



PRESERVATION OF SACRED AND COLLECTIVE OASIS SITES

Guelmim Region, Morocco

Since 2003, architect and anthropologist Salima Naji has worked to save the built heritage, but also the cultural and spiritual values and traditions, of the oasis towns of southern Morocco. This ambitious undertaking involves four projects that range in scale from communal granaries to partially abandoned fortified towns located in the Guelmim region in the Anti-Atlas Mountains.

This is an extremely arid desert region famous for prehistoric petroglyphs. The existence of underground aquifers and dry river beds (*wadi*) that flood during the rainy season led to a sophisticated management of scarce water resources and man-made oases that allow for sustainable agriculture. Naturally, towns developed around these verdant depressions, linked by caravan routes across the Sahara and West Africa to the Atlantic and Mediterranean. Grain was held to be sacred and the Berbers' collective grain stores were consequently also holy sites, even after their conversion to Islam, and many include mosques and tombs in or near them.

Today, the old mud towns are often abandoned and the granaries in decay, despite their importance for communal identity, while traditional building skills have been lost as the trend for a standardised architecture of breeze blocks and concrete steadily creeps in from the north to fashion the new towns, with modern amenities, that spring up alongside the old.

Naji aims to rectify this by restoring awareness and a sense of “ownership” in local communities for their historic monuments and public spaces, engaging new and traditional community groups in a participatory process that will ultimately benefit local use and local purposes, training and employing local workers, and, in the long term, promoting earthen architecture as sustainable and affordable for contemporary living.

For example, in the 13th-century fortified town of Assa, the earthen ramparts, towers and gates were restored; streets and public spaces (now used for festivals and weddings) were improved; the religious schools and mosques were rehabilitated (and now much reused by locals); and several private houses were also renovated that will have a “public” use as restaurants and guest houses, attracting tourism (while the families have often returned to live in them during the hottest months). Instead, at Amtoudi, two granaries were stabilised and partially reconstructed and the community hopes to incorporate them into tourist circuits. These projects provide an alternative model for the conservation of old towns and historic monuments in Morocco.









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CLIENTS

Agence pour le Développement des Provinces
du Sud, Rabat, Morocco:
Hajji Ahmed, general director
Rah Lahoucine, regional director

Cooperazione Internazionale Sud Sud,
Palermo, Italy:
Massimiliano Di Tota, coordinator Morocco
(2009–10)
Elmar Loreti, coordinator Morocco (2011–13)
Calogero Messina, project local manager
(2009–10)
Giovanna Dibenedetto, project local manager
(2010–12)

Local Communities:

Assa's traditional local council:
Ahchouch Houssein Afqir, Tayeb Lassaoui,
Waissi Hamdi
Amtoudi's municipal council:
Aguinou Lahoucine, president of the local
association
Amtoudi's traditional local council:
Haj Aguinou Abdellah, Achik Abdellah, Abderahman
Driouch, Aderdor Lahcen
Agadir Ouzrou's traditional local council:
El Harwi Lhoucine, Jaafari Mohammed, Lahcen
Ouchoua, community officer

ARCHITECT

Salima Naji, Kenitra, Morocco

DEVELOPMENT EXPERT

David Goeury, Laboratoire Espace Nature
et Culture, Paris IV-La Sorbonne, Paris, France

CONTRACTOR

Socorouissi, Laayoune, Morocco:
Hassane Jerrar, CEO

MASTER BUILDERS

Amtoudi Master Builders:
Haj Aguinou Abdellah, Achik Abdellah,
Abderahman Driouch, Aderdor Lahcen

Assa Master Builders:

Ba Moh Lahcen, Chajii Brahim, El Qabab
Mohamed, Outzoumert Mahmoud

Agadir Ouzrou Master Builders:

Bilal Ettaqi, Mbark Bousgane, Ali Messaoudi,
Abdellah Boulman

PROJECT DATA

Amtoudi granaries
Site area: 4276 m²
Cost: 69,000 USD
Commission: February 2007
Design: January 2003–April 2006
Construction: July 2007–January 2008
Completion: January 2008

Ksar Assa

Site area: 25,197 m²
Cost: 1,620,000 USD
Commission: December 2005
Design: January 2006–March 2010
Construction: February 2006–November 2011
Completion: June 2007–November 2011

Ksar Agadir Ouzrou

Site area: 1800 m²
Cost: 49,000 USD
Commission: January 2008
Design: March 2008–December 2008
Construction: May 2009–October 2011
Completion: October 2009–October 2011

AGENCE POUR LE DÉVELOPPEMENT DES PROVINCES DU SUD

The Agency for Promotion and Economic and Social Development of the Southern Provinces of the Kingdom, which embraces an area covering 60% of Moroccan territory and includes more than a million inhabitants, has been established to develop the infrastructure of the region, and to implement different territorial and sectorial programmes. It aims to provide both jobs and income-generating activities, based on the enhancement of local resources.

SALIMA NAJI

Salima Naji completed her architectural studies at the Paris-La Villette School of Architecture and her PhD in Anthropology at the School for Advanced Studies in Social Sciences (Paris). She has studied traditional architecture in southern Morocco for 20 years and has published six books. She created her own agency in 2004 and specialises in sustainable and participative development.

WEBSITES

www.lagencedusud.gov.ma
www.salimanaji.org