

ICOA993: COMMUNITY ACTIVISM IN THE POST DISASTER RECOVERY OF CULTURAL ICONS IN CHRISTCHURCH AND KATHMANDU

Subtheme 02: The Role of Cultural Heritage in Building Peace and Reconciliation

Session 3: Recreating Ideas of Memory

Location: Silver Oak Hall 1, India Habitat Centre

Time: December 14, 2017, 09:10 – 09:25

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Abstract: This paper will explore the concepts of democracy and community activism, and their application to recovery of cultural heritage in the post disaster context. It will examine how the community uses democratic and other processes to ensure salvage, reconstruction and recovery of cultural heritage in the earthquake affected cities of Christchurch (New Zealand) and Kathmandu (Nepal).

The paper will compare and contrast the different National approaches to cultural heritage protection and concepts of risk. It will also consider the different attitudes towards the value of cultural heritage as a contributor to: the community's social, spiritual and psychological well being; its sense of identity and place; and the city's future in the post disaster scenario. In the cases of both Christchurch and Kathmandu, local community members have banded together to seek particular forms of recovery and reconstruction for each of their city's most iconic monuments, Christ Church Cathedral and Kasthamandap. The paper will outline each community's concerns and their efforts: in one case to save a place of immense historic, aesthetic, spiritual and social significance from demolition; and in the other, to ensure that the lost structure is reconstructed fully in accordance with customary practice, following the traditional approach of cyclical renewal and reinstating the critical elements salvaged from the rubble. Reuniting the community through revitalization of seasonal maintenance festivals and reestablishment of the local community-based management system is seen as essential to the place's sustainability into the future.

The paper will illustrate the importance of iconic places to community identity and their sense of place, and the importance of community action in achieving the recovery of significant heritage places that are at extreme risk. In the process, if the community is successful, it can achieve some healing, but if not, the sense of loss, disconnection and disenfranchisement could be immeasurable.

Key words: *community rights, community participation, identity, healing, recovery*

Introduction

The role of cultural heritage in building peace and reconciliation is not a commonly discussed theme in the post disaster context. However, as the two case studies presented here reveal, the failure of government and property owners to adequately address community concerns, and their need for inclusion in the recovery of their cultural heritage in disaster affected cities, can lead to significant conflict that seriously hampers recovery, not only of the cities and the particular site under dispute, but also of the communities themselves and their sense of identity.

Christ Church Anglican Cathedral (located in Christchurch, New Zealand) and Kasthamandap (located in Kathmandu, Nepal) have both suffered severe earthquake damage in recent years resulting in their partial or complete collapse. Although the cultural, socio-economic and political contexts of the two case studies are very different, as are the post disaster recovery scenarios, in each case the local community has actively stood up to claim its right to the recovery of its heritage. In both cases, the property owners and duty bearers failed to recognize the importance of these sites as cultural icons that are intimately entwined with the identity of the two cities and their communities. As a result, they have been reluctant to listen to the communities or allow them to be active contributors to or participants in their recovery.

Methodology

This study is based on a review of the websites and social media (Facebook) pages of the community groups involved in the campaigns to save these two sites (*Rebuild Christchurch Cathedral* and *Rebuild Kasthamandap*), news items (newspaper articles and videos) and discussions with local community members, government representatives and other stakeholders and interested parties. The author visited Christ Church Cathedral in September 2016 whilst undertaking a review of the post earthquake recovery of Christchurch's built heritage (Forbes, 2017a), and visited Kasthamandap in 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017, whilst on informal visits and formal mission trips to review the post earthquake recovery of the World Heritage Property of the Kathmandu Valley (Jing et al., 2017).

Christ Church Anglican Cathedral, Christchurch, New Zealand

Earthquake Impact and Loss

Christ Church Cathedral is located at the heart of Christchurch and its tower and spire was the centre piece of the city and its most iconic landmark. The building, designed by George Gilbert Scott, one of Britain's most significant nineteenth century architects, was regarded as the jewel in the crown of Christchurch's collection of Neo-Gothic buildings that gave the city its distinctive character (Christchurch Dilemas, 2017). The city had grown up around the cathedral and was named after it. Located on the city's principal square, the building had, throughout its history, been the scene of many important civic celebrations, festivals, farewells and home comings (Forbes, 2017c:6). It was presented as the face of Christchurch on tourism brochures and it featured as the emblem of the city on letterheads and logos, including those of the city council. Thus it was integral to the city's identity.

In a series of earthquakes between September 2010 and June 2012, the spire, tower, porch and principal façade of the building collapsed. Since then, the building has been deconsecrated and left standing open and exposed to the weather awaiting its fate. The loss to the city has been immense. The building now stands in a square surrounded by empty spaces, in a city centre that has, as a consequence of the earthquakes and subsequent government approved demolitions, lost 49% of its listed heritage buildings and streetscapes (Forbes, 2017b:5).



Fig.1– Christ Church Cathedral as it stood in September 2016, showing the collapse of its tower, spire, porch and western façade (Forbes, 2016).

Duties and Rights

The cathedral was originally conceived and built by the citizens of Christchurch between 1864 and 1904. In 2007, it was repaired and seismically upgraded, again with funds donated by the community and the city council (Restore Christchurch Cathedral, 2017). In the wake of the earthquakes, however, the Anglican Church, as the legal property owner, considered the extent of damage and cost of repair too great. Under the headship of its newly arrived Canadian bishop, the Anglican Church decided to demolish the building and replace it with a modern structure better suited to current congregational needs and contemporary forms of worship. In its role as pastoral care giver, the church claimed that the additional funds would be better spent on providing for the needs of suffering families (Christchurch Dilemmas, 2017).

Although the cathedral was a category 1 listed heritage building, the Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Act, passed by the New Zealand Government in the wake of the February 2011 earthquake, suspended all heritage legislation and permitted the demolition of heritage buildings that would in normal circumstances be protected (Forbes, 2017a:5). Although the church had a legal right to demolish the building (supported by the courts), the community claimed that the cathedral belonged to the people of Christchurch and not just the Anglican Church (Restore Christchurch Cathedral, 2017). Thus, they claimed their right to save their cultural heritage and identity. Under the Act, Christchurch City Council, which comprised the

democratically elected local community representatives, had no power to enforce protection of the heritage building as it would in normal circumstances (Forbes, 2017a:5).

In its arguments and in line with its principal mission, the church elevated spiritual values, considered eternal, well above the physical attributes of the place, regarded as ephemeral. Thus it separated the intangible from the tangible. But for the local Christchurch community, it was the tangible attribute of the building itself that was most important. The cathedral was considered to be the heart of the city and without it the city could not recover physically, economically or emotionally.

Battle for the Cathedral

Even whilst the cathedral was isolated within the Red no-go zone of the city, which lasted two years, the local community campaigned to save the building. Obtaining the support and technical assistance of heritage professionals and engineers, the 'Save our Cathedral' group conducted protests and media campaigns to raise public awareness, secure public support for their advocacy campaign and funding to pursue their goals through the courts—firstly to prevent demolition of the building and secondly to force its reconstruction in its historic form.

Christchurch City Council, aware of the community's pain and the need for the city to retain its heart and identity, installed historic photographs and commemorative signage around the site and commissioned artworks, such as the Planted Whare at the entrance to the site, designed to celebrate life in the face of loss (Forbes, 2017b:16). The council also appointed an independent mediator to mediate the rising conflict between the community and the church (Rebuild Christchurch Cathedral website, 2017).

In September this year, after a seven year battle, the Anglican Church Synod finally voted to accept the financial assistance offered by the New Zealand government, the Christchurch City Council and the local community and agreed to repair the cathedral and rebuild its spire (NZ Herald, 2017).

Kasthamandap, Kathmandu, Nepal

Earthquake Impact and Loss

In April 2015, Kasthamandap, located in Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Square in the heart of Kathmandu, collapsed killing several people. In the rush to rescue survivors and retrieve the dead, heavy machinery was used to remove the debris, severely damaging the structure's surviving brick base in the process (Jing et al., 2017:24). Although many of the key structural and carved timber elements were salvaged, many others were lost among the debris, which was dumped and mixed with other earthquake debris on the field of Tudikhel (Rebuild Kasthamandap Facebook, 2017).

Kasthamandap was only one of many significant structures that collapsed within the World Heritage property, but it was unique as it was the largest and oldest satta in Kathmandu. It was a much loved community building that functioned as a community rest house for travellers and community facility and meeting hall for the people of central Kathmandu. It also contained several shrines that were in daily use. As one of the oldest structures in the city, the city of Kathmandu had grown around it and had been named after it. Reputed to have been built from the trunk of a single tree, it featured in travel brochures, advertising and business logos (Forbes, 2017b:6). Like Christ Church Cathedral, Kasthamandap was a cultural icon that was integral to the identity of the local community and its collapse brought a great deal

of distress to the people of Kathmandu.



Fig.2– Local Kathmandu residents making offerings at the shrines in Kasthamandap prior to its collapse. The large central posts are reputed to have been cut from a single tree (Forbes, 2014).

Duties and Rights

Kasthamandap, which dates from the seventh century (Coningham et al., 2015; Jing et al, 2017:23) had been built, used, managed and maintained by the local community for fourteen centuries. It was only in the 1970s, when all such monuments were nationalized, that the community was relieved of its responsibility for the site's ongoing care, with this duty passing to the government and the centralized Guthi Sansthan. In the wake of the earthquakes, the Government of Nepal delegated authority for reconstruction of Kasthamandap to the Kathmandu Metropolitan City Council (KMC), with general oversight remaining with the Department of Archaeology, which has overall responsibility for all Nepal's cultural heritage (Jing et al, 2017:24).

As the level of destruction on the site was so great, the government proposed a new substantially Kasthamandap to be built using modern materials and techniques, including the introduction of concrete piles down through the surviving historic masonry base of the structure. In addition, in line with government policy, procurement of contractors is to be undertaken through an open tender system that does not require the contractor to have any expertise in heritage conservation (Jing et al., 2017:20, 24, 26).

The local community claims that the government is not fulfilling its duty of care to the place. The community also claims that historically this duty belongs to the community and that the community has a right to be active participants in Kasthamandap's recovery and reconstruction (Rebuild Kasthamandap Website, 2017). The community wants to reconstruct the building to its original design and detail, using traditional materials and techniques, incorporating all its surviving elements and ensuring that all the necessary rituals are undertaken throughout the reconstruction process. They also propose to establish a

modern guthi to care for and manage the site into the future, ensuring that both its significant tangible and intangible heritage attributes are maintained (Jing et al, 2017:24-25; Rebuild Kasthamandap Website, 2017).

Battle for Kasthamandap

Observing the destruction of other heritage sites by inexperienced contractors, the local community has risen up to protect their most precious site and ensure that no more damage is inflicted (Rebuild Kasthamandap Facebook, 2017). Through talking to local people and social media, the 'Rebuild Kasthamandap' team has invited the community to participate in festivals and traditional ceremonies at the site, community storytelling, public lectures by heritage experts (on history, traditional architecture, iconography, etc), walking tours, site clean ups and monitoring of the debris. Many young professionals, supported by more experienced ones, have undertaken historical research, sorted and inventoried the salvaged materials, constructed a protective cover over the site and prepared documentation for reconstruction. The campaign has engaged with and reconnected the community through the surviving intangible attributes of the place, and thus worked towards facilitating the rebuilding of the tangible structure.

Community leaders have lobbied government both local and national, to allow the community to take responsibility for the site's recovery (Rebuild Kasthamandap Facebook, 2017). On May 12, 2017, two years after the earthquakes, the community signed an agreement with the National Reconstruction Authority, Department of Archaeology and K. M. C. that they believed would allow them to do this. However, the road to recovery has not been smooth. It seems that the government authorities interpret the agreement as an acknowledgement of the community's rights to be consulted as stakeholders, but no more. They have been reluctant to relinquish control of the project and are continuing with the standard government procurement process; even though communities lead projects may be exempt from this process (Rebuild Kasthamandap Facebook, 2017:19/8/2017). Hence, the battle continues.

Discussion and Conclusion

It is acknowledged that the role of government in the post disaster context is to facilitate a speedy and effective recovery for the affected community. Unfortunately, cultural heritage and identity do not often feature as a high priority, as they sit well behind human safety, public infrastructure, housing, health, education, livelihoods and the economy.

In addition, as evident in the New Zealand case, those with the authority to make decisions regarding the recovery culturally significant places do not necessarily have any cultural attachment to those places. In the case of Christchurch, the national government based in Wellington and the Canadian Bishop of Christchurch failed to fully appreciate the importance of the city's built heritage, including its Cathedral, to the identity of the city and its community.

In seeking a speedy recovery, community participation can often be seen by the parties with the dominant rights, generally Government and property owners, as a time-consuming obstacle to efficiency, especially where community engagement involves negotiating different and often conflicting priorities. Consequently, governments and other primary stakeholders prefer to use 'consultation' to inform communities of decisions already made, rather than include them in the decision making process. This is particularly evident where the built object (repaired, reconstructed or replaced) is the focus of the

recovery. This approach fails to understand that recovery is a process that can bring community healing. In the case of Kasthamandap, the community campaign to rebuild the monument has actively engaged the community. It has brought people of all ages together and through its activities of working and sharing together for a common cause, that of reclaiming their heritage, it has strengthened their identity as a people. If the campaign succeeds, it is hoped that the community will be stronger for it, but if it fails, it is likely that the sense of disenfranchisement and loss to be immense.

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ICOA993: ACTION DES COMMUNAUTÉS DANS LA RECONSTRUCTION POST CATASTROPHE DES ICÔNES CULTURELLES À CHRISTCHURCH ET À KATHMANDU

Sous-thème 02: Le rôle du patrimoine culturel dans la construction de la paix et de la réconciliation

Session 3: Recréer des idées de mémoire

Lieu: Silver Oak Hall 1, India Habitat Centre

Date et heure: 14 Décembre, 2017, 09:10 – 09:25

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Catherine Forbes est architecte, australienne, spécialisée dans le patrimoine, elle mène des expertises dans le cadre de certaines études (anthropologie, université de Sidney), gestion des risques de catastrophes du patrimoine culturel (UNESCO ITC, R -DMUCH, Kyoto) et action humanitaire (croix rouge australienne). Catherine a été engagée dans la reconstruction post catastrophe en Australie, au Laos et aux îles Salomon, et a récemment entrepris l'analyse de la reconstruction consécutive aux tremblements de terre à Christchurch et à Katmandou.

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Résumé: Cette étude explorera les concepts de démocratie, d'action des communautés et leur mise en œuvre dans la reconstruction d'un patrimoine culturel dans un contexte post-catastrophe. Il examinera la manière dont les communautés utilisent le processus démocratique et d'autres procédés pour permettre le sauvetage, la reconstruction et la réhabilitation de patrimoine culturel dans les villes de Christchurch (Nouvelle-Zélande) et Katmandou (Népal) à la suite de tremblements de terre.

Cette étude comparera et montrera le contraste entre les différentes approches nationales de la protection du patrimoine et de la conception du risque. Elle prendra également en compte les différentes attitudes à l'encontre des valeurs du patrimoine culturel comme contributeur au bien être social, spirituel et psychologique des communautés, son sens de l'identité et sa place ainsi que l'avenir de la ville dans le cadre d'un scénario post catastrophe. A la fois dans les cas de Christchurch et de Katmandou les communautés locales ont été associées à la recherche de solutions particulières pour la réhabilitation de leur patrimoine iconique, la cathédrale de Christchurch et le temple de Kasthamandap. L'étude mettra en exergue les sujets de préoccupation de chaque communauté et ses efforts : dans un cas pour sauver de la démolition un lieu d'une signification historique, esthétique, spirituelle et sociale immense et de l'autre pour s'assurer que la structure disparue soit reconstruite conformément à ses pratiques habituelles, suivant une approche traditionnelle de renouveau réintroduisant certains éléments sauvés des décombres. Réunir la communauté à travers la revitalisation de festivals saisonniers et le rétablissement de la gestion par les communautés locales est considéré comme essentiel pour la durabilité dans l'avenir.

Cette étude illustrera l'importance des lieux iconiques pour les communautés qui s'y identifient et l'importance de l'action des communautés dans la réhabilitation de lieux patrimoniaux qui sont soumis à des risques extrêmes. Dans le processus, si la Communauté parvient à un succès cela peut permettre la « guérison » mais dans le cas contraire, le sentiment de perte, reconnexion et dépossession peut être immense.