

## New and sustainable approaches to cultural heritage preservation. The case study of Nako.

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**The case study of Nako** Nako with its about 400 inhabitants is situated high up at 3.600 m above sea level in the Western Himalayas on Indian territory, Himachal Pradesh, close to the Chinese Tibetan border. The village houses an early example of Buddhist earthen architecture with significant artistic interior decorations dating back to the late 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Due to natural disasters and extreme climate conditions, the four temple buildings got seriously damaged and the valuable interior decorations suffered severe losses. To help the village and save its cultural heritage the Conservation Department of the University of Applied Arts Vienna started its preservation activities in 2004 lasting to date.

**The preservation master plan | Conservation of the temple interiors** Evolving from the initiative of the NRPP the Conservation Department has been concerned with the research and conservation of the elaborate temple interiors that comprehend wallpaintings, painted wooden ceilings and polychrome clay sculptures. Ernst Bacher, former General Conservator of the Federal Office for the Protection of Monuments, established the first preservation master plan. The existing four temples of the complex were to be treated and preserved as a whole ensemble, a general conservation concept stood above all single conservation measures in order to achieve stabilised temple interiors. The master plan addressed the different states of preservation in all the four temples and focussed on substantial conservation measures – reconstruction and retouching measures were clearly ruled out. Although this conception differed from other conservation concepts in the region, the master plan and its implementation were well accepted and appreciated by the village community and visitors as well. Since 2004 the master plan has been gradually implemented under the leadership of Gabriela Krist, head of the Conservation Department. In up to now seven summer campaigns conservation professionals from different fields, alumni and students of the Conservation Department, professionals from the National Research Laboratory for the Conservation of Cultural Property (NRLC), and the village community have been working together to realize the preservation goals. By 2009 the conservation measures for the interior decorations of the two biggest and most significant temples of the complex could be concluded.



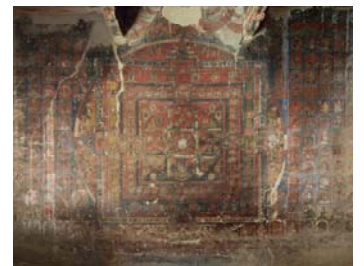
The courtyard of the Nako temple complex



Conserving the Lotsawa Lhakhang interiors



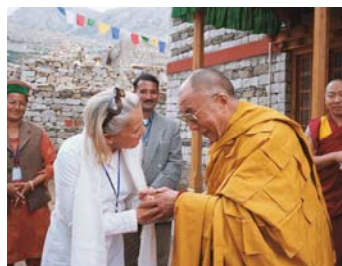
Filling of losses and cleaning of the wallpaintings



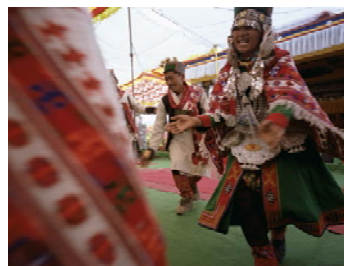
Lotsawa Lhakhang south wall after conservation



The founding of the Nako Museum collection



Meeting with His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama



Traditional dances during the 2007 festivities



The cultural landscape of Nako

**New approaches to heritage preservation | Sustainability** Actual approaches to cultural heritage preservation consider the discipline within a broader – social, intangible, ecological and economical – context. Sustainability has become a key issue. It demands various tasks to be covered considering the specific and complex framework of the preservation site and the potential for future development. Sustainable preservation in Nako addresses the remote location in the Western Himalayan region as well as the ongoing changes in the traditional village structures that occur with the rapid improvements of our globalized world. Keeping the village authenticity and continuing the long-lived traditions in accordance with the needs of nowadays life is what sustainable heritage preservation for Nako stands for.

**Raising awareness | The Nako Museum** The most important task has been to raise awareness for preserving the lived spiritual and cultural heritage of Nako for the future. With the long-term conservation work at the Temples interiors getting involved many professionals and villagers this process was started. It continued with the setting up of the Nako Museum by the Department's team together with the village community. The establishment of the museum collection gave impulses for the cultural identity of the village. Aspects of museology were introduced to the Nako Youth Club, responsible for the museum maintenance, and plans on a museum shop and cafeteria were initiated.

**Living religion and living culture | The Dalai Lama visit | Intangible cultural heritage** The building of the museum was part of the villagers' long-lasting preparations for the visit of His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama in 2007. For this event thousands of pilgrims were expected. The village Hangrang Organization managed and coordinated all related tasks that covered major building activities, accommodation and service facilities for the pilgrims, as well as teachings, seminars and festivities planning. Preservation works significantly contributed to the extensive preparations. The Dalai Lama visit was not only an outstanding spiritual event, but a vital cultural signal for the whole region that impressively showed the important intangible cultural heritage still existing and living in Nako. The rites, rituals, prayers, songs, dances, stories, and handicrafts make the liveliness of the village culture and need to be passed over and preserved as well.

**Long-term maintenance and care | Workshops and training | Local resources and building traditions | Cultural landscape** Since 2007 the temple complex, that had been taken care of by the villagers, has been regularly maintained by two monks. Especially for the Nako lama community a workshop focussed on preventive conservation and care of thangkas was realized in 2009. The workshop on traditional building technologies, their potential for modern housing and maintenance of traditional buildings was also organized. The workshop addressed the needs of lamas and village people who are facing a change in traditional building practices introducing new techniques and materials. Here, all preservation work for the temples served as an example for using locally available building materials and resources and fostering local building techniques. Furthermore, waste management and environmental preservation were presented taking into account the village with the increasing number of visitors and tourists. Nako and its heritage cannot be seen separate from its natural setting and environment, but with a more holistic view as a significant cultural landscape.

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### Acknowledgment

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