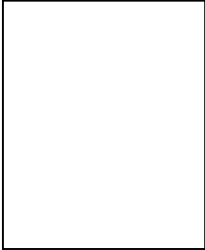


TIMBUKTU: FROM A WORLD HERITAGE SITE TO A LIVING CITY: CONSERVATION PRACTICES AND REHABILITATION PROGRAMMES FOR THE PRESERVATION OF THE EARTHEN BUILT HERITAGE



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Abstract

This paper deals with upcoming programmes for the conservation and management of earthen built heritage in Mali. It aims to synthesise the outcomes of several UNESCO missions, organised to set up operational activities for the rehabilitation of the ancient urban fabric of Timbuktu.

Background

Between July 2002 and February 2005, five UNESCO-Italian Government¹ joint missions have been organised in the framework of the World Heritage Convention² to assess its state of implementation in Mali and the state of conservation of the earthen heritage, focusing on the Old City of Timbuktu.

Mission

The missions, organized in cooperation with the National Director of Cultural Heritage, focused on the development of conservation and management policies for the preservation of earthen built heritage and its environs, in co-ordination with other programmes, such as “Terra” and “Africa 2009”, and organise adequate follow-up, by drafting concept papers and project proposals, organizing training workshops, consultative meetings and other events, in partnership with the site managers and other relevant stakeholders. The exchange of information and multidisciplinary expertise is at the basis of the methodological approach.

Project

The missions’ follow-up, to be implemented in co-ordination with the national authorities, focuses on the organisation of a number of activities specifically designed to build technical capacity and develop appropriate methodologies for the documentation and conservation of the Earthen Built Heritage in the Sub-region. First outcome achieved by the missions is awareness raised among the local communities on the issue of the conservation and management of living earthen towns and settlements, to create a core team of local experts and to raise funds, in order to set up operational activities concerning the rehabilitation of urban fabrics. A pilot project for the rehabilitation of a sector in the urban fabric of Timbuktu, by highlighting the results of the typological and technological analysis, represents the hands-on follow-up of the missions.

The project is twofold: working at the institutional level as a catalytic element in the Sub-region and at the operational level as an example of hands-on activity implemented in the framework of the World Heritage Convention aimed to restore a significant element of such extraordinary heritage, which embodies a remarkable component of the cultural identity of Mali.

¹ Joint Declaration on Cooperation concerning Cultural and Natural Heritage Protection between the Italian Government and UNESCO, Rome, 2001.

² Convention concerning the protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage, UNESCO, Paris, 1972.