

Dynamic Urbanism and the Notion of Heritage Conservation: *Lessons from Lamu*

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Abstract

There are no conceptual or practical frameworks to recognise and guide the development of spatial hybrids in Historic Swahili urban landscapes. The underlying tension between dynamic urbanism and the conservation agenda, both of which are intense political processes, has resulted in spatial hybrids and an urban environment that is problematic to define. Through an in-depth case study of Lamu this study aims to investigate the factors impacting the built urban fabric of Lamu old town and consequently form a critical approach towards heritage conservation. Lamu was carefully selected because it is the oldest living historic city in Kenya, with over 500 years of history. Given that it is the oldest and best preserved Swahili settlement along the East African coast, Lamu Old Town World Heritage property and its surrounding setting in the Lamu archipelago contributes to its 'Outstanding Universal Value'. Following the launch of Kenya's high modernist vision 2030 to open up marginal areas to global trade and economic growth, Lamu is scheduled to host the epicentre of perhaps the largest and most complex infrastructural project since the country's independence – Lamu Port South Sudan Ethiopian Transport Corridor (LAPSSET). The study is founded on the post-colonial theory of 'centre and periphery' and its application to heritage conservation. Combining theoretical and philosophical frameworks with first-hand data collected through field activities, the author examines the internal heterogeneity of heritage conservation and dynamic urbanism, and the influence this has had on the built environment. The study reveals that both processes are based on a common philosophical commitment to public welfare. However, heritage conservation is underpinned by static connotations while the modernist vision is rooted in the unrealistic and exclusive. Key findings point to inequalities, informal building practices, and a lack of appropriate policy in the urban environment. Several factors mainly economic, political and social factors have impacted the built environment. The current approach of conservation practice has not had a lasting impact on the capabilities of local residents, yet it is crucial to the value of the town. The study recommends that a meaningful collaboration between heritage conservation and urban development, through partnerships, appropriate flows of funding and expertise, and policy formulation, guides the development of Lamu town.

Keywords: Heritage conservation, historic urban landscapes, dynamic urbanism

INTRODUCTION

Lamu Old Town World Heritage property and its surrounding setting in the Lamu archipelago contribute to its 'Outstanding Universal Value'. Each component, including its people and their beliefs, customs and lifestyles, and the significant natural and cultural heritage, tangible and intangible, contributes to the whole (UNESCO-WHC, 2013). The conserved architecture is a symbolic representation of ideals and traditions of the Swahili society, as well as a historical record of incoming global influences along the East African coast (Apotsos, 2016). The Regional Physical

Development Plan is an addition to the measures put in place by bodies like UNESCO, World Wide Fund, The Council of Governors, National Museums of Kenya, which ensure the increase of economic returns and sustainability of Lamu as a whole (Ministry of Lands, 2009). Previously, four settlement schemes, started in 1971 as agricultural projects by the post-independence government, have attracted people from all over the country to the region. The national and regional importance of Lamu is its strategic location, which provides an opportunity for trade and exchange with

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neighbouring countries like South Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia and countries in the Middle East. Most importantly, its maximum utilisation as a centre for trade will play a vital role in promoting the economy of both the region and the country (Ministry of Lands, 2009). While Lamu Island and the Lamu Old Town World Heritage Site property are physically removed from the direct physical development plans, the impact on the cultural landscape is perhaps the largest cause for concern. Lamu is deemed to have survived the wave of modernisation that has characterised the development of other towns in the region, a situation that has changed rapidly with its status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The societal change is further hastened by macro government plans and policies to open up the region.

Lamu's expansion in the last decade is characterised by an increased demand for housing, with the preferred pattern for trade and commerce in the physical development plan of Lamu being Mpeketoni – a town on the mainland. Since it has more room for expansion, further enhanced by high land prices within the island where Lamu old town is located, Mpeketoni has attracted the highest

proportion of business enterprises in the District. While local authorities are playing a critical role in the region, dynamic urban processes reveal the tensions that exist between various actors, and the need for a guiding framework for the development of the historic urban landscape. The limitation of space for expansion has transformed the old town – increasing densities and straining water and waste infrastructure. This has motivated the development of new neighbourhoods outside the traditional conservation area. Currently, Lamu is classified as a town, with a population estimate of 34,273 which is the author's projection from the county population data of 143,916 as captured in the 2019 census (KPHC Vol.III, 2019).

These figures constitute the population of the old town – Amu – and the surrounding developments i.e. Shela, Kashmir, Bombay, Gadani, Langoni and Uyoni. The unprecedented increase in population, mobility and demand in housing follows the listing of Lamu as a World Heritage Site. Yet the conservatory project is aloof to the dynamic tensions and spatial hybrids beyond the traditional conservation boundaries as seen in **Figure 1**



FIGURE 1

Map of Lamu town, showing the conserved site and surrounding buffer zones

Source: Lamu World Heritage Site and Conservation Office, 2013

THEORY

The key thematic area of this study is a critique of heritage studies through the theory of centre and periphery. A widely held understanding of heritage is that it is imbued with some universal intrinsic value worth conserving. This is not only important for future generations but essential for the basic survival of today's cities. Cultural relationships and practices not only affirm and enrich identities, but also sustain the unique natural and built environment (Hosagrahar,

2015). The more distinctive, unique and special a place is, the more likely it is to succeed (Yuen, 2005, cited by Meysam et.al, 2015). As expressed in the Athens Charter with the culmination of the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) Mediterranean voyage in 1933, "The life of a city is a continuous event that is expressed through the centuries by material works – layouts and building structures – which ... form the city's personality, and from which its soul gradually

emanates” (Turner, 2015). The ideological framework of heritage and conservation is ethically positive. Indeed, the preservation of building traditions plays a vital role in meeting societal and built environment concerns. Yet, the practice of conservation in the built environment reveals a bias against the cultural heritage of marginalised communities. A combination of modernist ideologies and perceptions about heritage based and favoured by ideal notions of aesthetics, progress and political power has made it particularly problematic to engage with archetypes and urban structures in non-Western spaces. Two interconnected elements limit the effectiveness of heritage conservation in developing countries; the notion of globalisation and hegemonic politics of project selection criteria (Heathcott, 2013; Calame and Sechler, 2004).

There is need for a critical approach towards heritage conservation by paying closer attention to ill-fitting spaces and the capabilities of the abject poor (Heathcott, 2013). An empirical study of particular communities and neighbourhoods reveals that each context is a unique case. The historical geographical roots, modes of governance and unofficial processes of exchange between communities and local authorities make each neighbourhood a particular case (Myers, 2010). This is especially critical for developing countries whose priorities are an aspiration for access to the global economy. Guided by modernist ideologies of what cities should look like, and often informed by Western assumptions, systematic plans and urban frameworks have overlooked traditional needs, cultural values and relationships (Rakodi, 2006; Calame and Sechler, 2004; Simone, 2004; Hosagrahar, 2015; Myers, 1994). Often, local communities are left to their individual and group capacities to make statements with the urban landscape, most of which are unrecognised and often marginalised.

In comparison to other Swahili cities like Mombasa and Zanzibar, Lamu, which has remained relatively undisturbed, has retained its mid-nineteenth-century urban character almost completely. This is attributed to its geographic location, which has isolated Lamu from the centre of national governance throughout the twentieth century. The history of Lamu, its remoteness, and resultant designation as a World Heritage Site, is based on intense political processes. The

history and economy of Lamu and by extension that of the Swahili coast, is rooted in merchant capitalism, plantation farming and human slave trade. The historical societal inequalities between capitalist merchants, plantation owners and peasant day labourers are manifest in a functional spatial separation in the built environment. “Stone residential areas were built up by merchants and plantation owners, while the day labourers, servants and domestic slaves built using earth (*udongo*) and wooden poles (*fito*) with a thatch (*makuti*) roof outside the town proper” (Sheriff, 2010; 1998). The spatial disposition is a display of the Swahili society to integrate and consequently segregate based on commonness and familiarity.

In Swahili tradition, the *Waungwana* (civilised elites) lived within an inner wall, separate from the *Washenzi* (uncivilised) (Kamalkhan, 2010). The ideological shift of societal segregation from clan, caste and economical might to racial categories did not arise until when European colonisation injected the concepts of colour and race into the political dramas of urban space (Nightingale, 2012). A reading of the history of urbanisation in colonial Africa, in cities like Mombasa, Nairobi, Kinshasa, Cairo, Cape Town, and Zanzibar demonstrates that building regulations were racially distinct and about defining who could be where (Myers, 2011; 1996; 1994; Bissell, 2011; Simone, 2004; Burton, 2001; Sheriff and Ferguson, 1991). This tactical separation was motivated by health concerns and served as a strategy to exclude the majority of African urban dwellers from the colonial state resources. This segregation has impacted urban dynamics and architectural identities to date. The mud hut was resigned not only to an inferior archetype, but a racial identity categorisation. Though mud and stone settlements were part and parcel of the larger community, with a symbiotic relationship woven between them for socio-economic development, security and trade rivalry, architectural theory and practice have tended to exclude the former (Sheriff, 2010; 1998).

Given that most stone houses were owned by families of Arab, Asian and African-Arab descent, the scholarship and conservation of Swahili architecture tends to be underpinned by racially distinct structures (Heathcott, 2013). **Figure 2** shows the preserved buildings in the conservation area.



FIGURE 2

Image showing the Old Fort & conservation area in Lamu Old town.

Source: Kalume Kazungu, 2019

There are two critical elements to the matter of hegemonic politics; the first is the selection criteria for valuable heritage, and the second is the overly simplified notion of gentrification (Heathcott, 2013; Kipfer and Goonewardena, 2014). The conservation boundary of Lamu, flows of funding and expertise extend as far as the stone section of the old town. Following a commission by the modern state of Kenya to kick-start the conservation project in Lamu, Usam Ghaidan and his team singled out stone houses – veranda buildings, some shop-fronts, and mosques⁸⁸ – as valuable archetypes, while the non-conforming archetypes, including mud and wattle buildings, were marked for improvement (Heathcott, 2013; Ghaidan, 1975). Given that not all stone buildings were marked as valuable, it is the author's contention that the elements that led the team to single out some buildings was based on a qualitative art-historical approach. Owing to the complexity of the history of the Swahili society, the inclusion and exclusion of certain archetypes has resulted in instabilities of inheritance. Heathcott has categorically stated that it is not simply a matter of eradicating racial categories or expanding the portfolio of building

typologies. A conceptual framework that is based on superior and inferior archetypes limits the objectivity of the conservation agenda in non-Western spaces. Each component, inclusive of valuable archetypes and archetypes in need of improvement, a glorious past, and the immediate realities, contributes to the whole.

By excluding archetypes and settlements considered inferior, the conservatory project reveals the hegemonic politics underpinning the selection criteria of cultural heritage in the built environment. The selection criterion is based on ideal notions of aesthetics, forms, art-history, and grandeur in architecture, rather than cultural processes of formation, and excludes the ideologies of local communities, which have helped sustain the physical environment. The heritage and conservation practice is fuelled by efforts to save art-historical elements in the northern section of the old town. Anchored by values that are foreign to steward communities, Swahili cultural heritage is limited to the visual elements that constitute the traditional stone houses – smooth white lime plaster, thatch roofs,

coral stone, plaster carvings, and wood crafts. The project selection is focused on depicting the best of cultural landscapes, and as Calame and Sechler have put it, financiers often pay for the preservation of places and objects they personally consider precious, tasteful or exotic (Calame and Sechler, 2004). Since steward communities are the custodians of this heritage, the notion of pride and individual ownership is essential to the sustainability of the project. Moreover, increased investment in the region supports their livelihood. A majority of the population today have limited capacity to own, maintain or adapt the old stone houses and have instead opted to sell them out to foreign investors, and relocate to the new neighbourhoods. Those who choose to remain in the old town utilise makeshift practices to remake the houses as best as they can, albeit under a set of technical constraints. As a result most of the prominent cultural assets are owned and rarely occupied by foreign nationals, further challenging the objectivity and cultural significance of heritage conservation.

Remnants of earth-and-thatch houses are still evident in parts of Lamu and Shela, but many houses have been transformed into permanent buildings with modern concrete block walls and corrugated iron roofs. Two episodes of fire disaster in Langoni – the mud section of Lamu – in 1962 and 1981, have hastened this process of transformation (UNESCO-WHC, 2013). At present, the former mud section is larger than the stone town, covering an area of twenty-one hectares, and is spread between Langoni, Tundani and Gadeni. Langoni grew considerably in the early part of the twentieth century as a result of immigrants from other islands within the Lamu archipelago, while Gadeni grew during the last few decades as a result of immigrants from the Lamu mainland running away from Somali bandits. These developments, among others – Uyoni, Kashmir and Bombay – which have sprouted as a result of rural to urban migrations in the last decade, have facilitated the stability and economic development of Lamu town to date. Yet little is known about the motivations of forms and spatial patterns in these neighbourhoods.

RESEARCH METHODS

There are no conceptual or practical frameworks to recognise and guide the development of spatial hybrids in Historic Swahili urban landscapes. Through an in-depth study, this research has focused on Lamu World Heritage Site, seeking to interpret and understand the meaning, value and significance of heritage in the urban landscape. The evaluation is underpinned by an assumption that heritage conservation and urban development have a common philosophical commitment to public welfare. There are two motivations towards conducting this study. First, the author seeks to understand who the major actors of heritage are and what are the different ways in which heritage is being interpreted in Lamu. Subsequently the author aims to develop a theoretical framework of understanding where heritage should be embedded in order to provide mechanisms to articulate a possible future development with the existing plan of Lamu.

A phenomenological qualitative approach has guided this research, revealing the full scope and nature of cultural landscapes. A reading of post-colonial theory, heritage studies and the hegemonic politics of periphery and centre is inspired by the work of Joseph Heathcott, Calame and Sechler, Kipfer and Goonewardena and Jyoti Hosagrahar. Historical anthropology and archaeological literature on the East African coast has contributed to the cumulative knowledge of the context. The author has selectively relied on texts by Usam Ghaidan, James de Vere Allen and Abdul Sheriff for the diversity in perspectives about the *WaSwahili*. Texts by Michelle Apotsos broaden and shape the understanding of Islam identity in contemporary African architecture, while the work of Garth Myers and Carole Rakodi in urban Africa has influenced an in-depth study of Lamu. The case study approach is useful in understanding how a particular community makes sense of their experience, in turn shaping the author's experience and interpretation of the phenomenology of heritage. The investigation sought to establish the role of heritage conservation and the factors impacting urban development in Lamu. The findings are based on fieldwork in Lamu Old Town and the surrounding villages – predominantly Shela, Kashmir, Bombay and Uyoni. Having visited the site in 2013 and 2016 has given the author first-hand experience of

the rapid transformation of the urban landscape. Primary data was collected through observation of everyday practices and social relationships and assessment of the quality of the built environment. Informal conversational interviews with local residents provided opinions, values, and interpretations of the cultural landscape, while semi-structured and open-ended interviews with local authorities and practitioners gave insight about building practices and guidelines, flows of funding and expertise, motivations of planning processes and challenges of heritage conservation and urban governance. Secondary data such as policy documents, building guidelines, maps and photographs from Lamu World Heritage Site and Conservation Office, The Ministry of Lands, Public Works, Housing and Urban Development-Department of Physical Planning, and the County Government of Lamu has been instrumental in the investigation process. Architectural drawings provided knowledge about contemporary design and construction processes. Photographs and oral history about the historic urban landscape were sourced from Lamu Museum, while archival information from the Department of Architecture at the University of Nairobi, and internet information supplemented the sources.

The data was recorded in the form of photographs, notes, plans, sketches and voice recordings and synthesised by transcribing interviews, studying plans, evaluating areas and costs, and generating tables, flow charts and relationship diagrams. Through critical analysis, and a combination of theoretical frameworks developed in the literature review, the author assessed and conceptualised the cultural urban landscape of Lamu.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The theoretical study reveals that there is need for a critical approach towards heritage conservation by paying closer attention to ill-fitting spaces and the capabilities of the abject poor. The field work, through an in-depth investigation of ill-fitting spaces sought to reveal the motivations of forms and spatial patterns and consequently determine the role of the conservation agenda. It was established that the role of heritage conservation in Lamu is managing the heritage site, sensitising the local community about the importance of preserving cultural heritage, and working with local artisans to improve their livelihoods.

Cultural heritage programmes rarely focus on the development of the built environment for a majority of the custodians of this heritage. Recent withdrawals of foreign donor funding have revealed that there is no sustainability in the conservation project. To give an example, an informant remarks that while Lamu is popular for its numerous annual cultural activities, and donor interests, there is no cultural centre for Lamu. Most of these efforts have no lasting impact on the built environment for the local community. The legal framework of the conservation project in Lamu is not performing very well compared to a conservation site like Zanzibar. This is attributed to the semi-autonomous nature of governance in Zanzibar which allows for the integration and contextualisation of conservation with government structures. The lack of a political will to support local capacity and ideologies is undermining conservation efforts in Lamu. Currently, there is no programme to guide the development of the urban landscape, leaving residents to capitalise on cultural practices and local resources, most of which have no official recognition. New building techniques are sprouting and there is hardly any accessible official documentation of traditional building techniques. The capacity of residents to articulate their building needs is limited by financial capabilities and a technical know-how to make statements with the urban landscape of the twenty-first century. Rapid urbanisation has resulted in uncontrolled developments within and beyond the conservation area. There is no effort to support the building practices in the new developments. These new developments are characterised by congestion, irregular planning, lack of water and waste infrastructure, fire and health hazards, and poor sanitation. The same can be said for the old town, which is yet to develop a proper infrastructure to match the high population densities therein. Most foreign investments have been directed to the village of Shela, which has been described as the model for other developments in Lamu. Shela is a tourist town and mimic of the enclave of Mkomani, with 4–5 storey modern Swahili mansions, incorporating traditional Swahili building technology but adapted to contemporary needs. Contrary to the congested developments, Shela is made up of larger parcels of land owned by affluent communities. Although there is no spatial plan, neighbourhood planning is regulated and facilitated by the flows of funding and expertise of conservationists, reiterating

Calame and Sechler's argument that the values and perspectives of various individuals, supported by investor-interest groups, and facilitated by national governments, rip economic returns through the commercialisation of cultural aspects.

For a long time, Lamu has remained remote, serving as a revenue collection town through the tourism industry. In addition to the rich cultural heritage, the preservation of the Island and its surrounding setting has ensured cool, scenic and undisturbed natural landscapes. It is only recently that the force of the nation state and the twenty-first-century wave of globalisation are being felt by developing communities. The politics of national and regional economic advancement have stirred the urban dynamics of Lamu, threatening the status quo of a remote island. Due to aspirations for access to the global economy, developing states have adopted new structures of governance, economic models, urban plans and ideologies as a strategy for socio-economic advancement. Often informed by Western assumptions, rather than a correspondence to traditional needs, such

models are insensitive to local resources, cultural frameworks and capabilities of residents. Based on Kenya's high modernist vision 2030 to open up marginal areas to global trade and economic growth, Lamu town and its surroundings are scheduled to host the epicentre of perhaps the largest and most complex infrastructural project since the country's independence – Lamu Port South Sudan-Ethiopia Transport Corridor (LAPSSET). The vision for Lamu, much like that of Mombasa, Zanzibar and Dar es Salaam, is a metropolis that can successfully compete with cities elsewhere in the world. In light of this, there is a complex negotiation between a growing anxiety about cultural continuity and loss of heritage, on the one hand; and on the other, the possibility of a modern city for the people of Lamu (Inception Report, 2016). Although there have been teething problems associated with the implementation process, several steps have been taken towards realising this vision; Construction works for the 1st berth is complete and if successful Lamu would become eastern Africa's largest port. **Figure 3** shows the proposed plans of Lamu Port.

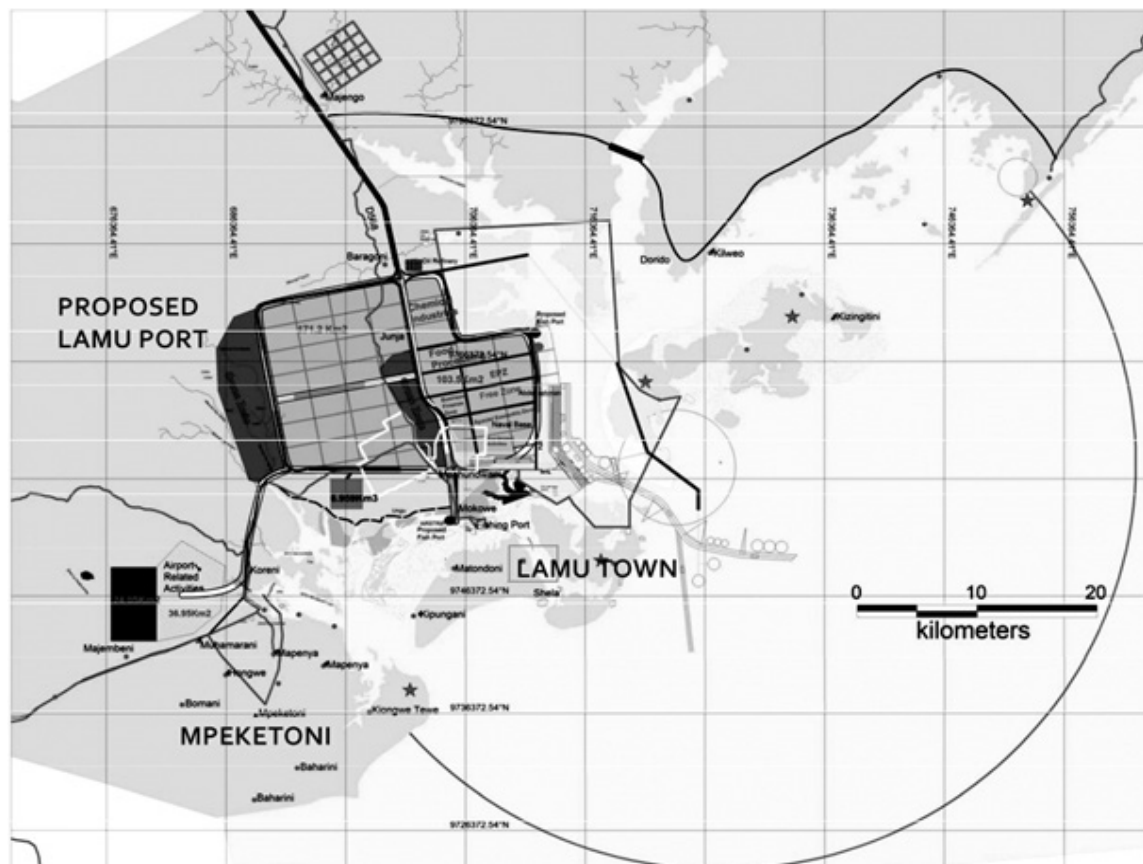


FIGURE 3
Map showing Lamu Old town, and the proposed Lamu Port
Source: Save Lamu, 2019

The impetus of macro-government policies and economic pressures is rapidly impacting the urban landscape through an unprecedented increase in population and mobility, increased property rates, speculative investments, and rapid urbanisation,

causing a strain on housing and infrastructure. There is an upsurge of building, new styles of architecture, as well as outward patterns of growth of the old town. **Figures 4 and 5** show upcoming developments beyond Lamu old town.



FIGURE 4

Map of Kashmir and Bombay on the south western side of Lamu town

Source: Google Earth, 2016



FIGURE 5

Map of Lamu Island showing Lamu old town and surrounding developments in 2013

Source: Lamu World Heritage Site and Conservation Office, 2013

Needless to say, power relationships, fuelled by political and economic gains, have greatly influenced the built environment in Lamu. Since the 1960s, the locals have successfully rejected government plans to link the island with the mainland by bridge, and have instead opted to maintain their maritime connection to the rest of the world (UNESCO-WHC, 2013). Some residents remark that this has been a strategy by the local business and political community to resist imminent competition. In view of the newly devolved government structure, these attitudes have since changed. It is perceived that county governments will weaken the hegemony of the state at the local level and facilitate an inclusive development structure. For Lamu, this means that local heritage, identity and previously marginalised communities are protected. The evolving reality, however, is manifest in uncontrolled developments and increasing levels of poverty in the urban space. **Table 1** below gives a summary of the factors impacting the built landscape.

TABLE 1
 Summary of factors impacting the built environment in Lamu

Major factors	Macro effects	Micro effects	Impact
Political	Colonial and post-colonial legacy	Marginalisation of archetypes	Degradation of some old buildings
	Regional development	Population increase	Informal developments, congestion
	'Devolved' central government	Neglected societal needs	Informal practices
		Increased property values	Purchase of Swahili houses
	Terrorism and insecurity	Uncertainty	
Economic	Capitalist mentality	Need to supplement income	Spatial organisation: Change of use of social spaces Vertical extensions Interior partitions
	Poverty	Basic survival	Use of substandard materials, poor workmanship
		Insecurity	Closed-off spaces Steel burglar proofing
Unemployment	Commercialization of heritage and traditions	Spatial hybrids in public spaces	
Environmental	Conservation of sand dunes, water catchment areas	Limited space for expansion	Urban planning
	Ban on mangrove harvesting	Substitutes for building materials	Brick and cement mortar
	Built environment	Lighting and ventilation	Fenestrations
Technology	Innovations	Modern influences	Use of glass, paint, tiles, aluminium, corrugated iron sheets
	Limitation of traditional materials and technology	Quality and strength	Reinforced concrete
		Time to build	Reinforced concrete Brick and mortar are faster to build
Social	Swahili heritage	Absorption and adaptation	Modern conveniences
	Societal transformation (Changeable)	Modern aspirations and individual assertion	Contemporary built forms Linear as opposed to cluster settlements
	Traditions (Constants)	Islam religious beliefs	N-S orientation
Family dynamics Ideological frameworks		Interior planning Social dependency	

Source: Author, 2022

Urban development and policies in Lamu are driven by an aspiration for access to the global economy. A conjuncture of forces including the modernist vision, economic pressures and cultural practices has resulted in a situation where there is little control in the new developments. The building environment may or may not comply with regulations where this is advantageous or feasible, or flout them when necessary or possible, taking advantage of the ambiguities and inconsistencies arising from a discrepancy between heritage conservation and the modernist vision. Local authorities agree that the development of Shela complies with the standards and expectations of both the modernist vision by adhering to the building code, and the heritage practice through the integration of local resources. The other developments including Langoni, Gadeni, Kashmir, Bombay and Lamu old town, which reflect the lived realities of the local residents, are considered disordered, informal and a mess, reflecting neither the modernist vision nor the conserved cultural value. The biggest challenge facing the new developments is that planning and building regulations are not adhered to, an element strongly linked to the failure of urban governance. There is congestion, poor sanitation, fire hazards, no proper access to buildings, safety and evacuation is challenged, and sewer services are strained, posing a risk to both the residents and the environment. Residents build stairways, balconies and septic tanks outside their plot boundaries on the access roads. This is not allowed but because of the limitation of funds and staff to carry out land surveys and implementation tasks, there's little the local authority can do.

Spatial constructions are informed by a mix of traditional practices and elements of modernity absorbed from communication technologies such as newspapers, magazines, Bolly-wood movies, and the internet. With the influx of foreigners from Mombasa, Nairobi and as far off as Europe, population mobility has supplemented these sources of exchange. The imagery of buildings is influenced by an aspiration for modernity, while the spatial organisation is governed by what is practical within the limitations of expertise and finances as seen in **Figure 6** Limited resources, combined with the grey areas of urban governance, have resulted in a haphazard development of neighbourhoods. The value and meaning of this process is attributed to cultural relationships

and practices between local communities and authorities. Yet, due to perceptions of how cities and government structures should work, these relationships have not received official recognition and remain characterised as informal. In Lamu, building is the greatest aspiration for people. Take for example, a street porter, construction worker, or any member you think is at the bottom of the social pyramid. One may wonder how they are able to realise their dreams of owning a house. What they do, when they earn a little money, is to buy building blocks, or enter into some form of arrangement with suppliers. Slowly they put up a house throughout their lifetime. It is the only aspiration they have in order to be respected in the society. Most houses are built in a span of 10 years. Lamu is a permanent construction site as seen in **Figure 7**. An evaluation of the state of conservation in the Lamu World Heritage Site highlights the drastic alterations, extensions, additions, partitions and unregulated changes in use in the built environment in the conserved section (**Figure 8**).



FIGURE 6
Image showing new housing developments in Kashmir
Source: Author, 2022



FIGURE 7
Image showing New building developments in Uyoni – North of Lamu old town
Source: Author, 2022



FIGURE 8

Image showing building alterations in Lamu old town

Source: Author, 2022

The innovative remaking of spaces in the conserved section is evidence of societal transformation and determination of the people of Lamu to experiment and transform the architectural forms of their town. Elements that were once symbolic have acquired new functions. The Swahili society, being predominantly Islamic, was keen on gender separation and the protection of the privacy of women – aspects of culture that are manifest in the spatial organisation of dwellings.

It is on this precept that the entrance lobby and interior courtyard spaces were symbolic and meaningful. The lobby was an exterior reception space for male non-blood guests not permitted into the house, while the courtyard served as an introverted outdoor space for the female residents. The courtyard was designed to illuminate and ventilate interior spaces since large windows into the street compromised the privacy of women. The people of Lamu are becoming increasingly aware of the tactical nature of architecture as a mechanism for mediating relationships between historical and contemporary realities. The society is more tolerant to traditional needs against more pressing issues linked to basic survival in an era of economic pressure. In some cases, the extravagant front porches have been sealed off either to create room for commercial activities such as shops and

kiosks, or keep off idle individuals who use them as sleeping quarters. Generally, most are not used for the traditional purpose, as observed by Kassim Omar (Omar, 2014). Likewise, the courtyard has been transformed by some to become craft workshops or extra rooms. The traditional long, narrow gallery spaces have been partitioned, and houses are extended upwards to create rental rooms for local tourists and international backpackers (Heathcott, 2013).

The immediate needs include tapping into the tourist industry and maximising households' income. The rising cost of living has prompted such basic survival strategies. Of due note is that properties are valued at very high rates for their historic value and some have opted to sell them to foreign investors and resettle, either in new developments in Lamu, Malindi, Mombasa, or even as far away as Europe. Population mobility and commercialization of heritage has made Lamu a flux between traditions and modern life. As such, there is no enthusiasm towards traditional imagery by the local community, which is sharply contrasted by investors' and tourists' attitudes.

Legal framework

Another challenging facing the development of the historic urban landscape is the lack of a cohesive regulatory framework. The main actors in Lamu have a contradictory impact in the development of the built environment. On one hand, the stakeholders of heritage and conservation, through the National Museums of Kenya, UNESCO World Heritage, foreign donors and investors, NGOs, County government, political class, and well-to-do local investors have pegged the visual character and cultural heritage on traditional imagery. The actions of the state, through the Ministry of Land, Housing and Urban development, are guided by economic advancement and systematic planning only at master-plan levels; while those of the community are motivated by an aspiration of modernity and economic development. The chart shown in **Figure 9** is a summary of the actors, motivations and impact on the built environment.

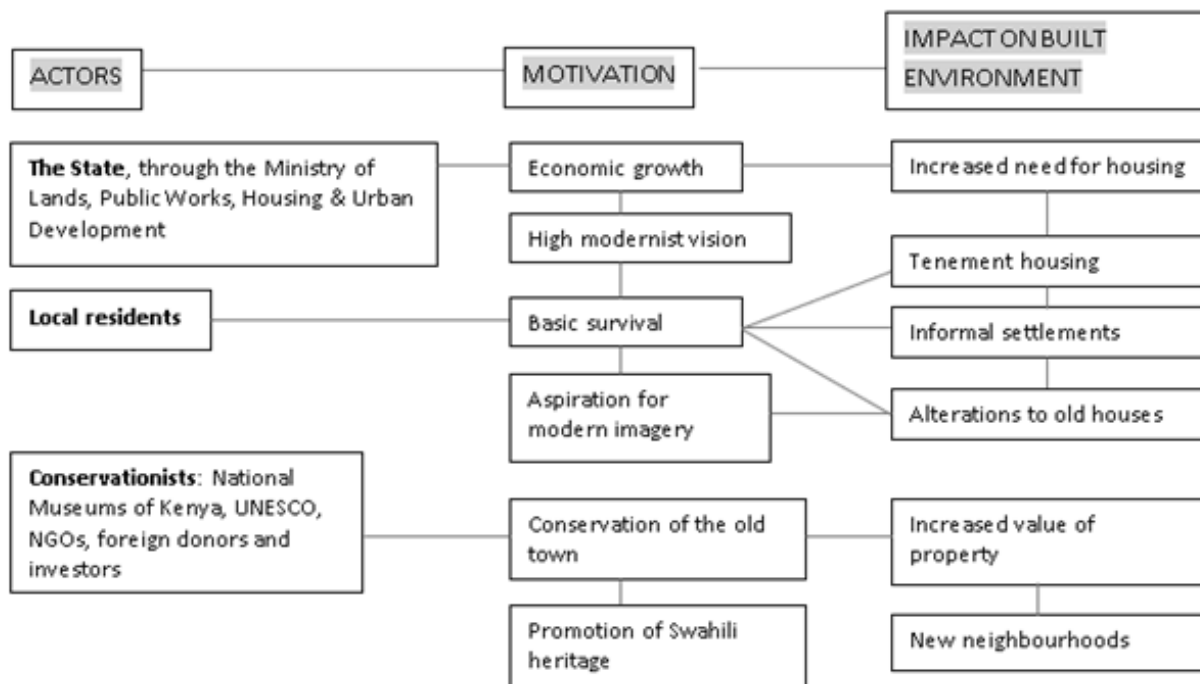


FIGURE 9
 A summary of the actors in the urban development and spatial hybrids
 Source: Author, 2022

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study aimed to form a critical approach towards heritage conservation to guide urban development. The study reveals that there is a dynamic tension between heritage conservation and the urban development of Lamu and recommends the following; to meaningfully appropriate cultural heritage in the urban space; have meaningful collaboration between heritage and urban stakeholders; and direct the flows of funding and expertise towards inclusive participation.

The politics surrounding cultural heritage conservation have greatly influenced the locals' as well as authorities' attitudes on its significance. Cultural identity in Lamu has been reduced to art-historical plaster motifs, white purist walls, *makuti* roofs, carved doors, arched openings, louvered windows, and *msharabiya* partitions, rather than the cultural processes that led to such formations. Due to historical geographical roots, and the hegemonic politics of the conservation practice, it has become problematic to emphasise the value and benefits of appropriating heritage conservation in the urban landscape.

A closer look at the ill-fitting spaces reveals the factors that are impacting the architecture and

urban development in Lamu today, including but not limited to the heritage tourism industry, heritage conservation, culture and identity, modernist ideologies, economic pressure, and environmental factors. Local residents and authorities are motivated by an aspiration for modern imagery but have limited capacity to assert themselves in the unequal urban landscape. Utilising cultural relationships and practices, local communities are making new and alternate statements in the built environment.

The conservation of Swahili urban landscapes has focused attention on the glorious aesthetic elements of traditional buildings so much that it, in effect, marginalises the spatial planning and urban development of these towns. By focusing on the grandeur houses, the major actors of heritage have neglected the cultural practices, settlement patterns and housing needs of local populations, from Lamu and other parts of the country. The dynamic tensions between systems of thought provide an opportunity for meaningful collaboration between heritage conservation and urban development. The notion of heritage is embedded in values and cultural structures that affirm and enrich cultural identities, as well as urban processes that help sustain them,

providing contextual meaning. Traditional spaces must be viewed in light of the heritage embedded in them as well as their cultural significance to contemporary society. The development of Lamu over the last century points to a continuous process of absorption and integration of cultural landscapes to modern life.

By paying relevance to ill-fitting spaces in the conservation area, the study reveals a more accurate reflection of the lived realities of Swahili cities. Meaning and identity is constantly being renegotiated through the simultaneous inclusion and exclusion of modern influences. The current approach of conservation practice has resulted in patronage, which has not had a lasting impact on the capabilities of local residents. Rather, a joint partnership should be forged to motivate and guide the aspirations of individuals. One of the ways this can be achieved is through the development of programmes to support traditional building technologies and facilitate their continuity or industrialisation.

The building guidelines provided by the conservation guide include the traditional combination of coral masonry with lime mortar covered with lime plaster for walls, mangrove poles or *boriti*, a pitched roof of palm leaf thatch or *makuti*, and timber casement or louvered windows. When well maintained, coral weathers well, as testified by the many eighteenth-century coral buildings in good condition in the old town, and good quality *makuti* lasts nearly as long as the corrugated iron sheets, or *mabati*, which corrodes in less than ten years. Indeed, the choice of building materials is of critical concern in Lamu's environment, especially in the phase of a changing climate. A majority of the contemporary building materials e.g. synthetic paints, bituminous roofing systems, corrugated iron sheets, concrete, sand-cement mortars and plasters, steel, and aluminium frames, deteriorate rapidly from an aggregate of factors such as the hot, humid climate, minerals and salts in the aggregate, brackish water, inexperienced workmanship, high humidity, and integrity of the materials which are prone to cracking, corrosion and weathering.

Further to, there is need to appropriate cultural heritage in the urban space. An inclusive participation means that ideologies and values are incorporated in the future developments to mitigate the tensions in dynamic urbanism. The

flows of funding and expertise in the conservation practice should be directed towards an all-inclusive agenda of making alternative statements with the urban landscape beyond the conserved area. The inclusion and participation of residents, their customs and local capabilities in planning processes generates a heritage-aware approach to development. Through an interdisciplinary approach a detailed analysis of the developments outside the conservation areas articulates the immediate values and capabilities.

The inequalities that proliferate the urban space are mitigated through cultural frameworks and informal practices. Cultural heritage needs to pay closer attention to the social and economic networks that sustain livelihoods and enable residents to realise their aspirations. Each component, including unstructured local ideologies, contributes to the whole, calling for a closer meaningful collaboration between the field of heritage and socio-economic advancement in official planning channels. Rather than a comparative approach of how cities should work, the values and benefits of cultural heritage conservation should be infused in a community and place, providing contextual meaning to it.

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