ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

This thesis explores synergies between culture and urban planning contributing towards sustainability of pilgrimage towns in India. The pilgrimage towns are viewed as significant repositories of traditional culture and learning, and crucibles of indigenous urbanism centering on religio-pilgrimage culture. These towns are mutating with rapid urban transformations across India and urban planning is viewed as a key tool of effecting transformations. However, envisioning of holistic culture-integrated urban planning frameworks to perpetuate cultural significance is under researched. This study aims for identification of aspects that reflect linkages between culture and urban planning and posits that their synthesis in planning initiatives would favor sustainability of Indian pilgrimage towns.

The content analysis of multi-disciplinary literature facilitates identification of theoretical linkages between culture, urban planning and sustainability focusing on pilgrimage towns. Drawing on literature and pilot case study, the thesis evolves a framework of dimensions that reflect linkages between culture, urban planning and sustainability at pilgrimage towns in India. The dimensions are advanced for development of an evaluative framework through reiterative discussions with experts’, by identification of components and attributes that reflect linkages. The relative significance of attributes for synthesis of culture and urban planning is elicited through weightages from national experts’. A place-based approach is adopted to test the framework by embedding the enquiry in a specific place-context at the religious town of Vrindavan. The framework is adapted for local application and a bottom-up approach is used for obtaining weightages from local stakeholders, thus indicating importance of identified place-based attributes.

A significant message that this research conveys is the need for systemic inclusion of culture in urban planning process in order to contribute towards sustainability of pilgrimage towns in India. Findings from analysis highlight that attributes of ‘cultural heritage’ and ‘spatial patterns’ reflect linkages between culture and planning significantly; while the attributes ‘exogenous economic drivers’ and ‘real estate development’ are considered low in significance. In particular, this thesis underscores importance of recognizing the attributes linked to cultural identity of a place, and mapping of its spatial dimensions for consideration in culture-responsive urban planning. Significance of the thesis is to expand the debate for synthesis of culture and urban planning at pilgrimage towns in India by
raising critical importance of intangible heritage, and need for urban planning to cognize and include cultural values linked to sacrality of pilgrimage towns.