The discussion on authenticity of historic buildings already arose in the late nineteenth century. The Society for the Protection of Ancient Building's Manifesto of 1877 consisted principally of a plea to “put protection in place of restoration”. This arose from the notion of romantic ruins which persisted throughout much of the twentieth century. The Athens Charter of 1931 for the Restoration of Historic Monuments had a more pragmatic approach towards allowing interventions to monuments. The preamble of Venice Charter of 1965 however states that “it is our duty to hand them [the ancient monuments] on to future generations in the full richness of their authenticity”.

Even though the World Heritage Convention does not mention authenticity, the Operational Guidelines requires nominated cultural properties to meet the conditions of authenticity. As per Article 82: “Depending on the type of cultural heritage, and its cultural context, properties may be understood to meet the conditions of authenticity if their cultural values (as recognized in the nomination criteria proposed) are truthfully and credibly expressed through a variety of attributes including: 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.” The Operational Guidelines explains the practical basis for examining the authenticity in articles 79 to 86, which is however a summary of the Nara Document on Authenticity.

The dialogues that led to the preparation of the Nara Document on Authenticity in 1994 began two years earlier in Kathmandu. In 1992 the Wood Committee of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) met in Kathmandu and critical comments were made on the restoration work being carried out on the I Baha Bahi. The issue was raised at the World Heritage Committee session in 1993. This led to the demand mainly of Asian State Parties to review the concept of authenticity. It also led to a decade long discussion which placed Kathmandu Valley on the list of World Heritage in Danger in 2003 due to uncontrolled urbanization and loss of historic fabric.

Considering that the Nara Document on Authenticity will have been twenty years old next year, and the discussions that led to this document initially began in Kathmandu, we intend on revisiting this discussion at the symposium. Over the past twenty years, the definition of heritage has expanded to include for example cultural landscapes and industrial heritage; however the application of authenticity on such heritage remains unclear. This is especially the case when considering the complexities of living urban heritage.

The discussion on authenticity is closely linked to the parallel themes of the symposium: management of heritage, community involvement and disaster risk.

- The system of management of heritage must have the main objective of safeguarding the attributes that express the values of the site. Authenticity refers to the way the values are expressed by the attributes: whether they are truthful and credible. Therefore the system of management must provide a means of ensuring the authenticity of these attributes.

- The creation of these attributes and the understanding of these values are closely linked to the relevant community. In most cases these communities still exist and therefore must continue to have a role to play in the discussion on understanding and retaining authenticity.

- Disaster risks directly impact authenticity. When a disaster occurs, heritage responds through its adaptation over centuries. There are however through time certain casualties. Materials deteriorate while entire structures are affected and in certain extreme cases the entire context and related intangible heritage are destroyed.
The primary object of a management system of any heritage site is to protect the attributes and elements that express the significance of the site. To achieve this, there first needs to be a clear understanding of the significance or value of the site. Effective management processes for decision making, implementing and monitoring are required, functioning within parameters provided by appropriate institutional, legal and economic frameworks. The management system must however also take into account the local context, existing governance structures and related sectors such as local development, tourism and disaster risk management. The new “UNESCO Recommendations on the Historic Urban Landscape” (http://whc.unesco.org/en/activities/638) has been adopted as “an additional tool to integrate policies and practices of conservation of the built environment into the wider goals of urban development in respect to the inherited values and traditions of different cultural contexts”.

The Operational Guidelines for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention requires all World Heritage properties to “have adequate long-term legislative, regulatory, institutional and/or traditional protection and management to ensure their safeguarding”. The required conditions for protection and management are provided in articles 96 to 98 and for management systems in articles 108 to 119. The efficiency and effectiveness of the management systems are often made questionable by the magnitude of the factors affecting the heritage property. In many cases traditional management systems have become dysfunctional but have not been revived or replaced by an alternative system. There are cases where management systems have been created for the heritage properties, but have not been fully adopted or integrated into the overall governance system. One can observe a tendency to prepare “Management Plan” documents, which explain what all needs to be done but are never implemented and might consist of recommendations that are not practical.

When Kathmandu Valley was placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger, the World Heritage Committee requested the state party to prepare an Integrated Management Plan (IMP). The IMP was prepared under the guidance of late Professor Herb Stovel and adopted by the State Party in 2007. The WHC/ICOMOS Mission Report of June 2006 states that the IMP of the Kathmandu Valley could be seen as a model process that “has gone through a thorough process of site-based information gathering and commitment by the concerned site-management authorities, and […] has incorporated the viewpoints and realistic possibilities of the complex management structure.” As per the IMP, the entire management system needs to be reviewed every five years, an endeavour which is now in progress. The outcome of the review and the lessons learnt will be publicized.

The discussion on management systems is closely linked to the parallel themes of the symposium: authenticity, community involvement and disaster risk.

- The management system must ensure the safeguarding of the attributes that express the significance of the heritage. This is clearly linked to the understanding of how the attributes express these values – whether it is truthful and credible or not. This understanding of authenticity becomes the basis for establishing an approach to conservation of the management system.
- The management system must take the community into account. In many cases it is up to the community to manage the heritage. Where traditional management systems still exist, these are maintained by the community. Where these have been lost, the new management systems must ensure that the communities participating in the management processes.
- The management system must include disaster risk management. Disaster risk is one of the major treats to the significance of the heritage property and must therefore be addressed by the management system.
The association between cultural heritage and community is being given increasing importance. This has been encouraged by the changing definition of cultural heritage, which has begun to focus more on the context as well as the related living cultural heritage. The involvement of community becomes even more relevant in the recent discussions on culture playing a key role in sustainable development. An important incentive of community involvement would be “benefit sharing” which has a direct link to sustainable development and the improvement of living quality.

Article 5 of the World Heritage Convention states that each State Party shall endeavour “to adopt a general policy which aims to give the cultural and natural heritage a function in the life of the community [...].” The Operational Guidelines mentions in Article 119 under Sustainable Use that “World Heritage properties may support a variety of ongoing and proposed uses that are ecologically and culturally sustainable and which may contribute to the quality of life of communities concerned”. The article also states that it is necessary to “promote and encourage the active participation of the communities and stakeholders concerned with the property as necessary conditions to its sustainable protection, conservation, management and presentation”.

In celebrating the 40th anniversary of the World Heritage Convention, an international symposium was organized in 2012 in Buyeo, Republic of Korea, by the Cultural Heritage Administration and ICOMOS-Korea entitled “World Heritage involving Communities: Concepts and actions in the Asian context”. The outcome document of the Buyeo Meeting states that “The aim was to explore the issue of community involvement within the Asian context. This is characterised by major trends that have a considerable impact on the way community issues are perceived and dealt with. [...] However participants recognize that there is a paradigm shift in the field of heritage conservation which is to engage communities within the state sector run heritage activities.” The document compiled relevant points under the following headings: (1) Who are “communities”?, (2) The concept of outstanding universal value, sustainable development and other values impacting world and heritage properties and its communities; (3) Boundaries; (4) Harnessing commitment to World Heritage for conservation and Sustainable Development; (5) Reconciling local traditions with the governance system; (6) Capacity Building. This initial contribution to this theme needs further elaboration which could be carried out in Kathmandu focusing on the community’s vital role in the context of urban heritage.

The discussion on community is closely linked to the parallel themes of the symposium: authenticity, management of heritage and disaster risk.

- The Nara Document on Authenticity points out the importance of the community. Article 8 states “Responsibility for cultural heritage and the management of it belongs, in the first place, to the cultural community that has generated it, and subsequently to that which cares for it.” This means that the understanding of heritage and the way the values are expressed depends on interpretation of the community that created the heritage.

- Heritage is created by a community and ideally they will remain the caretakers. This means that traditional management systems need to be prioritized and where possibly even revived. It is only when the original community linked to the heritage is lost or has transformed to an irreversible level that new protective measures need to be introduced. The close association between management and community is vital.

- Disaster risk management of heritage is primarily dependant on community participation and cooperation. Even though the first few days after a disaster the main focus would be on emergency response to save lives, the recovery of cultural assets that are of value to the community becomes an important part of rehabilitation. The identification of the most significant heritage, the disaster risk reduction and preparedness and the early response all depends on the close collaboration between the authorities and the community
Over the past few years, the world has become much more aware of disasters and the need for risk preparedness. The media coverage of the Tsunami of December 2004 was a success story in respect to both collecting billions of dollars for rehabilitation and reconstruction after the disaster as well as awareness building throughout the world. However, just 10 months later a fatigue had already crept in when funds were being raised for the victims of the Kashmir Earthquake. The success of responding to a disaster though lies in preparedness. The authorities and the communities need to be prepared in respect to reduction of risk as well as immediate response to a disaster. The safeguarding of lives is the main concern, which makes preparedness even more essential for areas that are given less priority, such as the protection of heritage.

As per Article 118 of the Operational Guidelines of the World Heritage Convention: “The Committee recommends that States Parties include risk preparedness as an element in their World Heritage site management plans and training strategies”. Most often, risk management and heritage conservation are seen as opposing actions. It is therefore critical that two issues are taken into consideration at an early stage of planning; how to integrate risk management into a conservation management plan and how to integrate heritage conservation into the planning for disaster preparedness.

The cultural heritage of the Kathmandu Valley has developed with a close association to earthquakes by adapting and regenerating in a process of cyclical renewal. The lingering awareness of the destruction by the Bihar–Nepal Earthquake of 1934 with a magnitude of 8.4 allows us to envision the need to be prepared. In case of an earthquake, the soil conditions in the valley magnify the intensity and due to liquefaction major damage to structures can be anticipated. There are lessons to be learnt from traditional buildings that have introduced measures to make structures more earthquake resistant. From history we understand that the return period of such destructive earthquakes is between 80 and 100 years and we are commemorating the 80th year of the Bihar Nepal Earthquake next year.

The discussion on disaster risk is closely linked to the parallel themes of the symposium: authenticity, management of heritage and community.

- Authenticity is greatly threatened by disaster risks. Cultural heritage is damaged or destroyed. There is often the tendency to restore or even reconstruct the most important structures in an effort to erase the traumatic events from ones memory and provide hope and motivation to the community. Under such circumstances the understanding of authenticity and the discussion on its application is critical.

- Disaster risk management must be part of the overall management system of any heritage site. After a major disaster, many historical buildings are lost during the response and recovery phase. More historical and vernacular structures are lost during the reconstruction phase. Bulldozers and heavy equipment come in to clear the area. New engineered shelters are set up for the homeless. Reconstruction begins as fast as possible with little understanding of the context and needs of the people. Many of these buildings are replaced by horrendously inappropriate structures in the name of earthquake safety. In Kathmandu state of the historic monuments and fabric in the aftermath of the 1934 earthquake give some idea on the scale of the destruction and the lack of resources and preparedness to carry out restoration works.

- Disaster risk management is dependent on community participation. A resilient community will ensure preparedness for disasters and will safeguard the heritage which is important to them. This does not mean that only safety is prioritized which would only lead to a community living behind defensive walls in fear and anticipation of the next disaster. As Goto-san a storyteller from the Minami Sanriku in the Tsunami devastated area of Japan explained: “Nature will reclaim what we snatch from it. We cannot fight it. We must learn to live with nature.”