

East Africa World Heritage Network and stakeholder priorities

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(Received 26 September 2011; final version received 17 December 2011)

By sketching links between tangible and intangible heritage, rights and entitlements, and past and present, the paper illustrates how the stakeholders of a heritage site perceive the relevance and potential of World Heritage status. Ilha in Mozambique and Bergen in Norway are both World Heritage Cities. Ilha was considered a site at risk when it requested support from Norway in 1999. Together the two cities formulated a collaboration project (2003–2007) that both contributed towards raising living conditions and heritage management expertise on Ilha. An East Africa World Heritage Network was established that has contributed significantly to traditional knowledge being shared between Zanzibar in Tanzania, Lamu in Kenya and Ilha. This has bridged gaps between UNESCO expectations of World Heritage management standards and the resources and skills available on Ilha. Main outcomes of the collaboration (and the East Africa World Heritage Network) are conservation and adaptive reuse of World Heritage designated buildings through local employment and community empowerment.

Keywords: World Heritage; intangible heritage; empowerment; capacity building; Ilha; Mozambique

Introduction

The island Ilha de Moçambique (Ilha) in East Africa is 2.5 km long and 600 m wide, with an estimated population of 15,000 in 2007. Ilha is connected to the Mozambique mainland by a 3.5 km single-lane bridge. Ilha has possibly some of the oldest extant colonial buildings in the southern hemisphere. Ilha de Moçambique has been a melting pot of African, Arab and Asian civilisations since the fifth century and an important trading centre even before the Portuguese arrived on the East Coast of Africa in the fifteenth century. Ilha served as capital for the Portuguese colonial power until 1898. While the architectural heritage of Ilha shows distinctive Portuguese and Indian architectural influences (Exner *et al.* 1987), the Swahili intangible cultural heritage of the East African coast is dominant amongst the indigenous population of Ilha (see Figure 1).

Two distinct settlements that reflect the old power structure constitute the built form of Ilha. The colonial mansions of Stone Town are built with lime-washed stonewalls and tiled roofs, bearing witness to the wealth of the former Portuguese and Indian residents. In contrast to Stone Town, Macutitown is a culturally alive and rich community where intangible heritage traditions are maintained and developed through regular cultural events with story-telling, song, music, dances and

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Figure 1. Ilha de Moçambique situated in the lagoon, seen from the mainland. Photo: The author (1999).

culinary arts, religious traditions and the local language. The Macutitown with its rows and clusters of simple thatched mud-houses ('macuti' being a Bantu name for straw) formed an almost continuous 'carpet' of thatched roofs. Macutitown accommodates the southern, lower part of the island that was a former stone quarry providing stone for the houses in the northern part. Macutitown is thus situated on a lower level than Stone Town and regularly floods during rainy seasons, which causes damage and deaths. Lately infrastructure has been improved, and many houses are built in concrete blocks with corrugated sheet roofs.

After Mozambique gained independence in 1975, private properties in Stone Town were nationalised, with residents and owners leaving the island and buildings falling into decay. During the Civil War of 1976–1992 Ilha became a refuge for people from the mainland and, while some squatters settled in the Stone Town, the already densely populated Macutitown became overcrowded – and repeatedly attacked by epidemic disease.

Ilha de Moçambique was inscribed on the World Heritage List during the Civil War, at a time when international experts had no access (World Heritage Committee, 1991, Ref. 599 Criteria IV and VI). The uniqueness of Ilha, however, remained well known. The architectural unity of each of the island's two settlements derives from the uninterrupted use of building techniques, materials and decorative principles since the sixteenth century. Ilha's extant colonial heritage includes its oldest fortress (St Sebastian 1558–1620) with fortifications and numerous religious buildings. The dilapidated condition of built form on Ilha was unknown in 1991 and several of the Scandinavian and Portuguese experts who worked on Ilha in the 1980s were shocked when they discovered the extent of degradation of the Stone Town when the Civil War ended. Ilha was defined as an endangered site in 2001 (Kane 2001, Mathisen 2001).

The Municipality of Ilha was given responsibility for day-to-day management of the World Heritage Property in 1996. However, after the long period of war, skills and resources in Mozambique were depleted and, with Ilha lacking both people with adequate skills in heritage management or crafts and no funds for maintenance and conservation, little was achieved (see Figures 2 and 3).



Figure 2. The backyard of The Slave House, Ilha de Moçambique. Photo: The author (2004).

The slave house and the fortress of S. Sebastião

Ilha de Moçambique and Bergen Municipality are members of the Organisation of World Heritage Cities (OWHC), a network supporting cooperation and knowledge exchange amongst cities with World Heritage designated property (OWHC 1993). The City2City Ilha-Bergen Pilot Project was initiated 1999 by Bergen in response to a request for support and cooperation from Ilha (Mathisen 1999). The project was included in the OWHC working programme, with Norwegian funding secured for period of three years starting 2003.¹

Ilha was at this time recognised as an urban World Heritage settlement at risk. Besides the heritage management responsibility, the local authorities needed to improve general living conditions on the island. How to combine these needs presented a major challenge. From the wording of the World Heritage List inscription, the deserted Stone Town was generally understood to be World Heritage, and the crowded Macutitown not. Few Ilha inhabitants felt that the World Heritage was part of their local cultural heritage – regarding the World Heritage as a foreign colonial hangover. The monumental buildings of Stone Town were easily understood as heritage. The minor dwellings and religious buildings of Macutitown, which represent a sophisticated African urban culture, were underestimated as heritage by the residents due to the modesty and poverty of the urban structure.

The first community consultation of the Ilha-Bergen project was made in 1999, when the Mayor of Ilha de Moçambique invited community leaders and religious leaders to help in safeguarding the built heritage. Norwegian experts contributed during the consultations in bringing forward relevant heritage topics. As few people expressed a sense of ownership or related to the World Heritage property, local intangible heritage remained the important tool in community meetings: cultural



Figure 3. The Slave House, Ilha de Moçambique. Photo: The author (2005).

groups were invited to participate and sum up discussions through songs, dances and poems – illustrating how people had lived and suffered through history, how their ancestors had been the main builders of the heritage site. The religious leaders were main contributors in this process, encouraging people to respect and take care of the work of their forebears. The Municipal Strategy Plan reflects a strong feeling of local ownership developed because of these processes (Mathisen and Kane 2007).

Earning a living was the main concern for people at Ilha – the right to a decent job as described in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UN 1946) – the main local priority. All heritage activities had to reflect this. Access to education, better jobs and health facilities were main issues – and safeguarding World Heritage was not a popular priority. Numerous workshops were therefore held with local stakeholders in order to identify job opportunities related to the World Heritage tasks on Ilha.

Through the centuries, Portuguese builders had trained local artisans. At the start of the Ilha-Bergen project, however, Ilha had very few. Through the OWHC network, Ilha learned that Lamu had maintained a continuous knowledge about lime production since the fifteenth century similar to traditions on Ilha, and that Lamu and Zanzibar had also kept their fine woodcarving craft traditions alive. These crafts were an integral part of the living Swahili crafts culture of the East African coast, earlier shared by Ilha. To rebuild some of these skills on Ilha, trained restoration architects, masons and carpenters from Lamu and Zanzibar were engaged for workshops and on-the-job training on Ilha. Although buildings of the Stone Town may

have Portuguese ‘roots’, their sustainable maintenance is in accordance with the living traditions of Swahili culture. In parallel, a carpenter and a stonemason from Ilha were then hosted by Zanzibar and Lamu for one year of training. They returned to Ilha as team leaders for the project’s conservation works. The municipal site managers were invited for training in Bergen, Norway, and they retained their posts as main contributors in heritage management at Ilha (OWHC 2004, 2006).

At the project start several municipality-owned heritage monuments were in severe decay. One of these was the Slave House that served as a commercial house for slave trade during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – a structure similar to the legendary Slave House at Ile Gorée, Senegal. The Slave House turned out to be an excellent case for documentation and on-the-job restoration training, representing the historic and present building traditions of Ilha (seventeenth–twentieth centuries). As it had served as a prison during the liberation struggle (1964–1974), it also offered opportunities to pass on histories of the atrocities of torture and imprisonment of that troubled period. The heritage project created decent jobs for many Ilha workers. The insurance provided against injuries and right to health service was highly appreciated, although the use of helmets, gloves and special boots were generally considered exaggerated precautions by many workers (Heldal and Mondlane 2005).

The huge gap between UNESCO requirements and the expectations of Ilha heritage management and the available resources, and the lack of local World Heritage commitment, constituted a considerable challenge. The fortification, S. Sebastião, the most imposing monument on Ilha, is also the monument that has received the



Figure 4. Stakeholders, Ilha de Mocambique. Photo: The author (2006).

most attention from UNESCO experts. The Fortress was the main detention centre for political prisoners during the independence struggle, and many people disappeared after entering the main gate. The Fortress was considered a haunted place of no interest to others than foreign visitors. The local authorities have tried to dignify the place by honouring those executed there and by arranging cultural festivals that target young people and emphasise their ancestors' sacrifices. This has opened a suitable space for big events on Ilha. At international cultural festivals and performances, stories are told of the slave trade through music, dance and theatre. These local initiatives have given the local population access to a monument that up until then was considered a 'forbidden' site. This has contributed to a slow but continuous empowering of the local community (see Figure 4).

Conclusion

When Ilha and Bergen explored the potential for cooperation, Ilha's links to the Swahili craft traditions may not have been immediately obvious, Ilha's Portuguese 'lime and stone' heritage having been emphasised by UNESCO experts and the East African legacy given less attention. Through the meetings of representatives from Ilha, Zanzibar, Lamu and Bergen similarities of craft and skills were identified which allowed further potential cooperation to be explored through subsequent meetings, conferences and workshops. Management and artisan skills are raised by imparting know-how, and job opportunities have been offered to both literate and illiterate workers. A tangible, sustainable project outcome is the reopening of lime production for Ilha at a local lime mine on the mainland. The mine now provides traditional lime for the restoration works and employs 50 'heads of families'. The Portuguese colonial building tradition is safeguarded through the restoration of the main monument, the Fortress, supervised by UNESCO. Many Stone Town buildings have been restored during the last 10 years, and several local companies established to host, feed and guide tourists. The increase of work opportunities in tourism and building activities has brought income and improved living conditions for people in Macutitown.

Many Ilha residents still consider World Heritage as a topic of little interest. The visitors who appreciate the beauty and history of Ilha have, however, contributed to raising local pride and a sense of ownership of the World Heritage of Ilha – increasingly seen as an asset for building a better future. It is my conviction that the outstanding universal values, the significance of an inhabited World Heritage site, cannot be fully understood, safeguarded and developed without considering the interest, dreams and priorities of the inhabitants. Improving living conditions is a main concern for authorities and managers of many World Heritage sites. These sites cannot maintain their unique outstanding universal values if the rights and interests of the present inhabitants of the sites are not properly addressed.

Notes on contributor

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Note

1. The OWHC East African network was instigated during a workshop in Zanzibar in 2003 when a Protocol was signed by the Mayors of Ilha, Zanzibar, Lamu and Bergen. Knowledge and skills of the network partners were developed through three workshops with the topics: 'Heritage and economics' (Zanzibar 2003), 'Imparting history' (Lamu 2004) and 'Working programme for Eastern Africa' (Ilha 2005). The network currently operates through informal personal contacts, cultural festivals and a series of heritage-related events.

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