Continuity and Change in Conservation:

A Study of the Relationship between Attitudes and

the Built Environment in Historic Old Town of Mombasa.

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ABSTRACT

Dynamics of growth and development put enormous strain on land use activities in urban historic areas. New spatial patterns emerge that lead to both visual and functional contradictions, which are manifest in the inappropriate scale in urban historic areas. The variety and complexity inherent in traditional cities is being replaced by insipid high-rise accommodation. Old Town of Mombasa, Kenya, is one such historic area that is loosing its historic built heritage and individuality at an alarming rate. Mombasa has been for centuries a leading trading town on the East African littoral, bearing an architectural legacy of historic buildings and spaces having Arabic, Indian, European and Swahili heritages. Its old town has ornately carved doors, covered balconies, narrow streets and alleyways, rendering it a truly unique area. The study posits that the current situation is occasioned by lack of local community participation in the formulation of the standards and guidelines that govern conservation, hence the social disconnect. This study seeks to establish the typo-morphological characteristics of the historic built environment, and the residents' attitudes towards this environment. It further endeavours to establish the factors underlying the resident's perception of their urban historic neighbourhood. A field survey was conducted, whereby a sample of 693 residents was interviewed along a semantic differential scale, in order to elicit attitudes towards their built environment. Principal Component Analysis, based on correlation matrices, was used to uncover the latent structure of a large set of variables that influence the residents' perception of their conserved area. The results indicate that conservation in the old towns should strive to achieve appropriate order, maintenance and upkeep, scale, create serial vision, open views and panoramas where possible, enhance orientation and continuity, and achieve the necessary complexity without creating information overload or monotony. This flexible approach forms the basis of a framework for conservation of the local distinctiveness, so that the built heritage is experiential and not habitual.

Keywords: *Conservation, Old Town of Mombasa, Attitudes, Likability, Factor Analysis, Complexity.*