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‘Old Townism’: A Generational Discord.

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Article history: ABSTRACT

06 December 2021 The heritage space of Old Town Mombasa is undergoing social evolution in terms of the demographic composition and the changing desires of the varying generations. The study sought to measure the perceived correlation between motorised transport, the veritable exemplification of misconstrued development, and conservation efforts within the Old Town heritage space. The qualitative analysis indicates that the top-down approach and limited economic development over time have left the younger generation of local residents lacking a sense of ownership and disparity with conservation objectives. The study recommends social re-engineering that will capture the ideologies of ‘Old Townism’ and create a beneficial sense of belonging.

Keywords: Social Re-Engineering, Heritage, Transport, Conservation

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INTRODUCTION

Major challenges of preservation and management confront the 192 state signatories of the 1972 UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (World Heritage Convention), the world's most subscribed treaty (Silverman, 2017). One of the reasons behind these many challenges is the failure to recognise historic urban towns as spaces made up of a complex cacophony of thousands of different owners and interests, at different scales and with a variety of values and expectations (Grima, 2017). To that effect, there has been consequent evolution of the sentimentality or identification of 'the spirit or sense of place,' a common theme in conservation discourse (Cohen, 2014).

The alienated top-down government approach to historical sites treats these sites as "sacred spaces" preserved only to receive international tourists. The policy and practices are producing patterns whereby local communities and particularly youthful generations lack a strong sense of ownership in the heritage sites (Seif, 2017).

The tasks of conservation are further complicated by the phenomena of cultural and economic globalisation, explosive urbanisation, broad and diasporic movements, the uneven distribution of resources (Rappoport, 2018). Issues surrounding resource exploitation and infrastructural improvements in the name of sustainable development as witnessed with hotel construction in Zanzibar and with harbour expansions in Lamu have incited changing desires among the youthful generations in places like Old Town Mombasa, presenting more impediments to the management of the Conservation Zone (Ndoro, 2017). This paper, therefore, presents the qualitative review of the

generational disengagement of Old Town Mombasa residents on the need and effectiveness of its conservation.

PERCEIVED MEASUREMENT OF CORRELATION BETWEEN MOTORISED TRANSPORT AND CONSERVATION IN OLD TOWN

Motorized Transport and other vagaries ailing Old Town Mombasa have been the veritable source of the decline of this unique urban heritage landscape. Though quite similar to Lamu Old Town in structure and origins, the variations here present a different set of challenges and the means to tackle them. Old Town's location within Mombasa's Central Business District and proximity to the Post Office, Central Bank, and County offices of Mombasa have rendered it a victim of rapid urbanism characterised by chaotic Motorized Transport.

The perpetual changes over time have been witnessed by the community of Old Town but are particularly unappreciated by the older generation (aged 45 and above), creating a disengagement of sentimentality towards the Town in the younger generation (aged 20-35 years). In the research study of the impact of Motorized Transport in Old Town, data findings point to a disagreement of values or significantly the placement of value on the heritage space.

In line with the subject matter of the research study which focused on transport and conservation concerns, the split in opinion pointed to a difference in priorities between the two age groups. The results of one of the inquiries, which aimed at highlighting the perceived correlation between Motorized Transport and the conservation within the space, are shown below.

Table 1: Perceived Correlation between Motorized Transport and Conservation

Age Range of Respondents	Average Correlation Score
Below 20 years	3.0
21-30 years	4.0
31-45 years	6.0
45 and above	9.0
Overall Mean Correlation Score	5.5

Table 2: Pearson correlation on age group and perceived correlation score based on age

	Age group Averages (x)	Perception Score(y)
Age group Averages (x)	1	
Perception Score(y)	0.71	1

There was a favourable lean of the majority towards an accepted perception of an existing relationship. However, using a sample of the interviewed respondents' population, a Pearson correlation coefficient was utilised to further dissect the findings according to a demographical split of age groups.

The positive score indicated a strong linear relationship between the variables. However, respondents from the older generation (aged 45 and above) seem to have a stronger sense of agreeability

regarding the relationship between conservation and the impact and presence of Motorized Transport within Old Town Mombasa than the younger generation. The older generation seems to have a deeper understanding and concern regarding the effect of Motorized Transport on the conservation of the Old Town.

The same methodology was then applied to articulate the division in attitude and opinion between various respondents in different questions within the study.

Figure 1: Expressed Level of Satisfaction with Conservation Initiatives

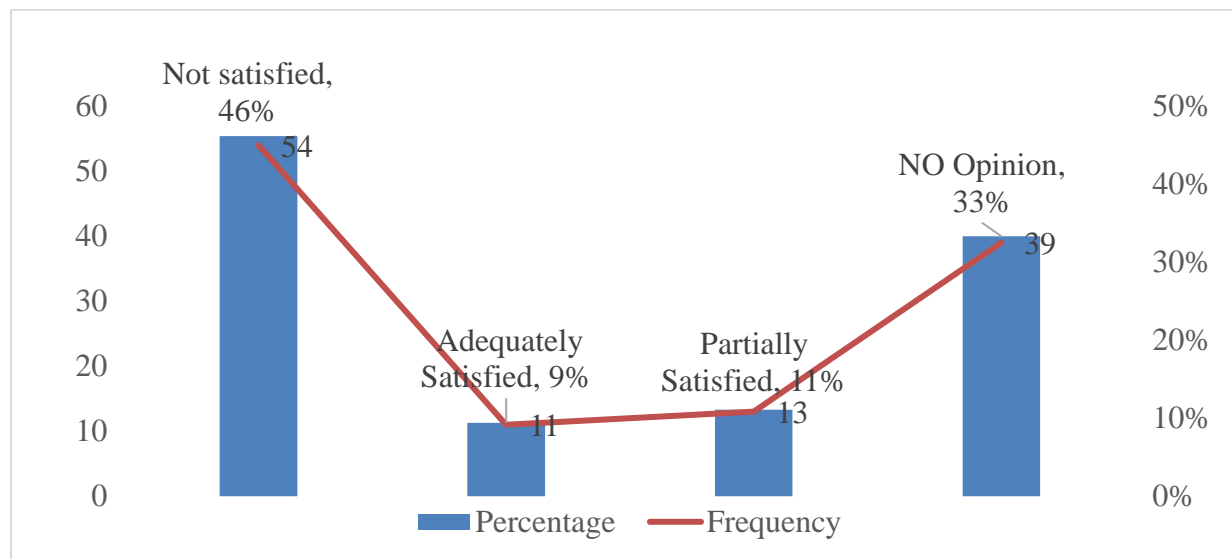


Table 3: Correlational Analysis of Level of Satisfaction against Age

Age Group	No Opinion
Below 20 years	1
21-30 years	2
31-45 years	3
45 and above	4

No Opinion (40)		Age Group	No Opinion
1	73%	1	
2	36%	Age Group	
3	26%	No Opinion	-0.82623
4	31%		1

Partially satisfied (30)		Age Group	Partially satisfied
1	18%	1	
2	27%	Age Group	
3	8%	Partially satisfied	-0.65327
4	10%		1

Adequately satisfied (20)		Age Group	Adequately satisfied
1	9%	1	
2	27%	Age Group	
3	9%	Adequately satisfied	-0.39859
4	5%		1

Not satisfied (10)		Age Group	Not satisfied
1	0%	1	
2	9%	Age Group	
3	57%	Not satisfied	0.9186
4	55%		1

Figure 2: The Perceived Effect of Motorized Transport on the Quality of Life in Old Town

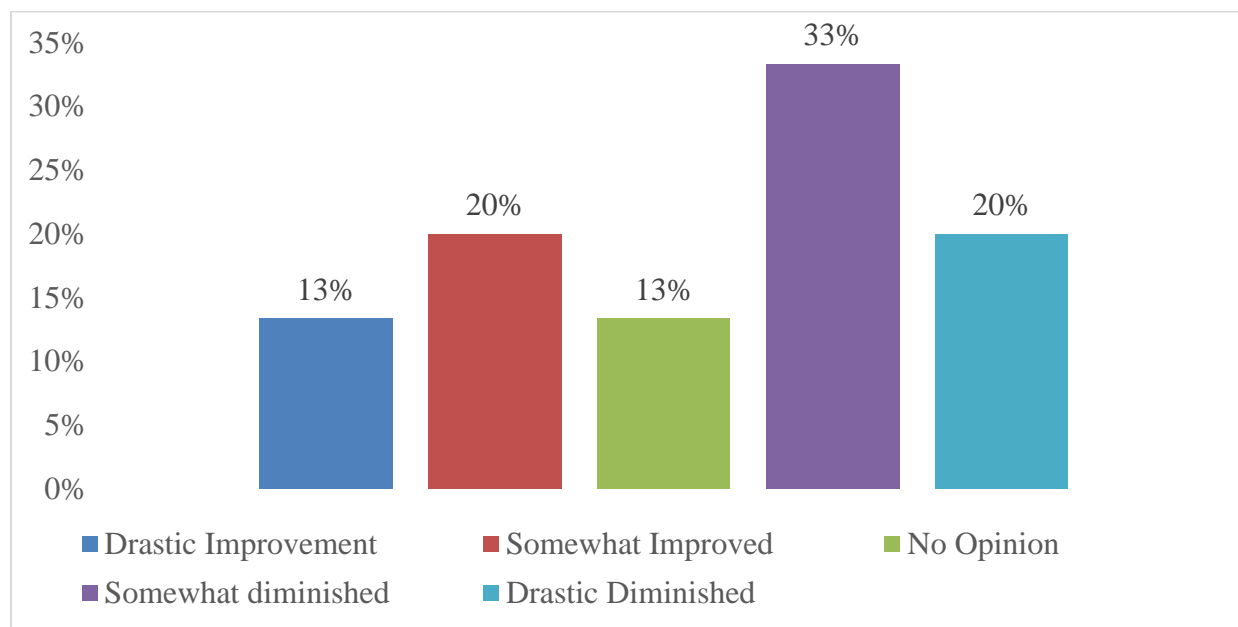
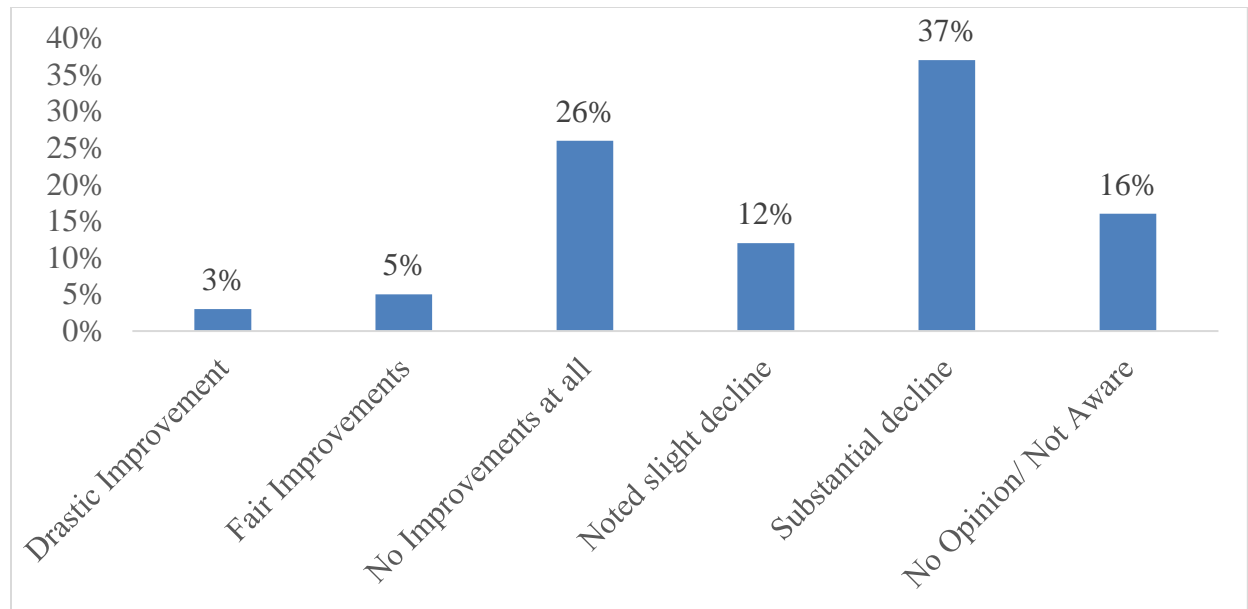


Figure 3: Expressed Level of Satisfaction with Motorized Transport Management



The results obtained above reflected changing mentality within the age groups regarding Motorized Transport-related concerns in Old Town. The strong positive scores indicated that the older generations leaned more towards disgruntlement on the impact and management of Motorized Transport than the younger generation. Commentary on the perception of change in Motorized Transport revealed varying levels of recollection amongst the age groups.

Many recalled 15 to 30 years before the advent of tuk-tuks within the Town when only a limited number of personal and service motor vehicles accessed the Town. Government and Old Port operatives were some of the few owners of motorised vehicles permitted entry into Old Town between 7.00 a.m. and 9.00 a.m. and exiting between 4.00 p.m. and 7.00 p.m. The handful of residents who actually owned vehicles parked them on the streets only during the evenings, beyond working hours.

According to the older generations, the vibrancy and vitality of the streets were evident. Residents, tourists, and businesspeople mingled freely as the Town came alive during the day. Older men sat in open spaces playing board games and discussing politics as children played beside them on the concrete floors.

Some people suggest that automobile dependency always increases as consumers become wealthier.

Though not always necessarily true, there is usually a synonymous increase in motorised vehicles with the upturn in economic fortunes in the developing world. This often occurs until an optimal level, where there are no more obvious gains from car dependency, is reached. The social and economic costs of increased vehicle travel outweigh the marginal benefits (Litman and Laube, 2021). From the traffic congestion, roadway risk, and environmental impacts observed during the study, it is sufficient to say, Old Town Mombasa has neared or possibly already attained optimal levels.

Developed countries and regions have reached a point of balanced transportation systems with maximum economic productivity and competitiveness, whereas Kenya has not. The older generation seemed prepared for the impact of modern dawn as legislation and the business environment changed positively in the whole country. Residents were attempting new businesses, joining white-collar jobs, and new occupants arriving in Old Town. The number of personal motor vehicles gradually increased within the resident community, and with it, however, noise chaos and other forms of pollution increased with it.

Though predicted, the advent of Tuk Tuks in Mombasa 10 years back was unanimously decried. All generational groups agreed that the inconveniences and noise drastically increased. While protected from the then public service

vehicles — ‘matatus’— plying through Old Town by legislation and the Old Town Conservation Plan of 1989, there were no regulatory adjustments to help curb the influx of tuk-tuks, which seemed able to negotiate the narrow streets of Old Town better than personal vehicles or matatus could.

Their capability of penetration and reasonable pricing seemed to serve the needs of the community. A culture of laxity and non-desire to walk ensued amongst the stay-in population. Visitors and tourists alike borrowed from this, utilising tuk-tuks to navigate the area faster, thus creating unsustainable tourism.

The generational disconnect however became apparent with further insight into the thematic area of this study. Correspondence with the younger generations (aged 20-35 years) revealed that Motorized Transport in the town and its effects on conservation was the least of their concerns. “Noise, chaos, and congestion do not bother us. It is life as we have always known it in Old Town.” There was consensus amongst the group that ownership of personalised motor vehicles was a sign of prosperity and the majority desired to own one in the near future. Much to the displeasure of the older generations, the presence of the chaotic and noisy tuk-tuks was viewed as a sign of economic relief and opportunities for self-employment amongst the younger generation.

Residents’ Attitude on Aspects of Tangible Conservation

Heritage management is often at odds with infrastructural development and poverty reduction goals on the continent, which ultimately take priority (Ndoro, 2017). Many aver that the trickle-down effect of tourism ideally envisioned as an economic pillar of the Conservation Zone is now non-existent. With global dynamics of terrorism, economic downturns, and most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic having an adverse effect on tourism in Old Town and other places alike, the younger generation feel that there is a need to pivot from this dependency.

Disregarding motorised transport as a major contributor to the declining touristic appeal, the younger generation augments the narrative of reduced tourism with a lack of employment

opportunities. The Old Port and other government entities within the area cannot cater to their economic needs. The consequent idleness has led to sporadic cases of crime and drug abuse in some fissures of the town, hence requiring visitors to be cautioned before casually passing through. The cases have quelled in recent times due to some heavy-handed responses from the Police. This, however, has further exacerbated the younger generation’s disenchantment with Old Town.

Many of that age group feel that there is a need for a complete overhaul of the structure of Old Town. They expressed the desire to carry out renovations and expansions in order to maximise their inherited and acquired houses within Old Town. There is resounding agreement from those in the age group of 20-35 years native to Old Town, as well as new entrants into the historical space with developmental ambitions. The absence of clear visions and frameworks which convey the common heritage values and meanings to these new entrants is eroding the historic fabric of historic cities and developers are taking advantage (Grima, 2017). Many desire to expand the size of their inherited houses or at the least, for Mombasa Old Town Conservation Office (MOTCO) to allow them to undertake renovation according to its specifications.

Mombasa Old Town Conservation Office (MOTCO) has been at the forefront of conservation in the heritage space. Much of the effort relating to Old Town has been geared towards protecting the existing outlook from structural pilferage. Lessons have been picked from other tainted World Heritage sites such as the fortified historical city of Valletta in Malta. Under the pretext of restoring houses, permits were being requested and obtained to sanction rooftop additions that interfered with the urban roofscape, raising concerns and questions about the impact of development on Valletta’s historic rooflines by UNESCO in 2009 (Grima, 2017).

Through legal measures, enforcement and advice, MOTCO has been able to stop adverse changes in existing building structures. A limit to upward expansion, standardisation of building colours, defined reconstruction styles, and maintenance of wooden balconies and doors does not seem agreeable to the younger generation. They opine

that it is denying them the opportunity for economic prosperity.

Some have expressed the desire to turn their traditional homes into standard rented apartments similar to those in residential areas such as Mvita and Tudor to the West of Mombasa Island. Others have expressed intentions to turn their homes into hotels, which would mean complete overhauls internally and externally. The enforced limitations have left younger-generation owners frustrated, leading to an abandonment of Old Town and an influx of new tenants and owners into the space.

Many ‘foreigners’ have purchased or occupied houses in Old Town. Completely detached from the conservation effort, the newcomer property developers have already tainted the outlook of the Old Town. Presently buildings outside the jurisdiction of MOTCO have an undistinguished skyline with varying height and designs contributing to a disorganised spatial layout. There is now little remarkable appeal in Old Town as a heritage site.

CONCLUSION

It is acceptable that historical sites designated for conservation be not only spatial structures but also serve as a reflection of the evolution of a society and its cultural identity. Initially conceived from the vagaries of motorised transport in an urban conservation zone, the outcome of this study revealed that social values have substantially changed, representing increased social wills and economic needs. This study exposed unfavourable attitudes of the Old Town younger residents have towards their built environment. The majority holding built heritage and its preservation as defunct in addressing their economic and development needs. In Old Town Mombasa, there is a feeling of deprivation amongst the younger generation of the true meaning of ‘Old Townism.’

It is imperative to now recognise that urban heritage sites may only be successfully preserved by also addressing social needs. Heritage protection would take a secondary priority if issues are linked to poverty reduction and sustainable development. The shift from the traditional emphasis on the preservation of fabric by technical experts to the

recognition of a range of communities and in particular youthful voices in the conservation process will increase the recognition of collective identity and sense or spirit of the place.

The management of choices and decisions around any vision for the future of the city in which the heritage may be sited require further discussion in order to create a consensus. Urban regeneration and renewal initiatives can prevent the destruction of the historic urban built fabric by preventing the further decay of the buildings. Sustainable rehabilitation and economic initiatives such as work programs and business opportunities related to the enhancement and protection of the heritage spaces can enhance the socio-cultural fabric and quality of life.

Recommendations

Public participation is a way to provide local and especially descendant communities with prioritised access, a strong voice in decision making. In such forums, they can be entrusted with preferential opportunities for exploiting tourism, and other economic opportunities and the facilitated with the capacity to do so. They should also become part of an essential strategy.

Authorities can utilise intelligent and innovative public education programs to help social re-engineering of the youth and reconnect them with their past, transmitting the common heritage to future generations. Through the same forums, non-local investors can be committed to partnering with the local community to nurture small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Training and mentoring programs then become essential to help the local community tap into tourism, transport, retail, and even security services.

Lessons can be picked from Lijang Old Town in China. The first was a subsidy plan for the restoration of indigenous people’s houses which defined the funding patterns and criteria for access to motivate and facilitate self-implemented restoration projects. Local inhabitants benefitted both financially and technically; the living environment and local households were greatly improved. The second was a job opportunity program that focused on job creation for native inhabitants, tourism improvement, and control. A specialised business permit mechanism helped

provide the youth who are the inheritors of the tangible and intangible heritage with job opportunities focused on traditional artefacts and industries and livelihood benefits through improved tourism environment and tourism revenues.

With a direct regard to motorised transport as a major threat to conservation in Old Town, the heavy involvement of the youth to not only drive but manage specialised Tuk Tuks for public transport within the urban area could lead to effective route management and reduced trips and distances. The immediate outcomes could be reduced pollution, reduced structural damage of the heritage buildings and economic benefits associated with the created job opportunities. The long-term impact of their involvement in such a program could lead to their understanding the essential balance between conservation and motorised transport through a reinvigorated sense of place and belonging.

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