

FIRST CONFERENCE ON THE HERITAGE OF THE INDIAN OCEAN
Higher National School of Architecture of Montpellier
Department of Cultural Affairs : Indian Ocean
Saint Denis, Reunion Island - 2nd, 3rd, 4th November 2011

Call for papers

On 2nd, 3rd and 4th November 2011, at Saint Denis (Reunion Island), the French Ministry of Culture and Communication (ENSAM/DAC-OI) is organising the First Conference on the Heritage of the Indian Ocean.

For this first event, the topics treated will be the heritage of our urban environment, the heritage of the various civilisations that have contributed to the cultural diversity of our towns and the territory of the Indian Ocean basin in general.

Debates will be structured around four topics :

1. From early settlement to the setting up of a common cultural space in contemporary times : migrations and sea routes, invasions, nomadic movements, tectonics of civilisations, religious, cultural and philosophical influences and commercial and technological exchanges.
A historical and political approach will enable a better understanding of the processes behind the setting up of the towns in the region, with their Indian, Swahili, Arabic, Shiraz, Portuguese, Dutch, English and French origins.
2. The evolution of coastal towns : History and development of towns, multiple influences and origins, aspects of urban and architectural heritage, structure and morphology (case studies). History and permanence of maritime links and exchanges. Contemporary evolution of these exchanges.
3. From recognition to protection of the urban heritage
Characteristics of heritage to be enhanced or protected : civil, religious or sacred, military and industrial heritage. Protection of ruins, monuments, sites and landscapes.
Evaluation of existing legislation, policies and practices.
4. Conclusion : What international cooperation for the future?
 - Enhancing the cultural heritage of the Indian Ocean and its contemporary evolution (architecture and urban landscapes).
 - Cooperation and exchange between students, researchers and professionals from different countries and backgrounds, widening the field of analysis and involvement of schools of architecture, art schools and universities, in a geographic and cultural space that remains to be defined, explored and enriched.
 - Developing poles of competence around questions of history, culture, landscape, material and immaterial heritage, in geographic, climatic, demographic, social and economic contexts subject to various constraints.

Argument

The Indian Ocean : a geographic or cultural space?

Although the Indian Ocean represents a defined geographic area, unlike the Mediterranean, it does not seem to represent a conceptualised 'oceanus nostrum'.

It is only recently that the Indian Ocean has been seen as an oceanic space between the land masses around its shores, the political, economic, and religious preoccupations of bordering countries being far more continental in character.

- *China, in the north east of the ocean, despite the expeditions led by Zheng He, hardly saw these increasingly distant, wild or deserted lands as being of any interest. The Ming empire was far more preoccupied by the tensions on its northern borders.*
- *On the eastern shores of the ocean, the peoples of the Far East turned towards the interior maritime spaces : the Sea of Japan, the Yellow Sea, the East China Sea the Banda Sea and the Jolo Sea, which are only seas around an Asian continent marked by a common monsoon.*
- *To the north, India, formerly confronted to Mongol invasions and the advance of Islam, as well as Persia and Arabia, situated at the heart of overland routes between the East and the West.*
- *To the west, the African continent asserted its links with the Middle East, Europe and the Atlantic, even though its Indian shores and the nearby islands of Madagascar, Zanzibar and the Comoro Islands were constantly marked by migratory movements from the sea. (India, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Arab peninsula).*

Yet, since antiquity, the coastal fringe had constantly been visited by Roman, Arabic and Chinese merchants, who travelled as far as Traprobana. (Ceylon : Ptolemy's maps)

With the various migratory movements and their respective cultures, rice-growing, dominant in the Indian Ocean region, spread from the east to the west over several centuries. Traces of this diversity are particularly marked in Madagascar.

Representations of the Indian Ocean altered with the arrival of the Portuguese, then the Dutch, the English and the French. Unlike the European domination of the Americas, the different migratory flows of Europeans only had a marked effect on the coastal zones, and resulted in the construction of towns for port, trading and defence purposes.

Examples are Cochin in 1503, then Cannalore, Ormuz, Mascate, Goa, Malacca, Calicut, Colombo, Diu, Macao, Daman, Mangalore, Manilla, San Tome, Pulicat, Masulipattanam, Surate, Madras, Bombay, Pondicherry, Chandernagor, Calcutta, Mahé, Batavia, Capetown, Fort Dauphin, Tamatave, Singapore and many others, and of course the towns of the Mascareignes archipelago, even though the history of these is rather different.

New exchanges of information and skills in both directions developed around these towns, which developed thanks to their situation bordering on the Indian Ocean and their maritime links. They tended to become separated from their colonial origins and today their economic and port networks can be situated on a global level.

It is in the light of these different influences that the concept of the Indian Ocean as a cultural space takes on a meaning. This geographic space does not, it is true, include the relevant states as a whole, but mainly their outer limits, formed through the multiple exchanges that were brought in over centuries via the ocean. The notion of heritage must be understood in its different cultural, social material and immaterial dimensions.

The "intangible cultural heritage" means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. For the purposes of this Convention, consideration will be given solely to such intangible cultural heritage as is compatible with existing international human rights instruments, as well as with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, and of sustainable development.

Considering the ancient character of the multiple relations, migrations, tensions and interbreeding that marked the coastal populations, the Indian Ocean is a cultural space of great intensity, the creative potential of which will be all the more forceful as it becomes the object of mutual recognition and enhancement.

List (not exhaustive) of heritage towns concerned by the conference :

South Africa : Cape Town

Comoro Islands : Moroni

India : Goa, Pondicherry, Diu, Daman, Cochin, Madras, Bombay, Calcutta, Surate.

Kenya : Lamu

Madagascar : Diégo-Suarez, Ansirabé, Fort Dauphin, Tamatave

Mauritius : Port Louis

Mayotte : Dzaoudzi

Mozambique : Island of Mozambique, Maputo

Namibia : Swakopmund

Oman : Aden, Mascate

Reunion : Saint-Denis, Saint-Pierre

Seychelles : Victoria

Tanzania : Zanzibar

Yemen : Socotra, Sanaa

Indonesia : Batavia - Jakarta

Sri Lanka : Colombo

Singapore

Djibouti

Practical information

Proposals of papers to be sent in by 20th June 2011

Address for proposals : marc.nouschi@culture.gouv.fr

Proposals must include a title, references, and a summary of 3 500 characters maximum. They will be submitted before the scientific council of the conference.

The conference will be held over three days, two of which will be devoted to presentations and one day of excursions to the heritage sites of Reunion Island.

The final content of the conference must be presented at the latest on the first day of the conference, for publication in French and English. It will consist of a text of a maximum of 16 000 characters and a bibliography.

Fares (economy class), accommodation and meals for those presenting papers will be covered by the School of Architecture.