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Past Forward, Unfinished

India's Creative Economy Policy, Institutional Nonrealization, and Cultural Entrepreneurship

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ABSTRACT: India's *Past Forward: The Future of India's Creativity* (2006) was an attempt to place cultural production within national economic planning. This article reassesses the report's three-volume vision through cultural economy and policy analysis. It argues that *Past Forward* understood culture as an ecosystem of livelihoods, knowledge, institutions, and community practices, rather than merely a sector for export or urban growth. Comparing the initiative with international creative economy trajectories, the article identifies institutional nonrealization: fragmented coordination, inadequate fiscal architecture, and weak measurement systems prevented implementation. The analysis shows how institutional conditions shape cultural entrepreneurship, market access, and sustainable creative livelihoods in India. **KEYWORDS:** Creative economy; Cultural entrepreneurship; Cultural industries; Cultural policy; Institutionalization;

India; Governance; Development policy; Informal economy. **DOI**: https://doi.org/10.34053/artivate.14.1.280

Introduction: Cultural Economies, Policy Waves, and the Indian Case

Over the past three decades, the concept of cultural and creative industries has evolved from a relatively narrow arts policy concern into a central component of global economic development discourse. Scholars increasingly recognize that cultural production—encompassing media, crafts, design, heritage, and performing arts—constitutes not only symbolic expression but also a complex economic domain characterized by uncertain demand, project-based labor markets, intellectual property regimes, and institutional interdependencies (Caves, 2000; Hesmondhalgh, 2013). This shift has been accompanied by policy frameworks that treat creativity as a driver of innovation, competitiveness, and urban regeneration, particularly within advanced economies transitioning toward knowledge-based production systems (Pratt & Jeffcutt, 2009). International organizations have further reinforced this trajectory by framing cultural industries as contributors to inclusive growth, employment generation, and sustainable development, thereby embedding creativity within global development narratives (UNCTAD, 2010; UNCTAD, 2022).

Within this broader intellectual and political context, India occupies a distinctive and analytically significant position. The country possesses one of the world's largest concentrations of creative labor, deeply embedded in historical traditions, community practices, and informal production systems, alongside rapidly expanding media, design, and digital sectors. However, despite this structural richness, Indian policy engagement with cultural economies has historically remained fragmented, oscillating between welfare-oriented support for artisans, heritage preservation initiatives, and market-driven industrial policies. Scholars examining India's labor-intensive and informal sectors have repeatedly highlighted the disconnect between state institutions and the lived realities of production systems organized through social networks, identity-based institutions, and community knowledge (Harriss-White, 2010; Mezzadri, 2017). Such institutional disjunctions complicate efforts to conceptualize cultural production as a coherent economic sector within national development planning.

Empirical estimates reinforce the scale and complexity of India's cultural production systems. Policy analyses have suggested that India hosts hundreds of millions of individuals engaged in traditional skills, creative practices, and informal cultural livelihoods, operating alongside formal creative industries such as media, entertainment, and design. This coexistence of large-scale skill ecologies with emerging creative industries represents a potential comparative advantage rather than a residual heritage concern, positioning cultural production as a strategic development resource rather than merely a symbolic domain (Shaban et al., 2022). These arrangements also make cultural entrepreneurship an important, though often underrecognized, dimension of India's cultural economy: artists, artisans, designers, and cultural intermediaries mobilize skills, relationships, and

resources through households, communities, informal networks, and formal creative ventures.

Against this backdrop, *Past Forward: The Future of India's Creativity* (Planning Commission, 2006) represents a remarkable yet underexamined policy initiative. Produced by the Planning Commission's Taskforce on Creative and Cultural Industries, the three-volume report sought to reconceptualize India's cultural resources as economic systems capable of generating livelihoods, innovation, and social cohesion. Unlike many contemporary creative industry frameworks that emphasized sector classification or export competitiveness, *Past Forward* framed culture as a civilizational asset embedded in living practices, skill ecologies, and institutional continuities. This orientation reflects a broader intellectual tradition within cultural economics that emphasizes the embeddedness of economic action within social meaning systems rather than purely transactional markets (Klamer, 2017; Throsby, 2001).

The central argument of this paper is that *Past Forward* constitutes an unfinished policy imagination. The initiative emerged during a global "creative economy wave" that included the United Kingdom's sectoral mapping exercises, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO, 2005) normative framework on cultural diversity, and UNCTAD's development-oriented reports (UNCTAD, 2010). However, while several countries progressed from conceptual framing to institutionalization, measurement regimes, and sustained fiscal support, India largely remained at the stage of conceptual articulation, accompanied by a single attempted mission architecture through the proposed National Mission for Creative and Cultural Industries (NMCCI). The initiative ultimately stalled, not because of conceptual weakness, but because it required forms of horizontal governance coordination, measurement infrastructure, and institutional restructuring that exceeded the operational logic of the Indian administrative state.

By reconstructing the trilogy as an integrated policy vision and situating it within global creative economy trajectories, this paper contributes to interdisciplinary debates on cultural economy, development policy, cultural entrepreneurship, and institutional change. It also offers insights into how alternative economic imaginaries emerge—and fail—within complex governance systems, highlighting the importance of institutional capacity alongside conceptual innovation.

Cultural Economy as Analytical Framework

The *Past Forward* trilogy adopts an understanding of cultural industries broadly aligned with UNESCO's approach to cultural expressions and the dual cultural and economic significance of cultural production (UNESCO, 2005; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP] & UNESCO, 2013). It treats cultural industries as producing tangible and intangible creative outputs capable of generating economic value through cultural assets and knowledge-based goods and services. Importantly, the report emphasizes that such industries operate across both formal markets and informal community settings, raising governance challenges related to intellectual property, ownership, labor regulation, and

institutional support. Understanding the significance of *Past Forward* therefore requires engagement with broader theoretical debates in cultural economy.

Cultural industries differ from conventional sectors in several structural respects. They rely heavily on symbolic value, exhibit demand uncertainty, involve project-based labor markets, and often operate through networks rather than vertically integrated firms (Caves, 2000). These characteristics complicate traditional economic analysis and have prompted scholars to emphasize institutional contexts, social relations, and value pluralism in understanding cultural production (Hesmondhalgh, 2013). Throsby's cultural economics framework further highlights the dual nature of cultural goods, combining economic and cultural value dimensions that cannot be fully captured through market metrics alone (Throsby, 2001). Similarly, Klamer's concept of a value-based economy emphasizes that economic action is embedded in social norms, meanings, and ethical considerations rather than purely transactional incentives (Klamer, 2017). These theoretical perspectives resonate strongly with the Indian context, where production systems often intertwine livelihood, ritual practice, and community identity.

Scholars of cultural industries policy have also examined the evolution of governance frameworks. Garnham (2005) and Pratt (2005) argue that the transition from "cultural industries" to "creative industries" discourse involved a shift toward economic instrumentalism, with governments increasingly emphasizing growth and innovation narratives. O'Brien (2014) further demonstrates how cultural policy intersects with broader economic policy domains, including urban development, innovation systems, and labor markets. Within developing country contexts, however, cultural industries exhibit additional complexities. Informal labor relations, fragmented supply chains, and limited institutional support create structural vulnerabilities while also enabling adaptive resilience (Shaban et al., 2022). These characteristics are particularly visible in India's craft and creative sectors, where traditional knowledge systems coexist with modern market pressures.

Viewed through this lens, cultural entrepreneurship is not a narrow category of individual creative start-ups. It concerns the ways cultural producers and intermediaries mobilize creative, social, and material resources to develop viable livelihoods and cultural value. In India, this action is frequently embedded in households, communities, artisanal networks, and informal markets; its possibilities are therefore shaped by access to finance, market infrastructure, training, intellectual property protections, and collective forms of support.

Past Forward can therefore be understood as an attempt to reconcile these dimensions: recognizing culture simultaneously as an economic sector, knowledge system, and civilizational resource while proposing institutional mechanisms capable of supporting its evolution. The relationship between this systems vision, the conditions required for its institutionalization, and the potential implications for cultural entrepreneurship is summarized in Figure 1.

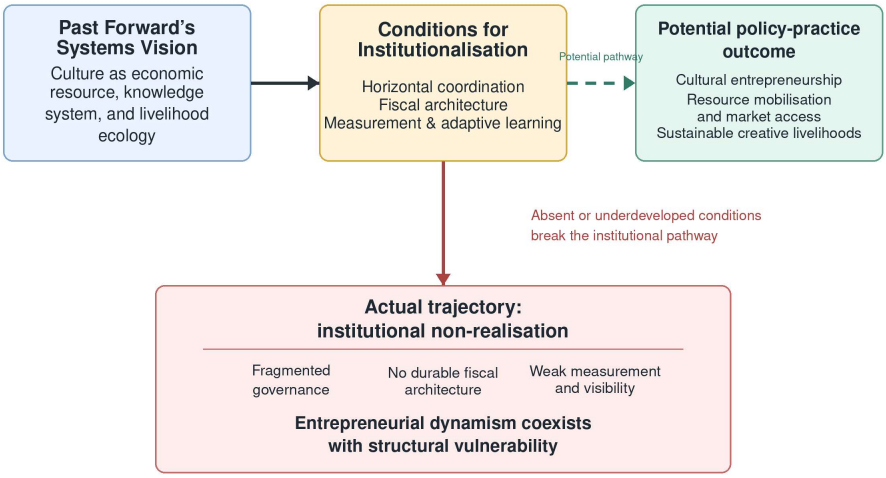


Figure 1. *Past Forward*'s systems vision, institutional nonrealization, and the cultural entrepreneurship implication.

Positioning *Past Forward* within Indian Policy History

Indian cultural policy since independence has largely been shaped by two institutional logics: state patronage and heritage preservation. National academies, museums, and cultural organizations were established to promote artistic expression and preserve traditions, often through grant-based funding models. While these institutions contributed to cultural recognition, they remained largely disconnected from the economic realities of producers and markets.

Simultaneously, economic planning focused on industrialization, agriculture, and later services, leaving cultural production marginal within development frameworks. Craft and artisan sectors were typically addressed through welfare-oriented programs or export promotion initiatives rather than integrated economic strategies (Liebl & Roy, 2003). This separation between culture and economic planning created structural gaps that scholars have identified as central challenges for India's creative industries.

Past Forward emerged at a moment when India was experiencing rapid economic transformation, urbanization, and global integration. The early 2000s saw growing recognition of knowledge-based industries and creative sectors worldwide, creating an opportunity to rethink the role of culture within development strategies. The Planning Commission's initiative therefore represented both a response to global discourse and an attempt to address domestic structural challenges rooted in informality, fragmentation, and institutional disconnect.

Research Objective and Argument

This paper seeks to answer three interrelated questions:

1. What conceptual model of cultural economy did *Past Forward* propose?
2. How did this model compare with global creative economy trajectories?
3. Why did the initiative fail to achieve institutional realization?

The paper argues that *Past Forward* articulated a uniquely systemic and civilizational understanding of cultural economies that was conceptually advanced relative to many global frameworks. However, its institutional ambitions required governance capacities—particularly horizontal coordination, stable measurement systems, and durable fiscal architecture—that were not secured within India's administrative structure. Consequently, the cultural economy agenda fragmented into adjacent domains such as skill development, MSME promotion, and tourism rather than evolving into a coherent governance regime.

The Architecture of *Past Forward*: Reframing Culture, Diversity, and Governance

The *Past Forward* trilogy represents one of the most comprehensive attempts by the Indian state to reconceptualize culture as an economic domain within national development planning. Rather than presenting a single policy proposal, the three volumes collectively construct a layered argument that moves from economic framing to epistemic reconstruction and finally to institutional design. Understanding this architecture is essential for evaluating both the ambition and the limitations of the initiative, particularly in relation to global debates on cultural economy and governance.

Volume I: Culture as a Lead Economic Sector

Volume I performs the trilogy's initial conceptual shift by positioning cultural and creative industries as a significant component of India's economic landscape rather than as peripheral activities associated primarily with heritage or artistic expression (Planning Commission, 2006). This repositioning aligns with global developments during the late 1990s and early 2000s, when creative industries began to be recognized as contributors to employment, innovation, and competitiveness across national economies (Hesmondhalgh, 2013; Pratt & Jeffcutt, 2009). Cultural production was increasingly understood not merely as consumption-oriented activity but as a productive sector embedded within broader innovation ecosystems.

The report challenges prevailing assumptions that cultural sectors are inherently unproductive or dependent on subsidies. Instead, it emphasizes their labor-intensive nature, geographic dispersion, and embeddedness in local knowledge systems, characteristics that make them particularly relevant in contexts where large segments of the workforce

operate outside formal industrial employment structures. Scholars examining informal economies have similarly highlighted how such sectors function through institutional arrangements based on identity, community norms, and social networks rather than formal regulation, thereby creating both resilience and vulnerability (Harriss-White, 2010; Mezzadri, 2017).

A distinctive feature of Volume I is its rejection of the dichotomy between traditional and modern industries. Rather than framing craft and heritage sectors as relics of the past, the report argues that India's comparative advantage lies precisely in its ability to combine tradition, design, and technological innovation. This perspective resonates with cluster-based theories of economic development, which emphasize the role of local knowledge, specialized skills, and network interactions in fostering innovation and regional competitiveness (Porter, 1998; Scott, 2000). It also aligns with empirical research demonstrating how traditional production systems can adapt to contemporary markets through hybridization and design intervention rather than displacement (Liebl & Roy, 2003).

At the same time, the report recognizes structural constraints, including fragmented markets, limited access to finance, inadequate institutional support, and weak supply chain coordination. These challenges mirror findings in empirical studies of craft and creative industries in India, which demonstrate the coexistence of entrepreneurial dynamism and structural vulnerability within traditional production systems (Shaban et al., 2022). By highlighting both opportunities and constraints, Volume I establishes the rationale for a coordinated policy response capable of integrating cultural production within broader economic frameworks. In this respect, *Past Forward* treats cultural entrepreneurship as a collective and institutionally embedded process, rather than solely an individual capacity to start and grow ventures.

Volume II: Diversity as Productive Infrastructure

If Volume I situates culture within economic discourse, Volume II provides the trilogy's conceptual and epistemic foundation by reframing diversity as productive infrastructure rather than merely cultural identity. This shift is particularly significant in the Indian context, where diversity has often been discussed in political or sociological terms but rarely treated as an economic asset embedded in production systems.

The volume draws heavily on interdisciplinary insights, arguing that cultural practices historically functioned as systems of knowledge transmission, skill development, and community organization. Such an understanding aligns with theoretical approaches in cultural economics that emphasize the embedded nature of economic activity within social institutions and cultural values (Throsby, 2001; Klamer, 2017). Rather than viewing cultural production as an isolated sector, the report conceptualizes it as an interconnected ecosystem spanning materials, techniques, institutions, and social relationships. This systemic perspective anticipates contemporary scholarship that treats cultural industries as complex socioeconomic networks rather than discrete sectors (Hesmondhalgh, 2013).

One of the most innovative components of Volume II is the Shilpa Sagar initiative, which attempts to map India's skills and craft traditions across regions and communities. Unlike conventional occupational classifications, this mapping approach recognizes the relational nature of skills, acknowledging their dependence on ecological resources, community networks, and cultural practices. Such mapping anticipates contemporary approaches to documenting intangible cultural heritage and cultural commons, which emphasize institutional context, collective ownership, and community participation (Shaban et al., 2022).

The volume also offers a critique of post-Independence cultural policy, particularly the reliance on grant-based patronage systems that separated cultural expression from economic livelihoods. Scholars examining cultural policy globally have noted similar tensions between intrinsic and instrumental rationales, with governments often struggling to balance artistic autonomy with economic objectives (Garnham, 2005; Gray, 2007). In the Indian context, this tension manifested in institutions that promoted cultural preservation but remained disconnected from production systems and markets, reinforcing a structural divide between culture and development policy.

By foregrounding practitioner perspectives alongside academic analysis, Volume II underscores the need for institutional arrangements that recognize cultural producers as economic actors rather than beneficiaries. This repositioning becomes central to the institutional proposals developed in the subsequent volume, where governance reforms are framed as prerequisites for unlocking the economic potential of cultural diversity. This reorientation also speaks directly to cultural entrepreneurship, which depends on cultural practitioners being able to mobilize resources, engage markets, and sustain creative livelihoods.

Volume III: Institutional Imagination and the National Mission for Creative and Cultural Industries

Volume III translates the conceptual insights of the earlier volumes into a comprehensive institutional proposal centered on the National Mission for Creative and Cultural Industries (NMCCI). The mission framework reflects broader governance trends in economic policy, where cross-sectoral coordination and targeted interventions are used to support innovation ecosystems and emerging sectors (O'Brien, 2014). Cultural industries, by their nature, intersect with multiple policy domains—including intellectual property, skill development, infrastructure, trade, and education—making integrated governance particularly important.

The proposed NMCCI was designed as an apex body capable of coordinating policy across multiple ministries, including culture, textiles, tourism, commerce, and education. Such coordination was considered necessary because cultural industries operate across institutional boundaries and cannot be effectively supported through isolated departmental schemes. Similar cross-sectoral challenges have been identified in cultural policy literature, where fragmented governance structures often hinder effective intervention

and reduce policy coherence (Pratt, 2005).

A notable aspect of the proposal is its emphasis on pilot projects and iterative learning rather than fixed program design. This approach reflects an understanding that cultural production systems are context-specific and cannot be governed effectively through standardized schemes. By advocating experimentation and feedback mechanisms, the report anticipates later discussions on adaptive governance, policy innovation, and mission-oriented development approaches. Such an adaptive approach can create enabling conditions for cultural entrepreneurship by allowing interventions to respond to the distinct needs of particular cultural producers, places, and production systems.

The volume also proposes structural reforms, including consolidation of fragmented responsibilities across ministries and the creation of specialized institutions to support artisans and cultural producers. These recommendations mirror cluster-based economic-development strategies that emphasize institutional coherence, coordination, and supportive infrastructure for innovation ecosystems (Porter, 1998). However, they also imply significant bureaucratic restructuring, which introduces political and administrative challenges within existing governance frameworks.

Importantly, Volume III documents broad rhetorical support for the initiative from policymakers, industry representatives, and cultural practitioners. Yet this consensus did not translate into institutional ownership. The absence of a single ministry willing to assume responsibility for NMCCI illustrates the difficulties of implementing cross-cutting reforms within vertically organized administrative systems, a challenge widely recognized in public policy scholarship.

Analytical Synthesis of the Trilogy

Taken together, the three volumes construct a coherent policy vision grounded in three interconnected propositions:

1. Cultural industries constitute a significant economic sector capable of generating livelihoods and innovation.
2. India's diversity represents a form of productive infrastructure embedded in social and institutional systems.
3. Effective governance requires mission-mode coordination across ministries and stakeholders.

This integrated framework distinguishes *Past Forward* from many contemporary creative economy initiatives that focus primarily on sector classification or export promotion. By emphasizing systems of practice and institutional ecology, the trilogy offers a deeper understanding of cultural economies as embedded social processes rather than purely market-driven activities. Such systemic thinking aligns with broader interdisciplinary scholarship that views economic activity as socially constructed and institutionally embedded (Klamer, 2017; Throsby, 2001).

However, the same features that make the framework conceptually rich also

contribute to its institutional vulnerability. The proposed reforms required significant administrative coordination, structural restructuring, and sustained political commitment—conditions that were not fully secured. The following sections therefore situate *Past Forward* within global creative economy trajectories to better understand both its ambitions and its divergence.

Global Creative Economy Trajectories and the Indian Divergence

The emergence of *Past Forward* between 2005 and 2006 coincided with a broader international shift in the conceptualization of culture and creativity as economic resources. During the early twenty-first century, multiple governments and international organizations began adopting creative economy frameworks to address structural transformations associated with post-industrial restructuring, knowledge economies, and global competition. These developments did not follow a single institutional pathway; rather, they produced distinct policy trajectories reflecting national priorities, governance capacities, and economic structures (Pratt & Jeffcutt, 2009). Situating *Past Forward* within this global context is therefore essential for understanding both its ambitions and its limitations.

While India's initiative shared temporal alignment with international developments, it diverged in emphasis and institutional trajectory. Most countries progressed from conceptual framing to measurement systems, specialized institutions, and recurring funding architectures. India, by contrast, advanced primarily through civilizational analysis and institutional imagination without securing comparable statistical visibility or administrative continuity. This divergence illustrates how governance capacity and institutional design shape policy outcomes even when conceptual frameworks are sophisticated.

Measurement and Classification: The United Kingdom Model

One influential trajectory emerged in the United Kingdom, where creative industries were defined and measured through sectoral mapping exercises initiated in the late 1990s. By quantifying employment, output, and economic contribution, policymakers transformed creativity into a statistically visible domain that could be incorporated into innovation policy, regional development strategies, and urban regeneration programs. Scholars analyzing cultural industries policy emphasize that measurement is not merely descriptive but constitutive: statistical categories shape policy priorities, institutional arrangements, and resource allocation (Hesmondhalgh, 2013; Pratt, 2005).

The UK approach demonstrates how classification can function as a governance tool. Once creative industries were identified as economically significant, they could be integrated into broader economic strategies, including cluster development and knowledge economy initiatives. Cluster theory further reinforced this approach by highlighting the benefits of geographic concentration, specialized skills, and network interactions among creative firms (Porter, 1998; Scott, 2000).

India's *Past Forward* adopted a fundamentally different starting point. Rather than beginning with sector classification, it began with a civilizational diagnosis of cultural production systems. While this provided deeper conceptual insight into embedded practices and knowledge ecologies, it did not generate the statistical legibility that facilitates policy adoption within bureaucratic systems. The absence of robust measurement frameworks therefore became a significant constraint on institutionalization.

Normative Legitimacy: UNESCO and the Dual Nature of Cultural Goods

International organizations also played a critical role in shaping creative economy discourse by establishing normative legitimacy for state intervention in cultural sectors. UNESCO's Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions recognized the distinctive nature of cultural activities, goods, and services as bearers of identities, values, and meanings, while also acknowledging their economic dimensions (UNESCO, 2005). This dual-value perspective aligns closely with cultural economics theory, which emphasizes that cultural goods embody symbolic meanings alongside economic functions and public-good characteristics (Throsby, 2001).

India's *Past Forward* can be read alongside this dual-nature perspective, treating culture simultaneously as a livelihood system and civilizational resource. However, while UNESCO's international framework provided a normative architecture through which cultural diversity could be incorporated into cultural and development policy (UNESCO, 2005), India's initiative did not achieve comparable domestic institutional embedding. The contrast highlights the importance of sustained institutional ecosystems in translating normative legitimacy into durable policy structures.

Trade and Development: UNCTAD and Global Comparability

Another influential pathway emerged through development institutions such as UNCTAD, which framed creative industries as drivers of trade, innovation, and inclusive growth. By emphasizing internationally comparable classifications and export potential, UNCTAD encouraged countries to develop satellite accounts and trade strategies for cultural products. This approach linked creativity directly to global economic integration, making it attractive for policymakers seeking new growth sectors in a competitive global environment (UNCTAD, 2010; UNCTAD, 2022).

Compared to this trade-oriented model, *Past Forward* prioritized livelihood systems, institutional ecology, and knowledge transmission. While conceptually richer in its treatment of cultural embeddedness, the Indian initiative did not align with global statistical frameworks that might have enhanced its international policy relevance. The absence of internationally comparable indicators also limited opportunities for benchmarking and external policy learning.

Governance Continuity: Singapore and the Creative City Strategy

Singapore provides an example of sustained governance continuity in creative economy development. Through multiphase planning, consistent investment, and geographically concentrated initiatives, the country integrated cultural policy with knowledge economy strategies. Scholars analyzing cultural policy note that administrative coordination, long-term planning horizons, and institutional stability are critical factors in successful creative economy interventions (O'Brien, 2014).

India's challenge differed fundamentally. Rather than focusing on a single metropolitan hub, *Past Forward* sought to address a national landscape characterized by vast regional diversity and decentralized production systems. Such scale increases the complexity of coordination and reduces the feasibility of tightly managed policy implementation. Governance strategies effective in small, centralized states are therefore difficult to replicate in large federal systems with heterogeneous institutional capacities.

Industrial Policy and Exports: South Korea's Cultural Industries

South Korea represents a distinct trajectory in which cultural industries were treated as components of industrial policy and export strategy. State support for media, entertainment, and digital content sectors created globally competitive industries and contributed to national branding through the Korean Wave (Hallyu). Scholars examining cultural industries highlight the role of specialized institutions, technological infrastructure, and public-private collaboration in enabling such outcomes (Jin, 2016).

India's *Past Forward* differed significantly in orientation. Rather than prioritizing export competitiveness, it emphasized livelihood sustainability, cultural continuity, and institutional reform. This difference reflects divergent development priorities: industrial expansion versus sociocultural resilience. While South Korea focused on globally scalable industries, India confronted the challenge of supporting dispersed cultural livelihoods embedded in community structures.

Fiscal Architecture: European Funding Models

In the European context, multiyear funding programs created predictable financial support for cultural sectors, enabling long-term ecosystem development. Cultural policy scholars emphasize that fiscal continuity is essential for institutional stability and sector growth, particularly in industries characterized by uncertain demand and project-based labor markets (Pratt & Jeffcutt, 2009). Dedicated funding mechanisms also enhance policy credibility and reduce uncertainty for stakeholders.

India's proposed NMCCI, while ambitious in scope, did not secure comparable fiscal commitments. The absence of a stable financial architecture contributed to institutional fragility and reduced incentives for administrative adoption. This contrast highlights how financial design constitutes a critical dimension of policy success beyond conceptual framing.

Comparative Trajectories

The divergence between global developments and India's experience can be summarized comparatively.

Table 1. Global Creative Economy Trajectories

Region/Country	Primary Policy Entry Point	Institutional Mechanism	Key Strength
United Kingdom	Measurement and classification	Cluster policies integrated into innovation frameworks	Statistical visibility
International Organizations	Normative legitimacy and development framing	Reporting frameworks and policy networks	Policy legitimacy
Singapore	Creative city strategy	Multiphase governance continuity	Administrative coordination
South Korea	Industrial and export policy	Specialist agencies and public-private collaboration	Export competitiveness
European Union	Funding architecture	Multiyear programs	Fiscal stability
India (*Past Forward*)	Civilizational analysis and mission proposal	Proposed NMCCI (not realized)	Systems thinking depth

Conceptual Depth versus Institutionalization

The comparative analysis reveals that India's initiative possessed unusual conceptual depth relative to many global frameworks. While several countries treated creative industries primarily as economic sectors or export opportunities, *Past Forward* framed them as embedded systems of practice linked to communities, knowledge traditions, and social institutions. This perspective aligns with theoretical approaches that emphasize the embeddedness of economic activity within cultural contexts and value systems (Klamer, 2017; Throsby, 2001).

However, conceptual richness alone does not guarantee institutional success. Governance capacity, measurement systems, and fiscal continuity play critical roles in translating ideas into policy outcomes. Countries that achieved sustained creative economy development typically secured these elements early in the policy process, enabling continuity across political cycles and administrative transitions (Hesmondhalgh, 2013).

India's Relative Position

India's trajectory can be analytically understood by comparing key structural dimensions.

Table 2. Comparative Diagnosis: Global Models versus India

Dimension	Global Pattern	India (*Past Forward*)
Conceptual framing	Sectoral or industrial	Civilizational and systemic
Measurement systems	Strong statistical frameworks	Limited institutionalization
Institutional structures	Specialist agencies or programs	Proposed mission (not realized)
Governance continuity	High	Disrupted by institutional change
Policy orientation	Growth and exports	Livelihoods and cultural systems
Outcome	Institutional embedding	Fragmentation across sectors

Implications for Understanding NMCCI

The comparative perspective suggests that the NMCCI initiative failed not because of conceptual inadequacy but because three critical institutional conditions were not secured:

1. Horizontal coordination across ministries
2. Durable fiscal architecture
3. Stable measurement systems

Without these foundations, the cultural economy agenda fragmented into adjacent domains such as skills development, MSMEs, and tourism rather than evolving into a coherent governance regime.

Institutional Constraints and the Limits of Mission-Mode Governance

The preceding sections demonstrate that *Past Forward* articulated a coherent conceptual framework for cultural and creative industries and aligned temporally with global policy developments. Yet the proposed National Mission for Creative and Cultural Industries (NMCCI) failed to achieve institutional realization. Understanding this outcome requires examining the political economy and administrative context in which the initiative emerged. Rather than attributing the outcome to political neglect or conceptual weakness, this section argues that NMCCI encountered structural constraints rooted in the organization of the Indian state, bureaucratic incentives, measurement deficits, and policy fragmentation. These constraints reflect broader governance challenges identified in cultural policy scholarship, where cross-sectoral domains often struggle to achieve institutional coherence (Pratt, 2005; O'Brien, 2014).

Horizontal Coordination and Administrative Structure

One of the defining features of the NMCCI proposal was its emphasis on cross-ministerial coordination. Cultural industries intersect with multiple policy domains, including textiles, tourism, commerce, education, labor, intellectual property, and regional development. The mission framework therefore sought to create an apex institutional structure capable of integrating these domains into a coherent strategy (Planning Commission, 2006). Such integration reflects contemporary governance approaches that treat innovation sectors as ecosystems requiring coordination across institutions rather than isolated sectoral interventions.

However, vertically organized bureaucratic systems tend to resist horizontal coordination because authority, budgets, and performance metrics are tied to departmental boundaries. Scholars analyzing cultural policy governance have consistently identified fragmentation across ministries as a major impediment to effective intervention, producing duplication, inefficiency, and institutional inertia (Pratt, 2005; O'Brien, 2014). The NMCCI proposal implicitly challenged existing power structures by suggesting consolidation of responsibilities and the creation of new institutional arrangements, such as a dedicated department for artisans and cultural producers.

Such restructuring would have required significant political capital and administrative commitment. In the absence of strong ownership by a single ministry, the proposal remained vulnerable to bureaucratic inertia. The difficulty of coordinating across departments therefore represents a central structural constraint on the initiative, illustrating how institutional architecture shapes policy feasibility regardless of conceptual merit.

Bureaucratic Incentives and Policy Paradigms

A second constraint arises from the mismatch between NMCCI's conceptual framework and prevailing policy paradigms within Indian public administration. Traditional cultural policy has often operated through grant-based patronage systems that position artists and artisans as beneficiaries rather than economic actors. By contrast, *Past Forward* emphasized enterprise development, market access, institutional reform, and innovation, effectively repositioning cultural producers as participants in economic systems rather than recipients of welfare.

This shift challenged established bureaucratic practices and funding structures. Cultural policy scholars have identified similar tensions globally, where attempts to integrate economic objectives into cultural policy encounter resistance from institutions historically oriented toward preservation or subsidy models (Garnham, 2005; Gray, 2007). In the Indian context, these tensions were amplified by the coexistence of multiple policy logics—heritage preservation, welfare support, export promotion, and industrial policy—creating fragmented institutional incentives.

Moreover, NMCCI's emphasis on pilot projects and adaptive learning contrasted with the scheme-driven approach that characterizes much of Indian public administration. Scheme-based governance relies on predefined guidelines, measurable outputs, and

budget allocations tied to specific programs. Mission-mode governance, by contrast, requires flexibility, experimentation, and iterative adjustment—capabilities that are more difficult to institutionalize within existing administrative systems. The mismatch between governance paradigms therefore contributed to implementation barriers.

Measurement Deficits and Policy Visibility

A third structural constraint relates to measurement and statistical visibility. As discussed earlier, countries that successfully institutionalized creative economy policies often began with robust classification and measurement systems. Statistical data provides legitimacy, facilitates budget allocation, and enables policy evaluation, thereby reinforcing institutional adoption (Hesmondhalgh, 2013).

India's cultural sectors, particularly crafts and informal creative labor, have historically been underrepresented in official statistics. Scholars examining informal economies emphasize that the absence of reliable data can lead to policy neglect, misrecognition, and underinvestment (Harriss-White, 2010). While *Past Forward* recognized this issue and proposed mapping initiatives such as Shilpa Sagar, these efforts did not evolve into stable statistical frameworks integrated into national accounts.

Without measurable indicators demonstrating economic contribution, cultural industries remained less visible within policy priorities compared to sectors such as manufacturing, information technology, or infrastructure. This invisibility reduced incentives for ministries to adopt and champion the NMCCI initiative. The absence of statistical legibility therefore represents not merely a technical limitation but a structural constraint affecting political attention and resource allocation.

Fiscal Architecture and Institutional Durability

Institutional sustainability also depends on financial architecture. Successful creative economy initiatives internationally often involve multiyear funding commitments that provide predictable resources for sector development and institutional stability (Pratt & Jeffcutt, 2009). Fiscal continuity enables long-term planning, stakeholder confidence, and sustained program implementation.

In contrast, NMCCI remained a proposed mission without secure fiscal anchoring. Public administration research emphasizes that policy initiatives lacking dedicated budgets are vulnerable to discontinuation, particularly during periods of institutional transition. The eventual restructuring of India's planning architecture further complicated NMCCI's prospects. As institutional arrangements changed, continuity of mission-mode initiatives became more difficult to maintain, highlighting the importance of fiscal design in policy durability.

Fragmentation into Adjacent Policy Domains

Following the stagnation of NMCCI, elements of the cultural economy agenda were

absorbed into adjacent policy domains, including MSME development, skill training programs, tourism promotion, and heritage initiatives. While these programs addressed certain aspects of creative industries, they did not replicate the integrated systems approach envisioned in *Past Forward*. Instead, policy interventions became sector-specific and fragmented.

This fragmentation reflects broader patterns identified in cultural policy literature, where economic instrumentalism can overshadow structural considerations of cultural production systems (Garnham, 2005). Rather than holistic governance, interventions focused on individual components such as entrepreneurship training or export promotion, limiting their ability to address interconnected challenges including supply chains, institutional capacity, knowledge transmission, and community sustainability.

Political Economy of Institutional Nonrealization

The outcome of NMCCI can therefore be understood as a case of institutional nonrealization rather than policy failure in a conventional sense. The initiative articulated a coherent vision but encountered structural barriers that prevented implementation. Such outcomes are not uncommon in policy innovation, particularly when proposals challenge existing institutional arrangements or require cross-sectoral coordination.

From a political economy perspective, the initiative required alignment among multiple actors: central ministries, state governments, industry stakeholders, and cultural communities. Without strong incentives for coordination or clear ownership, collective action problems emerged. The absence of institutional champions further reduced the likelihood of implementation. Governance capacity, rather than conceptual inadequacy, therefore explains the outcome.

Analytical Summary

The structural constraints affecting NMCCI can be summarized as follows:

Table 3. Structural Constraints on NMCCI Implementation

Constraint	Description	Institutional Implication
Administrative fragmentation	Multiple ministries with overlapping mandates	Weak coordination
Bureaucratic incentives	Scheme-based governance paradigms	Resistance to mission approach
Measurement deficits	Limited statistical visibility of cultural sectors	Low policy priority
Fiscal uncertainty	Lack of dedicated funding architecture	Institutional fragility
Policy fragmentation	Absorption into adjacent domains	Loss of systemic coherence

Discussion: *Past Forward* as an Unfinished Institutional Pathway

The analysis presented in this paper demonstrates that *Past Forward* was neither an isolated policy experiment nor a marginal cultural initiative. Rather, it represented an ambitious attempt to reposition culture and creativity within India's economic and institutional architecture. By framing cultural industries as systems of practice embedded in social institutions, the trilogy anticipated theoretical developments in cultural economy that emphasize value pluralism, embeddedness, and institutional contexts (Klamer, 2017; Throsby, 2001). In doing so, the initiative departed from narrow sectoral approaches and instead articulated a systemic understanding of cultural production as an ecosystem of knowledge, skills, materials, and social relationships.

At the same time, the initiative diverged from many international creative economy models. Whereas several countries advanced through sector classification, export promotion, and cluster-based development strategies, *Past Forward* prioritized livelihood systems, knowledge transmission, and community-based production networks. This orientation reflects India's structural realities, where cultural production often occurs within informal and decentralized systems rather than large-scale industrial firms (Shaban et al., 2022). The trilogy therefore addressed a fundamentally different policy problem: not how to expand globally competitive cultural industries alone, but how to sustain complex socioeconomic ecosystems rooted in tradition and community practice.

The comparative analysis suggests that India's initiative possessed unusual conceptual depth relative to many global frameworks. By recognizing cultural economies as interconnected ecosystems rather than isolated sectors, the trilogy offered a systemic understanding rarely achieved in policy documents. This approach aligns with interdisciplinary scholarship that views economies as socially constructed systems shaped by institutions, norms, and practices rather than purely market transactions (Hesmondhalgh, 2013; Pratt & Jeffcutt, 2009). It also resonates with value-based economic perspectives that emphasize meaning, identity, and ethical considerations as integral components of economic life (Klamer, 2017).

However, conceptual sophistication alone does not guarantee institutional success. The failure of NMCCI highlights the importance of governance capacity, measurement systems, and fiscal architecture in translating ideas into policy outcomes. Countries that successfully institutionalized creative economy frameworks typically secured these elements early, enabling continuity across political and administrative transitions. The Indian experience demonstrates that policy innovation requires not only intellectual imagination but also institutional alignment.

Cultural Economy and Knowledge Systems

One of the most significant contributions of *Past Forward* lies in its implicit recognition of cultural production as a knowledge system. The trilogy emphasizes the transmission of skills across generations, the role of community institutions in sustaining practices, and the interdependence of economic activity and cultural meaning. Such perspectives

resonate with contemporary discussions on knowledge systems and intangible heritage, which highlight the importance of institutional contexts in sustaining cultural practices.

The emphasis on diversity as productive infrastructure also anticipates theoretical approaches that challenge universal models of economic development. Rather than viewing modernization as the replacement of traditional practices, *Past Forward* suggests that development can emerge through adaptation, hybridization, and innovation rooted in existing knowledge systems. This perspective aligns with empirical studies demonstrating the resilience and adaptability of traditional production systems under changing market conditions (Liebl & Roy, 2003).

By foregrounding the relationship between culture and livelihoods, the initiative also contributes to debates on inclusive development. Cultural industries often provide employment opportunities for marginalized communities and regions with limited industrial infrastructure. Recognizing and supporting these sectors can therefore contribute to broader development objectives, including poverty reduction, regional equity, and social cohesion. Such arguments have gained increasing prominence in international development discourse, particularly through approaches that locate creative economies within local development pathways rather than treating them solely as globally traded industries (UNDP & UNESCO, 2013; UNCTAD, 2022).

Institutional Lessons from NMCCI

The institutional analysis presented earlier identifies several lessons relevant for contemporary policy design.

First, horizontal coordination across ministries remains a persistent challenge in complex governance systems. Policy initiatives that cut across sectors require clear ownership structures and incentives for collaboration. Without such mechanisms, fragmentation and duplication are likely outcomes. Cultural industries, by their nature, intersect with multiple domains, making coordination particularly critical.

Second, measurement systems play a crucial role in shaping policy priorities. Statistical visibility not only legitimizes sectors but also enables resource allocation and evaluation. Developing robust data frameworks for cultural industries therefore represents an essential step toward institutionalization. The absence of reliable data contributed significantly to the limited policy traction of NMCCI.

Third, fiscal architecture determines policy durability. Multiyear funding commitments and dedicated institutional budgets provide stability and enable long-term planning. Initiatives lacking secure financial foundations are vulnerable to discontinuation during administrative transitions.

Fourth, policy paradigms influence institutional receptivity. Reforms that challenge established bureaucratic practices may encounter resistance even when conceptually sound. Aligning new initiatives with existing incentives and administrative structures can enhance implementation prospects. The mission-mode approach proposed by NMCCI required governance flexibility that was difficult to reconcile with scheme-driven

administrative systems.

Fragmentation and the Contemporary Policy Landscape

Following the stagnation of NMCCI, India's engagement with cultural industries evolved through fragmented policy domains. Programs addressing entrepreneurship, skill development, heritage tourism, and creative entrepreneurship incorporated elements of creative economy thinking but did not replicate the systemic approach envisioned in *Past Forward*. This fragmentation reflects broader global critiques of creative economy policy, where economic instrumentalism can overshadow structural considerations of cultural production systems (Garnham, 2005; Gray, 2007).

Despite these challenges, the underlying issues identified in *Past Forward* remain highly relevant. Rapid technological change, globalization, and urbanization continue to reshape cultural production systems, creating both opportunities and vulnerabilities. Digital platforms, global value chains, and new forms of cultural consumption are transforming creative labor markets, often intensifying precarity while expanding market reach. Revisiting the trilogy therefore provides valuable insights for contemporary policy debates.

Reinterpreting Failure: Institutional Nonrealization

Rather than treating NMCCI as a failed policy, it may be more productive to interpret it as an instance of institutional nonrealization. The initiative articulated a coherent vision but encountered structural barriers that prevented implementation. Such outcomes highlight the importance of studying unrealized policy proposals as sources of insight into governance constraints and institutional dynamics.

This reinterpretation also underscores the role of timing in policy success. Institutional opportunities emerge within specific political and administrative contexts. When these contexts change, initiatives may lose momentum regardless of conceptual merit. The restructuring of India's planning architecture illustrates how institutional transformations can reshape policy trajectories, affecting continuity of policy initiatives.

Implications for Future Research

The findings of this paper suggest several directions for future research.

1. Comparative studies examining creative economy initiatives across developing countries could provide deeper insights into institutional variation and policy outcomes.
2. Empirical research on contemporary cultural production systems in India could assess how sector dynamics have evolved since the publication of *Past Forward*.
3. Interdisciplinary approaches integrating economics, sociology, and cultural studies could further explore the relationship between cultural practices, knowledge systems, and economic development.

Such research would contribute to a more nuanced understanding of cultural economies beyond conventional sectoral frameworks.

Conclusion: *Past Forward* and the Future of Cultural Economies

Past Forward represents a remarkable moment in India's policy history, when cultural and creative industries were briefly positioned at the center of economic planning. The initiative articulated a systemic vision that recognized culture simultaneously as economic resource, knowledge system, and civilizational asset. Its failure to achieve institutional realization reflects structural constraints within governance systems rather than conceptual inadequacy.

Revisiting the trilogy offers valuable insights for contemporary debates on cultural economy, development policy, cultural entrepreneurship, and institutional change. As economies increasingly recognize the importance of creativity, innovation, and cultural diversity, the questions raised by *Past Forward* remain highly relevant. Understanding why the initiative did not succeed can help inform future efforts to integrate culture and development in more effective and sustainable ways. It shows, in particular, that cultural entrepreneurship cannot be secured by individual initiative alone; it depends upon public institutions capable of supporting resource mobilization, collaboration, market access, and sustainable creative livelihoods.

In this sense, *Past Forward* should be understood not as a closed chapter but as an unfinished pathway—one that continues to offer conceptual guidance for rethinking the relationship between culture, economy, and institutions in India and beyond.

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