# SUSTAINABILITY OF URBAN RENEWAL PROJECTS: LESSONS FROM BHAKTAPUR AND BANDIPUR PROJECTS

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**Abstract.** Urban renewal is an intervention to reverse the trend of decay and decline in a city or a town. The concept is fairly new in the developing world.This paper presents the different debates and experiences of urban renewal and seek to find out the factors in urban renewal project that leads to its sustainability through case studies of Bhaktapur Development and Bandipur projects from Nepal. The findings confirm the importance of public participation in plan preparation and implementation, meetings and discussions among stakeholders and awareness campaign for the project to be successful and sustainable. A realistic project that is based on local needs and situation lead to project success.

**Keywords: Urban renewal, sustainability, public participation, implementation.**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Urban renewal is a **new idea for the many developing countries around the world** and yet to be put into practice. The term 'urban renewal' is dynamic as it evolves in accordance to change in the city and its economy. It is an intervention (of varying degrees) to reverse the trend of decay and decline is a city or town. As per New South Wales Government Guidelines,**2010** it is defined as '...*building on the strengths of each place, transforming under-used or dilapidated areas, boosting local economies and providing a mix of uses and activities to meet the needs of communities*.' Definitions vary as per the needs and requirements of the area for urban renewal.

Urban Renewal in Europe went through significant changes over the last decades. In 1970's the focus of renewal was only on physical intervention and was known as 'hard' urban renewal. The trend shifted in 80's, it made more efforts not to displace the people from their existing settlement areas, and this renewal was known as 'soft' urban renewal. In 1990's the urban renewal process became more integrated, integrating physical, economic and social aspects. This was called integrated urban renewal, which is area-based and it shows that complex interventions are required to renew a city [12]. In simple terms, the urban renewal model has shifted from demolition and redevelopment to renovation, conservation, rehabilitation and revitalisation.

The new generation of 'area-based integrated urban renewal' are debated heavily. It seems appropriate to intervene by defining the area of decay in the city, so that the interventions will be direct and more effective. However, as per the critiques of area-based policies from wider view, state that focus on a defined area displaces the problem to another neighbourhood. And as a result, such interventions do not contribute to well-being of the city as a whole. This usually happens because the root cause and the potential solution of the problem lie outside the renewal area. Sweden implemented area-based policy and only 5% of the poor could be reached [8]. It is quite evident that the area-based approach cannot **solve the overall issues like unemployment**, which would be the underlying problem of the designated urban renewal area. In other words,**policies based on area may lead to leaving out the social aspects**, since social aspects are not confined to an area or neighbourhood. So it is understandable that horizontal and physical interventions should address beyond the renewal area as some problems could not be solved within these areas. Vranken (2008) raised his opinions that selection of most deprived areas will leave the areas slightly better off without any attention at all. However, the area-based intervention is chosen, not because it is more appropriate but it is better visible.

The horizontal policies need to be put forward along with the area-based interventions to address the problem in a better way. The policies mentioned should target the whole urban area or certain specific characteristics (not through definition of areas).The policy to enhance the skills of unemployed residents, so that they have opportunity for employment, could be an example of horizontal policy. The Birmingham city council organised training for its residents to improve their chance of employment in new shopping centre [12] .However, it is experienced that horizontal policies often do not reach the people of most deprived areas.

The urban renewal policies in The Netherlands are similar to other western European countries but are more pronounced. The renewal is aimed at creating social mix housing in the disadvantaged neighbourhoods. It is to decrease gap of the disadvantaged groups from the main society through provision of diverse housing stock to have social mix. In addition, there are policies aimed at providing educational skills, which lead to easy integration, decrease criminality and create safe environment.

As in most developing countries, the urban renewal concept is quite new in India as well. The decay and decline of several Indian cities is being tackled with ad-hoc developmental initiatives. The early master plans of metro cities do not incorporate the concept of integrated urban renewal. It was restricted to conservation of heritage sites. Even the recent urban renewal program is infrastructure provision oriented. The Indian cities are characterised by high-density development in limited space. The urban renewal policies and programme to deal with each city varies due to different problems, contexts, needs and changes in diverse and complex Indian society. For instance, urban renewal in Jaipur city would be more conservation-oriented, whereas for Delhi city would be to make effective use of the core area [10]

In the light of above views, for an optimum scenario both area-based and horizontal policy interventions would be required to renew an area and these interventions should be decided within the framework of urban renewal strategy

considering the complete urban area.The urban renewal plan and policies have to be based on the different needs and context of an area,city or town.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

For comparative studies, urban renewal case studies from Nepal; Bhaktapur Development Project (BDP) and Bandipur Eco-Cultural Tourism Project (BECTP) are considered. A site visit to Bhaktapur was made in 2017 for site familiarisation and to know the place for study. The data is collected through secondary methods through publications and collection of written documents.

## 3. CASE STUDY

The two area based urban renewal projects of Nepal will be presented as case studies for comparative study. The projects are selected based on the experiences and ideas it will provide. The projects are

> *Integrated Urban Renewal and Development, Bhaktapur*
> *Bandipur Eco-Cultural Tourism Project*

The *Integrated Urban Renewal and Development* Project, Bhaktapur or *Bhaktapur Development Project (BDP)* is a huge project and consists of conservation of architectural heritages, renewal or construction of technical infrastructure, economic promotion and urban development plan preparation. The second project, Bandipur Eco-Cultural Tourism Project (BECTP) is a very small project in comparison to BDP. The project is for development of Bandipur as a tourist destination and presents completely a different approach from BDP.

## 4. BHAKTAPUR DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

Bhaktapur **is located about 12km from the eastern-side of Kathmandu (Capital of Nepal).** The original inhabitants were Newars (origins from India, Tibet, Assam or even Burma) and they were traders besides being farmers. In 9th century, their settlements were set up all the way to Lhasa and in Lhasa itself. The rise and fall of Bhaktapur was seen over the next 5 to 6 centuries. In the 15th century, the city was taken over by a Malla Dynasty King, who gave Bhaktapur its first modern shape. And after he divided among his sons and daughters, the city fell into pieces, though the continuing trade provided sound economic base for the city.

However, when the Shah dynasty took over in 1968, Bhaktapur's political independence and economic base eroded. The higher class people moved out of Bhaktapur and only the farmers were left behind. The situation aggravated with the change of trade-route to Tibet and India. These routes were once the backbones of Bhaktapur's glory. With the closure of Tibetan border in late 1950's, all trade connection with Tibet came to a halt. The new road to Chinese border bypassed Bhaktapur. A major earthquake in 1934 inflicted heavy damages on the structures and infrastructures service. As a result, the town became the poorest, backward, dirty and unhealthy place in Nepal [9].
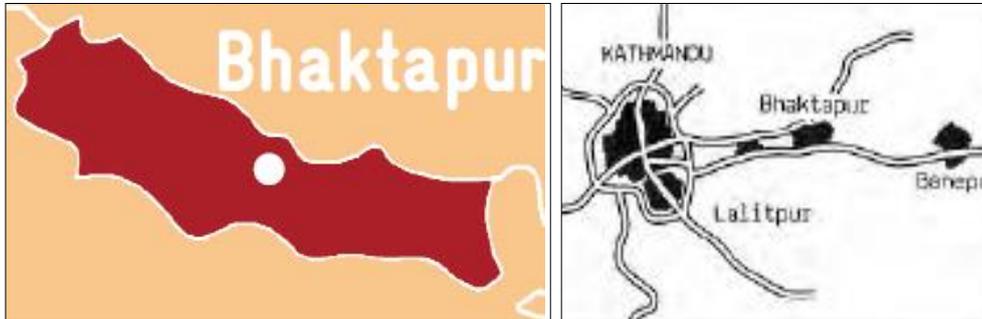
Figure 1.  Bhaktapur, Nepal , Source: [4]

In the year 1970, the Federal Republic of Germany presented a gift of Deutsche Mark (DM) 100,000 to the then Crown Prince, His Majesty Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev on occasion of the wedding. The gift was to be used for the restoration of a historic building. The Pujari Math in Bhaktapur was identified for restoration and was restored by a group of German architects in 1971/72. Thereafter, a proposal was prepared for integrated urban renewal by the appraisal group for the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation. It started the technical cooperation between the **governments of Nepal and Germany.**



Figure 2.  The palace and temples in ruin (L) and residential buildings destroyed (R) in 1934 earthquake, Source: [9]

The Bhaktapur Development Project (BDP) started as a project in one quarter of the town and ended covering the whole Bhaktapur town. Initially, it was development programme agreement to **ameliorate the living conditions** of the population in the northeast quarter of Bhaktapur and preparation of development plan for the city. It was a 12 years project (1974-1986), carried out by wide range of professional backgrounds from around the world. The project went through changes in policies, approaches and shifted priorities.

It was funded by GTZ(*Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer TechnishcheZusammenarbeit)* .The implementing agencies involved in the project were Bhaktapur Development Board (BDB) on the Nepali side and GTZ on the German side.

The project had four phases and the initial two phases (1974-1980) became known as German Project in Bhaktapur and Nepal. It was due to the dominance by the 12 long-term German experts in all the activities of the project. The later phases focussed its approach in working with local neighbourhood committees and were known as the 'Nepali or His Majesty's Government's (HMG) project'. This phase saw the withdrawal of German and Nepal Central Government's dominance and the build-up of local capacities. Campaigns were held to create awareness among the population and the administrations, that the temporary external development project must be transformed into ongoing self-sustained process.

### The Strategy: Parallel planning and implementation

The parallel planning and implementation strategy was adopted. The massive construction was carried out simultaneously with studies for economic promotion and preparation of the development plan.

The project commenced soon after the arrival of first German experts in May 1974.Later in November 1974, when the bilateral agreement was signed, over 10 construction sites had started with over 100 labourers. At this time, the implementing agency, the Bhaktapur Development Board (BDB) and the project was not created formally. It was only in 1975, that the BDB was set up and the Germans experts had tough time adjusting to the rules and regulations of the organisation [7].

It has to be noted that parallel planning and implementation strategy has been a successful tool for achieving results sooner. But it left no time to take in public ideas for the project. The strategy resulted in huge time pressure, ad-hoc decisions and unsystematic working procedures. However, the improvement in environment in the northeast quarter of Bhaktapur was appreciated by the population. In addition, the simultaneous experience in the field resulted in development of realistic programmes.
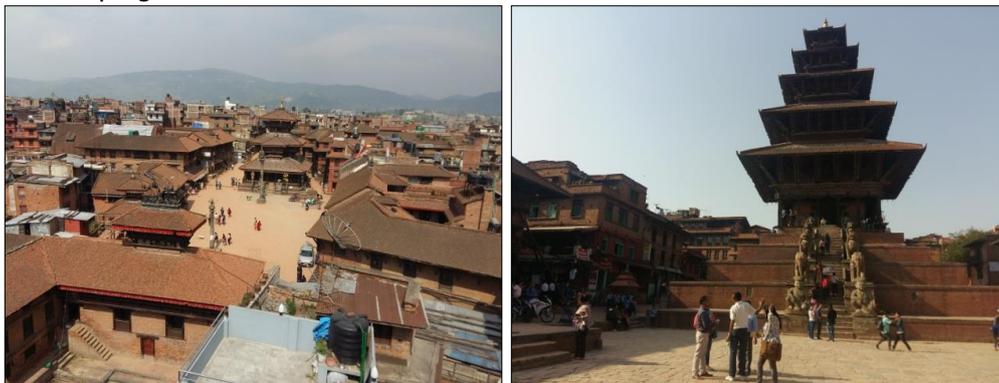


Figure 3. Dattatreya Square (L) and Taumadhi Square in 2017, Source: The Author

Figure 4. Street and brick paved drain in Bhaktapur in 2017, Source: The Author

**The end of the German project**

The political demonstration in major towns of Nepal in 1979 led to new political system in Nepal. The people strike against any on-going government project and activities of foreigners. For BDP, the people demanded for integration of public ideas and opinion into the project. The new direction of the project began. There was this need as there was growing tension and confrontation within the Nepali and German project people and the public for whom the development were carried out. It was crucial years and the project would have failed, if the approach was not changed [9].

The project was transferred from the Ministry of Works and Transport to the newly created *Ministry of Panchayat and Local Development*. A team of communication experts prepared a report, which contributed substantially to the formulation of the strategy, to be adopted in future. The main focus of the report was public participation into the project, exploring ways for it and conducting social communication study.

A realistic project proposal based on the local situation and needs were prepared under the initiation of the Nepali project manager. Number of working groups was established from local project staff and representatives from the concerned HMG institutions. The German 'expert' term was changed to 'advisors' and supported the working groups. At the same time, the number of expatriates was reduced.

The project proposal went through innumerable discussions with local leaders, teachers, traditional *Guthis* (closed association for religious activities or other purposes) and politically active people. It has to be noted that the even at this stage, the main population were left out. It was the local representatives of the

people. However, the trust was restored and the tension that existed within the actors was cleared gradually.



Figure 5.  In front of a Math (L) and Taumadhi Square (R), Source: [19].

## 5.  BANDIPUR ECO-CULTURAL TOURISM PROJECT (BECTP)

Bandipur is **about 143km from western side of Kathmandu and about 80 km from eastern side of Pokhara** (tourist destination).It is in Tanahun District of Nepal. It is a settlement on hilltop, from where one can have a view of Annapurna Range and Dhaulagiri peaks. It has rich cultural heritage brought in by Newars of Bhaktapur. In late 1760's, Bandipur was made **into a vital stop point on the trade route of India-Tibet** by the Newars. Bandipur, which was a simple Magar village developed into prosperous trading centre. The Newars brought their rich cultural heritage and architecture, which is the characteristic of the present day Bandipur.

However in 1970s, after the construction of the Kathmandu-Pokhara highway, the trade declined drastically as Bandipur was left isolated up on the hill top. Besides, the district headquarter of Tanahun, which was in Bandipur was shifted to Damauli. The town lost its importance and lacked accessibility, which forced people to move to other towns. There was great decline in the commercial trade and administrative activities in Bandipur [16] and the town turn into a semi-ghost town.
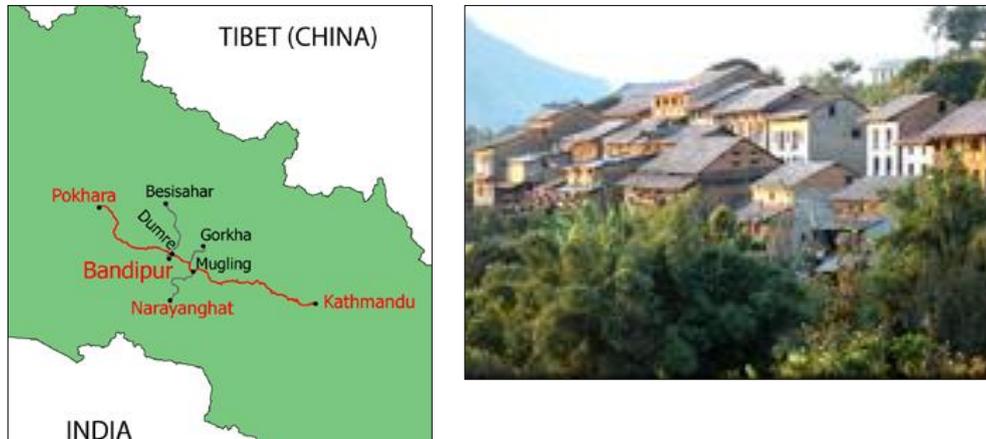
Figure 6. Bandipur location and image , Source : [1]

The BECT project focused on development of Bandipur as **an eco-cultural tourist spot that is sustainable**. The 2 years (2005-2006) project emphasizes the importance of interaction and discussion with the project partners and the local community. In contrast to the BDP, the project is of a small scale and focusing on only one aspect of urban renewal i.e. tourism promotion. May be due to which intensive public participation and discussions could be carried out. The activities of the project are broadly categorised into conservation, tourism, trainings, publication and promotion.

The project partners were '*Municipal Development Company of Hydra, Greece, Comune di Riomaggiore, Italy and Bandipur Village Development Committee, Nepal* '[1]. It was funded by the European Commission and several workshops and tours were held before the implementation of the project.

**Project Activities**

The two traditional houses were restored and adapted for tourist accommodation. Similarly, one house in the centre was restored into a visitor's centre. In total 11 house owners had applied for restoration, when the project called for it. It is rather a different approach of restoration, unlike initial phases of BDP. The house owners were involved in restoration along with the project team.

The repairs of Dumre-Bandipur and Bimalnagar- Siddha Gufa (cave) trails were carried out. More than 200 labours were contributed by the locals for repair of Dumre-Bandipur trail. The works for the improvement of Tundikhel area as a mountain viewing and picnic areas were carried out. The Thanimai temple in Gurungche hill was improved and for paving of Khadga Devi temple, around 600 square feet of stone pavements were contributed by the local people. The work for the temple was carried out under the supervision of Khadga Devi Puja Samita, the Bandipur Project sub-committee and the project team.In Ramkot, the three round houses were documented and repaired to serve as visitor centres. The repair work was done by the owners with assistance from the project.

The project also included study and research for the publication of promotional materials and website. Potential tours were explored within and around the town. Trainings for tour guides, for waste management and environment management were conducted.

**Implementation**

The project was implemented by the respective local committee under the supervision of the project team. For example, the local Siddha Gufa Development carried out repairs of stone trails to Siddha Gufa. Numerous meetings with the local committees were held to implement the project activities effectively. In some cases, designs were prepared during the meetings with the local implementation committee.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Bhaktapur Development Project was a massive urban renewal project with rehabilitation of the technical infrastructure and restoration covering approximately 40% of the town area. More than 250 small and larger historic structures were restored. Approximately about 1200 daily wage labourers were involved in the construction sites. The immense size of the project and no flexibility from the German consulting firm (System firm) and GTZ headquarters has caused the project experts to jump into the project to meet the deadline, undermining the component of public participation. Public participation existed in form of one- way communication from the project towards the public through motivation and information campaign related to health, hygiene and sanitation. Moreover, the targets set for the project was high and non-flexible. However, the results were quite impressive because the living conditions were improved. But it was inappropriate approach for the project to be sustainable. This kind of technical co-operation project may prevent the establishment of technical expertise and implementation capabilities of host country. Ultimately, the experts have to hand over the project to the local institution, which will be responsible for administration and technical maintenance of the project. Besides, during and at the end of the German project, the people of Bhaktapur became sceptical and hostile towards the foreign influence.

A new approach was adopted for the last two phases of the project, after the set-up of new political system in the country. It was more participatory approach involving the representatives of people, local leaders and the institutions. Unlike the initial phases, the project became more flexible to suit the local needs and situations. The time required for the participatory approach was more in comparison to the initial phases but it was necessary for **successful project completion.**

**It is noticeable that** in an inter-cultural joint venture, lot of energy and money is wasted, if external supporters alone implement it without involving the local people. Moreover, for the local people to have the sense of responsibility to the project, it is necessary to involve them in every stage of the project. It has been a successful project at the end of the day and a great learning experience for the teams involved and for the world. The projects highlight the importance of public participation in urban renewal process, so that the project is successfully

completed and is sustainable. The BDP project was designed and implemented during a time, when the concept of 'integrated urban renewal', was new. This resulted into continuous learning and implementation during the project duration. It will be interesting to note the throughout the span of the project, there has been continuous learning and implementation. It is a project that has captured world-wide attention due to its focus on preservation of the traditional structures and traditional urban-setting of the town. The project provides insights into the importance of public participation in an urban renewal process.

Bandipur project is implemented systematically through exchange of ideas among the project partners and involvement of local community. It can be attributed to the manageable size of the project unlike the Bhaktapur Development Project. Moreover, during the project time, previous experiences of other project existed and Nepal had local capacities and capabilities to implement the projects.

In the initial phase of the project, several discussions and meetings were held among the partners and the local people. The public were involved in implementation and not in project development. Different local user groups were involved in implementation of the project activities and as a result, a sense of responsibility of the project is developed among the people .The project was farsighted as awareness of the environment was created through trainings and seminars. The promotion of Bandipur as a tourist destination was done by participations in fairs, held in different countries and through hoarding boards and distribution of pamphlets. Additionally, local youths were trained on the importance of environment, heritage and tourism.

The project indicates the importance of meetings and discussions among the partners as well with the public, cultural exchanges, site visits, trainings and awareness campaign for the project to be successful.

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