



Conservation, Museumization and Heritage Marketing at Vadnagar Archaeological Centre: An Integrated Heritage Management Case Study from Gujarat, India

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Abstract: *The Vadnagar Archaeological Centre represents one of the most comprehensive recent attempts in India to integrate archaeological conservation, museumization, and heritage marketing within a living historic town. Moving beyond monument-centric preservation, the Vadnagar project demonstrates how archaeology can be strategically managed as a cultural, educational, and economic resource without compromising scientific integrity. This paper presents Vadnagar as a journal-ready case study, examining how conservation decisions informed museum design, interpretation strategies, and destination branding. Using a qualitative case-study methodology grounded in document analysis and interpretive assessment, the study evaluates how heritage management interventions contribute to visitor experience, governance effectiveness, and sustainable tourism development. The findings suggest that heritage marketing, when embedded within conservation planning and ethical museumization, functions as a protective rather than extractive force. Vadnagar illustrates a replicable model for medium-scale archaeological towns, particularly in the Global South, where tensions between preservation and tourism remain acute. The case contributes to heritage management literature by reframing marketing as an endogenous component of conservation strategy and by demonstrating the managerial value of experiential, in-situ museumization. Policy implications for archaeological authorities, destination managers, and urban planners are discussed.*

Keywords: *Heritage management, conservation, museumization, heritage marketing, archaeological sites, India, case study.*

1. Introduction

Archaeological heritage management has undergone a significant conceptual shift over the past three decades. Earlier paradigms focused primarily on excavation, documentation, and physical protection, often isolating archaeological sites from their surrounding social and economic contexts. (De La Torre, 2013) & (Smith, 2006.) Contemporary heritage discourse, however, recognizes

that long-term conservation depends on the ability of sites to generate social meaning, public support, and sustainable economic value.

In India, this transition has been uneven. While legislative frameworks emphasize monument protection, archaeological sites frequently remain under-interpreted, weakly integrated into tourism systems, and disconnected from local communities. Marketing, where it exists, is often external to conservation planning and risks commodification rather than stewardship.



Vadnagar presents a significant intervention in this landscape. Following extensive excavations revealing multi-period occupation—including early historic habitation, Buddhist monastic remains, and medieval urban layers—the site was not treated as a closed archaeological reserve. Instead, conservation planning, museumization, and destination development were conceived as interdependent processes. The result is an archaeological centre and experiential museum embedded within a living historic town.

This paper positions Vadnagar as an instrumental case study to address a central research question:

How can conservation and museumization be strategically leveraged to support heritage marketing and management without compromising archaeological authenticity?

2. Literature Review: Heritage Management and Marketing through Museums

2.1 Museums as Strategic Heritage Management Instruments

Early heritage tourism scholarship establishes that heritage sites—and museums in particular—cannot be managed using conventional tourism promotion frameworks. (Miller Sue, 1989) argues that heritage tourism promotion differs fundamentally from mass tourism because it must integrate community identity, education, and long-term socio-economic regeneration rather than short-term visitor growth. Museums thus emerge as strategic heritage management institutions rather than passive repositories of artefacts.

Subsequent studies reinforce this position by emphasizing that museums function as mediators between conservation authorities, visitors, and host communities. (Simmons, 1994) and (T. B. Jamal & Getz, 1995) highlight that local involvement in tourism planning is essential because communities constitute a core element of a destination's "hospitality atmosphere" and legitimacy

In this context, museums provide an institutional platform where conservation objectives and tourism development can be negotiated collaboratively.

2.2 Museumization, Interpretation, and Visitor Experience

Museumization literature consistently identifies **interpretation** as the primary mechanism through which heritage is transformed into visitor experience. (Fyall & Garrod, 1998) identify authenticity, accessibility, pricing,

and conservation balance as defining characteristics of a successful heritage attraction, arguing that interpretive quality directly affects both visitor satisfaction and long-term site sustainability. (de Rojas & Camarero, 2008) empirically demonstrate that interpretation and intangible narratives significantly influence visitor engagement, length of stay, repeat visitation, and willingness to support heritage preservation. Similarly, (Chen & Chen, 2010) establish that educational experience and peace of mind strongly influence perceived value and satisfaction, reinforcing museums' central role in heritage marketing through experiential learning. (Poria et al., 2009) further argue that interpretation must be customized, as visitors vary in their emotional and cognitive connection to heritage. This challenges standardized museum narratives and suggests that museums must adopt segmented interpretation strategies aligned with diverse visitor motivations.

2.3 Museums as Heritage Branding and Marketing Platforms

Heritage marketing research increasingly positions museums as **brand carriers** rather than promotional afterthoughts. (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000) conceptualize heritage attractions as symbolic products where museums communicate place identity, memory, and meaning. (Chhabra, 2009), through an empirical examination of museum marketing plans, identifies a disconnect between sustainability ideals and actual marketing practices, concluding that museums must consciously integrate conservation ethics into marketing strategies. (Balmer & Balmer, 2013) advance this discourse by introducing heritage identity theory, demonstrating how institutional heritage identities—when consistently communicated—enhance stakeholder trust, brand legitimacy, and long-term relevance. These insights align with (Wuestefeld et al., 2012), who show that heritage branding positively influences trust, emotional attachment, and willingness to pay.

2.4 Community Engagement and Museum-Led Governance

Community participation is widely recognized as critical for sustainable heritage management. (T. B. Jamal & Getz, 1995) and (Aas et al., 2005) argue that heritage governance requires inter-organizational collaboration, particularly where conservation and tourism interests intersect. Museums serve as **neutral institutional spaces** enabling dialogue between stakeholders. (Hamilton &



Alexander, 2013) and (Vollero et al., 2017) further emphasize residents' ambassadorial role in place promotion, noting that community-embedded heritage interpretation strengthens authenticity and destination image more effectively than conventional marketing.

2.5 Authenticity, Ethics, and Responsible Heritage Marketing

Authenticity remains a central concern in museum-based heritage marketing. (T. Jamal & Hill, 2004) propose a multidimensional authenticity framework—object-based, social, and existential—largely mediated through interpretation. (Beverland, 2005) adds that sincerity, continuity, and heritage consistency shape consumer perceptions of authenticity. Conversely, (Teo & Yeoh, 1997) caution that excessive commodification through theme-parkisation risks alienating local communities and diluting heritage meaning. This literature underscores the need for ethical museumization, where marketing supports conservation rather than spectacle.

2.6 Museums as Drivers of Destination Management and Economic Sustainability

Museums increasingly function as anchors for heritage-led destination development. (Buhalis, 2000) situates museums within broader destination systems comprising attractions, amenities, accessibility, and ancillary services. (Agyei-Mensah, 2006) and (Cassel & Pashkevich, 2014) demonstrate that heritage museums contribute to place marketing, urban regeneration, and tourism innovation when integrated into destination strategies. (Hasan & Imrul Jobaid, 2014) However, several scholars caution that economic benefits are uneven unless museums are embedded within inclusive governance frameworks.

3. Synthesis and Research Gap

The reviewed literature establishes that museums:

- Serve as **conservation mediators**
- Translate heritage into **marketable yet ethical experiences**
- Act as **branding and governance instruments**
- Enable **community-inclusive heritage management**

However, a key gap remains in **empirical, site-based case studies from India** that demonstrate how archaeological museums integrate conservation, museumization, and marketing within living heritage towns. Most studies examine museums, heritage marketing, or community

engagement independently rather than as a **single management system**.

This gap directly justifies the **Vadnagar Archaeological Centre** case study.

3.1 Research Gap Identification

Despite extensive scholarship on museum marketing, heritage tourism, and conservation, three critical gaps remain:

1. **Fragmented treatment of conservation, museumization, and marketing**

Most studies examine these domains independently rather than as an integrated management system.

2. **Limited archaeological case studies from India**

Existing literature is dominated by Western museums or monument-centric Indian examples, with minimal focus on archaeological museums within living towns.

3. **Insufficient empirical linkage between museumization and destination management**

While theoretical models exist, few studies demonstrate how museum-based interpretation directly shapes branding, governance, and sustainability outcomes.

4. Research Objectives

Based on the identified gaps, this study pursues the following objectives:

1. To examine how conservation strategies inform museumization practices at Vadnagar
2. To analyse the role of museum-led interpretation in heritage marketing and destination branding
3. To evaluate how integrated museumization contributes to sustainable heritage management within a living historic town
4. To develop a replicable heritage management framework applicable to similar archaeological sites in India and the Global South

5. Research Methodology

5.1 Research Design and Approach

This study adopts a **qualitative single-case study research design**, appropriate for examining complex heritage systems embedded within real-world social, institutional, and spatial contexts. The choice of a case study approach is justified by the exploratory and explanatory nature of the research, which seeks to understand *how* and *why* conservation, museumization, and heritage marketing interact within a living historic

town rather than to test predetermined hypotheses. As heritage management involves multiple stakeholders, values, and governance layers, a qualitative case study enables in-depth contextual analysis that would not be achievable through quantitative or experimental methods. Vadnagar Archaeological Centre is treated as an **instrumental case**, selected not for its uniqueness alone but for its capacity to illuminate broader theoretical debates in heritage management, particularly the integration of conservation and marketing through museumization.

5.2 Case Selection Rationale

Vadnagar was purposively selected based on three criteria:

1. Archaeological significance – The site represents a multi-layered settlement with continuous occupation, offering a rich context for examining conservation and interpretation strategies.

2. Institutional innovation – Vadnagar demonstrates a rare Indian example where archaeological conservation, museumization, and destination branding were planned as an integrated system rather than sequential interventions.

3. Policy relevance – The site's positioning within national heritage initiatives and its experiential museum make it a relevant case for informing heritage governance and tourism management practices in India and the Global South.

This purposive selection aligns with case study methodology, where analytical generalisation is prioritised over statistical representativeness.

5.3 Data Sources

The study relies on **multiple secondary qualitative data sources**, allowing triangulation and enhancing analytical robustness. Data sources include:

- Published archaeological and scientific studies related to Vadnagar
- Government heritage and planning documents
- Museum interpretation materials and exhibition narratives
- UNESCO tentative-list documentation
- Peer-reviewed literature on heritage management, museum studies, and tourism marketing

These sources collectively provide insight into conservation decisions, interpretive frameworks, and management outcomes, enabling a holistic understanding of the site's heritage system.

5.4 Analytical Framework

Data analysis was guided by a **thematic analytical framework** structured around three interrelated dimensions:

1. Conservation strategies – examining how preservation principles, ethical considerations, and technical interventions shape site management and visitor access.

2. Museumization and interpretation – analysing how archaeological knowledge is translated into narratives, spatial experiences, and learning environments.

3. Heritage marketing and management outcomes – evaluating branding, destination positioning, visitor segmentation, and governance implications.

This framework reflects contemporary heritage management theory, which conceptualises conservation, interpretation, and marketing as interdependent rather than isolated processes. The framework also enabled systematic comparison between theoretical insights from the literature and empirical observations from the Vadnagar case.

5.5 Method of Analysis

A **qualitative content analysis** approach was employed to interpret documents and interpretive materials. Texts were examined for recurring concepts related to authenticity, governance, stakeholder engagement, branding, and sustainability. These themes were then synthesised to identify patterns and relationships between conservation practices and management outcomes.

Rather than treating documents as neutral records, the analysis considered them as **institutional artefacts** that reflect planning priorities, governance structures, and ideological positions regarding heritage use. This interpretive stance is consistent with critical heritage studies and allows deeper insight into management rationales and power dynamics.

5.6 Validity, Reliability, and Trustworthiness

To enhance methodological rigour, the study applied several qualitative validity strategies:

- **Data triangulation** across multiple document types and disciplinary perspectives
- **Theoretical triangulation**, linking findings to established heritage management and tourism theories
- **Analytical transparency**, with explicit articulation of the conceptual framework and interpretive logic

While the single-case design limits statistical generalisation, the study achieves **analytical**



generalisability by contributing conceptual insights applicable to similar archaeological and heritage contexts.

5.7 Methodological Limitations

The study relies primarily on secondary data and interpretive assessment, which limits the ability to capture visitor perceptions or community responses through primary empirical measurement. Additionally, as the case is situated within a specific institutional and political context, some management practices may not be directly transferable without adaptation.

Nevertheless, these limitations are consistent with the study's exploratory aim and do not detract from its contribution to theory-building in integrated heritage management.

5.8 Methodological Contribution

Methodologically, this study demonstrates the value of **heritage-focused case study research** for bridging archaeology, museum studies, and tourism management. By operationalising conservation, museumization, and marketing within a single analytical framework, the methodology advances interdisciplinary heritage research and offers a template for future studies examining complex heritage systems in living urban contexts

6. Case Context: Vadnagar Archaeological Centre

The Vadnagar Archaeological Centre is situated within the fortified historic town of Vadnagar in Mehsana district, Gujarat, India. The town represents a rare example of a **continuously inhabited urban settlement spanning more than two millennia**, encompassing early historic, Buddhist, medieval, and early modern phases. Archaeological investigations have revealed extensive habitation layers, religious structures, craft activity zones, and human remains embedded within the contemporary urban fabric. Rather than existing as an isolated archaeological park, Vadnagar functions as a **living heritage landscape**, where archaeological remains coexist with active residential, religious, and commercial spaces.

Following systematic excavations that uncovered stratified cultural deposits and a Buddhist monastic complex, Vadnagar was identified as a site of national heritage importance. In contrast to conventional Indian approaches that restrict access or backfill excavated areas, the Vadnagar project adopted an **integrated heritage management strategy**. Conservation planning,

museumization, and destination development were conceived as interdependent processes, resulting in the establishment of the Vadnagar Archaeological Experiential Museum within the historic town itself.

The museum was conceptualised not as a conventional artefact repository but as an **interpretive narrative space** that connects excavated remains, material culture, and local traditions through spatial storytelling. This design enables visitors to engage directly with archaeological contexts while understanding their relationship to Vadnagar's living cultural landscape. Stratigraphic layers are translated into chronological visitor pathways, allowing audiences to experience the site's temporal depth rather than viewing isolated displays.

Vadnagar's heritage value is further enhanced by its urban continuity. Temples, stepwells, residential houses, and ritual practices form part of the same cultural system as the excavated remains. This coexistence of tangible and intangible heritage necessitated a management approach that balanced scientific conservation with everyday community life. Consequently, the Vadnagar project emphasises **in-situ preservation, minimal reconstruction, ethical display of sensitive material, and controlled visitor circulation**, ensuring both authenticity and public accessibility.

From a governance perspective, Vadnagar represents a **multi-stakeholder heritage initiative**, involving archaeological authorities, state heritage agencies, museum professionals, tourism planners, and the local community. This institutional configuration positions the museum as a coordinating node that aligns conservation objectives with urban development and tourism strategies.

Overall, Vadnagar provides a unique case of how archaeological heritage can be **embedded within a living townscape**, demonstrating the potential of museumization to function simultaneously as a conservation mechanism, an interpretive system, and a destination management tool. This context forms the foundation for analysing how integrated heritage management can reconcile protection, public engagement, and economic sustainability.

7. Discussion

Table 1: Mapping Literature Themes to Vadnagar Findings

Literature Theme	Key Insights from Literature	Evidence from Vadnagar Case
Museums as management tools	Museums mediate conservation, tourism, and community interests	Vadnagar museum embedded within living town; not isolated site
Interpretation & experience	Interpretation drives engagement and satisfaction	Stratigraphic storytelling and in-situ displays
Heritage branding	Museums act as place-branding platforms	Vadnagar branded as “multi-layered historic town”
Community engagement	Local participation enhances authenticity	Urban fabric and local narratives retained
Authenticity & ethics	Ethical interpretation sustains legitimacy	Sensitive human remains contextualized, not sensationalized
Destination management	Museums anchor sustainable tourism	Low-volume, high-value cultural tourism model

This case study demonstrates that the Vadnagar Archaeological Centre operationalises an **integrated heritage management model** in which conservation, museumization, and heritage marketing function as mutually reinforcing strategies rather than sequential or competing activities. The findings derived from the Vadnagar case challenge the conventional dichotomy in heritage scholarship that frames marketing as a threat to archaeological authenticity. Instead, the evidence indicates that **ethically grounded museumization and conservation-led branding can strengthen both protection and public value**

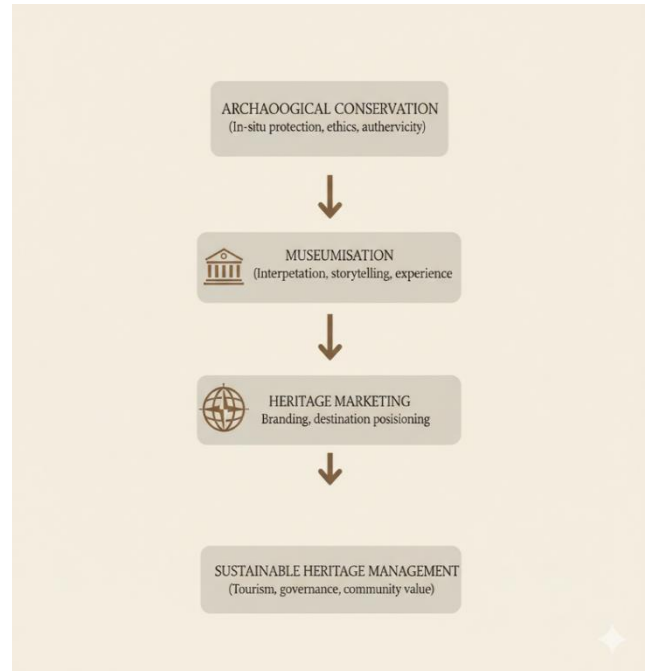


Figure 1 illustrates the integrated relationship between conservation, museumization, and heritage marketing as mutually reinforcing processes rather than sequential stages.

7.1 Conservation as a Strategic Enabler of Heritage Value

The case reveals that conservation at Vadnagar is not limited to technical preservation but is deliberately employed as a **value-creation mechanism**. In-situ preservation, minimal reconstruction, reversible interventions, and environmental monitoring do more than safeguard material remains; they directly enhance authenticity, institutional credibility, and visitor trust. These practices shape circulation routes and interpretive depth, demonstrating that conservation decisions actively configure visitor experience rather than constrain it. This supports the argument that conservation can be a **strategic driver of destination value**, not merely a regulatory obligation

Table 2: Conservation Strategies and Management Outcomes

Conservation Strategy	Management Outcome
In-situ preservation	Enhanced authenticity
Minimal reconstruction	Scientific credibility
Controlled access	Visitor safety
Ethical handling of remains	Institutional trust

7.2 Museumization as a Governance and Interpretation Tool

Vadnagar’s museumization strategy shifts the museum from an object-centric display to a **narrative and experiential knowledge system**. By foregrounding stratigraphic storytelling and in-situ interpretation, the museum translates archaeological complexity into accessible public meaning. This aligns with constructivist approaches to learning, where visitors actively engage with layered histories rather than passively consume artefacts. The ethical contextualisation of sensitive materials—especially human remains—further demonstrates that **interpretation legitimacy is foundational to heritage trust and institutional authority**. Thus, museumization at Vadnagar performs a governance function: it legitimises conservation, mediates stakeholder interests, and establishes interpretive accountability

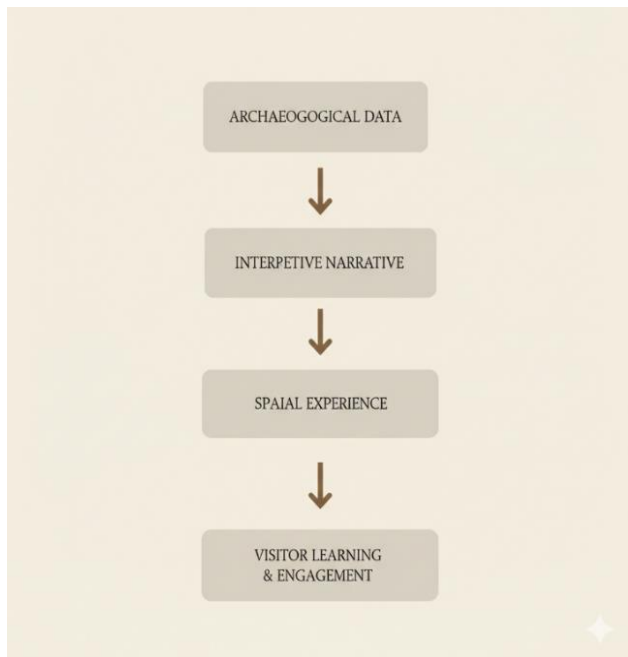


Figure 2: shows how archaeological information is translated into visitor experience through layered interpretation.

7.3 Marketing as an Endogenous Component of Conservation Planning

A key contribution of this case is the demonstration that **heritage marketing is embedded within conservation and interpretive design**, rather than appended as a

promotional afterthought. Vadnagar’s branding as a “multi-layered historic town” reframes archaeological remains as part of a living cultural landscape. This identity-based positioning supports low-impact, high-value cultural tourism and aligns visitor expectations with conservation priorities. Consequently, marketing functions as a **protective mechanism** by generating public legitimacy, funding justification, and stakeholder alignment, rather than as an extractive force that accelerates site degradation

Table 3: Visitor Segments and Value Propositions

Segment	Value Proposition
Cultural tourists	Authentic archaeology
Academics & students	Research relevance
Domestic tourists	Identity & heritage pride
Pilgrims	Religious continuity

7.4 Museums as Nodes of Multi-Stakeholder Heritage Governance

The findings further indicate that the Vadnagar museum operates as a **governance node**, coordinating between archaeological authorities, urban planners, tourism agencies, and the local community. This multi-stakeholder configuration reduces institutional fragmentation and aligns heritage objectives with urban development. By embedding archaeological heritage within the everyday urban fabric, the project avoids the exclusionary dynamics typical of fenced archaeological reserves and fosters community legitimacy. In this sense, the museum becomes not only a cultural institution but also a **policy instrument** that stabilises relationships between preservation and development

7.5 Implications for Heritage Management Theory

Collectively, the Vadnagar findings extend heritage management theory by reframing museumization as a **strategic management and branding mechanism** rather than a post-conservation display activity. The case confirms that conservation, interpretation, and marketing are structurally interdependent and must be designed as a single management system. This integrated model responds directly to long-standing calls for governance-based, experience-led, and ethically grounded heritage management approaches, particularly within archaeologically sensitive contexts.

7.6 Transferability and Contextual Limits

While Vadnagar offers a replicable framework for medium-scale archaeological towns, its success is contingent upon institutional coordination, political support, and long-term conservation investment. Sites lacking governance capacity or interpretive infrastructure may find integration more challenging. Nevertheless, the principles of **conservation-led museumization and authenticity-driven branding** offer a scalable template for heritage destinations across the Global South

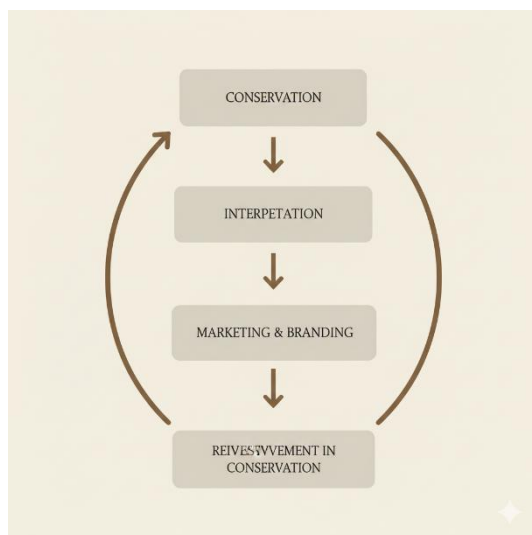


Figure 3. Heritage Value Creation Cycle

8. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the Vadnagar Archaeological Centre represents a paradigm shift in Indian archaeological heritage management by moving beyond monument-centric preservation toward an **integrated, experiential, and governance-oriented model**. The case establishes that conservation, museumization, and heritage marketing should not be conceptualized as sequential or competing activities, but rather as **mutually reinforcing management strategies** that collectively enhance both heritage protection and destination sustainability.

Vadnagar shows that when conservation is embedded at the planning stage and aligned with interpretive design, it strengthens rather than restricts public engagement. The use of in-situ preservation, minimal reconstruction, and ethical display practices has enhanced authenticity and institutional credibility while simultaneously supporting

heritage branding and visitor trust. Museumization at Vadnagar has not merely translated archaeological material into exhibits but has transformed the site into a narrative landscape that communicates cultural continuity, social meaning, and scholarly integrity.

Importantly, this study demonstrates that **heritage marketing need not commodify archaeological resources**. Instead, when grounded in ethical interpretation and conservation logic, marketing becomes a mechanism for legitimizing protection efforts, generating public value, and sustaining institutional support. Vadnagar's positioning as a "multi-layered historic town" illustrates how archaeological heritage can be framed as a destination identity rather than a single-asset attraction, encouraging low-impact, high-value cultural tourism.

From a management perspective, Vadnagar confirms that museums can function as **governance nodes**, mediating between conservation authorities, urban planners, tourism agencies, and local communities. This multi-stakeholder configuration enhances policy coherence, reduces conflict between preservation and development, and strengthens community legitimacy.

Theoretical contributions of this study lie in reframing museumization as a **strategic management and branding instrument** rather than a post-conservation display activity. Practically, the Vadnagar model offers a replicable framework for medium-scale archaeological towns in India and the Global South, where pressures of tourism growth, urbanization, and heritage protection intersect.

Future research should empirically test this integrated model across diverse heritage contexts and assess long-term socio-economic, governance, and conservation outcomes. As demonstrated by Vadnagar, archaeological heritage—when ethically conserved, intelligently interpreted, and responsibly marketed—can serve as a powerful catalyst for sustainable cultural development.

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