

Titus da Costa and Eric F Meffert

Titus da Costa

Grave injustices would have been done to human civilisation had the slow but inevitable destruction of the Stone Town continued unabated. A new dawn was heralded in 1985 when the government instituted The Stone Town Conservation and Development Authority under the Ministry of Water, Construction and Energy. Since then the Authority has been involved in an uphill struggle to repair the consequences of human neglect.

Activities, Achievements and Goals

In 1985 it was clear that all the government buildings in the Stone Town were in a pathetic condition. Even more so, the residences and godowns rented to private people. Thus the first positive step towards restoration, was to convert the tenants into private owners by offering them the opportunity to buy the houses at reasonable prices in the belief that proper attention would immediately take effect under private ownership. The selling itself was done in no uncertain manner. Only houses in really poor condition without architectural significance or rich historical background were sold. Upon buying, the new owner is required to repair the house during a fixed period in a manner prescribed by the Authority. Some 135 houses have been sold. The result is an outright success.

The funds realised through the selling of the houses are spent in restoring other government buildings within the Stone Town. This money forms the basis of the Authority's budget. So far, four buildings have been restored, including the Authority's office premises, currently in the final stages.

For the rehabilitation to be a real success, and more importantly to ensure the bleak period of the Stone Town history should never recur, it is important that society should realise its true value and therefore participate in the rehabilitation process.

A visit to the restored office buildings and their influence on the restoration of other houses would suffice to show how the Authority tackle this issue. The Stone Town Conservation and Development Authority also offers consultancy services to

restoration activities undertaken by government institutions and the private clients.

The rehabilitation is so diverse that the government cannot cover all the financial, technical and social aspects. It is imperative that greater efforts should be exerted from both within and outside the country to pursue the restoration efficiently and effectively.

The Stone Town Conservation and Development Authority is engaged in coordinating cooperation with various national and international organisations. Notable among these is the United Nation's Development Programme which has just initiated a pilot project.

NORAD has also assisted in restoring one of the said four buildings which now houses workshops for the typical Zanzibar craftwork. The Institute of Housing Studies in the Netherlands and the Aga Khan Foundation have also helped in training two staff members, currently enrolled in Rotterdam and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology respectively. One other staff member has just completed studies in Rome under the sponsorship of UNESCO. Currently 10 more staff, under the Authority's own sponsorship, are in various academic institutions in Tanzania. Hopefully more organisations will help train them further so as to realise the Stone Town Conservation and Development Authority's long term goal of self-reliance in manpower.

The German Volunteer Service has also provided the Stone Town Conservation and Development Authority with technical expertise. The French Government, the United Kingdom based Intermediate Technology Development Group and the European Economic Community have also expressed their interest in joining forces.

For a firm rehabilitation base, it is necessary that Stone Town's history should be well-known and its existing situation well-documented.

The Stone Town Conservation and Development Authority is currently trying to unearth the role of various buildings while also engaged in detailed inspection, documentation and monitoring of the conditions of all the buildings.

Furthermore, the Authority is currently constructing ten houses outside the Stone Town as shelter to temporarily accommodate Stone Town residents while their houses are in the process of restoration.

Setbacks

Needless to say, the Stone Town Conservation and Development Authority's work is not without problems. In this present period of transition, when traditional heritage is being rediscovered, when new experiments are being made to combine modern technology with cultural continuity, and when there is an urgent search for socially responsive forms of architecture for the poor who are in the majority, the restoration of Stone Town is lacking in almost all that is needed to pursue its aims.

We lack manpower. Resources like building materials and traditional technology are yet to be fully exploited. Materials and equipment are locally unavailable and hard to come by given the tough economic situation. The population keeps on increasing, leaving even smaller resources for the rehabilitation. In all fairness however, the development of The Stone Town Conservation and Development Authority is at least an initial concrete step towards the complete restoration of this international patrimony.

Mankind should therefore support the process. Not just to serve the town but also to create the awareness of the renaissance of the Stone Town as part of preserving the cultural heritage. We have to bear in mind that development, environment and architecture are interdependent.

We should therefore never deviate from our task of creating proper space for man's development through a synthesis of social, economic, technological factors and three dimensional forms. God bless the day, when man can confidently look back with pride.

Erich F Meffert

United Nation Development Project Leader

I would like to read a short quotation from Amos Rapaport's

“Human Aspects of the Urban Form”. In the chapter about environmental perception, the diversity of cities is discussed. About New York, for instance, he says “To visit nineteenth century New York, was almost like a trip to Europe because of the many specialised areas, some just a block in extent, others the size of a small town, each with different religious lives, languages, newspapers, restaurants, holidays and street lives”.

Then he turns his attention to Zanzibar. I quote once more “Another example is provided by Stone Town versus N’gambo in Zanzibar”. (N’gambo means — the other side of the creek — which is the African town.)

“The former of tall stone houses with narrow streets and alleys is separated by an old creek from the latter, with free standing coral house, arranged randomly under a screen of coconut palms. The grain is different, one is inward turning, the other outward facing. The two areas are also inhabited by different populations and have very different street lives and activities reinforced by sounds, smell, light and shade, temperature, air movement and so on”.

He continues, “a city like Zanzibar consists of areas homogeneous by race and religion with separate lives. They are very different visually and specially in terms of trades, smells, music, populations in all modalities. And the transitions are clear. A number of things are working together to reinforce noticeable differences. Variations in houses, street patterns, and open grounds, ethnicity, lifestyles, activities and the accompanying motives. The result is great richness and it is one of the reasons for encouraging the presence of different neighbourhoods in cities”.

This description is now history. It was already history when Rapaport published his book in 1977. Since then a number of changes have taken place in Zanzibar. Some of them are very much evident, others less visible. The creek does not exist anymore. It was already filled up in the 1950’s. The “screen of coconut palms” has gone. The trees that are left can be counted on two hands and I almost dare not mention Michanzani flats which replaced them.

The life as described has gone. This did not occur by slow evolution over time. The change took place very quickly.

A new generation has grown up since then, facing a heritage neglected to the extent of almost total destruction — but still vaguely recognisable.

What to do? Are the remains still of any value to anybody? People faced with severe day-to-day problems can hardly be blamed for being more interested in the present than in the past. The visible efforts to save the surviving treasures of the past are therefore even more commendable.

It is said that man cannot exist without history and Zanzibar is no exception. A young generation left for many years with little information about the past is again exploring its history. Such an approach developed into an attempt to master again Zanzibar Stone Town's destiny and to put a stop to just being a victim of circumstances. This has been recognised by the international community and gained its support.

There is the economic potential of Zanzibar in terms of tourism to be considered which however can be a means only for a more substantial end. Rehabilitation of Zanzibar's Stone Town does not mean to restore everything as it was before. The hope for the future is that the eyes will be sharpened to the values being reflected again in the reappearance of the past.

The goal is to fill the Stone Town again with meaningful life, to make a functioning township out of it which turns it once more into a home to the residents, not just a mere shelter. The UNDP/UNCHS (HABITAT) rehabilitation project of assistance to the Stone Town should be seen in this context. The project will fail however if it looks into buildings only. First come the people. The rest will follow. Therefore, the general housing issue is of top priority. If there is any chance assistance can be started in this seminar, please allow me to suggest some sort of architectural competition — in order to find out a suitable solution and at the same time avoid the failures of the past.

Some of the buildings in Stone Town are historic. There is the Hamamni Bath which has been renovated. The features of motifs on the building are somewhat Persian since it was built

by a Persian builder and by its side is the Persian Bath. This was the only bath in Stone Town which was for public use although there are quite a number on the island of Zanzibar. It was built in the nineteenth century by Said Baraghash, the Sultan of Zanzibar between 1870 and 1888.

Quite a number of buildings in town are Indian in style with balconies, galleries, and Indian doors and windows. Some have a combination of a bit of Indian, a little bit of Persian and some Arabic. Sometimes the arches in a building are Arabic, a dome Indian. There is a Hindu temple in the very heart of the old Stone Town.

A Roman Catholic Church was built in about 1897, designed by a French Father who had earlier designed a Church in Marseilles in France. The building is Romanesque. In 1970 the interior was restored and repainted.

Karume House was built in the early 1950's as a Town Hall, with a typical Indian style door. This type of door is numerous in a street which today is called Gizenga and is continued as Hurumzi and Darjani. Originally the name was Portugese probably because the Portugese Consulate was there.

Later it was carried on as Chor Bazaar to Hurumzi and to Modi Bazaar. The street is actually one continuous street snaking from the old Post Office to the Darajani. In this street, most of the Indians had their shops and residential buildings which are quite unlike the buildings which are on the seafront facing north. Most of the buildings facing north on the seafront; the People's Palace, the Custom House, the Court and Marine House, the old British Consulate building are typical Arab architecture, built by Arab businessmen before the buildings of the Indians. From the tower of Beit al-ajaib, the "House of Wonders", one can see the Old Fort which is now being renovated and next to it the orphanage building which was formally the Muslim Academy and prior to that the Sir Ian Smith Madrasa.

The funds for the School were contributed by His Highness The Aga Khan in about 1933. Nearby is the Jamhuri Garden which was once called the Jubilee Garden to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of Queen Victoria.

Along the seafront facing the north coast you see typical high Arab houses extending up to the harbour. One such building was the Grand Central Hotel. Until recently the building was the Ministry of Culture.

There is also the 'second' British Consulate. In this building Henry Morton Stanley lived for a short while during his journey to the East African Coast and Central Africa. It now houses the Department of Finance and the Workers Commission.

The Tembo House was the residence of the famous Indian businessmen Kowasjee Dinshaw and Brothers. The building was built in 1885. It is very easy to remember the date because it is very conspicuous on the door at the front of the building. It faces the sea.

Also facing the sea is the 'first' British Consulate building. David Livingston's body was brought to this building for identification. Also, explorers like Burton and Speke at one time or another lived in the building. It was later taken over by the famous firm of Smith MacKenzie and Company and it now houses the Zanzibar State Trading Corporation.

The Ministry of Education building was at one time used as an international maritime slave trade bureau until about 1893.

A number of buildings are being demolished. They are structurally weak and are going to be replaced by new buildings. We hope they will adhere to the old architecture of the Stone Town. There are many other buildings and elements of interest; the Customs Building, a carved Arab dome, the castilated wall of the People's Palace formerly the Sultan's Palace, the Friday Mosque, the towers at the old fort, the old dispensary, and the Bamnara Mosque one of the oldest buildings in the Stone Town. The minaret is believed to have been built about 1822.

1 The delegates to the Seminar on the Architecture of Housing were privileged to be given a conducted tour of the Stone Town restoration. This paper is a short introduction to the work of the Stone Town Conservation and Development Authority, which preceded the tour.