PROJECT “RESTORATION GENADENDAL, SOUTH AFRICA”

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Introduction

On 20 July 2001 the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science of the Netherlands approved the project proposal Restoration of Genadendal in South Africa, set up jointly by Delft University of Technology (DUT) and its South African counterpart, the Western Cape Cultural Commission (WCCC). A subsidy of just over 1 million was granted to restore the historic buildings and landscape of Genadendal, a nineteenth century Moravian mission station in the Western Cape Province.

As can be shown in my contribution on behalf of Delft University of Technology, this project can be considered as an interesting example in scope of the subject of the symposium about “Strategies for the world’s cultural heritage – preservation in a globalized world: principles, practices, perspectives”. The Public Awareness theme fits best with this project. For instance, the intense collaboration between countries, the way the project is set up and the fact that the project of restoration is put in a wider perspective of development of the place, instead of being treated as an isolated object.

The following text will give you a basic background about the project (state of the art July 2002) and the spearheads of my contribution.

Project Restoration Genadendal

Project Description

The project to restore the mission settlement of Genadendal is originally a South African initiative. There exists a long history of involvement in Genadendal and the settlement has been subject to case studies at the University of Cape Town, amongst others, for more than twenty years. Initially supported by the Dutch Department for Conservation in Zeist (The Netherlands), plans for Dutch technical assistance and co-funding for restoration activities were further developed at Delft University of Technology (DUT).

Since the latter half of the 1990’s, DUT and the Western Cape Cultural Commission (WCCC) have been working together with a view to upgrading and rehabilitating the historic core of Genadendal in the Overberg. Representatives of the Genadendal community were consulted in the process. The mission station is considered to be common cultural heritage between the Netherlands and South Africa, since the headquarters of the Moravian Church in Zeist (The Netherlands) is closely linked to the historic Moravian mission stations of the Western Cape and especially with Genadendal. Because of the positive work performed by the Moravian Church with slaves in the service of the Dutch West India Company (WIC) in the West Indies, the Church was allowed to send missionaries to the Cape, which was at the time under the rule of the Dutch East India Company (VOC).

Genadendal, the oldest Moravian mission settlement in sub-Saharan Africa, encompasses a rich religious history dating back to 1738. George Schmidt, a Moravian missionary of German descent, came to serve the impoverished and dispersed Khoi people who were on the brink of complete extinction at that time. Apart from being the oldest and culturally most significant mission station in South Africa, a number of other reasons justify the choice to commence at Genadendal for the implementation of a long-term integrated conservation plan. Summed up in the final report of the Mission Settlements Research Project executed by the University of Cape Town are the following six considerations.1

1) The settlement knows a long history of diverse interventions, often executed in an un-coordinated and ad hoc fashion, among which were ongoing initiatives to improve infrastructure and develop new areas that could be integrated in an overall planning scheme;

2) Greater Genadendal is faced with more general problems related to its natural and culturally modified landscapes, including under-utilisation and low productivity of agricultural land, invasion of alien plant species and deterioration of the historic irrigation system in the valley;

3) The long history of conservation efforts mentioned earlier, that included the establishment of the Moravian Mission Trust Fund and subsequent conservation projects on the mission werf since 1986 with the restoration of numerous buildings, the founding of the Mission Museum and the establishment of a nursery;

4) Genadendal has the advantage of already being legally constituted as a quasi-municipal area, meaning that there are various channels to accessing resources that made a multi-resource brokering approach feasible to fund an integrated conservation and development plan;