

UNESCO names Kozhikode 'city of literature': What this tag means

What is UNESCO's Creative Cities Network? Which other Indian cities are part of it? What does inclusion in the network mean for a city? We explain

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A bust of Malayalam author SK Pottakkad at SM Street in Kozhikode, the subject of one of his most popular works. (Express photo: Nandagopal Rajan)

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The city of Kozhikode in Kerala was added in UNESCO's Creative Cities Network (UCCN) on Wednesday. Gwalior from Madhya Pradesh was also among the 55 new cities to join the network.

These cities have been handpicked to represent seven creative fields — crafts and folk arts, design, film, gastronomy, literature, media arts, and music. Kozhikode was included in the category of literature and Gwalior in the category of music.

The UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN)

The UCCN was created in 2004 to promote cooperation among cities that have identified creativity as a strategic factor for sustainable urban development. It now includes 350 cities in over a hundred countries.

The network is aimed at leveraging the creative, social, and economic potential of cultural industries. It was launched to promote UNESCO's goals of cultural diversity and strengthen resilience to threats such as climate change, rising inequality, and

rapid urbanisation. It encourages a culture of creativity in urban planning and solutions to urban problems.

Indian cities in the network

Apart from Kozhikode and Gwalior, Varanasi (music), Srinagar (crafts and folk arts) and Chennai (music) are part of the network.

Kozhikode's literary tradition

The North Kerala city of Kozhikode is home to many prominent personalities of the state's literary and cultural world. The city, where several leading media houses are headquartered, has hundreds of publishing banners and several libraries enriching its literary tradition.

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The first Malayalam novel Kundalatha was born in Kozhikode in 1887. It was authored by Appu Nedungadi. Several illustrious writers like S K Pottekkatt, Vaikom Muhammad Basheer, Uroob, Thikkodiyar, NN Kakkad, P Valsala, Akbar Kakkattil, Punathil Kunjabdulla and MT Vasudevan Nair have brought laurels for Kozhikode. The city has also produced many film and theatre professionals in the last half a century.

Objective of the CCCN

The UNESCO Creative Cities Network allows member cities to recognise creativity as an essential component of urban development, notably through partnerships involving the public and private sectors and civil society. It envisages to develop hubs of creativity and innovation and broaden opportunities for creators and professionals in the cultural sector. These cities have to achieve the UN agenda of sustainable development.

Areas of action

The objectives of the network are implemented both at the level of the member cities and at the international level, notably through sharing experiences, knowledge and best practices. There are professional and artistic exchange programmes, research and evaluations on the experience of the creative cities, among other activities.

The annual conference of network cities

A highlight of the network is the annual conference of mayors and other stakeholders of network cities, which offers a unique occasion to strengthen ties between creative cities from across the world. The main objective of the conference is to exchange practical information on policies and activities carried out by cities and stimulate inter-city collaborations.

The last conference was held in Santos, Brazil, and this year's conference was in Istanbul. The next conference will be held in July 2024 in Braga, Portugal.

What members have to do

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Every four years, member cities are required to submit a Membership Monitoring Report, with the aim of demonstrating their steadfast commitment towards the implementation of the UCCN Mission Statement. They present an action plan for the following four years, providing insights into their achievements and lessons learnt, as well as the impact of the designation.