

## Saint-Louis (Senegal)

No 956

### Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	Island of Saint-Louis (Ile de Saint-Louis)
<i>Location</i>	Region of Saint-Louis
<i>State Party</i>	Senegal
<i>Date</i>	17 September 1998

### Justification by State Party

The historic centre of Saint-Louis is a colonial town; it is unique in this type of heritage partly owing to its relationship with water, being situated between two arms of the Senegal River, and partly to the novelty of the surrounding quays and the linkage with the system of transversal roads. No other colonial cities have the same characteristics. Saint-Louis has had considerable influence in the parts of Africa that were under French dominion and even further, particularly because of its architecture but also in terms of education, culture, craftsmanship, and services. The masons, joiners, carpenters, and jewellers have swarmed even into Anglophone regions, where they have worked and trained the natives in their crafts.

**Criteria ii and iv**

### Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *group of buildings*.

### History and Description

#### History

The Island of Saint-Louis was not inhabited before the arrival of the Europeans. The region belonged to the kingdom of Walo and was subject to exploration by Portuguese, Venetians, and Dutch from the 15th century onwards. There were a number of initiatives, particularly in the 17th century, when some settlements were established in the region. In 1633 the French decided to establish the first chartered company in Senegal, the Cap-Vert Company. The island at the mouth of Senegal River was selected in 1659 when, after some unsuccessful attempts, the Frenchman Louis Caullier chose this site for the fortification of the company. Several other companies followed the Cap-Vert

Company, and the English occupied Saint-Louis on three occasions, in 1693, in 1779, and from 1809 to 1817.

Initially unhealthy and inhospitable, the island also lacked building materials, until it was discovered that the plentiful masses of oysters could serve for lime production and road construction. Gradually the settlement of Saint-Louis developed its commercial activities, trading rubber, leather, gold, ivory, and cereals as well as dealing in slaves. To these were added the need for education and building of schools.

At the beginning of the 19th century the settlement had some 8000 inhabitants. In 1828 an urban master plan established the street pattern and regulated the development of the town, starting from the old fortification as the basic reference. The real development of the town, however, took place from 1854, when Louis Faidherbe was nominated governor. Thus from 1854 to 1865 Saint-Louis was urbanized. It was nominated the capital of Senegal in 1872 and reached its apogee in 1895 when it was nominated the capital of West Africa.

In this period Saint-Louis became the leading urban centre in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as the centre for the diffusion of cultural and artistic activities. The first museum of the industry, ethnography, and history of West Africa was opened in Saint-Louis on 15 March 1864. In this period the schools and other public institutions and services, as well as the first Senegalese military battalion, and a Muslim court of justice, were established.

The period of peace in the colony contributed to the development of economic and commercial activities, thus favouring the expansion and influence of the town. However, in 1902 Saint-Louis lost its status as the capital of West Africa and in 1957 it ceased being the capital of Senegal. This meant the departure of the French garrison with the military and their families and the closure of a number of offices and shops; the last to close were the customs in 1963. The French population was drastically reduced. At the same time, however, the overall population continued to grow, being 55,600 in 1960, 90,000 in 1976, and 150,000 in 1997.

The town has developed both on the Langue de Barbarie (the ridge against the Ocean) and in Sor on the continent. There has also been overpopulation in the old town, where some older structures been at risk of collapse. An new urban master plan was prepared in 1983 in order to regulate the situation, and also to provide for the protection of the historic areas. At present the city has revived its economy (based on fishing and agriculture) and tourism (international festivals, exhibitions, sports, etc.). The University of Gaston Berger was opened in 1992. A new airport was recently inaugurated in Saint-Louis to facilitate access. The growth of the city is giving the authorities the same concerns as any other large African city, including illegal occupation of land and environmental problems.

#### Description

The Island of Saint-Louis is articulated in three parts: the Nord quarter, the Sud quarter, and the Place Faidherbe and the Government Palace in the centre. The entire settlement is situated in a magnificent lagoon formed by the two arms of the Senegal River, which separate it from the maritime part of the town and from the Sor quarter on the continent. The long and narrow, almost rectangular, island is about 2500m long in the north-south direction and about 350m wide on average. The bridge of Moustapha Malick Gaye (formerly

Servatius) links the island to a ridge of land in the west, the Langue de Barbarie, which protects it from the Ocean. The Faïdherbe bridge, constructed at the end of the 19th century, links the town to the mainland and the area of Sor. The climate is tropical with a dry period from November to June.

The zone proposed for inscription consists of the central part of the Island of Saint-Louis, about 350m x 1300m. A buffer zone has been identified, mainly consisting of the water across the two arms of the Senegal River, east and west of the historic town, as well as of narrow areas of land of about 50m, to the north and south of the proposed zone.

The urban fabric of the old town is based on the orthogonal grid plan of 1828. There are four streets running north-south and a large number of short alleys crossing the island east-west. As a result there are blocks of different dimensions: 30m x 30m, 30m x 75m, and larger. The island is encased by a system of quays, which are a reference to all streets in the east-west direction. The urban layout gives the town its particular character and specificity. From the architectural and aesthetic point of view the quality of the two- or three-storied colonial buildings is distinguished in the form of wooden balconies with wrought-iron grilles, roofs with red tiles, and the doors and windows with wooden shutters.

The main historic buildings include the ancient fort, the *Hôtel du Gouvernement*, the Governor's Palace, which marks the centre of the island, the place where the first settlement was established. This ensemble has been modified to a great extent over the centuries, particularly in the interior, but it still conserves the exterior, although with some additions. The *Cathedral* is situated next to the Governor's Palace and was built with the voluntary contribution of the citizens, completed in 1828. The military barracks, called *Rognat Nord* and *Rognat Sud*, were constructed in 1837 in the centre of the town, on both sides of the *Place Faïdherbe*. Together with the Governor's Palace they form a classical composition in axis with the *Servatius Bridge*. The building of the *Regional Assembly for the River* has existed since 1825, first in a more modest form. It was extended to house a primary school in 1839, and after 1873 it was used for the colonial archives. Subsequently the building has provided the premises for various public authorities. A rather large complex, it is articulated with pilasters and balconies. It is in a good state of repair. Other buildings include *Faïdherbe Bridge* inaugurated in 1897 (506m long), the *Civic Hospital* built in 1822, and the *Great Mosque* of the North, built starting in 1838.

## Management and Protection

### Legal status

The owner of the Island of Saint-Louis is the State of Senegal; individual buildings have a mixed ownership, including public authorities and private individuals or institutions. As a result of inheritance succession, many buildings may have several proprietors, which complicates administration and restoration.

The legal instruments for the protection and management of the historic centre of Saint-Louis include the law for the protection of sites and historic monuments (71-12/1971), the decree for the application of the law (73-746/1973), and the decree declaring Saint-Louis a zone of urban renovation (76-277/1977).

### Management

The town received an urban master plan in 1928, and this has been the basis of its further development.

Louis Barge International prepared the first urban master plan (*plan de sauvegarde*) for the historic centre of Saint-Louis in 1983. Krzysztof Pawlowski prepared the second plan in 1984. A third plan with technical guidelines dates from 1997 and was the responsibility of Cabinet Archi + de Fodé DIOP. There are no regional development plans with an impact on the historic town.

The planning and management are the responsibility of the public authorities, including the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Urbanism and Habitat (Dakar), as well as the Municipality of Saint-Louis. The authorities collaborate with the Bureau d'Architecture des Monuments Historiques for the implementation of the guidelines. The Syndicat d'Initiative et de Tourisme and the Convention des Saint-Louisiens participate in their fields of competence. Itineraries have been identified for visitors, including visits to major historic buildings.

There is, however, a lack of resources, and particularly of qualified technicians to control the works and to sustain building owners in their projects.

## Conservation and Authenticity

### Conservation history

The conservation of the historic fabric is reported to have been satisfactory until the middle of the 20th century, when the capital of Senegal was transferred to Dakar. Since this date the old town has suffered from the lack of attention and means and has faced increasing degradation.

The historic centre has been inscribed on the list of protected sites since 1975 and it was identified as a zone for urban renovation in 1976 (Decree No 76-271).

Nevertheless, more and more buildings are getting into a hazardous state, risking collapse. Unauthorized ad-hoc repairs and works have been undertaken by owners or occupants which have undermined the character of the historic buildings. A certain amount of restoration work has been carried out in recent decades, conducted on listed historic buildings by the public authorities. Priority has been given to buildings and structures of architectural value that are still in functional order or risk ruin. However, the lack of resources has seriously limited the possibilities of public intervention. In fact, the current poor state of repair reflects the economic situation. In recent times, it has been necessary to demolish buildings for reasons of public safety.

### Authenticity

The removal of the capital of Senegal from Saint-Louis to Dakar has seriously undermined the conservation of the old town. Up to the present the historic town has retained its historic integrity and character and most of its authentic historic fabric. However, the state of conservation of many of the buildings is not satisfactory.

## Evaluation

### *Action by ICOMOS*

An ICOMOS expert mission visited the site in June 2000.

### *Qualities*

The location of the historic town of Saint-Louis on an island at the mouth of the Senegal River gives it a special quality of setting. The regular town plan, the system of quays, and the characteristic colonial architecture and public buildings give Saint-Louis its particular quality and identity. Furthermore, it has been a cultural and economic centre that has influenced the whole of West Africa, particularly in the 19th century.

### *Comparative analysis*

The historic town of Saint-Louis is a French colonial city and can therefore be compared with Gorée and Rufisque in Senegal and Bingerville in Côte d'Ivoire. The Island of Saint-Louis, however, is very different in its urban layout and character by comparison with Gorée, which is already on the World Heritage List. The other two towns have not been protected and are in poor condition. Through its history as a capital city, Saint-Louis has also acquired a more important architectural heritage than could be found in the other towns of West Africa.

### *ICOMOS comments*

The report of the ICOMOS expert mission recommended that the entire island be included in the nomination area, considering that it forms an indivisible unity. The buffer zone should consist of the two branches of the river, extending some 500m downstream, as well as including the Langue de Barbarie.

Furthermore, the report stressed the need for a special office to be established for the conservation management of the protected area, providing this office with the necessary expertise, facilities, and resources.

## Brief description

Founded as a French colonial settlement in the 17th century, the Island of Saint-Louis was urbanized in the mid 19th century. It was the capital of Senegal from 1872 to 1957 and played an important cultural and economic role in the whole of West Africa. The location of the town on an island at the mouth of the Senegal River, its regular town plan, the system of quays, and the characteristic colonial architecture give Saint-Louis its particular quality and identity.

## Recommendation

The outstanding universal value of the site is recognized. At the Bureau meeting in June 2000, it was decided that the nomination should be referred back to the State Party to provide guarantees of the urgent establishment of offices and facilities integrated with the necessary expertise and resources for the long-term management of the site. Furthermore, it was recommended that the entire island be included in the nominated area, since it may be considered to constitute a conceptual unity.

Following the recommendation of the Bureau, the State Party has given the requested assurances, and has guaranteed that the local office for the protection of the historic area would

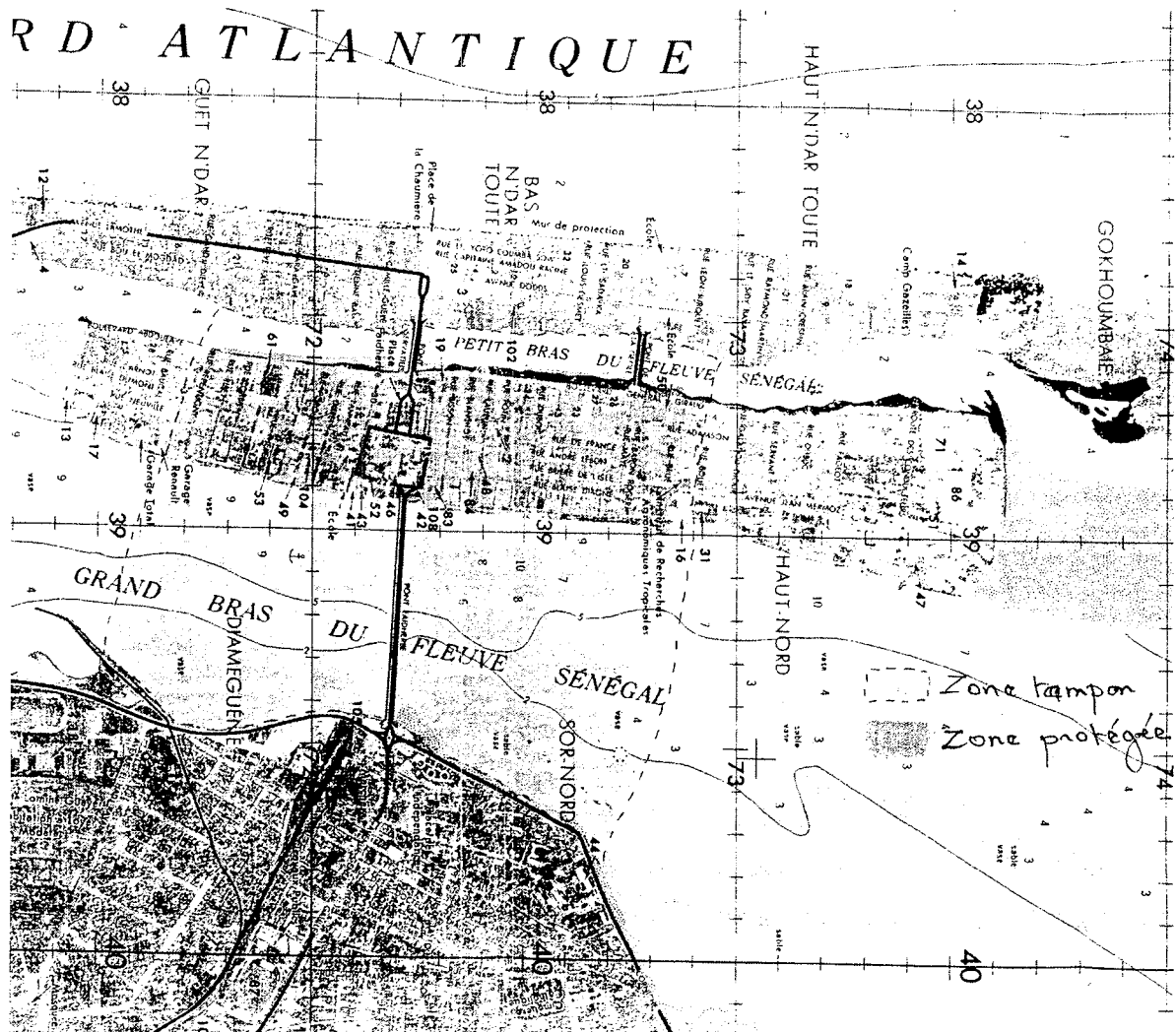
be re-established with the necessary personnel and under the direction of a qualified architect seconded for this position. A Committee will be established for the conservation of the Island of Saint-Louis, and the operational funds will be provided jointly by the State and the Agency for Municipal Development, and other sponsors. Furthermore, the State Party has agreed that the entire island be included in the nominated area, as recommended by the Bureau, with the two arms of the river forming the buffer zone.

It is thus recommended that the site be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria ii and iv*.

**Criterion ii** The historic town of Saint-Louis exhibits an important exchange of values and influences on the development of education and culture, architecture, craftsmanship, and services in a large part of West Africa.

**Criterion iv** The Island of Saint-Louis, a former capital of West Africa, is an outstanding example of a colonial city, characterized by its particular natural setting, and it illustrates the development of colonial government in this region.

ICOMOS, October 2000



Plan indiquant la zone proposée pour inscription et la zone tampon /  
Map showing nominated area and buffer zone