadmaps and guidance documents, along with the production of skill-based content tailored for the target demographic. Also, continuous assessment of learning skills is indispensable. The tools for evaluation vary depending on the theme, cultural context, and social content of the skills being taught. These evaluation methods fall under the purview of the roadmap guidance group, who undergo specialized training. It's crucial to consider the cultural sensitivities and developmental stages of the children.

The evaluation methodology employed in this project draws from various sources, including experiences from a summer school focused on revitalizing urban spaces. Additionally, the conceptual product judging method, emphasizing the emergence of creativity in idea processing, was also utilized. Furthermore, a variety of methods were employed to solicit both general and specialized perspectives on the project's implementation, including in-depth interviews, surveys and questionnaires, technical visit tours, and randomized questionnaire distributions at both general and specialized levels.

3.3. Key factors

The initiation of a new cultural, artistic, and literary movement begins with the involvement of creators, artists, and writers, followed by the establishment of managerial and operational teams tasked with facilitating the realization of this project's vision. Thus, the pivotal components of this endeavor include:

1. The planning and programming group, responsible for conceptualizing ideas and devising a roadmap akin to an R&D team, thereby transforming vision into actionable programs.

2. The roadmap group, assuming leadership over executive and operational teams as outlined in the project guidance document.

3. Educational and content production groups, entrusted with disseminating the appropriate ideologies, philosophies, and perspectives, with a focus on shaping the minds of children. This group covers social, educational, cultural, artistic, technological, and economic domains.

4. Operational, executive, and logistical teams, tasked with provisioning and maintaining spaces, equipment, and environmental security.

5. The facilitation and feedback group, comprising individuals who identify and address shortcomings and key performance indicators, ensuring continuous improvement.

COLLABORATION BETWEEN CITY MANAGEMENT, EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, AND UNIVERSITIES IS CRUCIAL IN DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING SKILL-BUILDING PROGRAMS TAILORED TO INDIVIDUAL NEEDS.

3.4. Continuity

Ensuring the continuity of cultural initiatives hinges upon the policies, behaviors, and perspectives of the central government. Without robust support and effective communication between government bodies and urban management structures, these endeavors risk being rendered futile. To address this, a concerted effort is underway to develop and assess a seven-year executive plan, mandated to establish a specialized organization tasked with safeguarding and evaluating the execution of this plan. This organization will operate under apolitical oversight, with a board of directors or trustees comprising philanthropists and experts in various fields such as education, health, and culture. It should operate within the framework of urban management, leveraging educational resources and opportunities.

4. More information

Mashhad was a candidate for the sixth UCLG – Mexico City – Culture 21 International Award (November 2023 – March 2024). The jury for the award drew up its final report in June 2024, and requested that the Committee on Culture promote this project as one of the good practices to be implemented through Agenda 21 for culture.

This article was written by Mr. Javad Asghari, Urban Development Deputy, Mashhad, Iran.

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