

The conservation of the African  
architectural heritage. Part II

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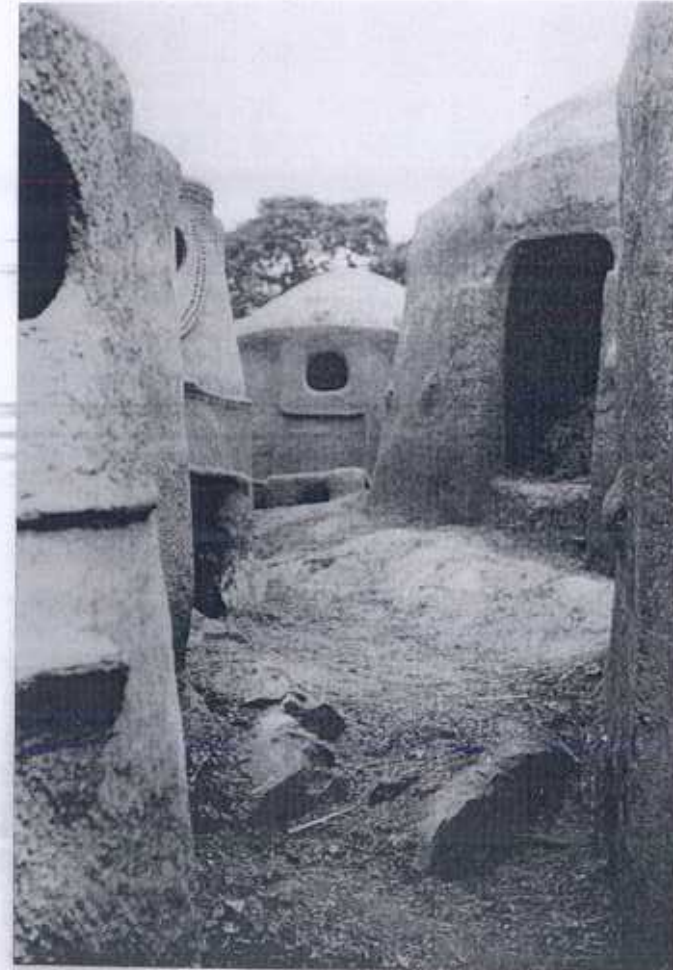


FIG. 1. Granaries of the  
Rukuba Tribe, Museum  
of Traditional Nigerian  
Architecture, Jos, Nigeria.

To date, the conservation policies of African countries south of the Sahara, both in terms of legal and administrative measures and the preservation and presentation of the cultural heritage, have been mostly concentrated on the protection and preservation of areas or sites of archaeological, palaeontological, ethnological or scientific interest and the protection of historic monuments, especially the ruined remains of abandoned built environments. Where buildings of historic and architectural significance which are situated in extant built environments have been protected as historic or national monuments, the protective measures have usually been implemented in isolation without securing the planned and controlled development of the surrounding areas so as to ensure that such development harmonizes with the protected monument. It can therefore be said that the adoption and implementation of the new concepts of conservation which focus on the conservation of the totality of the built environment, the planned and controlled change within it, and the integration of conservation with the overall planning and development of socio-economic programmes, are underdeveloped in Africa south of the Sahara; and where such policies are being developed, they are bedeviled with a myriad of planning and development bottlenecks.

#### Museum approach in the conservation of vernacular architecture

Many African countries have established open-air or village museums where examples of a country's vernacular architecture have been reconstructed or reassembled primarily for display purposes. Examples are the Tanzanian Village Museum on the outskirts of Dar es Salaam, the Bomas of Kenya on the outskirts of Nairobi, the Zambian Village Museum near Livingstone, and the more ambitious and complex Museum of Traditional Nigerian Architecture (MOTNA Project) in Jos, Nigeria (Figs 1-3).<sup>1</sup>

The establishment of such museums has in most cases been inspired by the European open-air concept without a critical analysis of the rationale of such types of museum. While vernacular architecture in Europe is, generally speaking, a phenomenon of the past, in Africa it is still a living reality, providing housing for the majority of the rural inhabitants, about 85% of the population. It still dominates the rural built environment, and the basic problem is not the preservation of a dying tradition or even an extinct one, but how best to achieve a rational and planned development of such an architecture.

Many conservationists are of the opinion that the dismantling and rebuilding of an historical building in an artificial setting should be a last resort only when all other means of securing the protection and preservation in its original setting have failed. Contrary to this, the concept of a folk or open-air museum has been made the cornerstone of

<sup>1</sup> See Ogunsusi, V., *An introduction to conservation and the viability of traditional architecture in Nigeria*, unpublished dissertation, University of York, 1982.

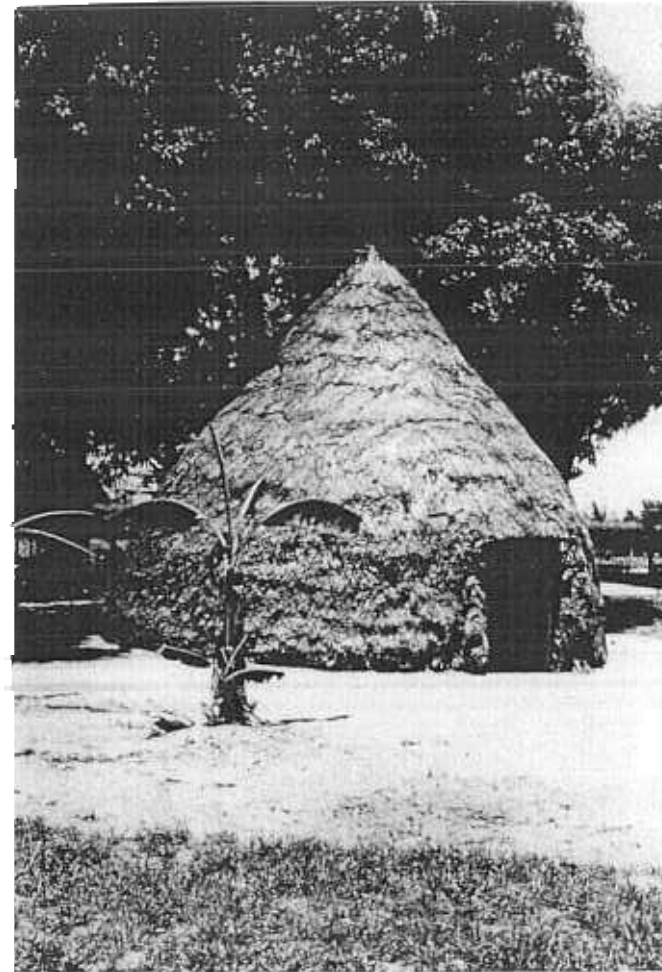


FIG. 2. Reconstructed traditional building in the Tanzanian Village Museum, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

policies for the preservation of vernacular architecture. This approach has a number of shortcomings. Even in a single country where such an architecture is varied in terms of materials, construction techniques, design and spatial arrangements, the reconstruction or assembling of even a representative sample is a gigantic undertaking. Of course, this can be solved by establishing several such museums, probably based on regions; but the main shortcoming is that such museums are out of

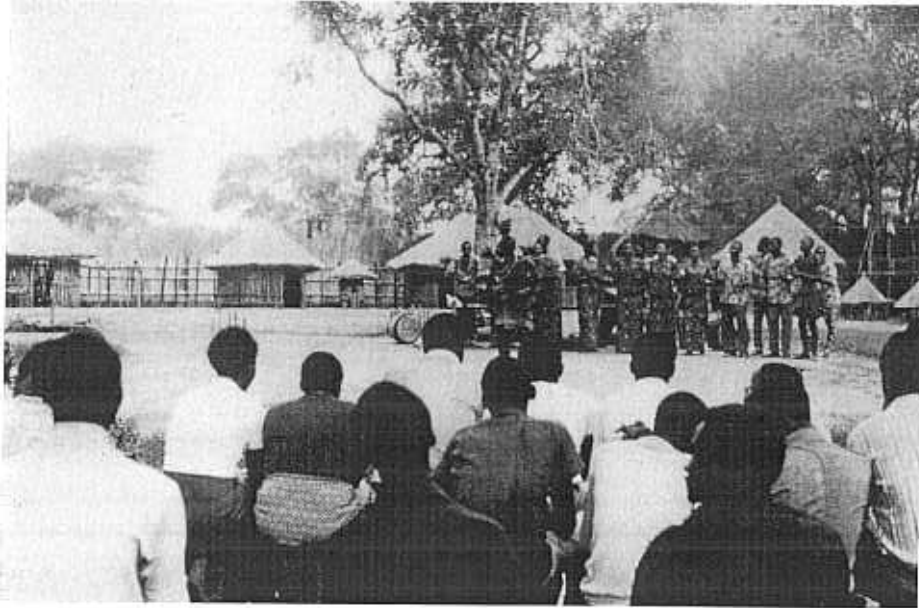


FIG. 3. A group of buildings and dancers in the Zambia Village Museum, Livingstone, Zambia.

context, and it is not possible to recreate the environment in which the buildings were conceived, developed and lived in.

Architectural conservation includes the protection and preservation of the structures as well as recording and documentation, detailed studies of materials, construction techniques and skills, and the history and culture of those who lived in the buildings. With the exception of Nigeria, where detailed studies and recording were undertaken under the leadership of the late Professor Z. Dmochowski, no such preparations were made before the establishment of most of the village museums; and rarely has such work been part of the research programmes of the relevant institutions afterwards. Independent studies have been undertaken by some faculties or departments of architecture of universities, such as those of the Kumasi University of Technology, Ghana or the Housing Research Unit, University of Nairobi, Kenya. However, these have been done either as training programmes for architectural students or research by the academic staff; but the conservation of such buildings is not dealt with in such studies. Finally, the preservation and development of the architecture and its future contribution to housing development both in the rural and urban areas is not recognized as forming part of the official conservation of the architectural heritage.

### The conservation of historic monuments

In most African countries, conservation legislation is geared towards the selection, listing or scheduling of buildings and other structures which are of historic or architectural significance as historic or national monuments—either individually or collectively. These legal provisions are deemed to be adequate for securing the protection and preservation of monumental remains of past cultures or civilizations, which in most cases are either ruined or situated in abandoned settlements. However, when they are within an extant built environment such provisions are inadequate since they do not cater for the protection and regulation of development in the surrounding areas. Thus the provision for a 'protected zone' in the area of such monuments, as is provided for in French legislation, does not exist in African countries. The consequence is that protected monuments are gradually being undermined by modern developments, especially by new buildings which in most cases are designed according to the modern international style copied unmodified from developed countries.

In most countries, legal protection is followed by preservation and presentation measures including repair, restoration, maintenance and interpretation of the monument to the public. The main objective is cultural and educational, and where tourism is an important social and economic consideration, its promotion is included in the formulation and implementation of conservation policies. In many cases, however, there is a lack of a clearly articulated policy on the integration of conservation with the overall planning and development of the social and economic programme. Because of this and the failure of policymakers and planners to accept conservation as an important developmental factor, it is relegated to the periphery and conservation authorities are bedeviled with the problems of inadequate finances, trained and qualified staff, and a very low planning profile.

These shortcomings, compounded by the attitudes of the planners and policymakers who view the conservation of the architectural heritage as the antithesis of modern development, have meant that many African countries have yet to adopt the modern concept of conservation to include the rational and planned management of the built environment. Where such policies have been adopted, as in Kenya where a conservation plan for the historic town of Lamu was prepared in 1976, and in Tanzania where a similar plan was prepared by a Unesco consultant for the historic town of Bagamoyo,<sup>2</sup> the implementation of the plans and the formulation of the necessary planning and development control measures have yet to be undertaken.<sup>3</sup>

### Future policies

From the above review of existing conservation policies, it is clear that in

<sup>2</sup> Watson, T., *Conservation of Bagamoyo*, Serial No. FNR/CC/CH/79/190, Unesco Paris 1979.

<sup>3</sup> Watson, T., 'Areas of concern: Bagamoyo, Tanzania', *Monumentum* (1982), vol. 25, no. 1, 28 ff.

the field of architectural conservation Africa south of the Sahara, though endowed with a rich and diversified heritage, needs to develop new perceptions and targets. In the formulation of policies and the planning of programmes there is a need to adopt the new concept of conservation which, without abandoning the traditional listing, scheduling and preserving of monuments because of their archaeological, historical and artistic significance, has widened its scope to embrace the more comprehensive approach towards the protection of a total environment and planned, controlled change. This accords well with the current emphasis on rational use of existing resources. Buildings of historical and architectural significance, as well as being cultural landmarks, may also be important housing stock; they may also represent a pool of knowledge and skills which, with proper planning and management, can contribute to the social and economic development of the communities which created them and the nation at large. It is suggested that the following policies should be developed, together with the appropriate planning and development control measures needed to achieve these aims and objectives:

#### *Vernacular architecture*

In this paper it has been maintained that African vernacular architecture is still a living entity, but this does not mean that its future is secure or unthreatened. On the contrary; its future is very insecure, and modern development policies represent a major threat. Urban development has not yet reached a point where it is fast devouring the rural areas; but the attitude of the policymakers and planners, especially in the area of housing and human settlement, makes the future of vernacular architecture seem bleak. The rural built environment is gradually being eroded by the introduction of new housing types and imported building materials and technology without a proper detailed study of the traditional living patterns; nor does it take into consideration the existing knowledge of local materials, construction skills and design in order that the new built forms might be suitably adjusted to the changes in life style as well as contributing to the preservation and development of vernacular architecture. This development has been aptly described as follows:

It is too easy to sweep away traditional patterns of settlement in the hope of creating a brave new world by the process of reorganization and rebuilding only to find that essential aspects of the sensitive relationship between people and their built environment have been ignored in the new development . . . and that the resulting built environment has too often resulted in physical development that is greedy in its use of national resources and which provides an unsatisfactory environment for the people. It is essential, therefore, that the designers and administrators of the new rural development should be equipped with a detailed survey of the traditional built environment of the areas in which they are working so that they may understand the existing complex interrelationships between individual, family, community, religion, animals, agriculture, trade, the built

form of housing, food storage, shops, schools, clinics, and churches, temples, or mosques as well as the overall pattern of a typical rural settlement.<sup>4</sup>

Although this description will apply to policies adopted by many African countries, there are a few exceptions, especially in West Africa where the philosophy of 'negritude' has promoted and supported the revival and appreciation of the African cultural heritage. Several West African nations are reported to have official programmes aimed at introducing innovations without endangering the old vernacular architecture too greatly. Study groups are at work; and dedicated European experts come as development consultants, learn the traditional forms, and make recommendations on how the existing materials and feasible building techniques can be used in order to build more durably. Means are sought to make clay mortar water-resistant, and admixtures to make it more solid are tested.<sup>5</sup> In Tanzania, a special government department, the Building Research Unit, has been established under the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development charged with the responsibility of undertaking research and studies on vernacular architecture. Building materials, construction techniques and skills are under scrutiny with the intention of formulating improvement and development measures for incorporation in the National Housing Policy and its programme.

It is therefore important that those involved in the conservation of architectural heritage should actively participate in ensuring that it is a major component in the formulation of housing policies, especially in rural settlements. The main thrust of these policies should be towards:

- i. The undertaking of research and studies, not only in recording and documenting the architectural heritage, but also detailed studies of building materials, construction techniques and skills, and the social and cultural patterns associated with a heritage, including settlement patterns.
- ii. Improvement and development of the heritage in terms of design, materials, construction techniques and skills, and their incorporation in the national housing policies and development, both in the rural and urban areas.
- iii. The protection and preservation of such a heritage within the rural built environment in clearly demarcated conservation areas or village ensembles which should be integrated with the village planning and development process.

To achieve these new conservation targets, the professions and institutions responsible for the conservation of the cultural heritage (up to now principally ethnologists working in museums) need to work very closely with policymakers, planners and other responsible professionals. Corporate management of the conservation programme calls for the support and participation of architects, physical planners, builders, engineers, sociologists, agriculturalists, geographers and administrators.

<sup>4</sup> Andersen, K.B., *African Traditional Architecture: A Study of the Housing and Settlement Patterns of Rural Kenya*, Nairobi, 1977, 1 f.

<sup>5</sup> Cardi, R., *Indigenous African Architecture*, 1973, 247.

### *Historic buildings and towns*

Lack of clearly articulated policies representing the second category of the heritage—the externally influenced architectural forms—can be attributed to two main reasons.

Firstly, as this is an architecture associated with colonialism, the newly independent countries sometimes associate it with exploitation and oppression, so that it can become a politically sensitive issue. Philosophically and morally, it may be difficult to convince policymakers that such an architecture is part of the country's national heritage and therefore worthy of preservation.

Secondly, most of the buildings in this category are situated in urban areas where development pressure is greatest. In most African countries, planning and development policies are modelled on those of post-World War II Europe, in which modern development is interpreted to mean comprehensive development and redevelopment, including the demolition of slum areas or what is regarded as substandard housing, to make way for modern, functional buildings which, in most cases, means high-rise blocks designed in the international style and constructed using modern building materials and technology. Another aspect of this development strategy is the demolition of buildings to allow widened roads to cater for the real or anticipated increase in traffic. Even where such buildings have not been demolished, their future is not secure; they are tolerated and used while the owners have no resourcing for financing modern redevelopment, or if the areas have already been earmarked for comprehensive redevelopment. Policies of urban renewal and improvement of existing housing stock are rarely adopted as part of an urban planning and development process.

### *Proposals for new conservation policies*

There is a great need to reevaluate the existing urban planning and development policies, in the process incorporating conservation as an important factor. In doing so there needs to be a new appreciation of the externally influenced architectural forms, as well as recognizing that the existing buildings which are of historic and architectural significance might form a valuable housing resource. It is therefore proposed that new policies should take account of the following:

- i. Conservation legislation should aim at securing the protection and preservation of areas containing buildings of historic and architectural significance rather than in selecting and scheduling buildings as historic or national monuments. This can be achieved by designating conservation areas.
- ii. The formulation and implementation of planning and development control measures to guide and regulate the undertaking of conservation work and new developments in such areas, so as to ensure that

the latter harmonize with the conserved heritage in terms of scale, materials and design.

- iii. The integration of conservation with the social and economic development programmes of the community and the nation at large, especially in the sectors of housing, education, culture and tourism. Urban renewal and development programmes in such areas should give priority to housing improvement by the preservation, renovation and conversion of existing stock including historically and architecturally significant buildings. Environmental improvement and enhancement measures, as well as traffic management as an alternative to road widening and increased pollution, are also urgently needed.

Finally, in this discussion of how African countries might adopt the already tried principles of the new concept of conservation, it must be stressed that there has to be an assured allocation of adequate finance, a supply of trained and qualified people, and a recognition of the conservation element in planning policies by giving it an equal placing with the other elements.

### **Résumé**

La politique de conservation dans les pays d'Afrique au sud du Sahara s'est concentrée jusqu'à présent sur la sauvegarde et la protection de sites d'intérêt archéologique, paléontologique, ethnologique ou scientifique et sur la protection de bâtiments historiques en particulier les ruines d'habitats abandonnés. Ce choix est reflété dans les règlements administratifs et les lois qui gouvernent la protection et la présentation du patrimoine. Mais l'auteur plaide pour une beaucoup plus large interprétation de la conservation selon 'les nouveaux principes' adoptés par les pays européens.

L'auteur donne une vue d'ensemble de la situation actuelle de la conservation en Afrique. Tout d'abord il décrit les musées de plein air ou de villages qui, selon lui, ont été inspirés par les exemples européens sans la critique nécessaire: en Afrique, l'architecture vernaculaire est toujours une réalité vivante qui concerne encore la majorité des populations rurales, soit environ 85% de la population totale. D'une part, l'auteur se pose la question de la valeur de tels musées lorsque la tradition est vivante, d'autre part il formule des objections à cette conception même, en particulier l'impossibilité de recréer l'environnement dans lequel les constructions furent conçues, réalisées et utilisées. Il note aussi le manque d'inventaire avant la création de la plupart de ces musées et regrette qu'il ne soit pas reconnu que les développements nouveaux de l'habitat traditionnel sont étroitement liés aux problèmes de la conservation.

Puis il étudie la conservation des monuments historiques et formule des critiques sur la législation en vigueur car elle ne tient pas compte du site des monuments qui est, parfois, détérioré graduellement par le développement de la construction. Car il n'y a pas de règle générale clairement formulée sur l'intégration des constructions anciennes dans le plan économique et social. Il cite cependant une ou deux exceptions comme à Lamu au Kenya ou à Bagamoyo en Tanzanie mais il note que le plan n'a pas encore été appliqué et que les mesures de contrôle n'ont pas été élaborées.

L'auteur est persuadé que les pays africains doivent préciser des concepts et des objectifs nouveaux. En particulier, il suggère qu'une approche globale permette de protéger l'environnement et de contrôler le développement afin d'obtenir une utilisation rationnelle des ressources, point qui est souvent mis en exergue de nos jours. Il souligne que l'environnement rural est abîmé par l'introduction de nouveaux types d'habitation, l'importation de matériaux et de technologies totalement étrangers aux traditions locales; le résultat est que les formes nouvelles ne sont pas adaptées au changement des mœurs et ne contribuent en rien à la sauvegarde et au développement d'une architecture vernaculaire.

Il attire également l'attention sur le fait qu'aucune décision n'a été prise quant aux bâtiments qui reflètent une influence extérieure et qui font partie du patri-

moine africain. Cela est dû en partie au fait qu'ils sont émotionnellement chargés—ils sont liés au colonialisme—et peuvent susciter des problèmes politiques mais aussi à leur situation, généralement en zone urbaine où les pressions sont les plus fortes. Il conclut en souhaitant qu'une nouvelle politique de conservation soit élaborée qui tienne compte des trois critères suivants: la définition de zones de conservation, la formulation et l'application de mesures de contrôle dans les plans d'urbanisation qui permettent d'orienter et les travaux de conservation, enfin l'intégration des bâtiments et sites à conserver dans le programme de développement économique et social de la communauté et du pays en général. Il plaide pour une aide financière accrue, une formation de spécialistes intensifiée et l'acceptation de la conservation comme élément du plan de développement.

### Resumen

Hasta la fecha, la política de conservación de los países africanos al sur del Sahara, tanto en términos de medidas legales y administrativas como de conservación y presentación del legado cultural, se ha concentrado sobre todo en la protección y conservación de zonas o emplazamientos de interés arqueológico, paleontológico, etnológico o científico y en la protección de monumentos históricos, especialmente las ruinas de construcciones abandonadas. El autor defiende una interpretación mucho más amplia de la conservación de acuerdo con 'nuevos conceptos' reconocidos en países europeos.

Comenta el panorama actual de la conservación en Africa, describiendo en primer lugar la técnica del museo tal como puede verse en los museos existentes al aire libre o en forma de pueblo, que cree haber sido inspirados por ejemplos europeos sin análisis crítico de la filosofía de este tipo de museo. En Africa, la arquitectura aborígen es aún una realidad viva, que suministra vivienda a la mayoría de la población rural, que representa un 85% de total. Aparte de poner en tela de juicio la necesidad de tales museos cuando la tradición sigue aún viva, el autor los critica a causa de sus inconvenientes, especialmente la imposibilidad de recrear el ambiente en el que los edificios fueron concebidos, llevados a cabo y habitados. Indica también la falta de catalogación antes de que se estableciera la mayoría de estos museos y el hecho de no haberse reconocido que la futura contribución de las construcciones tradicionales al desarrollo de la vivienda se halla íntimamente u

A continuación, comenta la conservación de monumentos históricos, criticando la legislación existente porque no tiene en cuenta las zonas alrededor de los monumentos que, en algunos casos, se ven degradadas paulatinamente por lo que se hace con ellas. No existe tampoco ninguna política claramente articulada sobre la integración de la conservación con la planificación y desarrollo generales del programa social y económico. Indica excepciones a la situación general, tales como Lamu en Kenia y Bagamoyo en Tanzania, pero menciona que todavía no se han emprendido ni la puesta en práctica de los planes preparados ni la formulación de las medidas de control necesarias para la planificación y el desarrollo.

El autor cree que es necesario que los países africanos adopten nuevos enfoques y objetivos. En especial, insiste en que se adopte una táctica más amplia de cara a la protección de un área determinada y al cambio planificado y controlado que esté de acuerdo con el énfasis actual sobre el empleo racional de los recursos existentes. Apunta que el medio rural edificado está siendo erosionado por la introducción de nuevos tipos de vivienda y de materiales y tecnología de importación sin estudio detallado adecuado de las formas de vida tradicionales, y que no se tiene en cuenta el conocimiento existente de materiales locales, técnicas de construcción y diseño a fin de ajustar la nueva construcción a los cambios de las formas de vida y contribuir a la conservación y al desarrollo de la arquitectura aborígen.

Llama también la atención hacia la falta de una política claramente formulada con respecto a las formas arquitectónicas de influencia externa que forman parte del legado africano. Esto ocurre en parte porque a veces están asociadas de modo emotivo al colonialismo y pueden convertirse en delicado tema político; pero otro motivo es que tales edificios suelen estar situados en zonas urbanas donde la presión constructora es mayor. Acaba proponiendo que deben redactarse nuevas tácticas conservadoras que tengan en cuenta tres formas de criterio: el reconocimiento de zonas de conservación, la formulación y puesta en práctica de medidas de control para la planificación y el desarrollo que guíen y regulen las obras de conservación y transformaciones en dichas zonas, y la integración de la conservación a los planes de desarrollo social y económico de la comunidad y de la nación en su conjunto. Y termina recabando mayor ayuda económica, más especialistas y que se dé cabida a la conservación en toda política de planificación.