

2021 HeritAP Webinar on

Conserving the Hearts of Asia: Rural Heritage

Nov. 18-19, 2021, Time Zone: UTC+8

I. Background

Indeed, the 'rural' constitutes Asia's hearts. 70% of population of Asia still lives in the rural. It represents the long years of growth, socio-economic foundations, spiritual dimensions, traditional knowledge systems and above all the livelihood of its populations. The 'rural' therefore should be prioritized in the heritage discourse. Rural heritage is also the great manifestation of cultural landscapes, showcasing the interdependency between nature and culture.

However, it is notable that the rural is threatened. The global humankind has experienced massive changes since the 21st century, of which the most significant is the rural decline with population shifting from rural to urban areas. According to the *2018 Revision of World Urbanization Prospects* produced by the Population Division of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), 55% of the world's population lives in urban areas in 2018, a proportion that is expected to increase to 68% by 2050. The rural decline is inevitably accompanied with processes of rural depopulation and urbanization. This phenomenon reveals multiple issues affecting the humankind, including an aging population staying in the rural areas and a drastic decline in the quantity and quality of services available to rural citizens such as education, health facilities, water and sanitation, recreations, and public welfares. To improve the conditions, different government and institutions in the Asia-Pacific region have implemented initiatives to revitalize the 'rural' in recent years. Rural revitalization is a development strategy aimed at improving social, cultural, economic, and ecological rejuvenation in the rural territories by focusing on a wide variety of facets including cultural and spatial patterns.

II. Programmes

Given the significant role of rural vitalization within the globalization process, it is essential for the international community to participate in discussions and reflections on the contexts, functions, and prospects of the rural vitalization. As such, the WHITRAP Shanghai will hold **2021 HeritAP Webinar on "Conserving the Hearts of Asia: Rural Heritage"** and which will focus on three themes:

1. Recognition of rural heritage, understanding relevant conventions and programmes and explore building synergies;
2. Community empowerment and multiple stakeholders' involvement;
3. Linking metropolis and rural areas.

Theme 1: Recognition of rural heritage, understanding relevant conventions and programmes and explore building synergies.

Rationale

Rural as against urban is considered low population density and agriculture as the chief livelihood together or distinctly different crafts, cottage industries, associated generally with more extensive landscapes and distinct characteristics of settlements and their architecture and livelihood. Such characteristics and values may be manifested in both natural and cultural attributes. With their own culturally defined terms used by different countries, extensive diversities are evident in different countries. Rural characterizes the identities and diverse values of many countries. Already many countries have begun to recognize diverse aspects of rural environments as part of the heritage. They vary from settlements themselves to agricultural fields to religious settlements to crafts-based entities. Such efforts at national levels are also underpinned by several international conventions and programmes. Although it will be a mammoth task given the diversity of rural in Asia, it would be useful to start by understanding the key characteristics of rural heritage. At the same time, it would also be useful to take a stock of prevailing conventions and programmes that recognize rural heritage and to familiar with relevant activities. They may include WH convention under which rural areas and agricultural landscapes are already inscribed and intangible heritage convention under which various crafts and associated spaces are listed. GIAHS has started recognizing agricultural landscapes which is one of the most distinct characters of the rural. CBD has promoted traditional knowledge systems which are also key characteristics of rural heritage.

Theme 2: Community empowerment and multiple stakeholders' involvement.

Rationale:

Heritage discourse has moved in the direction of community empowerment and engaging multiple stakeholders in conservation of heritage. Community empowerment can be done by the community themselves or through legislation. Engaging multiple stakeholders in which communities constitute an essential element but depends on case-by-case basis. It can also be interpreted as engaging rights holders (traditional rights enjoyed by the rural community) and knowledge (traditional knowledge systems) holders. It is also important to understand how these projects deliver the benefits to the communities which will guarantee the continuity and sustainable existence of the rural heritage. Experiences such as Hani rice terraces and Subak cultural landscapes have shown that rural heritage conservation provide sound examples to understand community empowerments and multiple stakeholders' involvements. In order to develop rural conservation strategies for the future, it would be useful to understand ongoing practices related to existing programmes in Asia.

Theme 3: Linking metropolis and rural areas.

Rationale:

The strong linkage between the metropolis and rural areas plays an important role in implementing revitalization initiatives. As the dominant artefact of the humankind for the 21st century, the metropolis has become a main feature of the human settlement pattern. The management of the city system requires the productive function of economic industries, cultural facilities and governmental bodies, which should cover a territory of both urban and rural areas. Consequently, facilitating and improving synergetic coordination between urban and rural spheres are the key components for the effective implementation of rural vitalization.

III. Expected Outcomes

1. Key characteristics of rural heritage of Asia
2. Current conventions and programmes dealing with rural heritage and identify key activities
3. Practitioners from the Asian region present their views on different sections of the strategy in particular the following:
 - a. Defining rural heritage current tools available and potential synergies for conserving the rural heritage.
 - b. Methods and tools available for Community empowerment and multiple stakeholders' involvement.
 - c. Strategies to enhance and reduce negative impact of metropolis on rural heritage
4. A draft strategy for promoting the conservation of the Hearts of Asia: the Rural Heritage