

Abstract

Creative economy has widely been identified as a growing economic sector, generating a host of economic and non-economic benefits. The same has driven research on cultural and creative industries (CCI), particularly, the phenomenon of their spatial clustering, which exploits the symbiotic interrelationship between place, culture, and economy. Despite such growing interest in the study of CCIs, creative economic research literature is heavily focused on examining technology-intensive creative industries concentrated in metropolitan centres of developed countries, and overlooks the labour-intensive traditional cultural or artisanal industries, which largely constitute the creative economic sector in developing countries. Having identified such gap, the present two-staged research has explored two dimensions of spatiality, i.e., spatial agglomeration of artisan units and co-location of artisan groups in a city-region of a developing country. The handloom industry of Varanasi – one of the oldest centres of textile production in India – has been considered as an empirical case.

In the first stage, the degree of spatial agglomeration of handloom production units spread across the Varanasi District has been assessed based on secondary data collected from the Handloom Census, considering location quotient as a territory-specific indicator of spatial concentration. It has been followed by a two-part model to identify the key determinants of spatial agglomeration considering a set of demographic indicators, sourced from population census, and key proximity measures.

In the second stage, a questionnaire-based primary survey was conducted, by drawing a sample of handloom weavers (N=424) from the clusters identified in stage 1, to collect data on several qualitative production-related attributes. Types of weaves and weaving techniques have been selected for classification of sampled weavers into six independent groups. Hierarchical and non-hierarchical *k*-means cluster analyses have been conducted to identify four clusters of spatial units sharing similar degrees of specializations in different weaver-groups, thereby revealing their co-location patterns.

Results of the two-stage analysis have revealed that handloom units in Varanasi District were spatially agglomerated into five spatial clusters. High share of large households (size ≥ 6) and low literacy rate could partially explain the variability in the degree of spatial agglomeration of handloom units. Upon being classified by combinations of types of weaves and weaving techniques, weaver groups were identified to be co-located. Share of large households, degree of spatial concentration of contractual labour, and income could differentiate the co-located clusters. Superimposition of clusters identified in stages 1 and 2 has identified the varying degrees of heterogeneity in spatial patterns of handloom units belonging to different weaver groups or 'schools of weaving'. Thereby, the research has revalidated that place, culture, and economy are symbiotically interrelated. It has also underscored the significance of recognizing the inherent spatial heterogeneity exhibited by distinct artisanal practices.

Keywords: artisanal production, spatial agglomeration, co-location, handloom cluster, weaver