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# Nara and beyond: implications on risk preparedness, recovery, and heritage management

ROHIT JIGYASU

## Abstract

*Placing the Nara document on authenticity and Professor Herb Stovel's contribution at its core, this article brings forward key considerations on risk preparedness, recovery, and heritage management. Stovel stressed that the field of cultural heritage needs to work closely with civic defense agencies to establish place of heritage in the chain of command for disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. This would necessitate that risk management be integrated in the overall management system for heritage sites. By presenting several examples, the article further discusses how judgment on values and the credibility of information sources in specific cultural contexts as advocated by the Nara document have a strong implication for the holistic, sustainable, and resilient recovery of cultural heritage. Such an approach seeks to take into consideration multiple narratives of values, balancing these with considerations for vulnerability reduction to achieve optimum safety. It further stresses the need to move beyond the authenticity debate and consider sustainability and human development as key parameters for the recovery of cultural heritage. The article concludes with the author's reminiscences of Prof. Herb Stovel based on his personal interaction during 2002-2011. His support for young heritage professionals through the creation of regional platforms like SANEYOCOP and his well-articulated views on the role of charters for guiding conservation practice are certainly valuable contributions that will continue to guide generations of heritage professionals.*

**Keywords:** Risk preparedness, disasters, conflicts, authenticity, recovery, reconstruction, heritage management, values, charters.

## Risk Preparedness of cultural heritage: an integrated management approach

In 1998, Professor Herb Stovel authored a pioneering publication, *Risk Preparedness: A Management Manual for World Cultural Heritage*, which offered, perhaps for the first time, a comprehensive understanding on this subject before it caught global attention with increased media attention of the damages to cultural heritage sites and museums due to disasters and conflicts. Stovel's views on this subject further evolved over time, and he candidly shared these during my correspondence with him between 2002 and 2010.

He stated:

*In many disasters that I have looked at in my professional life, it is the lack of authority to intervene and evaluate damage to heritage buildings in ways which will not threaten life and security but which will respect the capacity of the structure to do its job in future, that results in more physical loss than the disaster itself.*

He cited the example of Edinburgh, where eleven of the twelve buildings destroyed due to fire were torn down by the civil authorities because the heritage advocates and professionals who could have stabilized them without threat to life or property were not allowed into the discussion. It is important, therefore, to take a look at processes and to ensure that the preparedness activities examine “line of command” and make a place for the heritage advocate during response.

Therefore, the most important thing that can be done to reduce disaster losses to cultural heritage before they occur is to ensure that concern for heritage is an integral part of the civil defense response system. This means working with civil defense officials to clarify the place of heritage in risk management, and coming up with strategies to integrate that concern in preparedness, response and recovery phases. This would necessitate that a protocol be in place in all communities which defines a strong and authoritative voice for the defense of heritage, immediately post-disaster. Stovel believed, and rightly so, that if the importance of the heritage voice is not established in the line of command for response to fires or earthquakes etc. before the disaster occurs, it will be too late to establish this after the fact.

In Herb Stovel’s words, this means planning –but not producing a plan. The goal is to have priority concern for heritage in any existing risk management plan for the community. This is the most critical and most frequently overlooked element in risk preparedness. Unfortunately, when a disaster occurs, much more heritage is often lost through response and recovery than through the disaster itself if a concern for heritage has not been contemplated in the overall risk response plan,

Nevertheless, Stovel did have strong reservations on placing too much emphasis on producing ‘Management Plans’, which he expressed time and again. According to him

*There is significant ‘management plan’ fatigue in the World Heritage system. It is already confusing to be asking States Parties to produce management plans and/or to ensure adequate management systems. It has been seen that the mere production of management plans does not guarantee management adequacy for World Heritage properties –it really depends on the property, and the circumstances. If a management plan can be designed to improve the management system for conservation, that’s great. But most World Heritage management plans (there are some notable exceptions) are produced without any likelihood of implementation, and don’t change anything. This is an invitation to produce yet another plan whose purpose will be unclear and which will in most cases change nothing.*

He stressed that management plans do have a place and can be very useful, but if they are not produced under the right conditions (built internally, grassroots up, along with the stakeholders, designed together with those will be responsible for implementing them), they lead to nowhere. The contemporary expectations and challenges comprise of the need to clarify the intended focus, the need for proven models and success stories, and the need to improve the coherence in overall planning.

Heritage management meant balancing conservation (the focus of charters) with other legitimate forms of use of heritage sites and ensuring that use goals are achieved with the least amount of negative impact on heritage values.

*We need one management plan for a heritage site, which puts together all concerns and suggests how that site may be managed to meet all needs including heritage. We do not need management plans that focus only on conserving the heritage assuming there are other management plans dealing*

*with transport, housing, food, water, etc. The integrated heritage manager promotes a management approach which finds a place for heritage in the big picture, not just promotes a heritage approach which others may adopt or not as they see fit.*

Therefore, risk management should also be part of this larger picture rather than an exclusive plan in itself.

According to him, the focus on this area is often unclear due to the lack of agreed definitions of terms such as risk preparedness, disaster preparedness, risk reduction, risk management, disaster mitigation etc. Stovel was averse to the use of term “natural” disasters exclusively as it is not usually considered to include the consequences of conflict. Hence this word choice according to him leaves out or sets aside a commitment made in the early 90s in the UNESCO System to stop separating natural disasters from armed conflict results. “The International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS) was built around this idea. So he questioned the return to what most people would interpret to signify exclusively the world of natural disasters; a throwback to 80s language?”. Interestingly his critique of the use of the term “natural disasters” was far ahead of the times; at the time, the field of disaster management rejected the term “natural disasters” from its vocabulary, stating that no disaster is natural. He further emphasized the need to explain technical terms like risk, vulnerability, hazard, and threat in layman’s words for the benefit of those engaged in day-to-day management of the sites.

He further emphasized the need to defend and promote traditional building technologies, focus on the psychological impact, particularly in recovery, and define consolidated principles. Single coordinated international response is still lacking and integrated approaches are difficult to ensure. Information sharing is arduous with no single sources. Additionally, there is a proliferation of unconnected and unknown initiatives.

He further stated that since all heritage properties are not homogenous, it is not correct to adopt a shared methodology for risk preparedness which would be applicable to all. Architectural monuments and complexes, historic towns and landscapes, and archaeological sites must be considered separately and require different treatments of their properties according to their typology. It is also important to provide hands-on guidance and supervision for each of these typologies in much more practical ways.

### **Significance of the *Nara document* in the context of post-crisis recovery of cultural heritage**

Herb Stovel was perhaps one of the heritage experts who made the most significant contribution to the *Nara document on authenticity*, which marked tectonic shift in heritage discourse when it was adopted in the historic Japanese city of Nara in 1994. In his paper “Origins and influence of the *Nara document on authenticity*” (2008), he eloquently explains various discussions that lead to this document and also traces the impacts it made on international heritage discourse.

In response to specific culturally embedded conservation practices in Japan, the *Nara document on authenticity* made a significant leap from an exclusive focus on values based on the material remains from the past to explicitly stating that all judgments on values attributed to cultural properties as well as credibility of related information sources may differ from culture to culture, and even within the same culture and therefore authenticity analysis is very much



concerned with relative measurement (Stovel, 2008: 10). As a relative concept, authenticity must be used in relation to the ability of particular attributes to express the nature of key recognized values clearly (Stovel, 2008: 10). The range of “credible” information sources (form and design, materials and substance, use and function, traditions and techniques, location and setting, and spirit and feeling, and other internal and external factors) got extended to include management systems, and language and other forms of intangible heritage.

Herb Stovel rightly advocated the application of the concept of authenticity to complete heritage sites, rather than just to fragments of the sites. This, according to him, responds to our ever-expanding views of what constitutes cultural heritage and the growing challenge to work within systemic, holistic, and integrated frameworks in managing cultural heritage. These emerging frameworks integrate concern for culture and nature, 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). The approach reimagines the relationship of indigenous communities to heritage sites. As eloquently put forward by Tschudi-Madsen (1985), the solution lies in recognizing that indigenous communities are integrally linked to the ecosystem they inhabit. This thinking articulated by Stovel in his paper is surprisingly far-sighted and is still influencing the emerging knowledge framework for heritage management 10 years later with profound implications on the approach for post-crisis recovery of cultural heritage. This removes our focus from mere reconstruction of architectural heritage as articulated in the *Riga Charter* (2000) to holistic, sustainable, and resilient recovery of cultural heritage, of which physical reconstruction is just part of a process and protection of heritage values. It is not merely an end in itself, but also strives to recognize the role heritage in building the resilience of communities and ensures the continuation of services and benefits for long-term sustainability.

The critical question remains, that in this new paradigm, which cultural heritage values should be recovered, to what extent, and how? Therefore, first and foremost, it is important to decide where and how to position heritage in the overall recovery process, especially when the priorities in the aftermath of a disaster or conflict are on providing the basic needs of food, shelter, infrastructure, and livelihoods for the affected communities. The second challenge is choosing what approach to follow; building back as it was before to restore pre-crisis values at the cost of reinforcing the vulnerabilities, or rebuilding to look as before but with new materials and techniques to enhance safety but restoring only the visual character. The third and diametrically opposed approach to the first one would be to replace the traditional fabric with contemporary design and construction to reflect the new opportunities provided by the disaster to break with the past.

Beside the above-mentioned approaches, the alternate one would be to embody the concept of rebuilding so that it is better tailored to cultural heritage. This would involve deciding the threshold of safety *vis-à-vis* the heritage values, and reimagining the past for the future by reducing vulnerability and building on existing capacities. This also implies that the recovery of heritage cannot be seen merely in terms of visual appearance. It is important to take into account other considerations, such as traditional knowledge and skills, local affordability, and sustainability, while incorporating measures to reduce vulnerability to future disasters. This would necessitate upgrading the skills of craftsmen to ensure continuity as well as evolution in response to the need to retain the values and reduce vulnerability and risks.

The biggest challenge would be in the trade-offs between the new and old methods: to what extent should structurally inadequate historical building details be retained? Which details are so inherently weak that alternatives must be sought? Which characteristics are so key to the buildings' history or aesthetics that new ways to maintain them must be sought? What determines the choice between a safer modern –say steel structure inserted (whether visible or not) within an exterior of historical details– versus a less safe rebuilding of the historical building with less intrusive reinforcement measures? And, of course, the basic question one may ask is: Do modern materials actually make traditional buildings safer? A straightforward approach would be to assess the performance of buildings that were strengthened with modern materials against the 2015 earthquake in Nepal (Ranjitkar, Theophile and Newman, 2016).

Consideration for early recovery should also be made during the emergency response to cultural heritage. A well-conceived workflow of debris management, documentation, salvage and storage of heritage fragments from damaged buildings will aid in reusing them during the reconstruction process in the best possible way.

Recovery is also linked to the inherent nature of heritage that defines its values for example the Ise Shrine in Japan is reconstructed every 20 years and this act in itself contributes to the value. Therefore, in this case, authenticity of workmanship and cyclic renewal process takes precedence over preservation of physical fabric.

Understanding which heritage values are prioritized by the custodians is key to developing strategy for post-crisis recovery of cultural heritage. For example, following the destruction of Bohol church due to the 2013 earthquake, and the fire in Wangduaphodrang Zhong in Bhutan in 2012, the recovery of movable assets of religious and spiritual value were prioritized over the physical remains of the damaged building. In the latter case, values do not really lie in the surviving material fabric because craftsmen can reconstruct the building as it was before using traditional knowledge and skills that still exist. Moreover, the predominant consideration for the local custodian was resumption of religious practices rather than physical reconstruction of the material fabric. Following the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, the predominant national and international focus was on the repair and reconstruction of monuments that included palaces and large temples because of their symbolism and the tourism revenues they generate. Contrary to this, repair and reconstruction of local shrines and community structures were crucial for traumatized communities since these acted as social anchors for their psychosocial healing. In Sankhu village in Kathmandu valley, Nepal, young volunteers, whose traditional houses had been destroyed by the earthquake, salvaged traditional doors and windows from their collapsed houses and stored them for eventual use in the reconstruction of their houses. They did this while they were living in temporary shelters a few days after the earthquake. Moreover, owing to the important socio-cultural and economic role that public open spaces and squares play in the lives of local people, their recovery was more critical than a mere focus on buildings. Their recovery would necessitate regeneration of all the social, cultural, and economic activities that are carried out in these spaces and not merely reconstruction of the built fabric. Take for instance the case of Bungamati village in Kathmandu valley, where the main temple located in the public square in the middle of town collapsed due to earthquake. While it was important to consider reconstruction of the temple, it was equally important to regenerate the open space surrounding it so the socio-cultural link with the community was restored. This was all the more important since many traditional open spaces were gradually taken over by temporary shelters for those who lost their homes; in the absence of a clear policy, there is also a risk of these turning into slums with inadequate living conditions.



WANGDUAPHODRANG ZHONG, BHUTAN. Reconstruction following a devastating fire in 2012 through engagement of local craftsmen. *Image: Rohit Jigyasu.*



SANKHU VILLAGE, NEPAL. For affected communities, the recovery of local shrines is more important than recovery of large monuments since these are intimately connected to their daily socio-cultural life. *Image: Rohit Jigyasu.*





**BUNGAMATI VILLAGE, NEPAL.** Recovery of public spaces in earthquake-affected village is of utmost importance due to the significant role they play in collective life of the community. In the aftermath of disaster, these are at high risk due to construction of temporary shelters. *Image: Rohit Jigyasu.*

Often during the recovery process, emphasis is given to the recovery of tangible elements while the intangible aspects are overlooked. However, disasters also impact intangible heritage values that are rooted in traditional rituals and practices collectively carried out by the community. Therefore their revival is indeed paramount not only for securing cultural heritage, but also for the psycho-social healing of affected communities.

In various instances, tangibles carry many of their values due to intangible associations and overlooking the latter in the recovery process deprives the very essence of heritage that calls for its recovery. Moreover, in most cases, the tangibles are maintained due to their significance and utility to the local community and mere consideration of physical aspects during the recovery process makes heritage unsustainable in the long run. Therefore, recovery of tangible heritage will only carry true meaning if its associated intangibles are also restored. Macchindranath Jatra is one of the most important ritual processions in Kathmandu valley; it takes place every 12 years. In this procession, the idols of Rāto Machhindranāth (diety of Newari community) are carried from village Bungamati to the center of the historic town of Patan in Kathmandu valley on a specially made wooden chariot. Ironically, this procession was underway when 2015 earthquake struck and was abruptly stopped. In spite of the struggle for basic needs following the disaster, the community was interested in taking up the procession again as soon as possible. They wanted to quickly restore the area where the chariots are made, reconstruct the storage area of the materials used for making the chariot, and repair the route of the procession. The community also made efforts to revive other rituals and festivals within few days of the earthquake.



**BUNGAMATI VILLAGE, NEPAL.** The spaces associated with local rituals and festivals should be given due consideration in the recovery process. *Image: Rohit Jigyasu.*

Yet another case demonstrating the importance of values rooted in local cultural context is that of “Tantrik” temple located in the Swaymbhunath World Heritage site, which suffered massive damage from the 2015 earthquake. Due to local religious beliefs, only designated people could enter the core of the shrine that contained wall paintings of immense artistic and historic value. Following the earthquake, through the support of the local community, the fragments of these wall paintings were painstakingly salvaged and stored in boxes padded with sand, under the guidance of international experts. However, the local community expressed their desire to redo these paintings following the required rituals rather than just putting back the salvaged pieces. Clearly, for them the spiritual value of the wall paintings holds much more importance than the historic value-

When recovering urban heritage, the essential consideration is the recovery of both physical and social integrity of the urban fabric. While physical integrity would involve recovery of the entire morphology of built fabric, the social dimension would require strategies to retain or bring back the original inhabitants rather than exposing the place to gentrification process, which will essentially deprive heritage of its significant social values that give identity and meaning. Moreover, there is often a mythology revered by a monolithic community inhabiting a particular heritage place. Even seemingly single communities sharing a geographical location, religion, or ethnicity, may be divided into diverse groups based on gender, age, shared needs and interests, and power relations. In fact, each member may belong to multiple communities based on their shared identities, perceptions, and needs (Sen, 2006). Therefore, the recovery process should be mindful of the multiple narratives of heritage and ensure that the heritage belonging to the powerful group does not take precedence over the heritage of the weaker, marginalized, or minority groups. If this is not taken into consideration, the recovery process could recreate or reinforce conflicts and vulnerability of heritage in the long run. The recovery process should, therefore, promote cultural diversity and tolerance through consideration of heritage belonging to all the sections of community and serve as powerful means for building peace and reconciliation.

Nevertheless, it is important to reflect upon whether the symbolism attached to heritage really serves to achieve the well-stated purpose at the local level or is merely meant to convey a message to the international community. Take for example the case of reconstruction of Mostar Bridge following the war.

All the above-mentioned examples illustrate that our approach toward the post-disaster recovery of cultural heritage depends on the values attached to heritage, and its social, cultural, economic, and institutional context.

An even more fundamental issue is related to the consideration of the official versus local narrative of heritage itself; where the latter may also have diverse perspectives among various sections of the community. This is even more challenging in societies affected by conflict since there are always different narratives or perceptions: who are the winners or victims, the majority versus the minority points of view, nationalist versus the ethnic view of heritage, and the communal versus the secular. Of course, often short-term gains for securing political mileage often take precedence over long-term gains of achieving rebuilding identity, achieving resilience and building peace and reconciliation.

A critical challenge is how to deal with heritage when the socio-spatial structure of the community is significantly altered following a conflict since the original inhabitants may have moved away or changed their location within the city; new groups may have moved in, taking over the areas abandoned by the original inhabitants. In some instances, only a certain section of the community may have remained while others have left the place for good out of choice or fear. In such situations, can old identities or values be reinforced or new identities or values be created? Can existing identities or values go through a planned transformation through a post-crisis recovery process and, if so, how can this be achieved and what enabling mechanisms are needed in the larger context in which the recovery process is initiated.

Recovery of heritage does not entail only the reconstruction of the remains of the past. Heritage is embodiment of social and cultural practices and these must be given due consideration even in the design and planning of new post-crisis reconstruction. Take the case of reconstruction in Maharashtra state in India following 1993 earthquake with the help of soft loans from the World Bank. The policy of relocation of reconstructed villages to “earthquake safer places” decided on the basis of the nature of the ground, not only distanced people from their agricultural land but also from their cultural heritage represented by temples and mosques, wells, and old trees with old deeper spiritual values for them.

Due to incompatibility of the new village layout and house designs with spaces needed for carrying out traditional social and cultural practices, many reconstructed houses were abandoned. Also new materials and construction practices were encouraged at the cost of traditional skills in stone masonry. Rather than upgrading traditional building knowledge in stone, which is a locally-available building material, it was considered to be a cause of the destruction. While poor stone constructions were indeed responsible for the collapse of houses, the improper use of the material was the cause rather than the material itself. In fact, even with subsidies provided by the government to promote new material and technology, local people could not afford building good constructions due to limited resources and lack of appropriate skills and knowledge of new materials and technology. Due to the fear against the use of stone inculcated by the engineers educated in contemporary construction skills, most people resorted to new materials and technology employing heavy use of reinforced concrete and brick, albeit compromising heavily on basic safety standards. Concrete was also found to be climatically inappropriate compared with stone and wood, which kept the indoors cooler during the hot summer months. Perhaps the most disastrous consequence of this reconstruction policy was the nearly total disappearance of traditional stone craftsmen who slowly changed to contemporary materials and construction techniques or shifted to other occupations.





**MARATHWADA, INDIA.** The house designs and the layout of villages reconstructed after the 1993 Marathwada earthquake in India had no link with traditional architecture and planning. As a result, many of these villages were not occupied by the beneficiaries, who preferred to reconstruct their traditional shelter. *Image: Rohit Jigyasu.*



**MARATHWADA, INDIA.** Local masons carry out unsafe construction practices using new materials and technology because of lack of appropriate knowledge and unaffordability. *Image: Rohit Jigyasu.*



However, a post-crisis situation sometimes creates new values. The disaster prevention center located in the downtown area of Minamisanrikucho was totally destroyed by the Tsunami that hit the shores of East Japan following the massive earthquake in 2011. While several people climbed to the roof to save their lives, the Tsunami waves did not spare most of them. A brave woman working at the center perished while shouting from atop the roof telling people to escape to the safe area. The tsunami left the skeleton of the structure bare, while everything else was either damaged or swept away entirely. As the post-tsunami recovery phase progressed, the crucial question was whether to keep this structure as a memorial or demolish this as it represents painful memory. The views on this were sharply divided. Meanwhile, the story associated with this structure became popular through national and international media and there were steady streams of visitors from Japan and abroad visiting the site and paying tributes to the victims. Though the government was initially toying with the idea of demolishing this structure, it has been left intact due to its rising popularity, and is now decorated with flowers and incense for visitors to pay their respects. While most local inhabitants still are not particularly in favor of keeping this structure, there is predominant acceptance of the new values this site has come to embody over time. Contrary to this, in another nearby town of Ksennuma, a huge fishing boat was swept inland due to the tsunami, reminding people of the destructive power of the waves. A similar discussion regarding the future of this wreck again started among the authorities and local community. However, the final decision was to clear the site by removing the boat. Retaining and restoring the symbols of painful past would necessitate consensus on the accepted new post-crisis values among various stakeholders including various sections of the community. Of course, there is likelihood of their greater recognition as heritage with increasing distance from the event as time may serve as the great healer as in the case of Hiroshima memorial. Recovery of these remains may sometimes also need a creative interpretation as in the case of Berlin wall, and in that process may also involve adding new values through powerful narratives linked to the event and struggle for recovery afterwards.



**TRADITIONAL FISHING VILLAGE OF SHIZUGAWA IN MINAMISANRIKUCHO.** It was nearly wiped out due to 2011 Great East Japan Tsunami. *Image: Rohit Jigyasu.*



**SHIZUGAWA, JAPAN.** The skeleton of disaster prevention centre located in the middle of Shizugawa town following massive damage due to the 2011 Great East Japan Tsunami has become a popular place for visitors. *Image: Rohit Jigyasu.*



**BERLIN WALL.** The remains of the Berlin wall have been creatively interpreted as memorial of painful past. *Image: Public domain.*

### Moving beyond authenticity debate

In heritage conservation charters, the term reconstruction means to return to the original or previous status of a heritage place or building on the basis of reliable documentation, to avoid mistaken interpretations of history. Reconstruction means returning a place to a known earlier state and is distinguished from restoration by the introduction of new material (Burra Charter, 2013: 2). However, as time passes, new materials age and difference that was once obvious in a reconstructed building tends to become blurred. In addition, natural hazards such as earthquakes and floods produce destruction and trigger reconstruction in a cyclical process. Heritage buildings located in disaster prone areas have consequently been affected and intervened in many times after disasters. The extent of the interventions in the form of rebuilding, repair or replacement of parts, among others – will, eventually affect our perception. In this context, does a building continue being the same even when it has changed over the years? Or in other words, can something be authentically rebuilt? This is similar to the case of the Ship of Theseus, where planks were replaced progressively over time until the point when it was asked whether it should still be considered the same ship.

Moreover, there is fundamental issue whether heritage can ever be reconstructed in the real sense because it might not be possible to restore social values from day one and historical and artistic values are bound to get changed/adversely affected.

The nature of interventions will therefore be influenced by the main conservation philosophy which would vary according to the nature of heritage and its socio-cultural context. Whether these interventions help in reading different stages of a building or the new is made to look old or in those cultural contexts, rebuilding/reconstruction is part of the very nature of heritage as in the case of Ise Shrine. However, there are cases where craftsmen possessing traditional skills undertake post-disaster reconstruction using new traditional materials such as wood or reusing the parts from the old building completely at their discretion; they sometimes use this opportunity to demonstrate their creativity by introducing subtle or pronounced changes in design. However, in such cases, the level of craftsmanship may be questionable. A related challenge is which historical layers to retrieve while undertaking recovery. Should all the historical layers that existed prior to disaster be retained or what particular layer of history should be chosen? What if a new historical layer is exposed after a disaster, as in the case of Wangdue Phodrang Dzong in Bhutan where new historical layers of the structure were revealed following devastating fire in 2012? What considerations should govern such decisions?

Taking into consideration the complex interaction between the heritage significance /values based on the nature of cultural heritage and the very cyclic nature of disasters, especially those caused by natural hazards, authenticity in its wider scope as defined in the *Nara document* (1994) can only be one of the many considerations for the recovery of heritage sites; other considerations are integrity and sustainability, as well as its role in improving the quality of lives of people associated with heritage. On a final note, a disaster could be seen as an exceptional incident that can profoundly reveal the limitations as well as the challenges of the discipline of conservation today, beyond established notions of authenticity towards alternative ones.

### **My personal reminiscence of Herb Stovel**

It is indeed challenging to write a piece on someone like Herb Stovel. He was a multifaceted person, a visionary, a thinker, a mentor, a giant among the giants whose contribution to heritage conservation cannot be summed up in few words. During his illustrious lifetime, he touched the lives of so many people, inspiring them and shaping their outlook toward heritage conservation. I consider myself fortunate to be among those people.

Although I had been reading his work since I joined my post-graduate studies in conservation, my personal association with him began in 2002, when I joined ICCROM as a visiting fellow for three months. On my first day at ICCROM, I come across this huge bearded guy, whose larger than life persona and deep voice made me feel initially a bit nervous. To my astonishment, I realized that he was well acquainted with doctoral research I had just completed and was already waiting for me with some pointed questions.

A few days after I had settled at ICCROM, he came to me with his famous book *Risk preparedness: a management manual for World Heritage properties* and asked me to give my comments on how it could be improved. Being a young professional, I was a bit intrigued at the idea of commenting on this pioneering work. After listening to my critical comments, he merely smiled rather a bit mischievously and only some days later came back to me with an offer of consultancy to develop the training kit on risk preparedness for cultural heritage, which would help ICCROM in developing courses on the subject. It was this very opportunity provided by Herb Stovel that laid the basis for my later work in this area that still continues to date. Such was his faith in young professionals; he firmly believed that giving them opportunities would bring in fresh ideas and energy to intellectual and practical pursuits in heritage conservation.

After returning to India, my dialogue with Mr. Stovel on various issues and perspectives on heritage management specifically risk preparedness continued through series of exchanges over email. He not only questioned existing notions and practices on heritage management but also engaged in an intellectually stimulating debate on new theoretical perspectives and practical ideas on risk preparedness of cultural heritage.

He was also an excellent teacher who believed in “case based” learning through the use of interactive mediums which included good old transparencies for overhead projection. He shunned power points as cold monologues that discouraged the effective engagement of participants. The opportunity of co-teaching an ICCROM course with him on Risk preparedness in Delhi during March 2004 organized to test the training kit, helped me immensely in learning these important skills.

My interactions with Herb Stovel continued till 2010 with occasional opportunities to meet and work together. I saw him for the last time in July 2010 during the World Heritage session in Brasilia, where he provided some very useful suggestions for the future activities of ICOMOS-ICORP (International Scientific Committee on Risk Preparedness) and personally put me in touch with representatives from various organizations. He also asked me to speak to his students who had joined the committee meeting as interns. He was always so enthusiastic to be in company of his students and looked for opportunities to inspire them through interactions with his former students and colleagues.

In fact, it was Herb Stovel's initiative to bring together five young conservation professionals from various countries in South Asia (most of them ICCROM alumni) to set up a unique online forum called 'SANEYOCOP' – The South Asian Network for Young Conservation Professionals as an initiative to voice regional concerns and initiatives at the international forum, which was needed in the absence of or ineffective national committees of ICOMOS in most of the countries in the region. In his introductory note to the network, He candidly remarked,

*For the network to be effective, it must have results oriented objectives (...) it will never be enough just to feel that you can talk with someone somewhere; there is a need to feel that your efforts will produce some changes, some results somewhere. The key to the success of a network is to ensure the activities undertaken are directly linked to its purpose for existence, its objectives, what it wants to accomplish. If the purpose of a network is simply to foster exchange and learning among members, then perhaps it is enough to talk about setting up a newsletter or something similar. But in my experience with networks large and small in Canada, North America and internationally, it is never enough to develop networks on this basis. Networks like this depend on volunteer support and enthusiasm, and eventually volunteer energy will wither and die unless directed toward larger objectives, objectives focused on 'changing something'. So for me the real question for SANEYOCOP members is –do you want to change something? I think you do, remembering the exchanges in the early days of this network, but I think you need to debate face to face what those changes might need to be. Hence for me the most important thing you (we) could do is organize a constitutive assembly during which members debate these points, and clearly establish a sense of purpose. Once this purpose is agreed to, then the rest of the discussion –what will we do?– can follow more easily.*

While setting up SANEYOCOP, the emerging professionals from region raised many questions to him to which he patiently responded in his usual simple, clear and well-articulated manner. Produced below is an excerpt from one such email exchange on October 4, 2004, in which he responded to questions on conservation charters and their role for a region posed by a young conservation architect, Chetan Sahasrabudhe.



*CS: What is a Charter? Is it guidelines, procedures, code of practice, policy for public awareness or a combination of everything?*

HS: No rules, but generally Charters contain principles which provide guidance for professionals and practice, helping clarify how historic buildings and sites should be treated. Principles may be translated as “guidelines” –applied principles– in local jurisdictions and practice. None of this belongs to anybody, hence use of language is loose, but generally, ICOMOS invents Charters and others invent other types of documents. ICOMOS is understood to have been entrusted when founded with developing and managing the ‘body of doctrine’ of conservation principles.

*CS: What is the Charter to be based upon? Isn't it supposed to consolidate the research and experience in implementation, accumulated over a number of years?*

HS: Yes, in general. But always in a particular context. Regional, national or thematic (e.g., historic towns, or historic gardens). Hence every charter should make provision for input by many experienced professionals within the designated context.

*CS: What is the process for preparation of a Charter?*

HS: It depends. If it is an ICOMOS Charter, they have their own rules, focussed on process, and involvement. Check the ICOMOS web site, [www.icomos.org](http://www.icomos.org), and you will eventually get some of this from them. If not ICOMOS, it is up to the organisers of the Charter. The more inclusive, the more likely the process is to result in a document which is recognized as having some credibility.

*CS: Is legal status of the resource to form the base on which Charters are formulated? In a number of Indian Cities the local government has protected a number of previously unprotected heritage structures. Are they excluded from the Charter?*

HS: Charters have absolutely no legal status. They represent efforts by professionals to agree on what is important but in no case have they ever been seen as having legal status unless governments adopt them. This has happened in Australia, where adherence to the *Burra Charter* has been made a condition of acceptance of proposed work for government funding. In Canada, I often threaten people –you are going to violate the *Venice Charter!*– and it often works, but I have no legal justification to make such claims. In India if a city wished, that city could say that for every building recognized or listed, then the standards described in such and such a charter would apply.

*CS: Should things like listing format be a part of the Charter?*

HS: As explained above, no - unless a jurisdiction links a charter and its principles to a list.

*CS: How do the provisions of the Charter apply to complexes and areas where individual components have differing significance?*

HS: There are no rules. Nor is there any one charter; there are many. Most charters say –every case on its own merits. In the local context, it is important to ask which charters might apply, and to what extent, before trying to apply them.

*CS: Is the division of 'Western' and 'Indian' approach valid? Is the Nara document irrelevant?*

HS: There is western and eastern, and within each, many subdivisions. The *Nara document* is the most relevant (hardly irrelevant) of the international documents for the Indian reality, being the first international document created since the 1964 *Venice Charter*, and being the first document to emphasize the importance of making conservation decisions within their cultural context.

CS: Does Venice Charter epitomize Western Thinking?

HS: The *Venice Charter* was adopted in 1964 as reflective of an international reality, by individuals from many countries including Asian countries. Subsequently, its shortcomings were recognized inside and outside of Europe, and efforts were made to rewrite it inside ICOMOS. In 1978, ICOMOS decided to keep the *Venice Charter* as an historic document in its own right, and to accompany it with national and thematic charters –the body of doctrine which today ICOMOS tries to look after.

CS: Is it that there has been no further thinking in the profession after that?

HS: There have been more than a 100 documents produced since 1964 so so much further thinking has taken place! This history of principles, charters etc. is easily available from many sources within and beyond ICOMOS.

CS: What is role of charters/principles/guidelines for a region?

HS: If I were in actively working in the region, I would wish to pursue the idea of a charter for the region on conservation in the region. This does not exist, and this is much needed. This is always the starting point for serious conservation in any country or region. But while this might be necessary, this would not be easy to do. Would agencies and individuals in each country recognize the results of a regional effort? The birth of maturity in a professional group is the realization they should define the principles they should live by. Young (and older) professionals in South Asia are at this stage now. This is an opportunity, and one which could galvanize member interest and activity. But how to manage it? This is the question.

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