

Poster Session at E-Science-Tage 2019: Data to Knowledge

27. – 29.03.2019 in Heidelberg

Nepal Heritage Documentation Project

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On April 25 and May 12, 2015, Nepal was hit by strong earthquakes with magnitudes of up to 7.8Mw (moment magnitude scale) and 7.3Mw. These disastrous events killed and injured thousands of people, and destroyed buildings and infrastructure. They also had a devastating effect on the rich cultural heritage in the area. Together with the vivid and recent urbanization processes, Nepalese heritage sites are under constant threat and their sheer existence is at risk.

Among the many projects to support the people in Nepal, the “Nepal Heritage Documentation Project” (NHDP) focuses on the documentation of endangered historical monuments. It aims at developing and implementing the first comprehensive inventory of endangered monuments, especially monastic courtyards and arcaded resthouses.

Based in Heidelberg and Kathmandu, NHDP is a truly collaborative effort. The team includes experts from a broad range of fields: architects and monument conservationists, historians, linguists and anthropologists, as well as IT and Digital Humanities specialists. During the documentation process, in-situ data as well as architectural and historical data are combined with aspects of the monument’s cultural, religious, and social context.

Overall, NHDP will document about 400 monuments within the first two years. The data form the basis for a new Open Access “Digital Archive of Nepalese Architecture and Monuments” (DANAM). Findings from the rich historical and anthropological research carried out during the last decades, provided by academic partners, completes individual records. DANAM is an implementation of the ARCHES platform, an open source management system for cultural heritage (jointly developed by Getty Conservation Institute and World Monuments Fund). It is a hybrid system based on the CIDOC-CRM ontology.

NHDP hopes that its commitment to systematic documentation and data management, up-to-date standards of documentation, and Open Access will set the stage for sustainable preservation of monuments. Intense co-operations with Nepalese institutions, especially the Department of Archaeology of the Government of Nepal, will create a new cultural heritage repository designed specifically for the management, preservation and protection of national and communal heritage.

In Germany, NHDP is formed through the cooperation of the Heidelberg Centre for Transcultural Studies (HCTS) and the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities (HAdW). In Nepal, the Saraf Foundation of Himalayan Traditions and Culture is the key project partner and representative. NHDP is also supported by an international network of partners, including the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust, i3mainz at the Mainz University of Applied Sciences, and UNESCO Nepal, among others. The project was made possible by a generous grant from the charitable British foundation Arcadia.