

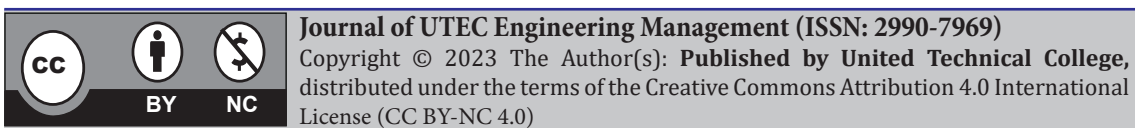
Integrated Heritage Conservation: Exploring the Role of Community Participation in the Conservation of Thimi

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ABSTRACT

The sustainability of cultural heritage resources is strongly linked to the effective participation of local communities in the conservation and management of these resources. Integrated heritage conservation is assumed to be an appropriate conservation approach specifically to promote inclusive participation of local communities and sustainable community development in the historic settlements. In this context, considering the case of historic town of Thimi, this study aims to explore the existing context and role of community participation in the planning and conservation of heritage resources and also investigate the context of integrated conservation. Multiple tools of data collection such as Key informant's interview, household's surveys, participant observation, informal discussion and archival research have been used. Findings demonstrate that continuous decay and destruction of cultural heritages in Thimi have threatened its unique identity and the traditionally well-sustained community is now degrading and heading towards unsustainability. The context of community participation and conservation also seems weak in promoting sustainable conservation and development in Thimi. It recommends for adopting and implementing inclusive participation of local communities and integrated approach to conservation along with preparing comprehensive policies, plans and legislations for promoting sustainable conservation and community development in the historic settlements.

Keywords: Community Participation, Heritage, Conservation, Community Development

INTRODUCTION

Heritage is a broad concept that encompasses natural, indigenous and historic or cultural inheritance. Cultural heritage is an expression of the ways of living developed by a community and passed on from generation to generation including customs, practices, places, objects, artistic expressions and values (ICOMOS, ICTC, 2002). In fact, it has been largely reflected as a legacy, a symbol and representation from the past generations handed over to the present with the hope of passing it across to the future generations (Nilson & Thorell, 2018). According to Jokilehto (1999), the concept of cultural heritage has been continually broadened from historic monuments and works of art to include ethnographic collections, historic gardens, towns, villages and landscapes (Bhatta, 2009). Cultural heritage must be understood in a much broader sense than just as a synonym for historic buildings, monuments and art. In addition to built heritage, the life styles, festivals, traditional skills, religious perceptions of the world as well as culturally determined approaches to land, family, food and other define the scope of cultural heritage (Bhatta, 2008). Cultural heritage is an important component of communities, groups, and individuals and it is the roots of development (UNESCO, 2003).

Bhatta (2016) stressed that the historical urban areas and towns which embody the values of traditional urban cultures are being threatened, physically degraded, damaged or even destroyed by the impact of rapid urban development and poor governance. The communities with the centuries old traditions, cultures, and lifestyles are facing irreversible cultural, social and economic losses. In this context, conservation of cultural heritage is essential for sustaining the diverse values of heritage and its authenticity not only for present generation but also for the future generation. Integrated approach to conservation that considers community participation as a key tool to achieve conservation and also integrates the key planning issues such social, cultural and economical significance together

to conserve tangible and intangible heritage for long time. The significance of community participation in preserving cultural heritage has been endorsed in a wide range of literature, including scholarly research and institutional conventions (Chan, 2016). It is a bottom-up approach that has spread across the practices of heritage conservation (Ronchi, 2020; Yung & Chan, 2011). The paradigm shift in heritage conservation from place-based conservation to more people-centered conservation (i.e., from conservation of only tangible heritage to intangible cultural heritage that depicts the people) has contributed largely to this notion (Oladeji, Grace & Ayodeji, 2022). As there is a growing recognition of the link between cultural heritage and community wellbeing, the call for more community participation in conservation is gaining momentum. Scholars argued that sustainability of cultural heritage resources is strongly linked to the effective participation of local communities in the conservation and management of these resources (Oladeji, Grace, and Ayodeji, 2022). In context of Nepal for Eco-friendly and productive construction this approach found to be applied (Mishra and Rai, 2017; Maskey and Mishra, 2018). In this context, this research considers a case of historic town of Thimi in Kathmandu valley, to examine the role and context of community participation in the conservation of heritage.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Heritage Conservation

The concept of heritage conservation has its roots in the conservation movements in the late nineteenth century when awareness of the value of historic urban centers developed in reaction to the loss of the defence structures of many fortified medieval cities in Europe due to their expansion (Bhatta, 2008). During this period, a city was considered as a monument or as an object of art (Jokilehto, 2003). After the First World War in the early twentieth century, the reconstruction of historic centres was started and the conservation movement gained momentum only after the Second World War. Its importance was further emphasized after

the foundation of international organizations, charters, conventions and many other efforts on conservation (Bhatta, 2009, Bhatta & Chan, 2016). ICOMOS Australia (1999) defined conservation as: “conservation means all the process of looking after a place so as to retain its cultural significance”. The Venice Charter recognizes the need to safeguard the heritage and sees it as our duty to hand them on in the richness of their authenticity to future generations (Bhatta, 2008). The article three of Venice Charter also states the aim of conservation as: “the intention in conserving and restoring monuments is to safeguard them no less as works of art than as historical evidence”(ICOMOS,1994).

Townsend (2003) argued that critical conservation (i.e. critical process and then creative act) is most appropriate in urban conservation practices because a historic urban centre cannot be treated as work of art or as a static object rather it embodies multidimensional cultural values that must be considered on a par with its contemporary role. The broader definition of conservation refers more widely as a complex, diverse, and even divergent social practice. It has now shifted from protecting the single built form to the wider context such as area-based conservation or district regeneration (Bhatta & Chan, 2016). Since, heritage is a broad term, its benefits are not only limited to cultural and historical values but social and economic values are now prominently identified (Bhatta, 2008). The intangible heritages such as traditional skills and techniques of making craft are also considered significant in the urban conservation.

Urban conservation, in fact, deals with cultural heritage within urban areas and in particular historic urban centres. It is a process of managing change in historic urban areas in which urban conservation works within the greater context of the urban system (Imon, 2006). It is more than conservation of physical fabric; ensuring continuity of the socio-cultural system and contribution to sustainable development are very much at the core of urban conservation (Bhatta,

2008). Integrated conservation with active community participation is considered a key approach to achieve sustainable development in the historic towns (Bhatta, 2008).

Cohen (1999, p.11) defined “historic city centres are made up of a web of buildings and streets from different periods that create various cultural and urban strata. Over the centuries, they have finely honed their urban character and now offer quality urban culture. New cities and suburbs however lack any feeling of history and are devoid of any sense of cultural continuity”. He further elaborated that proper urban conservation transforms historic cities into hubs of cultural activity, making them much more than merely residential (Bhatta,2008). Hence, conservation on an urban scale is concerned with the urban fabric as a whole and not with architecture alone (Cohen, 1999, Bhatta & Chan, 2016). The approach of conservation thus varies from culture to culture. Conservation of a place should identify and take into consideration all aspects of cultural and natural significance without unwarranted emphasis on any one value at the expense of others (ICOMOS, Australia). The ultimate aim of conservation is not to conserve material for its own sake but rather to maintain (and shape) the values embodied by the heritage. More exactly urban heritage constitutes social, economic, aesthetic, cultural and historical values and these are considered as selection criteria for heritage conservation (Bhatta, 2009). The intangible heritage such as traditional skills and knowledge can be selected for their cultural and economic values. Conservation is now considered as an important part of urban regeneration, particularly in the historic towns, where the entire urban setting is a strong cultural heritage resource, and urban regeneration with the dominance of heritage conservation is inevitable.

Integrated Heritage Conservation

The approach of urban conservation has been shifted to an integrated urban conservation, in which conservation is seen as an integral part

of development planning (Bhatta & Chan, 2016). Cultural heritage plays important role within the wider context of urban planning and contributes significantly to maintain diversity and unique identity of a city. Cohen (1999) argues that urban planning and conservation are not contradictory, but rather complementary terms and urban planning that does not take conservation into account is incomplete. According to Feilden and Jokilehto (1998, p.80) "integrated conservation implies reconciling conservation requirements and town planning objectives, i.e. considering the values and interests of the existing historic fabric as equal in status to other factors in the general planning process". The integration of conservation in all levels of urban and regional planning is essential. The European Charter of Architectural Heritage defined integrated conservation as the integration of architectural heritage into the context of people's lives and making it part of regional and town planning and development scheme. The Article 7 of the Charter states: *"Integrated conservation is achieved by the application of sensitive restoration techniques and the correct choice of appropriate functions. In the course of history, the hearts of towns and sometimes villages have been left to deteriorate and have turned into areas of substandard housing. Their deterioration must be undertaken in a spirit of social justice and should not cause the departure of the poorer inhabitants. Because of this, conservation must be one of the first considerations in all urban and regional planning"* (Bhatta, 2008). Similarly, the Declaration of Amsterdam Charter also highlighted the importance of social justice in urban conservation and explained the principles of integrated conservation as (i) conservation of architectural heritage should be an integral part of urban and regional planning;(ii) integrated conservation involves the responsibility of local authorities and calls for public participation; (iii) the success of any policy of integrated conservation depends on taking social factors into consideration; (iv) integrated conservation necessitates the adaptation of legislative and

administrative measures; and (v) integration methods require the promotion of methods, techniques and skills for restoration and rehabilitation. In the historic towns, integrated conservation is needed which includes the conservation conscious development plans and the laws that are able to control the harmful changes (Imon,2006; Bhatta & Chan, 2016). The integration process need to be included in three levels of public decision making: (i) policy level; (ii) planning level; and (iii) project level. In each level, there may be more than one sectors involved. Hence, integration is also necessary in all sectors of each level.

Community Participation in Heritage Conservation

Defining Community Participation

Community participation or public participation has been defined in many different ways. It can be normally seen as an interaction between the government and the people to consider the view of general public into decision making (Bhatta, 2008). According Ng, Cook and Chui (2001, p.178) Participation is more than consultation; it should be engagement in making choices and determining future development. While Creighton (2005, p.7) explains public participation is "the process by which public concerns, needs and values are incorporated into governmental and corporate decision making". The forms and means of public participation are crucial to the community development. Arnstein (1969) defined the eight different forms of public participation in her work entitled "A Ladder of Citizen Participation". In the ladder, the lowest rung, 'manipulation' represents the least citizen power while the highest rung, 'citizen control' represents total citizen control over decision making. Arnstein's model can also be applied in heritage conservation with modifications to understand the different levels of public participation. The level of public participation in conservation also increases when the ladder rises up, so as the degree of its influence over decision-making (Chan & Bhatta, 2013; Chan, 2016).

It is apparent that greater degree of real participation is always necessary rather than merely a consultation. The power holders generally play a greater role in public participation. The distribution of power to general public and empowering them for decision making is essential. Public can play stronger role by making strong civil society and it can make political and policy changes through their political participation (Bhatta, 2008). Huntington and Nelson (1976) stressed that participation can be best achieved through open, visible and credible decision making process to which general public has access. Community participation is essential in every type of decision making from national level policy making to project level planning including conservation of cultural heritage. It is a key to building an empowered community and thereby critical to success of local communities and heritage conservation projects.

Community Participation and Heritage Conservation

As urban conservation is integral to the development of local community; inclusive participation of local people helps to provide best solutions to the problems (Bhatta, 2008). Community participation gives the feeling of ownership and provides opportunities to residents and others to actively involve in decision making of heritage conservation. Community feedback also helps to provide the evaluation of the proposed project and alternatives so that best decision about heritage conservation can be done (Imon, 2006; Bhatta, 2009; Chan and Bhatta, 2013). The ICOMOS Charter on the conservation of historic towns and urban areas pointed out that the participation and active involvement of residents is essential for the success of conservation programme and therefore should be encouraged. (ICOMOS, 1987). According to Kerr (2000) public participation in cultural heritage management can resolve issues like conflicts over legal, social and economic factors about which the public may have different views.

Since all the activities of conservation directly impact the local community, their participation in decision making shape their future life and path of development (Bhatta, 2009). In urban conservation, the real participation is needed in policy level, planning level and project level activities. It should be the integral part of urban conservation and management. It can be argued that public participation can be instrumental in establishing the cultural significance of a place and developing conservation objectives to retain its significance (Bhatta, 2008).

Community engagement in the process of heritage conservation may lead to capacity building of community and their concerns are prominently addressed in the development process. It will foster the sense of belonging and strengthens the social networks among the communities (Bhatta, 2008). The bottom-up approach i.e. putting the local community at first has to be the basic principle for the sustainable urban conservation and development.

Community Participation in Heritage Conservation for Sustainable Development

The community participation in heritage conservation provides local community opportunities to identify their problems, plan, implement and monitor the conservation projects and management of the entire historic towns. This process provides the community a feeling of ownership, more inclusive approach and maximum satisfaction and thus contributes significantly towards sustainability (Bhatta, 2008; Chan and Bhatta, 2013). Similarly, a sustainable tourism plan would be successful only when the local communities are involved in planning process and not only the state but the local community too is benefited economically, socially and environmentally (Chan and Bhatta, 2013). In the historic towns of developing countries like Nepal where most of the built heritages and land plots are privately owned, when attempt to conservation, conflicts may arise due to willingness to return maximum benefits from their development. In

this situation, community participation may provide opportunity to raise public views and solve the conflicts through consensus thereby achieve best solutions (Bhatta, 2008). Hence, the participation in policy level, planning level and project level for heritage conservation and partnership among community sector, public sector and private sector will promote sustainable community development in the historic towns.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts case study as an approach to investigate the context of community participation and its role in promoting heritage conservation with specific reference to historic town of Thimi in Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. The literatures on the concept of heritage conservation and community participation and their relationship were reviewed extensively. The policies and plans on urban development and conservation in Thimi were also reviewed to examine the context of community participation. In addition, participant observation, informal interview with local residents, semi-structured interviews with key informants (n=11), and structured questionnaire survey with households (n=74) was conducted in 2021. To know the current situation of cultural heritage resources, local arts and crafts and socio-economic conditions of Thimi, household survey in two major areas, one at the Chapacho which belongs to community of Prajapatis (potters), and another at the Balkumari which belongs to community of Shresthas (traders), were carried out. Each residential square of the Chapacho and Balkumari was assumed as one stratum and from each stratum the stratified random sampling was performed. Altogether 74 households of the study area were surveyed. Key informants representing the government institutions, professional experts, local intellectuals, community organizations and political parties were conducted to understand the nature of problems and issues related to the topic. The primary data were collected through site

survey, household surveys and semi-structured surveys while the secondary data were collected from different reports, earlier research, books, journals, maps and photographs available from libraries, desktop research and Madhyapur Thimi Municipality Office. To have a better knowledge of the community participation in heritage conservation and development in the historic context of developing countries, a successful case of “Bhaktapur Development Project” was also reviewed with reference to community participation and conservation policies, strategies and implementation mechanism. It was carried out through the analysis of secondary sources of data such as from books, reports, journals, maps, photographs and earlier research available from libraries in Nepal, Bhaktapur Municipality Office and desktop research.

Study Area: Thimi

The historic town Thimi, also known as a ‘Pottery Town’, is one of the 31 settlements of Kathmandu valley with their history going back to medieval times, and periods further back (Pant; 2002). One of the inscriptions dated 484 AD in shivalinga mentions the Place Themring gram which is now believed to be the Thimi (Pant, 2002, p.15). Located at the east of river Manohara, a tributary to Bagmati, Thimi is at a distance of 8 km east from the present capital city–Kathmandu and 4 km west from Bhaktapur, the medieval capital city of Nepal. It is traditionally known as Madhyapura, probably because of its central location in the Kathmandu valley. The historic town Thimi with its neighboring small traditional towns; Bode and Nagadesa were incorporated in Madhyapur Thimi Municipality (MTM) in 1996. The town Thimi is at an elevation of 30 meters from the lower valley floor with total land area of 240.79 hectares which is 21% of the total area of MTM. It is linear in shape, elongated towards north-south, divided into two parts by central spinal road and bounded by Arniko highway at the southern part and Kathmandu-Bhaktapur road at the northern part.

After the conquest of Bhaktapur at 1768 by Gorkha King and shifting of capital to the Kathmandu, Bhaktapur along with Thimi remained in a setback in every type of activity and undergone a stage of stagnation (Jayana, 2007). It was only after the introduction of Purano Thimi- Bhaktapur road at the northern edge in 1853 and introduction of vehicular movement after 1940 and Arniko highway at the southern edge in 1973, Thimi experienced rapid urban growth and dynamism (Bhatta, 2016). The total population in the municipality now is 119,955 and it is urbanizing with an increase in 3.4% of population (CBS, 2022). Thimi is predominantly a Newar town (Jayana, 2007). In *Newar* towns, each inhabitant of the town becomes the member of a number of community associations such as Guthis (Bhatta, 2008). Thimi is made up of 14 different maximal communities (Pant, 2002); all these communities have traditional occupation, rituals and functional services to render to the town communities. *Shresthas* are merchant by occupation while *Prajapatis* are potters and *Manandhars* are oil manufacturer and so on. These maximal communities of *Newars* are further subdivided into communities according to the traditional division in their respective occupation, and ancestral lineage (Pant, 2002; Bhatta, 2009). The distribution pattern of these communities in Thimi has provided the distinctive urban space. The distinct urban characters and unique urban form of Old Thimi are the result of their socio-cultural and religious practices prevailing in each community. The communal activities, religious and cultural functions have taken the special pattern of urban built form with artistically decorated monuments, temples, stupa, rest houses, and other structures (Bhatta, 2008).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings revealed that the historic identity, urban characteristics, and heritage of Thimi are deteriorating day by day. Based on the author's continuous involvement in the research of Thimi since 2006, and the in-depth

study conducted in 2021 through site visits, key informant's interview and household surveys, the key issues of heritage deterioration in Thimi are summarised as (i) Changes in community life style; (ii) increasing migration and impacts on urban core; (iii) lack of funding for conservation; (iv) change in modes of movement; (v) conversion of use of heritage buildings; (vi) lack of heritage inventory and regular maintenance; (vii) lack of tourism development; (viii) rapid urban expansion; (ix) and weak participation of local residents.

The expansion of Thimi follows haphazard way and the new development around historic Thimi shows mixed land uses such as commercial, institutional, industrial, residential and other uses. With increasing land and rental value, fragmentation of vacant land is rapid converting it into small commercial plots. The unplanned development has broken the continuity of spirit of historic characters and traditional identity of Thimi (Bhatta & Chan 2016). The spinal road of historic Thimi has also experienced rapid commercial development. There is change in use of buildings from residential to commercial and institutional bringing transformation in their traditional architecture and appearance. The survey results from the historic core area demonstrated that 38% of buildings are modified and newly designed, whereas 22% of them are constructed by demolishing traditional buildings, 8% are constructed in vacant land and 8% buildings have changed their façade. Similarly, pedestrianized historic Thimi is now added with vehicular movement; community open spaces (social space for community activities) are now frequently used by vehicles, and wide lanes and squares of Chapacho area used for the pottery workshop and socio-cultural activities are now disturbed by vehicular movement. It has brought congestion in urban space, loss in socio-cultural activities, and deterioration of cultural heritage.

It is found that there is an increasing tendency of changing traditional occupation to trade, commerce and services. The *Prajapatis* who are traditionally the potters are now competing

with the traders such as *Shresthas* and others in transportation sector, trade and commerce. Out of 44 households of *Prajapatis* in *Chapacho* area, 18 households (40.9%) replied that they are not satisfied with their traditional occupation of pottery, and majority of them are interested to change their profession because of lack of proper market, return and scarcity of clay. In addition, no one of the respondents is interested to involve their children adopting pottery as their profession. The production of mask and handicrafts are also disappearing albeit local people have excellent skills and knowledge in craft production. With change in life style, traditional socio-cultural activities and celebrations are also limited to certain festivals.

Another crucial issue observed from the field stud is the increasing migration of local people from historic core to the near-by area specifically for better opportunities. One of the key informants, senior architect and urban planner from Thimi mentioned that migration is due to different push factors in historic core such as inadequacy of space, property division, uncomfortable old house, lack of financial source to renovate the buildings, and pull factor such as better economic opportunities and more infrastructure facilities at new area. He further added that majority of residents at the southern part of Thimi (Shankhadhar Chowk) are actually migrated from historic core. It seems that heritage buildings specifically the traditional residential buildings have been abandoned by people instead of their reuse and renovation. The local government often fails to implement conservation projects specifically with lack of funding. About 65% of total respondents replied that municipality is responsible for conservation of cultural heritage, and 60 % replied that funding for conservation should be managed by central government, the municipality, and community itself. Another crucial issue of heritage conservation is the impacts of devastating earthquake of 2015; more than 1000 buildings including traditional buildings, temples and historic objects were damaged and destroyed.

Integrated Heritage Conservation in Thimi

Cultural heritage conservation is often viewed as necessary activity to promote sustainability in the historic towns. It plays a prominent role in urban policies by offering several new opportunities for socio-economic development (Bhatta and Chan, 2016). Heritage allows us to recognize the identity, the peculiarity and plurality of a society, identifying and satisfying basic ethical needs of a community, local distinctiveness and tradition (Bizzaro and Nijkamp, 1996). It suggests that conservation of historic urban centers is extremely important in the promotion of sustainable development. Conservation process thus aims to ensure continuity of unique qualities of historic urban centers, and enriches lives of present and future generations (Bhatta and Chan, 2016).

Integrated conservation provides many benefits to local community by strengthening local economy and improving built environment. The primary benefits of integrated heritage conservation include net job creation, income effects for producers and suppliers, charges paid (cultural tourism expenditures, grants, and donations) and that of secondary benefits include simulation of private investments, improved aesthetic of the area, increase in art and craft employment, socio-economic stabilization of neighborhoods, potential magnet effects for high quality development, and attraction of high wage labor market segment (Hendon, 1991 cited in Bizzaro and Nijkamp, 1996). This interpretation fits perfectly in the notion of sustainability, referring to our responsibility to preserve cultural heritage for future generations (Bizzaro & Nijkamp, 1996). Emphasizing on cultural heritage conservation for development of local people, Bhatta (2008) and Bhatta and Chan (2016) stressed that integrated heritage conservation or area-based revitalization aims to preserve cultural heritage for present and future generations and revitalize the whole town, which is extremely essential to promote sustainable community development.

Historic town of Thimi encompasses significant heritage resources that have fashioned its unique

urban characters and identity. The entire urban fabric had supported a cohesive community with strong social networks having strong community feeling, functional neighborhoods and a unique socio-spatial hierarchy (Jayana, 2007; Bhatta, 2008; Bhatta & Chan, 2016). Its heritage resources and identity are however constantly destructing along with the degrading socio-economic conditions and quality of life of local people. This situation suggests for immediate need of integrated conservation which would address needs of local people and conserve heritage resources. It aims to foster the preservation of heritage and identity, protects cultural continuity and sense of place and improves quality of life (Bhatta and Chan, 2016).

Community Participation in Cultural Heritage Conservation in Thimi

Genuine participation of communities keeps the public fully informed about the status and progress of plans and programs, policy formulation and evaluation process. It actively solicits public views, their perceptions and needs regarding the resource use, development and management strategies (Bhatta and Chan, 2016). Community participation is considered one of the major factors to promote sustainable development in the historic towns; views of local people, the prime beneficiaries, are important and should be incorporated in the process of heritage conservation (Bhatta, 2008). Since, the participation provides local people opportunities to define their needs and raise voices, many problems such as conflicts in the distribution of resources and project prioritization, arising during heritage conservation in Thimi could be easily resolved (Bhatta, 2008; Bhatta & Chan, 2016). In the context of Nepal, both the central and local governments have identified community participation as one of the major objectives in some of their plans and policies, but it has not been fully adopted in practice. Out of 74 respondents, 95% replied that they are not satisfied with the existing policies and programs of Madhyapur Thimi Municipality. In addition, the main objectives of the Local

Government Operation Act (LGOA) 2017 is the decentralization strategy to promote public participation in the development works, however, there is a yet lack of clear framework and guidelines about the forms and degree of participation required in local development and planning process. Additionally, there is no any statutory provision if participation is not ensured by the local government.

There is need of comprehensive legislations, which would ensure public engagement in the planning process of Thimi. The local government has the right to draft and enact local laws, regulations, guidelines, procedures and standards, whereby participation of local communities can be ensured. The Municipal Assembly includes members representing women, and disadvantaged community. A kind of participation in the form of representation of community members is observed, however the personal aspirations and political background of each member greatly affect their decisions in most of the cases which may not be suitable to the other members of the community. Local people often criticized them for being too unfair towards minorities. Local people including minorities should be consulted through different means such as public consultation meetings, exhibitions and door to door consultations to ensure genuine participation in heritage conservation (Bhatta, 2008).

The Madhyapur Thimi Conservation and Development (MTCD) Plan 1999, the Integrated Action Plan 2000 and recent planning interventions by the municipality are the major planning attempts; however they have not fully addressed the public views and their genuine needs in the planning process. With lack of support from public and deficiencies in the institutional capacity, these plans have not been implemented successfully (Bhatta, 2008). Moreover, the Ancient Monument Preservation Act and Guthi Corporation Act are the central statutory means of heritage conservation and development control, but they do not also identify the importance of public participation in heritage conservation (Bhatta, 2008, Bhatta

and Chan, 2016). Even the bye laws on the Traditional Residential Zone of Thimi have failed to understand the needs of the local people. The legislations have focused the sectoral approach i.e. piecemeal approach of conservation and their intention is seen towards freezing change rather than managing change (Bhatta, 2008). One of the women key informants commented that:

“Inclusive participation of local people including women and poor people is crucial for the holistic development of the community; however the Madhyapaur Thimi Municipality has not paid much attention to involve Women, Dalits and disadvantaged people in the planning and policy making process. It is because of the prevailing patriarchal mind set of policy makers, as well as lack of practical knowledge on how to adopt tools and conduct effective process of inclusive participation”.

These arguments are also strongly supported by the household’s survey and discussion with residents. Majority of the respondents (95%) replied that they are not satisfied with the municipal policies, plans and programs. They replied that the bye laws are too restrictive and

municipality is not transparent and proactive in the development and conservation works. It suggests that community participation in urban conservation of Thimi is minimal.

Bhatta (2008) argued that there is need of comprehensive statutory mechanism and strong political commitment that would encourage active participation of communities. The genuine development needs of the local people will be fulfilled if the public views are strongly addressed in the policies, plans and programs of urban conservation and development. Community participation is therefore essential in (i) understanding of the heritage significance i.e. during identification of heritage values and preparing heritage inventory; (ii) developing objectives to retain significant values; and (iii) management to achieve the objectives i.e. in the project implementation, monitoring and reviewing process (Imon, 2006, Bhatta, 2008). Community participation can range from simply informing the public about plans, to engaging in more consultative practices such as getting input and feedbacks from various groups, and to empowering key community stakeholders in the decision-making process.

Table 1: Summary of Conservation Approach and Public Participation in the Plans and Policies of Thimi

Plans/Policies	Approach of Conservation	Community Participation
Ancient Monument Preservation Act 1956	Individual building –based	Not mentioned
Guthi Corporation Act 1964	Individual building –based	Not mentioned
Municipal Bye Laws (2000)	Individual building- based	Not mentioned
Madhyapur Thimi Conservation and Development (MTCD) Plan 1999	Area-based revitalization	Conducted consultation with community organizations
Integrated Action Plan (IAP) 2000	Area-based revitalization	Not mentioned
Local Administration(LA) Act 1971	Not mentioned	Not mentioned
Local Government Operation Act (LGOA) 2017	Empowered local government to draft and enact local laws, regulations, guidelines, procedures and standards on urban development and conservation	Community Participation

Glasson (1999) stressed that public consultation with multi-stakeholders helps to ensure the quality, comprehensiveness and effectiveness of the planning and also aids in establishing the credibility of the planning process. Bhatta (2008) highlighted that genuine participation of local community in fact encourages them to raise their genuine needs which can motivate the municipality to protect social capital, sense of place and promote community well-being. The degree of citizen control i.e. partnership, delegated power and citizen control as advocated by the Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation can be considered as an effective approach of participation in the process of heritage conservation in Thimi. Similar to the case of Bhaktapur Development Project (BDP), formation of Local Development Committees (LDCs) and Community Development Units (CDUs) will also have effective role to engage public in the conservation process in Thimi (Bhatta, 2018). Traditional social networks and community organizations such as private Guthis could play proactive role to facilitate community participation. These organizations could mediate and support the local community during preparation and decision making of conservation and development plans (Bhatta, 2008).

CONCLUSION

There is no definite mantra for a participatory process and in many cases, the processes and results of such participatory processes have not been so efficient (Chapagain, 2012). Genuine participation of local residents including women and marginalized groups is crucial to make the planning and conservation projects successful. The historic town of Thimi is facing rapid deterioration of heritage resources because of multiple factors including rapid urban expansion and migration of local people to periphery from urban core, introduction of vehicular movement in the historic core (change in modes

of movement), lack of heritage inventory and maintenance, change in community life style, conversion of use of traditional buildings, lack of tourism development, lack of funding for conservation and above all lack of inclusive participation of local communities in the conservation and development of Thimi. This study suggests urgent need of integrated approach to heritage conservation and inclusive community participation in the planning of Thimi. It recommends effective integration and coordination between the top decision making body and the community organizations to be implemented to encourage local people for active participation. This can help to success the process of urban conservation which is also essential to promote tourism activities in the historic towns. Moreover, public participation helps to plan and manage heritage resources for tourism development in a sustainable manner (Bhatta,2008). Thus, the proposed integrated conservation plan has to address conservation, tourism and development needs of local people through broader public consultation and participation. The Madhyapur Thimi Municipality should play proactive role to provide full support to the local organizations and the organizations need to be active and should work closely with local people.

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