The Spirit of Place of Bhaktapur, Nepal

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There is no clear approach to defining the authenticity of the 'spirit and feeling' of a place or how it could inform heritage conservation. I argue that the notion of spirit of place may be defined in a manner that directly links it with the concept of cultural significance of historic places, how it is understood by a community, and with heritage conservation goals and development needs of that place. Residents in the World Heritage Town of Bhaktapur, Nepal, were interviewed to explore their shared understanding of its spirit of place. The residents identify the spirit of place of Bhaktapur in terms of four interrelated place dimensions; that is, the 'sense of sacrality', the 'sense of community', the 'sense of historicity', and the 'sense of serenity'.

Keywords: spirit of place; sense of place; intangible heritage; authenticity; Bhaktapur

Introduction

The focus of cultural heritage conservation worldwide has been gradually shifting from a monument-centric vision to a broader understanding of heritage. This is reflected in a set of attributes now widely used to define the authenticity of cultural heritage, especially for World Heritage sites. These include: form and design; materials and substance; use and function; traditions, techniques and management systems; location and setting; language, and other forms of intangible heritage; spirit and feeling; and other internal and external factors (UNESCO 2013, 22). Some of these constructs have no specific or clear definitions. Articulating these criteria in relation to different kinds of heritage, the degree of their universality, and the nature of agency, evidence, and process in defining them have been constant points of contention.

The quest for the 'originality' or 'truth' about cultural heritage had led to defining the notion of authenticity as an objective and measurable attribute inherent in the material fabric of artefacts and monuments (Jones 2010). The initial parameters used in the World Heritage designation in its first three decades to test for authenticity thus included the physical dimensions of a heritage property, that is, design, materiality, artisanship, and setting, which had been understood as universally applicable (Jokilehto 2006). This materialist conception of heritage sites as original, static, and timeless had also been central to the creation of imagined homogeneous national and folk cultural identities (Handler 1986; Labadi 2013). As these parameters were primarily developed for self-contained historic sites and based on object-centric logic, translating these into complex, dynamic, and large-scale sites, such as inhabited historic towns, has proven difficult (Pendlebury, Short and While 2009). Contexts where symbolic aspects of historic sites are culturally more significant (Munjeri 2004; Byrne 2012; Chapagain 2013; Silva 2013b), and situations where the experiential/existential aspects of heritage is vital are equally problematic (Munjeri 2004; Reisinger and Steiner 2006; Steiner and Reisinger 2006). Critiques of this

materialist perspective, in contrast, frame authenticity as a quality that is culturally constructed, contextually variable, and observer dependent. Authenticity could thus be determined by the cultural values and multiplicity of attributes (UNESCO 1994); dynamically negotiated between heritage professionals with different forms of expertise (Jones and Yarrow 2013); and variably understood and constructed by different stakeholders within a community (Silva 2013a). Taking an extreme relativist position could also be unproductive. Believing that authentic values could be simply attributed to any heritage makes the idea of authenticity inconsequential in heritage management, as it negates the possible uniqueness of the history and materiality of heritage (Jones 2010). It also disregards the significance of experience of authenticity in people's social lives (Jones 2010). It could also mean, in an absolute relativist stance, that there are no universal standards and values to be agreed upon (Jokilehto 2006).

Consequently, extreme standpoint in either perspective is unhelpful. A multitude of factors come together to form the meaning of authenticity of a heritage site or object. The meanings of authenticity emerge through how it is experienced and negotiated in the networks of relationships among people, places, and objects (Jones 2010). As the nature of these multiple factors and networks of relationships transforms overtime, the meaning of authenticity needs to be constantly renegotiated and redefined.

Effectively transferring the nuances of these scholarly debates on authenticity to the operational level has been challenging (Stovel 2008; Labadi 2013). Stovel (2008) explains this superficial definition of authenticity on the limited understanding of the concept by those preparing nominations, insufficient analysis of the concept in relation to the sites nominated, and State Parties' use of outdated *Operational Guidelines* or of ignoring the available cues in the *Guidelines*. He identifies the continuing need to apply new authenticity standards to heritage sites holistically, rather than to fragments of sites as the best way forward. Such systematic, holistic, and integrative perspectives of heritage sites should provide for 'the big picture offered by a cultural-landscapes approach, for integrating tangible and intangible heritage, for linking the living and the spiritual to the physical, and finally (in the name of authenticity) for defining indicators that focus on the big picture rather than on fragments of that reality' (Stovel 2008, 16).

Inclusion of the principles of the *Nara Document on Authenticity* in the *World Heritage Operational Guidelines* in 2005 and the introduction of the *Convention for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage* in 2003 (UNESCO 1994, 2003, 2005) were meant to facilitate such holistic understandings of authenticity of heritage sites. Nevertheless, what is still lacking is an in-depth discussion on how forms of intangible heritage define a site's cultural significance and the actions that would safeguard such a nexus between its tangible and intangible heritage. Particularly problematic is the articulation of the intangible attribute of 'spirit and feeling' of a place. Some examples in this regard indicate that its definitions are cursory and not instrumental in establishing the significance of heritage places. For example, the constructs of 'spirit and feeling' for the Kathmandu Valley World Heritage sites are defined as the '*sensual* impact of the heritage property,….The visual environment linked to sound and smells reflects the sentiment of a place….This means controlling pollution – air, water, noise – and the change of the visual environment' (UNESCO Kathmandu Office 2007a, 7). This definition seems to fall into the materialist perspective of authenticity, neglecting the nascent understanding that authenticity emerges through the experience and negotiation of networks of relationships among people,

places, and objects. UNESCO *Guidelines* even suggest that 'attributes such as spirit and feeling do not lend themselves easily to practical applications of the conditions of authenticity' (UNESCO 2013, 22).

Consequently, my objective is to illustrate how the notion of the *spirit of place* could be articulated to clarify its contribution to the cultural significance of a historic place; its connection to a community's definition of heritage value; and its framing of heritage conservation and development goals in that place. I ground this inquiry in the historic town of Bhaktapur, Nepal.

The Concepts and Method of Study

Spirit of place could be defined as a unique experiential quality or character of a place that is exclusive to that place, and therefore, an essential part of its identity (Norberg-Schulz 1980; Garnham 1985). This distinct sense of locality gives 'meaning, value, emotion, and mystery to [the place and its experience]' (ICOMOS 2008, 2). In general, this phenomenon is about the cherished aspects of a place that have deeper meanings and emotional connotations to the inhabitants of the place; it evokes a sense of belonging and wellbeing among them; and its erosion could diminish their quality of life (Noberg-Schulz 1980; Garnham 1985; Jackson 1994). Spirit of place is evoked collectively by the tangible socio-physical attributes (such as buildings, landscapes, objects, observable activities and social characteristics, visual features, people, animals, and sensory information) of the place and the intangible/symbolic attributes (such as, memories, values, meanings, beliefs, and emotions) associated with the place (Garnham 1985; ICOMOS 2008; Silva 2013a). Therefore, on the one hand, the spirit of a place could be explained in terms of the significant socio-physical features and symbolic attributes of that place. On the other hand, it could also be conceptualised in terms of descriptive, qualitative attributes of the place. Those qualitative place attributes come together to evoke this place experience, and thus could be defined as 'core dimensions' of the spirit of place (Silva 2013a). The spirit of a place is not an immutable aspect of a place. As socio-physical and symbolic attributes of a place change over time, so does the spirit of the place. It is 'a continuously reconstructed process, … and…a place can have several spirits and be shared by different groups' (ICOMOS 2008, 3).

As Relph (2009) points out 'sense of place' and 'spirit of place' are closely connected although with a subtle difference: sense of place is our experience of the spirit of place in a particular location. I use 'sense of place', therefore, to discuss how the residents of Bhaktapur articulate their lived-experience of Bhaktapur's 'spirit of place'. Spirit of place is transmitted essentially by people, and transmission is a vital part of its conservation (ICOMOS 2008). Therefore, how the residents understand the spirit of Bhaktapur is critical to its conservation. In addition, I explore the residents' knowledge of the sacred meanings associated with Bhaktapur; spiritual values or sacred meanings associated with a place are considered a vital symbolic attribute of spirit of a place (Norberg-Schulz 1980; Jackson 1994).

During several visits to Bhaktapur between 2010 and 2012, I interviewed thirty of its residents who generally represent the age, gender, religious, social, educational, and geographical diversity of its population. Participants were native Bhaktapurians of its predominant Newāri ethnic group, between 20-70 years of age, and live in different neighbourhoods. Since Bhaktapur society still follows a caste system to some extent, four respondents representing a 'higher' caste and another

four representing a 'lower' caste were selected; others fell in between these two ends of the caste hierarchy of the Bhaktapur society. Altogether, sixteen male and fourteen female respondents were identified through a chain-referral selection method and interviewed (Schensul, Schensul and LeCompte 1999).[1]

Interviews were conducted in two phases. The first identified what the interviewees considered Bhaktapur's significant attributes and the second their views on its heritage management. The first phase involved a free-listing survey technique, considered a useful technique for isolating and defining elements in a cultural domain (Weller and Romney 1988; Borgatti 1999). Each participant listed thirty environmental features important to Bhaktapur's identity. Respondents could include items such as buildings, areas, streets, natural features, multi-sensory cues, and activities. The frequency of occurrence of all features were tallied and scaled for salience. Items recalled more frequently and/or first are assumed more salient to the identity of Bhaktapur than items recalled last and/or rarely. Interviewees were then asked to explain their reason for listing these features. Their responses indicate the tangible and intangible attributes that make those features more significant for Bhaktapur's identity. Participants were also asked to list five locations each in Bhaktapur that they liked most and least, along with the reasons and the relevant positive or negative attributes. Respondents also reflected on how they would describe Bhaktapur to a first time visitor, focusing on attributes that they thought are more pertinent to its identity. Aggregate analysis of the data from this first phase demonstrates that the interviewees are aware of Bhaktapur's heritage significance, have a strong attachment to the town, are able to define its sense of place, and describe the symbolic and religious dimensions and associated practices that they deem vital for its heritage. Respondents participated in semi-structured interviews in the second phase, which focused on their views of Bhaktapur's heritage management, development issues, socio-political situation, and intangible heritage as well as to clarify their responses from the first interview.

Additionally, I interviewed 15 respondents who had current or previous professional links to Bhaktapur's heritage conservation and development planning. Four architecture students at the Khwopa Engineering College in Bhaktapur, who are also native Bhaktapurians, assisted me in the fieldwork as cultural informants, interviewers, and translators of documents and interviews that were in the local languages. A group of faculty and students of the College participated in a focus group to discuss the findings of the study and to offer their feedback on the validity of the findings and data interpretation.

Bhaktapur: *The City of Devotees*

Located in the Kathmandu Valley of Nepal, about 14 km east of the current capital Kathmandu, Bhaktapur [2] was on the historical trade route between India and Tibet and the centre of political power in the valley during the Malla dynasty, which lasted from the twelfth to the eighteenth century. Other power centres eventually emerged under the Malla rule first in Kāntipur (now, Kathmandu) in 1482 and later in Lalitpur (now, Pātan). Bhaktapur lost its political prominence when Pritivi Nārāyan Shāh ended the Malla rule in 1768 and moved the capital to Kathmandu (Whelpton 2005). The Malla period represents the thriving society and culture of the Kathmandu Valley, especially of the ethno-linguistic group Newār (or *Nepā*), as expressed in their

architecture, urban form, belief system, caste system, arts and crafts, rituals, and other cultural dimensions.

In 1979, UNESCO declared seven monument zones in the Kathmandu Valley collectively as a single site, called the Kathmandu Valley World Heritage Site. This declaration was based on three criteria: The site is 'a testimony to the unique 'Newāri Culture' which is still alive today.…The cultural traditions [are] manifested in the unique urban society which boasts of one of the most highly developed craftsmanship of brick, timber, and bronze in the world' (Criterion III); it is 'comprised of exceptional architectural typologies, ensembles and urban fabric,… unique to the Kathmandu Valley' (Criterion IV); and the site is 'tangibly associated with the unique co-existence and amalgamation of Hinduism and Buddhism with animist rituals and Tantrism. The symbolic and artistic values are manifested in the ornamentation of the buildings, the urban structure and often the surrounding natural environment, which are closely associated with legends, rituals, and festivals' (Criterion VI) (UNESCO Kathmandu Office 2007a, 3). UNESCO listed all seven monument zones as 'World Heritage in Danger' in 2003, due to the threat to their historic integrity from the rapid urbanization in and around the zones (Amatya 2007). This condition was later removed in 2007 after developing an Integrated Management Framework for heritage conservation of all zones (UNESCO Kathmandu Office 2007a, 1).

As it was the primary centre of the Malla rule, Bhaktapur has a concentration of religious, palatial, and vernacular architecture, located within a well preserved urban setting (Figure 1). The World Heritage Monument Zone in Bhaktapur is, however, limited to monuments located in three main public squares: Durbar or Palace Square, Taumadhi Square, Dattatreya Square, and the streetscape that connects these three areas (Figures 2 & 3) (UNESCO Kathmandu Office 2007b). In addition to this core area, a buffer zone encompasses the entire historic town.[3] The Department of Archaeology of Nepal and the Bhaktapur Municipality are responsible for the conservation and management of the monument zone.

As the Newāri practice Buddhism, Hinduism and Tantrism, there are numerous monumental as well as small temples, *stūpas*, monastic buildings, priests' houses (*Math*), and shrines dedicated to numerous deities of the Buddhist and Hindu pantheons all over town. Daily life and the rituals of Bhaktapur certainly capture the essence of its name, 'city of devotees'; its unique urban form, civic structures, and vernacular setting provide a distinct backdrop to life as it unfolds in Bhaktapur. It is, therefore, a testament not only to its history, but also to the continuation of Newāri society and culture within the valley. The core area of the World Heritage Monument Zone, therefore, does not necessarily reflect the entirety of Bhaktapur's cultural legacy. As heritage conservation primarily concentrates on protecting the physical authenticity and integrity of the World Heritage listed monuments and their settings, the current management activities do not evoke a deep appreciation of Bhaktapur's heritage importance. This is particularly true of Bhaktapur's intangible heritage and its association with the built heritage, in spite of the fact that the intangible heritage is identified as critical to Bhaktapur's heritage significance in Criterion IV (cited above). To develop a better understanding of Bhaktapur's cultural significance and the issues related to its protection, one needs to study how its residents' belief systems are manifested in the built fabric, rituals, and daily life and how they understand its spirit of place.

The Spirit of Place of Bhaktapur

Meanings embedded in urban form

Typical of historic urban settlements in the Kathmandu Valley, Bhaktapur is organised along a main street connecting two major market squares, Taumadhi and Dattatreya. The street also expands at many locations to form smaller squares. Narrow alleyways (*galli*) lead away from the street into the neighbourhoods, forming smaller neighbourhood squares. One finds many temples, wayside shrines, dance platforms, large and small ponds, waterspouts, wells, and public rest-houses (single storey *Paati* and multi-storey *Sattal*) in these squares and along the street and adjacent alleys. The alleys give access to a maze of houses, which are residential clusters organised around courtyards (*chowk*). Residential units are three to four stories high with stores or shops on the ground level, living and sleeping spaces above, and the kitchen at the top. The royal palace is located away from the main street in front of its own square (Durbar Square). Inside the palace is the temple of Goddess *Taleju*, the tutelary deity of Malla kings. Along the river, places for funeral rites (*ghat*) are located (Korn 2007). Bhaktapur is densely built with a continuous urban edge along streets and alleys. Bhaktapur appears to have developed organically, without a specific geometric pattern or order.

Underneath this maze of buildings lies a highly symbolic cosmological pattern that gives sacred meaning and order to the urban space and, in turn, to life within Bhaktapur. The order is defined by the location of a multitude of temples (*Dega* and *Pith*), houses (*deochhen*), and aniconic shrines dedicated to various divinities.[4] It is a *mandala*, or cosmo-geographical order, established by several concentric spheres or territories of power emanating from these deities (Figure 4). Most important are the Eight Mother Goddesses (*Astamātrikā*), demarcating the cardinal directions and the outer sacred boundary of the town. At the centre of Bhaktapur is the ninth Mother Goddess *Tripurasundari*, surrounded by three specific *Ganesh* incarnations. In between the centre and the periphery are boundaries delineated by eight main *Ganesh*, eight *Bhairav*, eight *Rishi*, and ten *Dasa Mahā Vidyā* (Slusser 1982; Tiwari 1989; Levy 1990; Vergati 2002).[5] Each of these deities represent a particular cardinal or sub-cardinal direction and is associated with a specific *Astamātrikā*. Within this setting are other temples dedicated to the main gods of Hindu tradition, such as *Vishnu*, *Shiva*, and their various incarnations. Every neighbourhood (*Tole*) has a temple for its own *Ganesh* (*Tole Ganesh*) and a shrine for its own area protector (*Chetrapāl*, a form of *Bhairav*). Major street intersections have a stone marker dedicated to a *Chwāsa*, divinities that dispel waste and pollution. Every house has its own small shrine – a flagstone in front of the main entry (*Phikālākhu*) – dedicated to the God *Kumāra* for daily worship. Every family or clan has their own clan deities (*digu-dyo*), usually very small shrines located on the periphery of Bhaktapur (Levy 1990; Vergati 2002).

Each divinity presides over its own particular territory that is defined annually at festival times, when each deity is led out in processions (*jātrā*) that do not vary from specific ritual limits (Vergati 2002). Besides these *jātrā*, many other festivals and processions enact the sacred dimensions embedded in urban form. The most important festival is *Bisket Jātrā*, the New Year Festival, which is celebrated annually for two weeks in mid-April. Essentially a fertility rite, it re-enacts the Newāri concept of primal procreation, the origin myth of Bhaktapur and its spatial divisions (Figure 5). Another key festival is the autumn harvest festival, *Mohanī* (or *Dashin*).

Over the course of nine days, people visit each *Astamātrikā* shrine on its designated day, starting the first day at *Bhamayāni Pith* in the east and ending the visits to peripheral shrines on the eighth day at *Mahālakshmi Pith* in the northeast, effectively circumambulating the boundary of Bhaktapur. On the ninth day, they visit the *Tripurasundari Pith* at the town's centre, completing the Bhaktapur *mandala* (Gutschow and Kölver 1975; Levy 1990; Parish 1994). The circumambulatory paths of these festivals delineate the sacred space around temples and neighbourhoods. The primary circumambulatory path (*pradakshinā patha*) is defined by many festivals with many divinities on many occasions and creates a sacred territory around the center of Bhaktapur (Figure 6). People of higher castes (and the royal family, historically) live within the sacred area defined by this primary *pradakshinā patha,* and people of lower castes live outside of it. People of the lowest castes mostly live outside of the outer sacred boundary delineated by the *Astamātrikā* temples. The primary circumambulatory, therefore, separates the 'sacred' town from a 'profane' countryside. As there are no ramparts around Bhaktapur, the sacred boundaries formed by the gods are believed to have protected Bhaktapur and its people (Gutschow and Kölver 1975; Levy 1990).

This hierarchy in the ritual purity and social structure of Bhaktapur is embedded in the use of the town's topography for siting buildings, determining their height and the extent of architectural embellishment. The palace complex and upper caste residences of priests and the administrative class are located at a higher elevation in Bhaktapur, which decreases toward the periphery. Lower-caste houses are located at these gradually decreasing elevations, corresponding to their place in the caste hierarchy. The height and ornamentation of architectural details of buildings also gradually decrease from the centre toward the periphery (Gutschow and Kölver 1975). This connection in the social and architectural fabric still exists to a great extent in Bhaktapur.

The interviewees strongly suggest that residents know about the protection they receive from the sacred boundary created by the *Astamātrikā*. The interviewees know about the primary circumambulatory path, as it is the route taken by *Gai Jātrā*, the annual procession for commemorating the deceased of the previous year. Respondents were all able to trace the procession routes for the temples of Mother Goddess, *Ganesh*, and *Bhairav* located within their neighbourhoods. They also told me where people from different caste groups generally live, the boundaries of different neighbourhoods (*Tole*), and the important divinities in those *Toles*. They explained the meanings of many Newāri rites and stories about most divinities. The residents know a great deal about the meanings embedded in Bhaktapur's spatial order, even if they cannot always coherently articulate its meanings. They understand that Bhaktapur is a sacred landscape. Their cultural upbringing and the many rites and rituals they perform have informed them of the meanings attributed to Bhaktapur. The symbolic dimensions of Bhaktapur heritage, therefore, continue into the present.

The residents' understanding of Bhaktapur's symbolic dimensions clearly reflects their lived experience within Bhaktapur and how they themselves relate to the place. It also reflects how they describe its sense of place, as given below.

The Sense of Place of Bhaktapur

References to the sense of place dimensions of Bhaktapur appear in residents' responses to multiple interview questions. For example, a 22-year old university student, who has published a tourists' guide on Bhaktapur, describes the town's importance and life:

> I would describe Bhaktapur as a sacred place: a place that fuels inspiration; it is a serene, timeless, and homey place. It is one of the small places in Nepal; but this is where you get to experience the Newāri culture most – food, dances, architecture, Newāri language, and people. It is the 'city of devotees'; not just devotion to religion, culture, and festivals, but also promoting fairly conservative values. However, it is not a stagnant place, but a progressive one; it has not been affected by development as in elsewhere….. There is a very relaxed, slow mode of life in Bhaktapur, compared to other places [in Nepal]. There is social cohesion or unity among people. We do not have an identity crisis. I think a phrase like 'small is beautiful' would define what Bhaktapur is.

A similar response comes from a 28-year old tourist-trinket seller responding to whether he would ever leave Bhaktapur:

> Bhaktapur is an ancient settlement; it is like a museum. There are a lot of old buildings here. The buildings, streets, and alleyways all are different from and more preserved than Pātan and Kathmandu. We also have many more *Jātrā* than other places; some are unique to Bhaktapur. Also, our people's way of living has not changed much over time or modernized much, relative to other places like Kathmandu…. Temperature in Bhaktapur is not so hot, not so cold. There is no air or noise pollution, like in Kathmandu. Also, it is not crowded or congested with people and cars. People are friendly and helpful. And, above all, this is my birthplace. So, I have no intention of leaving Bhaktapur.

The following response from a 45-year old woman resonates with the quotations given above:

> I would describe Bhaktapur as a city full of temples, deities, arts, and culture. Its environment is clean, no dust or pollution. So, it is a good place to live, and to come see. There is no place here I do not like….. I am not interested in leaving Bhaktapur for good: this is my *janmastān* [birthplace]. I may be a frog living in a well; but I do not have any need that cannot be fulfilled in Bhaktapur.

A 22-year old female bank clerk reflected upon Bhaktapur in this way:

> How would I describe Bhaktapur? I would say that it is a city full of temples and historical sites; a clean and very peaceful place with helpful people…. This is a place for a restful and relaxing living; your neighbors are very helpful, and I feel very safe here due to this close-knit community. However, we are losing this peaceful atmosphere due to Western-influences: our social cohesion is waning.

Similar sentiments recur among other interviewees. The interviews reveal that the residents identify the sense of place of Bhaktapur in terms of four interrelated place dimensions: the 'sense of sacrality', the 'sense of community', the 'sense of historicity', and the 'sense of serenity'. These four dimensions are derived from the historic and contemporary physical and symbolic attributes of Bhaktapur - the built plus the natural; the real and the imaginary. These four place

dimensions are closely intertwined and complement each other and collectively define the sense or spirit of place of Bhaktapur today. I call these attributes 'core' dimensions of the sense of place of Bhaktapur.

The most prominent dimension is the 'sense of sacrality' of Bhaktapur. This is undoubtedly derived from the strong religious belief in the community, which is expressed through daily domestic rituals and seasonal public festivities. Some residents attribute Bhaktapur's importance among other similar towns in Nepal to this strong sense of sacrality. A 55-year old woman from a 'lower' caste group says, 'We have many more gods and goddesses than any other place in Nepal'. A Buddhist monk mentions, 'Bhaktapur was once the capital city of Nepal: therefore, it has always been important in religious terms. Even today, people from other places come to Bhaktapur first to receive gods' blessings before they begin festivals in their own towns. *Chandēshwari Jātrā* in Banēpā and *Matsyendranāth Jātrā* in Pātan are two examples'. A clan elder remarks, 'This is the only home of *Siddha Lakshmi* and *Vetāl Bahirav*. Therefore, Bhaktapur is more significant than other towns'.

All interviewees in the free-listing survey cite religious places. Fifty-eight percent of respondents clearly refer to fifteen or more religious places (thus, over 50% of the items), which reveals their sacral significance for the residents. Certain reasons are related to ritualistic practices and the power of the deities: 'If you want a son, you go pray to *Ashapura Mahadev* at Sangha Mahadev Temple during *Yomāri Pūrnimā* festival' (a 49-year old business owner); 'If a woman has difficulty in getting pregnant, you go pray to *Jhātapō dyō* naked at midnight' (a 69-year old farmer); and 'When children are late to begin speaking, we worship *Kamal Vinayak Ganesh* to cure the problem' (a 65-year old farmer and a clan elder). A 45-year old woman says, 'I go to Chupin Ghat to wash my face during *Bisket Jātrā* festival' and 'I listed the temple at Suryamadhi, because *Wakupathi Nārāyan* is one of the greatest Narayan Gods'. Similarly, Buddhist residents list places particular to their own religious rituals: 'Suryamadhi is where Ādipadma Mahāvihār is located; our annual *Panchadān* ritual starts there' (a 49-year old business owner). For many residents, even the places that are not religious shrines have sacred meanings. For example, two residents give two different reasons for listing a particular historic pond: 'Siddha Pokkhari was created using the mystic power of Tantrism; water appeared and filled the pond automatically' (49-year old business owner) and 'God *Indra* and Goddess *Indrāni*, with their retinue of *apsarā* [celestial nymphs], go to take a bath at Siddha Pokkhari' (65-year old farmer).

The sense of sacrality visually manifests itself in the myriad of shrines scattered in and around Bhaktapur, some monumental and many minuscule, yet all are considered sacred by the community. Residents often describe Bhaktapur as a 'town full of gods' and/or 'town full of temples'. I found that this sense of sacrality of Bhaktapur is only partially derived from the monuments declared as World Heritage sites. Certainly, the *Taleju* Temple in the Durbar Square, the *Nayatapola* and *Bhairav* Temples in Taumadhi Square, and the *Dattatreya* Temple at Dattatreya Square each contribute to this sense of place dimension. In the free-listing survey, these four shrines are listed by 17%, 34%, 17%, and 83% of the respondents, respectively. Nevertheless, the sense of sacrality is primarily evoked by the *Astamātrikā* Temples, the vast number of small neighbourhood temples dedicated to *Ganesh*, *Bhairav*, and other deities, and by small shrines attributed to various family or clan deities (*digu-dyo* shrines). In the free-listing survey, 90% of the participants listed at the least one *Astamātrikā* shrine; 27% of respondents

listed all eight shrines. *Tripurasundari* shrine was listed by 34% of the respondents, and the *Nava Durgā* temple (dedicated for all nine Mother Goddesses) was referred to by 45% of the participants. Even if these shrines are not listed in the free-listing survey, people frequently mention them when answering other interview questions, indicating the importance of Mother Goddesses in their lives. In addition, shrines dedicated to 54 other deities are also mentioned in the free-listing survey. The presence of this vast pantheon of deities in Bhaktapur not only evokes its sense of sacrality but also underscores the role religion plays in the daily, seasonal, and annual cycles of Newāri culture. One leaves the house making a gesture of reverence at the *Phikālākhu*; stops at the *Tole Ganesh* and at the *Tole Bhairav* for a hurried few minutes of worship; and then rings the bells when passing wayside shrines. For example, disavowing that she 'dislike' any place in Bhaktapur, a 45-year old woman says, 'I worship Lord *Ganesh* daily; I go to many temples in many parts of town year around for worshipping; so, as the gods created the world, who am I to say what I dislike in it?'

Every evening, prayers and traditional music resonate in many temples and public rest-houses. The sounds and smells of these daily activities are inescapable and multiply when combined with the recurring religious festivals celebrated year round throughout Bhaktapur. A 70-year old farmer remarks, 'What do we have in Bhaktapur? *Mandir* [Temples] and *jātrā* –and, that's all; they are better than those at other places [in Nepal]; so, we should take care of them well,' indicating the importance of this multitude of religious festivals for Bhaktapur's heritage. A 24-year old fine arts student concurs: 'The three cities are not very different from each other: whatever you see in Bhaktapur, you can see them all in Pātan and Kathmandu. But we are richer in *jātrās* and other festivals than in other places'. During the interviews, residents referred to 36 different festivals and rituals. Among those festivals, all the interviewees mention *Bisket Jātrā*; 40% mention *Gai Jātrā*; 30% *Mohanī (Dashin)*; 27% *Nava Durgā Jātrā*; and 17% *Sithi Nakhā*. This strong presence of religion in the life of Bhaktapur, as several residents mention, makes it truly a 'city of devotees'. This sense of sacrality, therefore, is an outcome of how people view, feel, and live their lives within a decidedly numinous setting.

Residents talk about the great sense of community and social cohesion that they enjoy in Bhaktapur. They feel that Bhaktapur has no serious civic and economic problems, has a tightly-knit community, and they consider interpersonal relations with family, neighbours, and friends important in their lives. Many do not imagine ever leaving Bhaktapur, as it is their '*janmastān* (the birthplace)'. For example, regarding life in Bhaktapur a 38-year old shopkeeper says, 'This is my birthplace; this is where my family and friends live. I do not think that I would find satisfaction in life anywhere else'; a 69-year old farmer comments, 'I like living here; because, in Bhaktapur, we all are brothers and sisters of a one family; we help each other in every way'; and a 50-year old metalsmith remarks, 'I have friends and family living all over Bhakatpur. I like visiting them, chatting, gossiping, and spending time with them; so, how could I not like any part of the town?...I cannot find the kind of good, helpful neighbours that I have here in Bhaktapur in other places'. In explaining why he does not have any 'disliked places' in Bhaktapur he continues, 'So, I help them as well, because they are my own people'. Participants frequently use terms such as 'helpful', 'hospitable', and 'humble' to describe the people of Bhaktapur. A 16-year old female high school student sees a negative aspect of this social cohesion in Bhaktapur: 'Here everyone knows everybody's business; people get together, sit in *Paati*, stare at others

passing by, and gossip. I do not like that'. Nevertheless, her comment points out the strong social interactions that exist in the community.

This second dimension of the 'sense of community' derives from the homogeneity of Bhaktapur's population in terms of ethnicity, religion, and language, and from the historical and emotional connections people feel for their clan, their immediate community, and the land (their neighbourhood and the town). As a place predominantly inhabited for centuries by the Newāri ethnic group, with limited demographic and socio-economic change, residents still largely maintain their traditional value system and lifestyle. Commenting on life in Bhaktapur, a 69-year old farmer simply remarks, 'We are all Newār in Bhaktapur'; a 49-year old business owner says, 'Bhaktapur is culturally more important than other places in Nepal. This has been a Newāri settlement for several *paramparā* [generations]; people continue to live and practice according to the ancient traditions…I feel secure in Bhaktapur, because Newāri people live all around me'; and a shopkeeper states, 'This is a Newāri town; so, there is more unity among people here compared to other places in Nepal. Therefore, it is safe to live here too'. Both Hindus and Buddhists call Bhaktapur home, and no significant differences or tensions exist between them since, within the Newāri culture, the two faiths are integrated in multiple ways. A Buddhist says, 'We celebrate all festivals irrespective of caste, creed, or class divisions', and a Buddhist monk avers, 'There is social harmony in the community. I feel secure in the community. Wherever I go, I return to Bhaktapur. This is my home; this is my birthplace'. As Bhaktapur society is organised with intersecting caste, clan, neighbourhood, and *Guthi* (communal trusts) affiliations, these intra- and inter-group relationships still define one's identity. As Newārs value these relationships deeply, the resultant social cohesion evokes a strong sense of community in the residents' minds. A casual visitor, while marvelling at the monuments in Bhaktapur, would not readily notice this very important intangible dimension in the Bhaktapur's cultural heritage.

Furthermore, residents deeply appreciate the 'sense of serenity' they experience in Bhaktapur. This place dimension has nothing to do with any significant natural features. There is no significant vegetation cover in Bhaktapur's streets and squares, except for small cultivated plots (*Baari*) concealed behind groups of houses. Although one can see the Himālayan Mountains from the town, they are usually invisible due to cloud cover. The sense of serenity in Bhaktapur is derived from the laid-back lifestyle of its people, its relative orderliness and cleanliness compared to Kathmandu and Pātan, and its less urbanized character. Life moves at a relaxed pace in Bhaktapur. Residents seem to have a lot of time on their hands, allowing them to spend time outside; they take slow walks on the streets; chat with family, neighbours, and friends; play cards, knit, or sing in the public rest-houses (*Sattal* and *Paati*); thresh paddy or dry pottery in the neighbourhood squares; and watch life unfold from the trellis windows on the upper floors of their houses. Interviewees tell of people taking week-long leaves to participate in *Jātrās* and other festivals. They compare themselves to residents of other cities, who, according to a female university student, 'are more concerned with their careers; here, people are not that concerned with their jobs, but with having a good time and celebrating life'. Added to this relaxed pace of life is a certain 'ambience of quietude', as a male university student refers to it, which comes from the relatively less urbanized condition inside Bhaktapur and with its resultant orderliness and cleanliness. Bhaktapur is not physically congested or crowded; waste removal inside the town happens with remarkable effectiveness; and, the mostly mud or brick buildings and brick-paved streets minimize the 'Urban Heat Island'[6] creating a pleasant microclimate.

A sampling from the interviews clearly captures the sense of serenity that residents experience in Bhaktapur. A 49-year old business owner says, 'This town is the cleanest place in all 75 districts of Kathmandu Valley'; a 16-year old female student remarks, 'It is a cleaner and better maintained town than other places'; and, a 38-year old woman thinks, 'Bhaktapur is cleaner and quieter than other places [in Nepal]; there is no noise pollution!' A 30-year old photographer adds, 'This is a place of peace and scenery [referring to the historical setting]'; according to a 38-year old shopkeeper, 'I like places such as Durbar Square, Taumadi Square, Dattatreya Square, Changu Narayan, and Nagarkot; these are very serene places – less crowded, less noise, very peaceful'. Many residents mention these places as their most liked places within Bhaktapur due to these environmental qualities. Other places favoured by respondents include the Suryavināyak area, Siddha Pokkhari, and Kamal Pokkhari, again due to similar place attributes. The shopkeeper continues: 'Bhaktapur is a peaceful place: it is clean; there is lot of open space - less congested and less crowded; less crime than other places; and, we are very helpful people; therefore, life here is more relaxing'. In describing this sense of place dimension, the residents of Bhaktapur are evidently comparing Bhaktapur with the other towns in the Kathmandu Valley. Coming from the more polluted and chaotic cities of Kathmandu and Pātan, one unmistakably recognizes the presence of a 'sense of serenity' in Bhaktapur.

The importance of Bhaktapur's history in defining its sense of place is clearly evident in the interviews. A 49-year old shopkeeper reflects on how he would describe Bhaktapur to a visitor: 'When I think of Bhaktapur, I think of it as a historical town. I would describe Bhaktapur to a foreigner as an ancient town with cultural importance and where a lot of educated people live'. A female high school student says, 'Bhaktapur is a culturally-rich, historical place; full of temples and hospitable people'. An 18-year old female university student adds, 'In Bhaktapur, culture and traditions are better-preserved than in other places in the country; here, modernization has not yet affected life as in other places'. Several interviewees refer to specific historic places to indicate the historical significance of Bhaktapur. A 55-year old metalsmith mentions, 'Bhaktapur has a lot of historically important things, such as *Panch-Tale Mandir* [Nyatapola Temple], *Taleju Bhawani Mandir*, *Bhairav Mandir* [in Taumadhi], *Layāku Ganesh Mandir*, Changu Narayan *Mandir*, and *Ratha Jātrā* [*Bisket Jātrā*]; so, it is more important than other places in the country'. Some residents could not provide detailed account of the town's history; but they had a sense of its historical importance. For example, in the words of a 29-year old female school teacher, talking about the importance of Bhaktapur, 'I do not know much of Bhaktapur's history; but it has important historical buildings, such as 55-Window Palace, *Panch-Tale Mandir* and so many other temples. They all have rich carvings and paintings. Bhaktapur is famous for its arts and crafts traditions. That is why it is a World Heritage Site'. The community thus understands and appreciates the history of Bhaktapur, and their experience of its heritage forms the 'sense of historicity' as another core dimension of Bhaktapur's sense of place.

Interviewees refer to several physical attributes that contribute to this sense of historicity, such as the historic built fabric (primarily the vernacular buildings), materials used predominantly for building (mud, brick and wood), and narrow streets and alleys. They also point out that Bhaktapur has not been drastically gentrified or modernized; its social environment still expresses vestiges of its past life. While many tourists visit Bhaktapur every day, their presence does not overwhelm the urban spaces. Most residents still wear traditional Newāri dress and jewellery, and activities that take place on streets and squares still display a distinctive local flavour. The interviewees refer to these factors. For example, according to a 25-year old female

nurse, 'Bhaktapur is an important place in the country due to the people's practice of its historical culture/traditions: people in Bhaktapur still make *juju* curd; wear traditional Newari dresses such as *Hāku Patāsi* [red & black *saari*] and *Bhad Gaule Tōpi* [black hat]; and, conduct ancient *jātrā*. Also, we have so many ancient temples; it is a city of temples'. One respondent noted that, in Bhaktapur, 'One feels like time has stopped. Any visitor would certainly feel like he/she has been taken back into a historic time'. This 'stillness in time' comes from the fact that Bhaktapur continues to be an inhabited place, yet its society, not only its physical environment, seems not to have undergone much change over time.

These core dimensions form a key set of meanings associated with Bhaktapur today. As these are based on current characteristics and conditions of Bhaktapur, these dimensions attribute a considerable temporal relevance and validity to contemporary place meanings. They represent how Bhaktapur's residents make sense of the town's current attributes to make it a meaningful liveable milieu.

In addition to these core dimensions, residents also mention a set of negative perceptions of the place. These include environmental pollution, the lack of infrastructure, and the institutional or bureaucratic dysfunction. These factors are perceived to be detrimental to the positive sense of place dimensions discussed above, and in turn, to the protection of Bhaktapur's heritage. I call these attributes 'risk dimensions'.

Bhaktapur is considered to be relatively well maintained; nonetheless, environmental pollution exists at the periphery mainly from the pollution of the Hanumante River, air pollution from the improperly managed waste disposal site in the Yōshinkhel area, and from the brick-making factories outside the town. Additionally, the sewage disposal system, installed by the German-led Bhaktapur Development Project in the 1980s, has not been updated nor maintained, and Bhaktapur's entire sewage is dumped untreated into the Hanumante River.[7] The Hanumante River is considered to be a sacred river; *ghats* where funeral rituals take place are located along the river; and, during the festival season, *Vārāhi*, *Maheshvari*, and *Brahmāni Jātrās* parade across the river without using the bridges. While this environmental pollution may partially be a result of population increase, it is also evidently a consequence of poor management of the town's infrastructure. Sixty-three percent of the respondents mention pollution as a critical concern in Bhaktapur, and polluted areas as places they dislike most. It is considered a threat to the sense of sacrality and serenity of Bhaktapur. Interviewees did not directly indicate that solving this problem would help heritage conservation in Bhaktapur, but the connection between this issue and heritage is quite clear, as one respondent notes, 'Not only should we repair the facades of temples, but we should also clean and fix the surroundings of the temples as well; then Bhaktapur will be a beautiful place to live'.

The second risk dimension is the lack of infrastructure, particularly the chronic shortage of water and electricity, which is also a common issue in the greater Kathmandu Valley (*Kathmandu Post* 2010a, 2010b). Sixty percent of the interviewees refer to this water and electricity shortage. Despite the still-functioning historic water-supply system (Spodeck 2002), people largely depend on piped-water. The breakdown of national and local governments has magnified these shortages, due to the lack of management, planning, and development of this important infrastructure. The Bhaktapur Municipality has cleaned and restored 65 historic wells to mitigate

the water shortage; although admirable, this is inadequate to meet the current demand. In addition, 37% of the respondents mention the lack of amenities such as a hospital, better schools, and entertainment venues, especially for the youth. Meanwhile, 17% of the participants refer to other infrastructural issues such as the upkeep of roads and the sewage system. To a great extent, this lack of infrastructure diminishes the liveability in Bhaktapur, and thus, its sense of community.

The third risk dimension is the institutional dysfunction in the country and its consequent impact on the workings of the local government. Forty-three percent of the interviewees discuss this issue. Since the abolition of the monarchy in 2007, Nepal has been mired in political instability; many governments have been formed, many prime ministers have been elected, but political leaders have been unable to agree on a constitutional and governmental system for the country (Acharya 2014; Kaswan 2013). This political instability has seriously jeopardized the functioning of Bhaktapur's local government. This has eroded people's confidence in the country's political system and its institutions. Other areas of concern are unemployment and the stagnating local economy, which are attributed in part to institutional failure. Residents are frustrated with the government's failure to address these concerns, but express no imminent political unrest that might threaten Bhaktapur's sense of serenity.

In addition to these three risks, several respondents mention increased motorcycle traffic on the narrow streets of Bhaktapur (10% of them), westernization of the Bhaktapur society (10%), theft of historical artefacts from temples (6%), increased cost of living (6%), and loss of agricultural land (6%) as other concerns.

Conclusion

The core dimensions that contribute to Bhaktapur's spirit of place and the risk dimensions reflect both the people's articulation of their experience and the way residents understand the heritage of Bhaktapur and its management. The four core dimensions indicate that the town's physical, social, and cultural characteristics have continued fairly well over the course of time. Except for the risk dimensions mentioned above, the core sense of place dimensions are still strong. They represent the residents' current socio-cultural values that determine Bhaktapur's cultural significance. These then become a framework to evaluate and to delineate possible action for improving Bhaktapur's heritage management. I argue that conservation and development activities could be conceived through an appreciation of both the core and the risk dimensions of the sense of place. Fostering core dimensions while alleviating risk factors could be the main objective of both the development and conservation agendas of Bhaktapur. Such action would then effectively enhance Bhaktapur's sense of place, and in turn, its people's perception of the value of their heritage. Moreover, the sense of place and the sacred meanings that residents of Bhaktapur discuss are associated with the entire town and its vernacular built fabric, its surrounding agricultural lands, and a myriad of cultural practices; the World Heritage core zone and its monuments are only a part of this total heritage. Conservation of this macro cultural landscape is consequently crucial to safeguard Bhaktapur's cultural heritage.

Without limiting its definition into either materialist or constructivist conceptions of authenticity, the spirit of place is articulated here as a set of meanings that emerges through the way it is

experienced and negotiated in the relationships between the place and its residents, within a certain historical and cultural context. Safeguarding such intangible socio-cultural values need to be a vital part of any heritage management project. The sense of any place is temporal, nonetheless; the ways people define and value a place's core dimensions and risk dimensions vary with time and demographic shifts. It is, therefore, important to periodically re-evaluate the way people understand and value the sense of place of their heritage.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. In qualitative research, there is no specific rule for sample size for interviews that is required for a credible research outcome. The number depends on data saturation, logistical limitations, research objectives, characteristics of the target population, and the specific epistemic community's definition of research validity (Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte 1999; Baker and Edwards 2012). The typical approach is to rely on data saturation, the point at which no new information or themes emerge from the data. Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) found that, among a group of relatively homogeneous individuals, saturation occurred within the first 12 interviews; however, basic themes emerged as early as six interviews. Similar results were found by Nielsen and Landauer (1993) (cited in Guest, Bunce, and Johnson study). Romney, Weller, and Batchelder (1986) found that samples as small as four respondents can provide exceptionally precise information with a high confidence level, if the respondents have a certain degree of familiarity about the domain of inquiry. In the current study, all participants are from a relatively homogeneous group of same culture and ethnicity (Newār); they are also natives and residents of the research setting (Bhaktapur). They were interviewed independently and in private; thus there was no undue influence on the information they provided. Consequently, I decided that a sample of 30 respondents would provide sufficient and credible information of their thoughts on their town and heritage.

2. *Bhakti* (devotion or devotees) + *Pura* (city); it is locally known as Khwopa and Bhadgaon.

3. The original buffer zone was smaller than the current zone. In 2006, the Nepali Government requested UNESCO to consider a further reduction of the core and buffer zones of Bhaktapur World Heritage site, in order to deal with the urbanization around Bhaktapur. UNESCO, however, extended the buffer zone to include the entire historic town, as it was considered the only way to mitigate the urbanization impact on the World Heritage site (UNESCO Kathmandu Office 2007b).

4. In *Dega* temples, the worshipper does not enter the building at all; worshipping is carried out with a help of a priest. *Pith* is open-air shrine with idols and/or symbols of the deities; worshippers can enter the shrine for rendering offerings. In *deochhens*, or 'god-houses', portable images of deities are kept for the use during the festivals. Architecture of *deochhens* follows that

of ordinary houses, and thus is different from *Pith* and *Dega* shrines. Aniconic shrines are usually small stone markers with or without any carved motifs or symbols.

5. Mother Goddesses or *mātrikā* are manifestations of the feminine essence of cosmic power (the Supreme Divine Mother or *Dēvi*, either as an independent divinity or as an emanation of God *Shiva*); they are the guardians of Bhaktapur's boundary and the inner space. *Tripurasundari*, 'Goddess of Three Cities', protects the inner space and holds the powers of the eight peripheral *mātrikā* in an eightfold increase at the centre of the *mandala*. She is thus the maximal form of the Supreme Goddess *Dēvi*. These nine Mother Goddesses are also called *Nava Durgā* (nine *Durgās*) and there is a special temple dedicated to *Nava Durgā* near the Dattatreya Square, in the oldest part of Bhaktapur. *Ganesh* is an elephant-headed god, and considered the 'overcomer of obstacles' and 'giver of good fortune'. Praying for Ganesh is important before undertaking any significant religious activity. *Bhairav* is also either emanation or transformation of *Shiva*. *Rishis* are sages and scribes of spiritual wisdom received directly from the cosmic source. *Dasa Māhā Vidyā* or 'ten great knowledge or revelations' is a group of ten aspects of *Dēvi*, represented in female forms within a spectrum that ranges from malevolent to benevolent personalities (Slusser 1982; Sakya 1989; Levy 1990; Vergati 2002).

6. The Urban Heat Island refers to the higher temperature in urban areas (relative to their rural surroundings) due to higher building density, use of building materials such as concrete and asphalt that store short-wave radiation, and waste heat generated from energy consumption in buildings and vehicles (Rizwan, Dennis, and Liu 2008).

7. Based on the interviews with the officials of the Bhaktapur Municipality.

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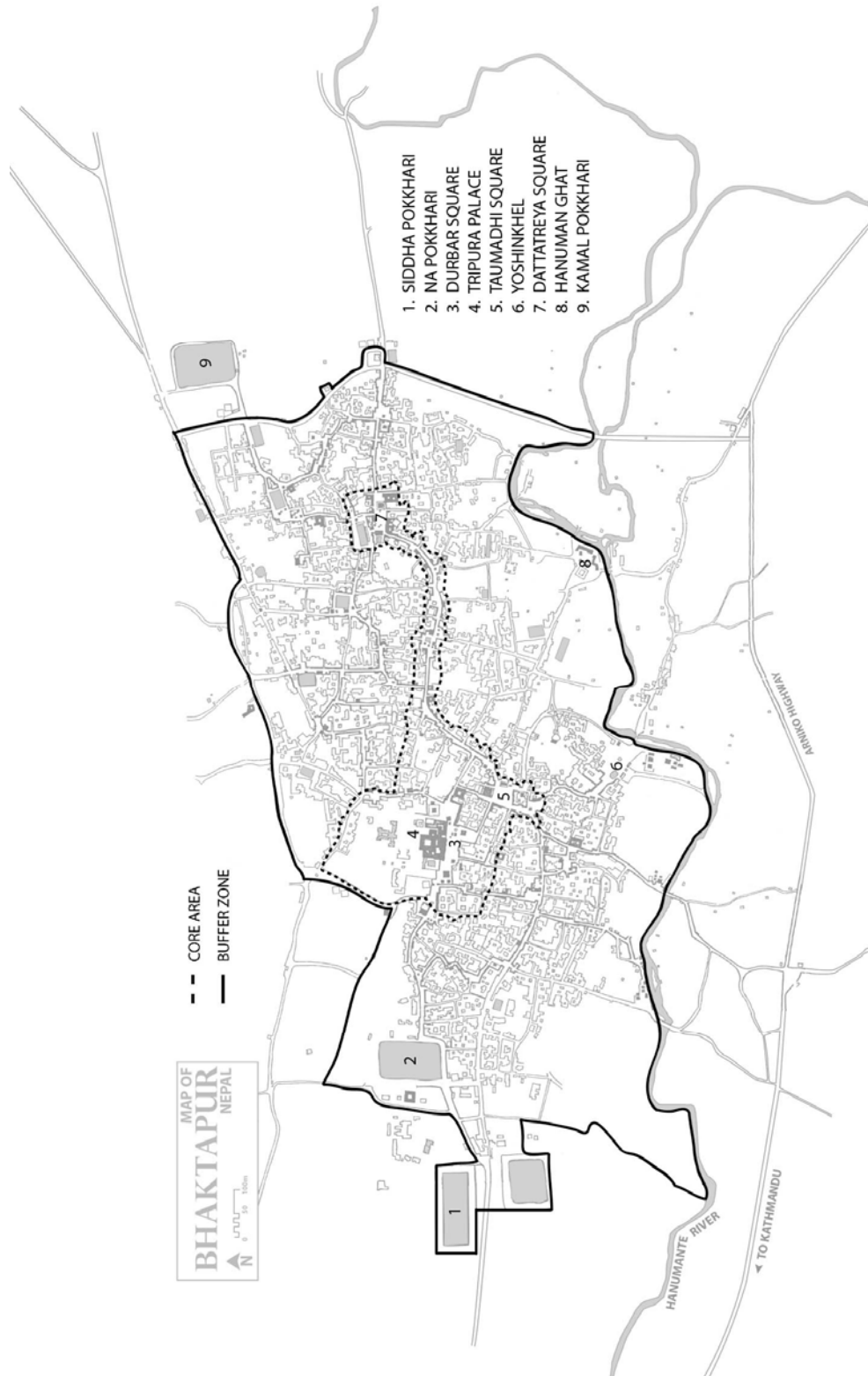
Figure 1. The core and buffer zones of Bhaktapur World Heritage Site (The illustration is by the author).

Figure 2. Bhaktapur Durbar Square (looking east): the palace is on the left (The photograph is by the author).

Figure 3. Taumadhi Square (looking north): the *Nyatapola* Temple (on the left), the *Bhairav* temple (right) and a *Sattal* (foreground) (The photograph is by the author).

① HILLS SURROUNDING THE KATHMANDU VALLEY
② RIVERS ENCIRCLING BHAKTAPUR AND GHATS LOCATED ALONG THE RIVERS
③ NORTHERN FOOTHILLS AND HIMALAYAN MOUNTAINS
④ ASTAMATRIKA
⑤ ASTABAHIRAV AND ASTA RISHI
⑥ ASTA GANESHA AND DASHA MAHA VIDYA
⑦ THREE GANESHA, TRIPURASUNDARI, BHADRAKALI, AND TALEJU

Figure 4. The Bhaktapur *Mandala*; a historic painting (The photograph is by the author).

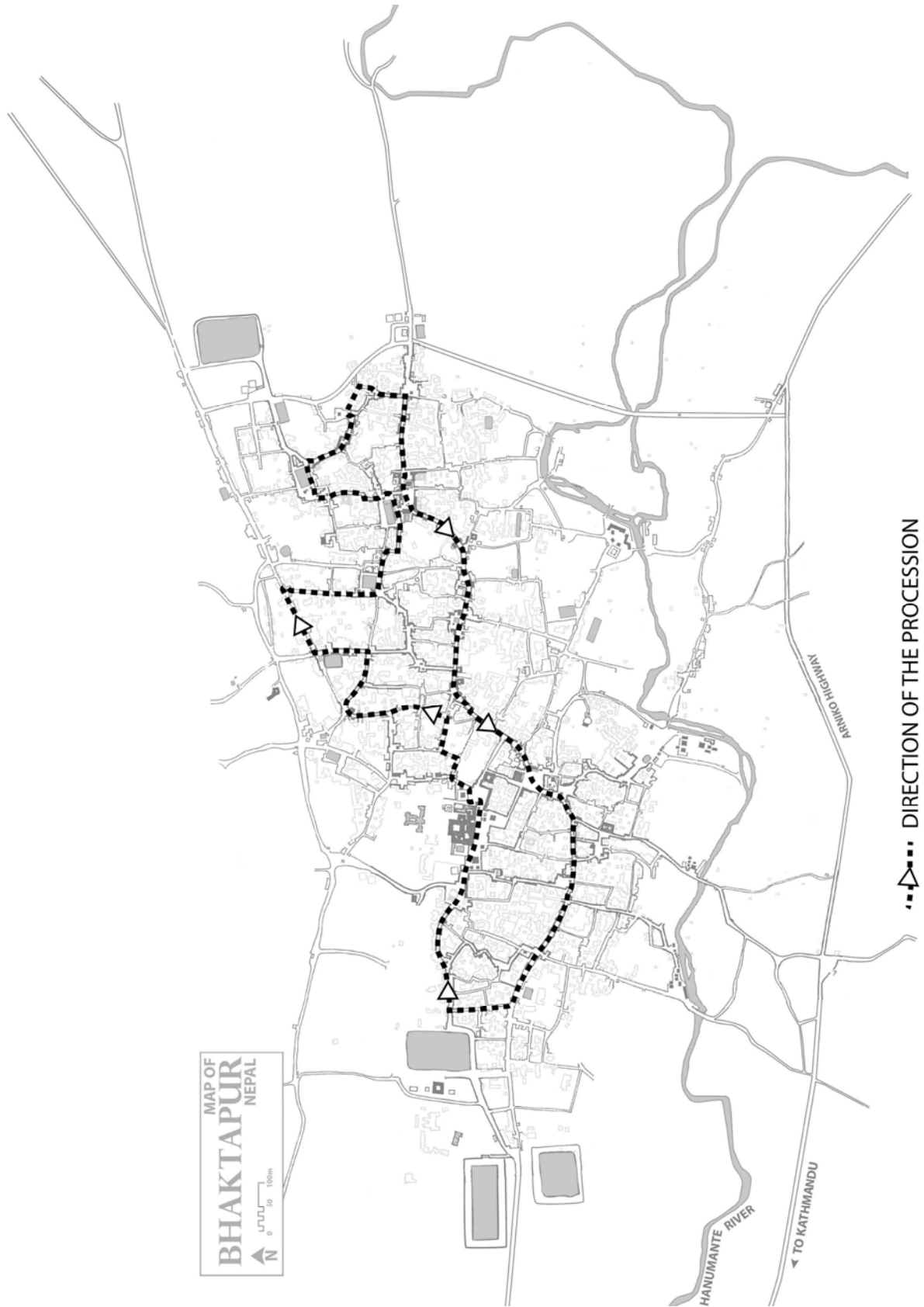Figure 5. *Bisket Jātrā* in the Taumadhi Square (The photograph is by the author).

Figure 6. The primary *Pradakshinā Patha* of Bhaktapur (The illustration is by the author).