

Linking Tangible and Intangible Heritage: A Case Study form Yenya Punhi Festival of Kathmandu

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Abstract

Today, the world's heritage is at risk not only because of natural processes of decay and destruction but also from social change as manifest in urbanization, globalization and cultural homogenization. With these emerging problems, the heritage conservation discourse has also reached a new dimension by including a broader range of concepts such as tangible heritage, intangible heritage, community participation, indigenous knowledge and many others. Although the scenario has changed in the international context, Nepal's heritage conservation still focuses on monuments, sites and buildings. In addition to that, the conservation practices are still carried out in a top-down approach and community involvement is for now limited to plans. While numerous intangible heritage expressions – like masked dances, chariot processions, festivals and rituals – form an integral part of people's daily social life and are still practiced and managed by the community, no serious attention has been paid to them from the government. In the Kathmandu Valley, these heritages have been maintained by the traditional social association of people known as “Guthi” whose continuous activity can be traced back to the 5th century. Many expressions of tangible and intangible heritage have survived for centuries because of this unique form of community association. Among the numerous festivals of the Kathmandu Valley, the Yenya Punhi festival was chosen as case study for this work, since it is also a major festival in the city of Kathmandu. As it is celebrated in the largest and most urbanized city of Nepal, which is facing the challenges of all modern cities with regard to social change and urbanization, the festival is the perfect example for this study. Despite modern challenges, the Guthi in the Kathmandu Valley still play a major role in heritage conservation. More recently, though, some interventions of the various formal institutions have been registered. So this study focuses, on the one hand, on the management, continuity and other related problems of the festival, and on the other on Nepal's position in terms of intangible heritage conservation. The problems of Kathmandu and the Yenya Punhi festival are the problems of every country in a similar situation, which means that this case study can also serve as an example of how to find solutions for similar problems not only at other festivals within Nepal but also elsewhere in the world.