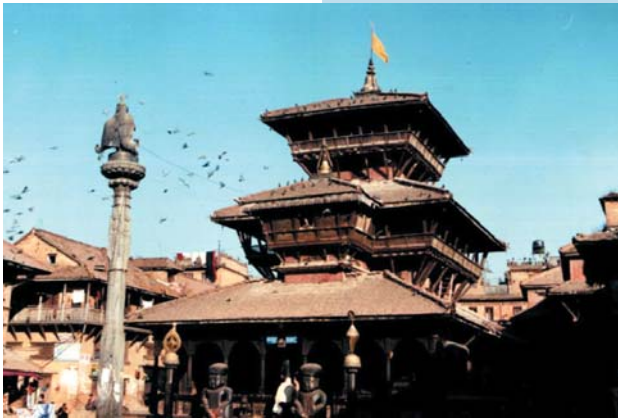


NEPAL

CONSERVING URBAN CULTURAL HERITAGE IN BHAKTAPUR

Urban cultural heritage conservation work is more effective if it both involves local people in decision-making about what work should be done and how, and it also helps to meet local people's needs, in addition to conserving the built environment and generating revenue.



The Royal city of Bhaktapur sits in the Kathmandu valley in Nepal, beneath the towering wall of the Himalayas. With a history of over 1,500 years and many temples and historic buildings, Bhaktapur is a living and working city as well as a cultural treasure.

Despite its architectural and historic significance, for many decades large parts of

the city lay in ruins after being devastated by an earthquake in 1934, with no efforts at systematic reconstruction. In 1972, the German Government offered to restore the ruins of the Priests' House (Pujari Math) in honour of the wedding of King Birendra Bir Bakram of Nepal. By 1974 this initial intervention had developed into a cooperative programme between the Nepalese and German governments, which have been working together on the Bhaktapur Development Project (BDP) ever since. The aim of the BDP is to preserve the cultural heritage of the city at the same time as improving the living conditions of its inhabitants.



The BDP has been a learning process for all involved, and has responded to the growing realisation that cultural conservation cannot be achieved by simply renovating buildings, monuments and physical infrastructure. To be effective and sustainable,

conservation efforts must involve and be led by local people and must ensure that their livelihoods and basic needs are also addressed directly by the programme activities.

In the first phase of the BDP, the focus was on restoring dilapidated historic sites, as well as establishing urban infrastructure and services (including sewers, water mains, road surfacing and a solid

waste collection system). During this phase of the project there was almost no involvement of local people in decision-making, with the result that local government officials complained that the German staff were failing to consult people and ignoring their basic needs.

This situation came to a head during a national political revolt in 1980, when the BDP project workers, together with all other public employees, went on strike. The result of the national revolt was a move to democratisation in the country, including a new system of elected community representatives in every town. The response of the BDP was to take a more citizen-led approach to the project.

At the same time, a national programme for 'Urban Development through Local Efforts' (UDLE) was set up to support the on-going democratisation and municipal decentralisation effort. UDLE is managed by the relevant government ministries, assisted by the German development agency GTZ. Its role is to support municipalities, including Bhaktapur, in their responsibility for managing urban areas. It offers

technical assistance in urban management, planning, financial management, public health and environmental education programmes and administers a 'Town Development Fund' which, with a grant from a German development bank, gives grants and loans to local authorities for social infrastructure and revenue generating projects.

Since the start of UDLE, BDP has been able to work through elected municipal bodies. The result of this changed approach has been that more recent BDP activities are more clearly linked to residents' and voters' needs, including measures to spur the urban economy, building small and craft enterprises and industry in Bhaktapur.

The programme, especially in its later, more responsive form, has increased local commitment to the protection of heritage sites. In the fiscal year of 1997/98 Bhaktapur spent US\$ 285,000 out of its total municipal capital expenditure of US\$ 750,000 on the renovation of the built environment and cultural conservation. Furthermore, this investment is being recovered through tourist revenue. The municipal government has introduced a scheme of making service charges of \$ 5 to foreign tourists, and 40 cents to nationals. Whilst \$ 5 is a small amount for international tourists, it adds up considerably as a source of funds for local government. In 1997/98 this levy amounted to 41% of the municipality's revenue.

Clearly, the more that cultural conservation initiatives can be demonstrated to have benefits for local people and organisations in this way, the more local support there will be for them.



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