

ADAPTIVE REUSE OF HISTORIC BUILDING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The case of mikindani Old Boma, Tanzania

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Abstract. Mikindani is a fascinating old town in Southern part of Tanzania with winding streets and an interesting blend of thatched mud houses and coral stones influenced by foreign architecture. Mikindani was an important trading centre as far back as the 15th century and the famous explorer David Livingstone quoted it in his diaries as being "the finest port on the coast". Since then its fortunes have fluctuated but it still reflects its multicultural Arabic, African and European history. The Government of the United Republic of Tanzania, entered in an agreement with the British Non Government Organization "Trade Aid" on leasing of a historic building famously known as "Old Boma"* to be used for community development projects. In the year 1996, the building was a derelict ruin and within the collaboration of the Government and Trade Aid, the building has been restored into a comfortable hotel with modern facilities, while retaining its original features and charm. This hotel has created full time jobs and is an important training ground for a wide variety of jobs associated with the hotel industry, tour guide and community developments and has provided income for local fishermen, farmers and other traders. Moreover, it has attracted stream of visitors to the town and investments related to tourism industry in the town. Its restoration has accelerated the rehabilitation of other historic building and hence the town has rejuvenated. The built heritage of this historic town has been a catalyst for its development.

1. Preservation of Cultural Heritage in Tanzania

The Antiquities Act of Tanzania enacted by the independent government in 1964 and amended in 1979 to replace the colonial Monuments Preservation Ordinance and the Monuments Ordinance promulgated in 1937, is the basic legislation for the protection and preservation of the country cultural heritage resources. Under the law, the following categories of cultural property are recognized and protected: relics, monuments and protected object, (Amambay: 2005).** Conservation means all the process of looking after a place so as to retain its cultural significance (ICOMOS Australia, Burra Charter 1999). The aim of conservation is to safeguard the quality of values of the resources. Protect its materials substance and ensure its integrity for future generations (Fielden and Jokilehto 1998:14).

The desire to preserve the evidence of the past has many justifications. Rypkema (1992:206) notes that: 'Preservationists often talk about the "value" of historic properties: the social value, the cultural value, aesthetic values, urban context value, architectural value, historical value, the value of sense of place. In

fact one of the strongest arguments for preservation ought to be that, a historic building has multiple layers of "values" to its community Tiesdell etal (1995:11). The desire to preserve must ultimately be a rational economic and commercial choice; problems will arise where buildings are preserved only as a consequence of legal and land use planning control. In the absence of commercial justification, however, most preservation occurs only because there are legal and land use planning control that restrict physical change and prohibit demolitions (ibid).***

* BOMA means ; British Overseas Management Authority

** Source: Legal Framework for Protection of Immovable Cultural Heritage in Africa: Published by ICCROM 2005 pg.13-17

*** One of the prime motivations in architectural conservation is to provide education opportunities. Fielden (2004:ix)

2. Historic landscape of Mikindani Town

The traditional architecture of the town of at 18th century was very different from later developed by foreigners. However, there are few structures still standing that belongs to fourteenth century. This architecture still manages to describe the influence of many cultures including, Arabian, Indian and European. Local building types were limited to rectangular sleeping and cooking huts, and various types of store rooms. The buildings were linked by more or less defined outside areas cleared of grass and scrub and well swept, where many of the daily tasks and social activities took place. The architecture was a complete spatial system, with the enclosed structures forming only a part of homestead. The relatively short life of the building materials, from ten to fifteen years, was entirely appropriate to a farming method which required fields to be left fallow after a few years of intensive cultivation to regain their traditional fertility, after which the homestead would be relocated. Following the arrival of explores and foreign traders, particularly in connection with the slave trade, a number of forts and trading posts were built and testify to this difficult historical period. Later on, the colonial period generated new needs for construction. Inspired by the local solutions implemented by the traditional craftsmen, the construction technicians



The Old Boma Building in 2005 (Photo Author)

developed very interesting architectural compositions and styles.

The penetration of European in Africa, a classical style was a symbol of civilized taste. Possibly the Roman authoritarian quality appealed in confirming a sense of domination over the new territories. The symbols were readily applied by the nouveau riche capitalists of industrial Europe, and equally well by successful colonial entrepreneurs. Neo-classical architecture clothed their investment in a new territory with respectability and authority. This may be considered the

'Imperial Style'. At a practical level it was certainly easier to reproduce classical coral stone and stucco in its new context than it was to reproduce the craft-intensive Gothic style of which was popular in the late 19th century in Europe. The pointed window and door arches which are the characteristic of Victorian Gothic are seen in some of the early buildings built



The Old Boma Building during restoration in 1997

from coral stone and corrugated iron sheets.

The Mikindani Old Boma building is among the early architecture introduced by Germany colonialist in Tanzania at the end of 18th century. The Old Boma building was used as governor's residence in early 19th century by German and British colonialist. It was restored in 1996 to adopt new functions as a hotel. The building which was constructed using coral rags set in lime mortar with massive wall made up of undressed pieces is strong and stable. The rendering and plastering was originally finished smooth with lime mortar and white washed with several coat. This finish provides a protective layer to the fabric wall structure. The plains external façade of the Boma are often hide wonderful decorated interior parts. One of the interesting characteristics of the Boma buildings decoration is the spectacular niches opened in rows, on the walls. Behind the architectural trappings of the street elevation would often be a coral stone and corrugated iron sheet. Coral Stone was the main building material found all along the Indian Ocean coast and has influenced local building design and construction for centuries in the Indian Ocean coast of Tanzania.

3. Restoration of the Building and Community Development

Under the threats of collapse, the building was abandoned in the late 1980s and handed back to the Antiquities Division after many years serving different functions. The division of antiquities started to plan on how to conserve and reuse this important building

in the history of the country. Concerned by the devastating impact of this activity on the landscape of the town, the Antiquities division decided in 1990s to undertake the restoration of the building. This represented a great challenge, as it meant not only the restoration of the building which is in ruinous state, but also the implementation of a self financing restoration and management system. It is within this context; the Division of Antiquities entered into an agreement with the British nongovernmental organization known as "Trade Aid" on leasing of the building with the condition of restoring it and uses it for community development. The stakeholders then programmed the rehabilitation project, by proposing several possible functions for the building, allowing creation of various activities for the neighborhood residents, while preserving the identified values. Many ideas were expressed, but only the most financially viable could be studied. A decision was finally made, giving it two functions as a tourist hotel and centre for training of local residents in tourism related industry. The building were restored for two years and rented to the NGO for 25 years, after that, the building will be returned to the government.



The Old Boma building after restoration in 2001

The economic dimension of restoration work at the Old Boma building is addressed by tourism activities, which helps to generate revenue for local communities through the sale of objects, food products and services on one hand, and by the local authorities who collect taxes and other charges. The restoration of the Old Boma Building contributes immensely to the local and community developments needs of Mikindani town. According to David Throsby (2007) *historic building is an asset that has financial value as capital (it could be sold off as real estate for commercial developments), and it also has financial value in terms of the flow of services it provides (estimated, for example by the rental value of the office space)*. These aspects of the buildings value could be accorded its economic value as a piece of purely physical capital.

As such, this economic value could be provided by any building. But this is not just "ordinary" building; its distinguished feature is that it also has cultural value, delivering from the cultural significance which is essential to its qualification as cultural heritage.

Today, numerous development projects in the town are attached to the Old Boma hotel. They include the yacht club, scuba diving, handcraft industries, tour agents and tour guides and vocation education training centre. Its restoration has accelerated the rehabilitation of the historic buildings and hence the town has been rejuvenated. It has attracted a stream of visitors to the historic town and investments related to tourism infrastructure in the town. The restoration of the Old Boma building has compelled economic and social reasons for the retention of the historic character of neighborhoods, that can be summarized as follows; the retention of the physical fabric of an area provides the basis for cultural heritage tourism and this require the development of the infrastructure to sustain it. Tourism offers unparalleled opportunities for the economic development for those local communities in or near the heritage sites. Properly managed tourism creates jobs and alleviates poverty. The provision of accommodation and associated visitors service creates opportunities for the employment and local industries. The development of community business creates a range of social structure and partnership within the community which have ongoing social and economic benefits. Conservation of buildings and areas provides sustainable employment for a range of artisans including stonemasons, carpenters, and others. Conservation of traditional buildings also provides a framework for the retention of traditional skills and training of new generations of artisans.

4. Conclusion

The restoration of the Old Boma building has increased a number of tourists visiting the historic town of Mikindani. Therefore retention of physical fabric of an area provides the basis for cultural tourism, the provision for accommodation and associated visitor services and it has created opportunities for employment to local communities and development of local industries. The restoration of the Old Boma building has been the catalyst for development in Mikindani and Tanzania in general. Tanzania has abundant good ancient built heritage which if properly preserved and developed can contribute towards government effort to alleviate poverty. This is high time that heritage stakeholders can partner in order to develop a sustainable conservation, management and utilization of our cultural heritage for prosperity.

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