

Preserving and enhancing urban heritage



Above right: the "Door of no return" built on the Slave Route in Ouidah, Benin. Below: traditional door in Morocco.

The preservation and development of urban architectural heritage is more than just a cultural enterprise: it is an important factor of urban development. It also creates long-term links between educational institutions and local authorities, in both the North and the South.



The term heritage traditionally referred to isolated monuments and buildings. Today, it has been extended to include urban or natural ensembles – historical centers, villages, landscapes or large regions, which often lack protection in emerging countries in spite of their authenticity. Beyond the enhancement of archeological sites providing evidence of lost civilizations, today there is a move towards the protection of built heritage rooted in local traditions in order to pass on the craft knowledge and social practices they represent.

Likewise, intangible heritage – sacred sites, rituals and historical events that have left little in the way of physical remains in the region, such as the Slave Route in West Africa – are gaining recognition. The vestiges of colonial times are also becoming

With the School of African Heritage



Au palais des rois d'Abomey.

The School of African Heritage, with the *Institut National du Patrimoine* (French national heritage institute) and the *École du Patrimoine de Chaillot* (Chaillot heritage school), organizes training courses for museum curators and urban

planners from French-speaking African countries. Case studies range from the restoration and enhancement of the royal palaces of Abomey (Benin) to development projects in the town of Porto Novo, from the perspective of the environment, intangible heritage, tourism and infrastructure.

www.epa-prema.net
www.inp.fr
www.citechaillot.fr



Training urban planners, School of African Heritage / Institut National du Patrimoine / École de Chaillot.



French expertise and Chinese heritage

The explosion of Chinese cities over the last 10 years has resulted in the demolition of historical districts, which has in turn raised awareness of the importance of their conservation. The Chinese national institute for studies and research on historical towns and Tongji University in Shanghai have launched a vast campaign for the protection of historical districts using management plans inspired by French tools. Backed by the Observatory of Architecture in Contemporary China, French expert assignments and the *École de Chaillot* have contributed to the restoration of the towns of Tongli and Xitan, listed World Heritage sites.

ing historical objects, and their recognition and restoration open a path to local appropriation.

Economic, social and environmental tools

Heritage that is unused disappears. For sustainable conservation, old buildings must serve current purposes. The frequent lack of means in less developed countries only appears to be an obsta-



Top: the town of Tongli (China), which is the object of a protection plan.

Above: welcoming Chinese urban planners and mayors in Rennes.

cle. In fact, using local labor means that action that has become costly in the most developed countries can be envisaged. Techniques such as stone or earth masonry, woodwork and the use of lime to bind mortar, plaster and whitewash are still in common use. Adapted training courses are a means of passing on these techniques.

In addition to providing a direct source of employment on sites, heritage restoration also generates commercial and craft activities. Tourism, with the creation of hospitality structures for visitors, the enhancement of sites and the



Restoring the Jalali mosque in Ahmedabad (India).



The vestiges of colonial times are becoming historical objects (right, bourgeois building in the center of Algiers, Algeria).

The restoration and regeneration of the historical center of Ahmedabad

In 1997, for the 50th anniversary of India's independence, the French government offered to cooperate with the Indian government in the field of heritage protection and promotion. In 2000, the historical center of Ahmedabad, with its outstanding urban and architectural quality, benefited from a renovation protocol aimed at helping the local population to protect its heritage and continue to live there, to revitalize life in the districts and to train Indian architects in protection techniques. A heritage center, a place for providing information and training, was opened in 2003 and by late 2005, 49 restoration projects had been successfully completed.

organization of visits, becomes a development priority. Any tourist activity generates pressure. Striking the balance between developments that destroy and those that save requires in-depth knowledge of the heritage.

Channels for cooperation

UNESCO and its World Heritage protection program provides not direct financial aid, but recognition of sites that then attracts private and public investment. Experience sharing between networks of cities that face the same concerns is another promising channel for cooperation. Decentralized cooperation schemes often choose urban heritage as a priority.

Several European programs target historical centers in emerging countries. The new member countries benefit from structural funds – regional programs or the Community Urban and Interreg initiatives. The European Commission finances different regional programs, including EuroMed Heritage, Asia-Urbs and Urb-AI.

The World Bank's heritage and urban development program finances major infrastructure projects that sometimes include cultural and architectural heritage components. In 2006, 18 projects of this kind were underway.

In France, heritage is one of the priority areas of intervention of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs and the French Development Agency (AFD). The Ministry of Culture and Communication supports the exchange of experts.

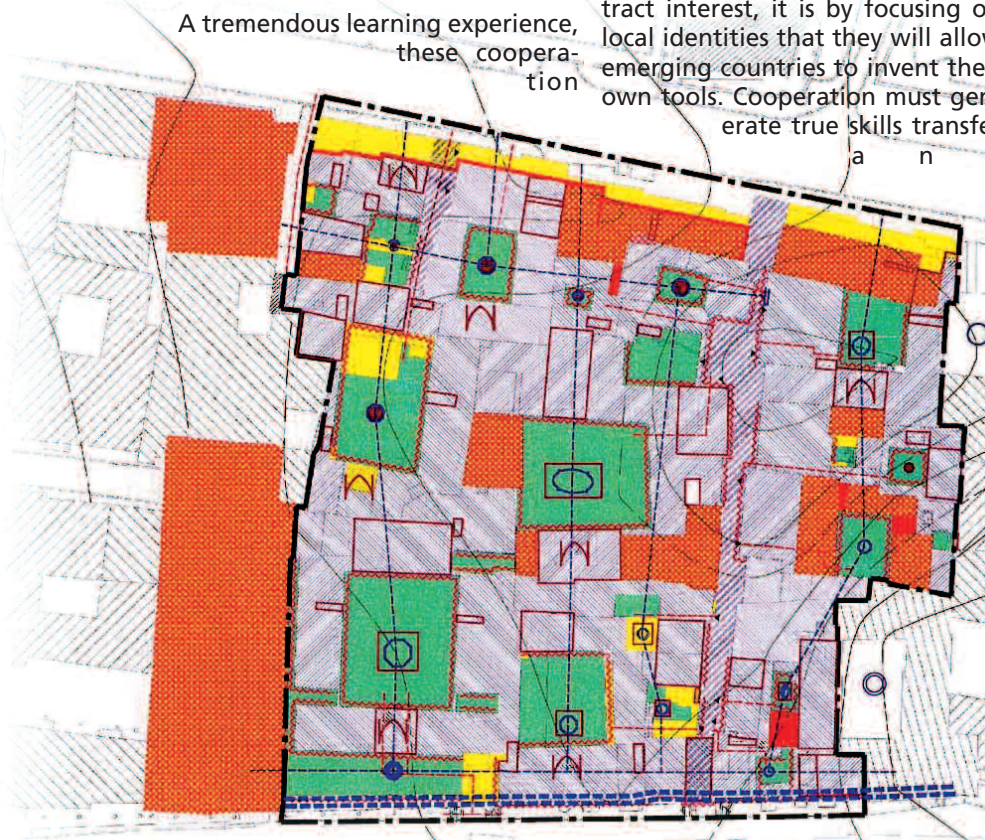
French architecture schools cooperate with foreign institutions. In terms of crafts, the Avignon school of conservation and restoration organizes vocational workshops and participates in defining the corpus on traditional habitats abroad. The *Institut National du Patrimoine* contributes to initiatives for the protection of scenery and to training for museum cura-

Restoration class in Bulgaria, Institute of Bulgarian Monuments / École de Chaillot, workshop in the Rhodopes.

tors. The *École de Chaillot* cooperates with several countries for the training of specialized architects.

A tremendous learning experience, these cooperation

schemes are a source of contacts and contracts for professionals on both sides. If Western models attract interest, it is by focusing on local identities that they will allow emerging countries to invent their own tools. Cooperation must generate true skills transfer



Restoration class in Syria, Damascus faculty of architecture / École de Chaillot, joint workshop. Proposal for protection plan for the Qanawat district.

Webography

UNESCO World Heritage
<http://whc.unesco.org/about/>

Conseil international des monuments et des sites – ICOMOS
www.icomos.org

European program (EuroMed Heritage, Asia-Urbs, Urb-AI)
<http://europa.eu.int>

World Tourism Organization
www.world-tourism.org

Site internationale sur la revitalisation des centres historiques des villes d'Amérique latine et des Caraïbes – SIRCHAL
www.archi.fr/SIRCHAL

French cooperation
www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/solidarite/fsp

Comité de coordination, d'orientation et de projets – COCOP
www.egide.asso.fr/fr/programmes/econet/

École d'Avignon
www.ecole-avignon.com

Culturesfrance
The agency of the ministries of Foreign and European Affairs and Culture and Communications responsible for international cultural exchanges.
www.culturesfrance.com

Online webography:
www.villesendevenir.org