

Ilha de Mozambique – Preservation through Tourism

Edward Echeverria
Member, ICOMOS, USA.
Washington, D.C.

1. Historic Background

There is an increasing awareness of the importance of Ilha de Mozambique to the cultural heritage of East Africa not only in Mozambique but among international cultural agencies. The preservation and promotion of the colonial buildings on the island off the northern coast of the country would complement the efforts to promote cultural tourism in the neighbouring countries of Zimbabwe and Tanzania, to their mutual benefit. Moreover, tourism is virtually the only resource that can be tapped to finance historic preservation.

The island is long and narrow, a limestone ledge rising out of the Indian Ocean, 3 kilometers long and barely a half kilometer wide. A bay provides safe anchorage and white sand beaches border the island on both east and west. Early Bantu settlements of mud walled villages have been recorded, dating from 200-300 A.D. The island had become part of an important coastal trading network, by the middle of the tenth century, according to the writings of Persian and Arab merchants in search of gold and other coveted metals. After Vasco da Gama reached the island in 1498, the island became a way-station in the Indian spice trade. Its protected harbour was a safe refuge in the monsoon season, for ships on their way to the Indian subcontinent, and the gold which was traded along the East African coast would be used to purchase the Asian spices, pepper, cinnamon and cloves. The island also served to defend the sea approach to Portuguese settlements on the mainland, which were important take-off points for the penetration and capture of the interior regions. The Swahili Arab dominance in trade was soon challenged, setting in motion a great struggle for trade supremacy.

The first Portuguese fort was built in 1507, and a small "castillo" in the style of a small Portuguese castle served as a trading station. Around it grew a European settlement, residences, commerce and a chapel. A monument marks the site of the original chapel, which was later destroyed in the 1607, in fighting with the Dutch, but there are many other early colonial churches extant. The northernmost point of the island was fortified to defend the entrance to the bay. In 1522 the Chapel de Nossa Senhora was built in the fort.

By the early 16th C. the governor of the territory, with title of Captain of Mozambique and Sofala, a Portuguese settlement on the mainland, maintained residences in both places, but lived on Ilha de Mozambique six months of the year in order to receive the frequent arrivals of Portuguese ships. With increasing interference of the Portuguese in the Arab and Indian trade, strong reactions and hostilities ensued, requiring additional fortifications. The Fortaleza of San Sebastian was built in 1558.

With the rising importance of the gold trade, the Captain took up permanent residence on the Island, while another officer under his command was posted in Sofala. By the end of the 16th Century, the island was an important outpost of empire, with two fortresses, churches, convents and a hospital. All gold, silver and ivory which were traded for cloth, spirits and miscellaneous items, had to pass through the Ilha de Mozambique, and then transhipped to their various final destinations.

In the beginning of the 17th C., the Dutch began an unsuccessful attempt to conquer the island. In 1607, the town was destroyed but was rebuilt. The major

religious orders of San Joa de Deus, Dominicans and Jesuits established monasteries, and the Jesuits became proprietors of most of the rental properties on the island until 1759, when they were banished from Portugal and the colonies. The Palace of San Paulo was converted from a convent to the Governor's Palace in the same period.

During this period, the export of slaves to Brazil expanded and overshadowed trade in gold and ivory and the island began to lose its commercial supremacy to the slave ports on the mainland at Quelimani and Ibo. By the second half of the 18th C., demand for slaves exceeded the gold and ivory market and each year between June and October, 15 to 18 Brazilian ships arrived at the Ilha de Mozambique to collect slaves which were shipped out under subhuman conditions. Finally, the slave trade was officially outlawed in 1837, but the traffic continued despite the official ban, under the guise of "contract labour". By mid-century, the population was about 4,500 of which three quarters were slaves.

With the relocation of the capital to Lourenco Marques, now Maputo, the development of the Ilha de Mozambique was halted and the town slid into decline. Attempts to reverse the physical deterioration were undertaken shortly after Independence. Conservation work was started on the Palace of San Paulo and several churches by the staff of Nampula Museum. In 1981 and 1982, architects Krysstof Powlowski and Viana de Lima, sponsored respectively by UNESCO and the Gulbenkian Foundation, surveyed and documented some of the principle monuments. Between 1982-85, the Mozambican Ministry of Culture sponsored an impressively detailed study by the Danish School of Architecture at Aarhus, resulting in a comprehensive diagnostic survey and analysis. Thoughtful prototypes for conservation and reuse of the buildings were prepared and recommendations were made for upgrading the infrastructure. These documents provide the basis for the phased reconstruction and reuse of more

than 30 buildings of monumental importance and 400 limestone buildings of varying architectural value. In 1980, over half of the stone structures were occupied as residences, offices or institutions, such as the Museum in the Place of San Paulo

Urban Development

The development of the island continued into the 1970's so that today, the town is totally built-out, as indicated in Fig. 1. *Plan of the Island*. With a population of over 7,000 in 1980, the remaining open space is in parks, playgrounds and cemeteries. The northern part of the town is masonry, built by the Portuguese and Asian merchants in continuous building blocks, as indicated on the plan. In 1980, 250 masonry buildings, housing 1200 inhabitants were occupied, while the rest were in varying stages of decay, some seriously undermined by vegetation. The southern half, always occupied by native Mozambicans, (during the slave period, three quarters of the population were slaves), is known as the "Macuti Town". The division between north and south is sharply demarcated, with very small lots predominating in the poor neighbourhoods to the south. The free standing buildings house 6,560 people or 95 per cent of the households in the town and are predominantly wattle and daub with double-pitched thatched roofs; a number of them have been modernized or replaced with more durable concrete block with flat roofs. The layout varies, with the eastern portion displaying straight streets with houses aligned in geometric order, while the neighbourhoods on the west more random and often labyrinthine in appearance. The bayside (west) is bordered by numerous old warehouse buildings.

Proposal for Re-use for Cultural Tourism

The entire northern half of the island has been declared a National Patrimony by the Government of Mozambique, organized in a single administrative unit called the Bairo Do Museo. Based on the comprehensive diagnostic survey (the Danish study referred to above), there

are more than 30 monumental buildings and 400 limestone buildings, representing over 400 years of development. The buildings are all one and two storeys. Given the small size of the island, a tight urban form has emerged, visible in the plan and photos. The central residential and commercial core offers a street scene with uninterrupted facades where it is difficult to distinguish the division between one house and another. A splendid arcaded sidewalk fronts the most important row of commercial buildings. Architectural unity has been maintained through the use of homogeneous building materials, parged limestone and coral, and a consistent treatment of facades with regular placement of doors and windows and architectural details like the carved and moulded cornices and pilasters. Variation is added by the application of Portuguese, Arab and Indian motifs in the treatment of some doors and windows.

There is a certain tendency to focus on the preservation of monuments, churches and monasteries, but in Ilha de Mozambique it is obvious that the large number of anonymous masonry buildings constitute the urban texture of the town. As the Danish architects write, "The continued existence of the anonymous structures is essential to the whole town's historical and architectural significance."

Among the typical larger buildings are the Lion Warehouses, with five attached galleries with double pitched roofs fronting on the beach. The Danish report suggested re-use as a maritime museum, exhibiting local fishing boats and outrigger sailing canoes as picturesque and attractive displays. Alternatively, depending on feasibility studies, such a building could revert to a practical economic use, e.g., in cotton ginning and spinning mills. The building fronts on bayshore, and enhances the visual aspect of the town.

One large building dating from the early 19th C. consists of a two-storey entry behind which is a large courtyard,

enclosed by one storey structures. Though its original use is unknown, it could become a permanent centre for research and management of the historic preservation. The building could provide accommodations for both living and work, with workshops and a small exhibit area. Considerable work is required to restore the facade and central entry hallway.

At a more modest scale, a two storey building in the centre of town could, when restored, provide a modest 10 room guest house with wide verandas overlooking the bay. The structure consists of heavy masonry walls and wide parapets enclose a potential roof terrace, bar or restaurant. There are a few infill sites that the Danish architects propose should be developed for housing, using traditional barrel vaults for roofs, to avoid the need for scarce timber, with an internal courtyard separating family living from service areas, in the traditional Portuguese manner.

There are a number of buildings that can be readapted for use as guest houses and small hotels within the historic district. Despite the absence of a current economic market for vacation or weekend houses, some of the smaller houses could attract local residents engaged in the tourist service industry. As mentioned above, about half of the limestone buildings are presently occupied by local residents, largely small traders, especially in salt; although the trade seems stable, it provides only a modest income. As demand increases in the area, an interest in modernization, densification or reconstruction of these buildings may occur. A line of credit should be established to encourage their preservation, with proscriptions against stylistic changes and incentives such as reduced interest charges. Precedents exist all over the world for this type of private restoration; notable architectural parallels are found in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, San Juan, Puerto Rico and Cartagena, Colombia.

First Phase Tourist Development

A conservative estimate of a first stage of tourist accommodations should be limited to a total of 50 to 60 rooms in a

combination of small guest houses and inns. The latter would meet international standards, with private baths, etc. Within the assemblage of tourist accommodations, would be artisan shops, displaying ceramic, wood and stone products as well as other commercial products for the tourist industry.

Demand for these facilities in the first phase would probably depend on the large expatriate community in Mozambique as well as visitors from South Africa (a traditional pre-war tourism market) and the neighbouring East African countries.

As the market for Mozambican tourism is renewed with the prospect of permanent peace in the country, expansion to a second stage of development should not exceed 250 rooms, or 500 beds. This would be adequate to market as an international destination and produce revenues sufficient to support the historic preservation project.

There are sufficient potential activities available in sports fishing, sandy beaches in addition to the historic tours of monuments and strolls through the contrasting neighbourhoods of the stone and Macuti towns. From the Fort of San Sebastian, Chapel of Nossa Senhora Do Baluarte, Convento de Santo Domingo and the Palace of San Paulo, visitors can walk through the mid 16th Century relics of ecclesiastical art and architecture, and the picturesque Macuti neighbourhood which preserves the practice of traditional arts, music and dance with marvellous costumes and make-up, as well as the production of artisan goods.

A six to seven day visit to the island would be adequate to enjoy and understand the cultural and natural environment. This tour would be combined with a wildlife tour to the spectacular parks of Zimbabwe to make up a 21 day package for international tourism.

Preliminary Cost Estimates

Using local materials and modern installations and equipment (plumbing, electrical and mechanical, etc.) it is

estimated that a combined first phase of 60 rooms distributed in 6 to 10 or 12 locations would require an investment of \$1.8 million at an average of \$30,000/room, including "back of the house" services, kitchens, laundry, etc. Financing should be backed by government loan guarantees.

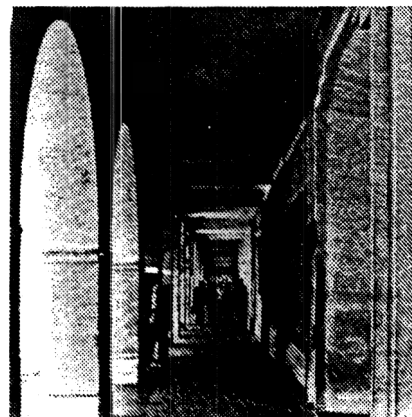
Due to the gross unemployment in Mozambique today, labour costs are very low. Requirements of imported materials can be minimal. Thus, the restoration and consolidation of the first 5 to 6 major monuments might be achieved for as little as \$200,000.

The revenues generated by this tourist development should be internalized, in a reinvestment fund for further restoration and preservation of the historic fabric of the town. For in addition to the private investment in hotel and commercial tourist activities, the Government of Mozambique must be prepared to make improvements in essential infrastructure, starting with the bridge that links the island to the mainland. Built in 1966, it is an iron structure in urgent need of repair. Improvements to street lighting and street furniture are needed, along with upgrading of the water supply, sanitation and solid waste collection. The objective is to create a pollution free environment. These improved standards must be extended to the Macuti town as well, to safeguard the health of the local population who will also be serving in the new tourist facilities.

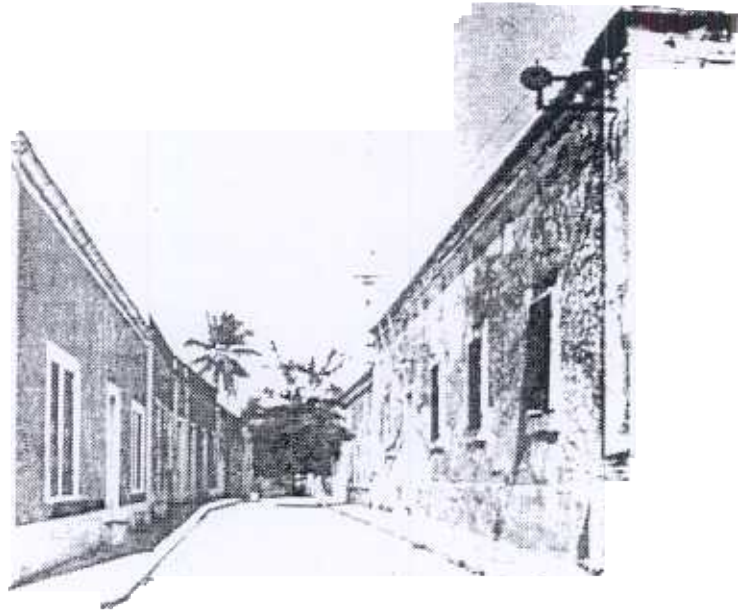
Despite frequent visits to Mozambique over the past five years, the writer's familiarity with Ilha de Mozambique is limited to the excellent written reports and architectural studies of the island. The bitter and cruel war that ravaged the country for almost 15 years made it impossible to visit sites outside of the major cities of Maputo and Beira; these comments are designed to stimulate further interest and support for this project. There is a desperate need to restore the economy and create employment, exploiting all possible resources. The truce between the government and RENAMO has been holding and with peace, the prospects for economic development are good.



**CENTRE DE DOCUMENTATION
UNESCO / ICOMOS**
49-51, rue de la Fédération
75015 PARIS
Tél. 01 45 67 67 70 - Fax 01 45 60 06 22







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