

**REPORT ON THE JOINT WORLD HERITAGE CENTRE/ICOMOS MISSION
TO THE “TOWN OF LUANG PRABANG” (Lao PDR)**



© Luang Prabang World Heritage Office

4 - 9 April 2022

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS	5
List of Mission Recommendations	7
Conservation/Preservation of Attributes within the Inscribed Property and Buffer Zones	7
Development Projects	8
Governance.....	9
Living Heritage and Stakeholder Engagement	10
THE PROPERTY	11
Summary of past World Heritage Committee decisions and issues	13
SUMMARY OF THE NATIONAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM FOR THE PRESERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE WORLD HERITAGE PROPERTY	15
National Legislation for Heritage	15
Institutional Framework	16
Management Tools and System in force	16
Role of religious communities and village leaders	17
THE MISSION	18
ASSESSMENT OF THE STATE OF CONSERVATION OF THE PROPERTY	19
Issue 1: Preservation of the Town of Luang Prabang	19
Introduction.....	19
Assessment of the decrease in the number of traditional houses and structures	19
Positive impact on the conservation of the property	21
Authenticity and “Civil Buildings” Types (or Typologies).....	22
Authenticity of materials and techniques	22
Actions by the State Party for traditional buildings and structures.....	23
Cautionary Comment: an underrated attribute of the high ecological value of the OUV	24
Assessment of Gaps	26
Management of buffer zones	26
Issue 2: Development projects	27
Nam Khan Riverbank protection project	27
Nam Khanh river bridge replacement project	30
Luang Prabang Hydropower project	32
How development projects could support the OUV of the property	36
Issue 3: Governance	38
Efficiency of PSMV.....	38
Tourism management	39
Governance and management framework.....	40
Mechanism of multistakeholder consultation	40
International cooperation.....	41
Human and financial resources	41

Operationalization of financial mechanism for self-benefitting and sustainable funding (Heritage Funds)	41
Issue 4: Living Heritage Town and Stakeholder Engagement.....	41
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	43
Conclusions	43
General.....	43
Governance and Management	43
Reported threats to the OUV of the property	44
Mission Recommendations	45
Conservation/Preservation of Attributes within the Inscribed Property and Buffer Zones	45
Development Projects	46
Governance.....	47
Living Heritage and Stakeholder Engagement	48
ANNEXES	49
Annex 1: Terms of Reference of the Joint World Heritage Centre / ICOMOS Reactive Monitoring Mission to the “Town of Luang Prabang” (Lao PDR)	49
Annex 2: Decision 44 COM 7B.32.....	52
Annex 3: Composition of mission team.....	54
Annex 4: Itinerary and programme of the mission as implemented	55
Annex 5: List of people met.....	56
Annex 6: SOUV of the property	58
Annex 7: Maps, photographs and other graphical material required to illustrate issues	59
Annex 8: List of key documents which have informed the mission	65

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Mission members would like to express their gratitude to the authorities of Lao PDR, in particular, the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism, represented by H.E. Mrs Suansavanh Viyaket, Minister, and Mr Phakhanxay SIKHANXAY, Director-General of the Division of Heritage and his team.

All members of the Luang Prabang World Heritage Office (LPWHO), led by Mr Saveuy SILAVANH, Director, should be sincerely thanked for their company, the explanations they provided before, during and after the Mission, and for sharing their views on the various aspects of the preservation of the property. Likewise, the participants in the stakeholders' meeting on the premises of the LPWHO are thanked for the fruitful exchange.

The Mission further expresses its gratitude to Mr Bounleuam MANYVONG, Vice-Governor of Luang Prabang and Chairman of the Provincial Committee for World Heritage, and his office for the attention paid to the Mission's visit and the exchange of views.

The Mission would also like to thank the Permanent Delegation of Lao PDR to UNESCO for their support. Our sincere thanks also go to the UNESCO Office in Bangkok, especially Mrs Duong Bich Hanh, Chief of the Culture Unit, Mrs Montira Unakul Horayangura, National Programme Officer, and Mrs Mali Chayamarit, who accompanied the mission in Luang Prabang, facilitating communication with the national partners.

Mr Seun PHETSANGHAN, former Minister and Advisor to the National Committee for Heritage, should be warmly thanked for his company and the insights he shared with the Mission.

Ms Diane Belkheraz of the World Heritage Centre Asia and the Pacific Unit, Ms Régina Durighello and Ms Rebecca Currie of ICOMOS International should also be thanked for their support.

Nao HAYASHI (UNESCO World Heritage Centre) and Laurence LOH (ICOMOS)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Reactive Monitoring Mission to the World Heritage property 'Town of Luang Prabang' was conducted from 4 April to 9 April 2022, at the request of the World Heritage Committee in Decision **44 COM 7B.32** (Fuzhou/online, June 2021).

The Mission's main tasks were to evaluate the state of conservation of the Town, the possible positive and negative impacts of recently completed and planned projects on the property, such as the Luang Prabang Hydropower project (LPHPP), as well as to review the efficiency of the applied governance in relation to the preservation of the Town, its buffer zones and decision-making processes.

The inscription of the Town of Luang Prabang in 1995, the creation of the Luang Prabang World Heritage Office, the introduction of the Conservation Management Plan ("Plan de sauvegarde et de mise en valeur", hereinafter referred to as PSMV) in 2001, the incorporation of the Buffer Zone in 2013 and the thoughtful expansion of the original Statement of Outstanding Universal Value in 2013 (referred to as the SOUV, which serves to convey the cultural and natural essence of historic Luang Prabang and its wider setting) have collectively been the "guardians of the OUV" till today. The Mission assesses that the physical attributes identified in the SOUV (such as townscape and architectural features), qualified by authenticity and integrity, are substantively intact. The incremental application of the conservation management framework over 18 years and the development of management expertise in parallel have served the heritage-related needs of the site well and should continue to do so. However, some attributes of the OUV of the property are now threatened by a number of factors as outlined below and in the main sections of the Mission report.

Close examination of the inventory of listed Remarkable Traditional Buildings and Structures, measured against enforcement of the regulations, has allowed the Mission to verify that there is "loss of traditional buildings" and to offer a perspective that mediates between public perceptions and statistics.

This exercise, coupled with fact-finding field trips and interviews of stakeholders, brings to the surface many fundamental concerns that can inform the proposal to draft an up-to-date conservation policy that complements and strengthens the PSMV. It could also guide urgent strategies and actions related to an underrated attribute (wetland and ponds), increase the focus on the property's ecological setting and its intangible cultural heritage associated with the spirit of place and feeling, its liveability (traffic congestion, noise pollution, urban clutter, etc.), the management of the Heritage Funds, grants and incentives, sustainable tourism, the introduction of modern interventions in the public realm, and most importantly the concept of Integrated Spatial Planning.

The participation of the Town's inhabitants in cultural mapping exercises to record oral histories and non-material legacies for future generations or activities, such as exhibitions to convey their impressions of life in a World Heritage property, should be ongoing initiatives to capture the Town's essence as a historical and living entity.

Collectively, these components will contribute to the sustainability and safeguarding of the historic urban landscape of Luang Prabang in all its forms and functions.

Commentaries on ongoing public realm infrastructure projects within the Town, namely the Nam Khan Riverbank protection project and the Nam Khan River bridge replacement project, are outlined, especially their impact on the OUV of the property. Ideas are offered on how to move the projects forward in the direction of enhancing OUV.

However, a resounding call to action to address and guide the foreseeable transformation of the Province and Town of Luang Prabang is encapsulated in this extract from page 35-36 of this report on the Luang Prabang Hydropower project (LPHPP):

*“...the current status of technical data and the resultant analysis prepared by the technical team, of which the majority are dam and infrastructure experts, transmitted to the WHC by the State Party, is **insufficient to provide reliable foundations and proof of absence of the possible direct, indirect and cumulative impacts of the LPHPP and other dams upstream and downstream to the World Heritage property’s OUV and its attributes.***

The attributes of the OUV include the natural environment of the Mekong, associated religious and cultural practices and the living conditions of local communities.”

The observation above is a microcosm that reflects the overarching concern of the Mission in respect of the **possible deterioration of the state of conservation of the property in time to come**. The cause will be implementing new projects that do not respect and complement the historical context. Thus, the call for urban design guidelines for heritage sites and guidelines for integrated spatial planning for sustainable development at the regional level is urgent and desirable. This signals the need to pivot from a monolithic rules-based heritage conservation approach to a more inclusive sustainability-based and criterion-based approach, as advocated by the World Heritage Convention, to enable the coexistence between traditional values and the requirements of modern everyday life.

The Town of Luang Prabang now stands at the crossroads of major transformation, as the country moves ahead with regional economic restructuring and development, particularly for infrastructure. This transformation is evidenced by the long list of development and international aid projects proposed and implemented inside Luang Prabang and those beyond the remit of the heritage town where until recently¹ there was no legal requirement and it was assumed that beyond the boundaries of the buffer zone there is no necessity or legal requirement to assess their impact on the Town.

Every single one of the projects, small and large, involves physical construction works, the removal of existing fabric and materials and their substitution with modern, replacement materials and engineered parts. For every ancient brick preserved and restored, an incalculable quantum of new bricks will be introduced.

The Mission concludes that it is highly likely that these direct, indirect and/or cumulative impacts will contribute to irreversible change.

This change would undermine the intangible values of the historic urban landscape with its unnamed and nonphysical attributes that connect people to place, practices, functions and beliefs, and how they support and sustain urban life through their continuous connection with the built and natural environment. The historic town would then become a mere appendage to the development agenda where the growth of financial capital takes precedence over the strengthening of cultural and human capital.

Recognizing current realities and the need for policy integration, the Mission’s practical recommendations attempt to address the issues at hand, whilst the dichotomy expressed above is the compelling story that underscores the need for the heritage of Laos to be placed at the heart of community and its sustainable development, where the defined heritage values should serve as a core criterion in evaluating development options. This will be the magnitude of the challenges ahead, especially building consensus across the board.

¹ Impact Assessments were enforced by a recent revision of the Law on National Heritage

List of Mission Recommendations

Based on the analysis above, the Mission recommends and invites the State Party to take the actions below. Please see also the conclusion at the end of the report.

Conservation/Preservation of Attributes within the Inscribed Property and Buffer Zones

1. Address the threats to the remaining 257 buildings listed in the 1995 inventory, especially 142 religious and civil buildings under poor and moderate conditions, identified as the first sub-type, namely those wholly constructed out of wood, in a contingency plan; This includes the setting up of a sustainable financial mechanism, along with the Heritage Fund, to provide financial assistance in cases where the owner is unable to cover the reconstruction costs; **PRIORITY: HIGH**
2. Address the course of action when traditional buildings are beyond reasonable repair norms. Presently the only legal course of action is to reconstruct the buildings in strict accordance with the regulations of the PSMV. **PRIORITY: HIGH**
3. Recognise that the term “Civil Buildings” be defined by a new list of architectural types (or typologies) that correspond to different periods of construction and styles, as suggested in the above analysis under issue 1; **PRIORITY: HIGH**
4. Pursue its work on revisiting and updating the PSMV to adopt supplementary policy documents, integrate contemporary concepts of management of all attributes of the OUV, as well as to enable to respond to new contingencies; as well as introduce, within this updating process, international frameworks, such as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially related to climate change and sustainable tourism, the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) Approach, Intangible Heritage and universal access; **PRIORITY: HIGH**
5. Update regularly GIS inventories to include early 20th-century modern buildings, contour levels of the embankments, and depth soundings of the Mekong and Nam Khan Rivers in the vicinity of the property, amongst others, to enable the chronological tracking of all attributes of the OUV; **PRIORITY: HIGH**
6. Consider investing in supply chains of affordable local materials for construction and repair, as well as training programmes as a means of ensuring the continuity of conservation with authenticity; **PRIORITY: MEDIUM**
7. Consider, as necessary, a broader awareness campaign about the rules stated in the PSMV targeting the inhabitants and homeowners of the property, including some successful case studies to demonstrate the merits of the PSMV; **PRIORITY: MEDIUM**
8. Support the rehabilitation programme for wetlands and ponds reserves with a scientific approach to save the bio-ecological climatic functions, especially as it is an attribute of the high ecological value of the OUV that is underrated; over-densification and encroachment around these natural spaces should be controlled; **PRIORITY: HIGH**
9. Expand the inhouse Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) research team to ensure that data on how the social fabric is connected to sustaining the urban fabric of the town as a living entity is collected and collated to inform on the planning process, especially as gentrification in the core zone, exacerbated by the outmigration of much of the existing resident population, has led to the loss of spirit and feeling; **PRIORITY: MEDIUM**
10. Revisit and strengthen the management of the buffer zones, in light of their essential role in preserving the inscribed zones and in particular in considering the large-scale development projects; **PRIORITY: HIGH**

Development Projects

Nam Khan Riverbank Protection

11. Prioritise the technical areas of study highlighted in the 2019 technical review to move the future projects along in a proactive manner, especially in the area of slope stabilisation and earth protection in the interest of risk preparedness; **PRIORITY: HIGH**
12. Preserve the landscape of the riverbanks to protect the attributes sustaining the property's OUV by designing a hybrid system to suit different site situations as opposed to a one-size-fits-all approach, with the assistance of landscape consultants and soil specialists, and In taking into account the findings of soil investigation, slope analysis and simulations of rising water levels to build back better in the interest of sustainable development; **PRIORITY: WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE CONCERNED PROJECT**

Nam Khan Old Bridge

13. Consider, to moderate the need for a comprehensive HIA, an option of a like-for-like replacement of the Nam Khan Old Bridge with a present-day model of the Bailey bridge, which is still being manufactured (See <https://www.ibeehivesteelstructures.com/steel-baileybridge>), besides the three options reviewed by ICOMOS; **PRIORITY: HIGH**

Luang Prabang Hydropower project

14. In the underlying situation where the previous studies and the HIA have not provided satisfactory analysis and solid proof and certainty that the LPHPP upstream will not further affect the attributes of the OUV relating to the natural environment of the Mekong and Nam Khan Rivers, associated religious and cultural practices and living conditions of local communities, take the precautionary approach not to pursuing the LPHPP and relocate the project and other future and similar projects to where there is no suspected causality for the World Heritage properties, their associated values or their environmental setting; **PRIORITY: IMMEDIATE**
15. Further revisit existing research and compilation of documentation related to the attributes of the OUV, including nature-culture link, associated religious and spiritual practices related to the Mekong and waterways, deepen the understanding of the sense of place of the Town more straightforwardly to inform future assessments of impacts of development projects on the OUV of the property; **PRIORITY: MEDIUM**

Other development projects under study or implementation

16. Provide the World Heritage Centre with an update on all planned development projects in and around the World Heritage property if they are suspected of having potential impacts on the OUV of the property, and ensure that adequate Impact Assessments are undertaken in line with laws of the Lao PDR, paragraphs 118 bis and 169 of the *Operational Guidelines* of the World Heritage Convention, following the guidelines provided by the World Heritage Convention's Advisory Bodies; **PRIORITY: WHENEVER APPROPRIATE AND BEFORE ANY IRREVERSIBLE DECISIONS**
17. Promote the participation of the LPWHO in the conceptualization and feasibility studies of development projects, as a way of increasing their exposure to the development project design and providing specific expertise and views to the development stakeholders; **PRIORITY: WHENEVER NECESSARY**
18. Draft and implement an improved Urban Design Guidelines, which also control the vista at the level of streetscapes to fill the gap between original and local designs based on precedents and generic designs. This Guidelines could apply to neighbourhood settings,

public infrastructure and materials suggested by new development projects within the inscribed zones and buffer zones to ensure that collectively there is no negative heritage impact in terms of coherence in design and materials; **PRIORITY: HIGH**

19. Incorporate in the objectives of the development and aid projects benefits in preserving and enhancing the OUV of the World Heritage properties and sensitize stakeholders and partners about the obligations of the State Party to the World Heritage Convention, as well as ensuring the financial provision to implement necessary Impact Assessments in the project planning and conceptualisation process, with the participation of the LPWHO; **PRIORITY: WHENEVER NECESSARY**

Governance

Integrated management framework

20. Integrate the World Heritage Convention's related guidelines into a broader context of territorial and development planning relative to the inscribed and buffer zones as well as in the wider setting so that the overall management framework becomes coherent and cohesive; **PRIORITY: MEDIUM**

Integrated Tourism Management Plan

21. Entrust the coordination of the draft Tourism Management plan to the LPWHO, including carrying capacity studies on some hotspots on the tourism itineraries, to guide the regulation of the visitor influx, flow and education, and prioritise tourism-related infrastructure development (e.g. Phousi mountain). The Plan should integrate the principles of World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism and the ICOMOS International Charter for Cultural Heritage Tourism **PRIORITY: HIGH**

Management Plan (PSMV)

22. Consider the integration of specific aspects of a living heritage town and the application of concepts of authenticity applicable to the Asian context (e.g. Nara Document, Hoi An Protocols) to make the renewed policy provided by the PSMV viable and workable in a real-life context; **PRIORITY: HIGH**

Luang Prabang World Heritage Office (LPWHO)

23. Maintain, considering the criteria for the World Heritage property's nomination and management, the current structure of the LPWHO as the sole and unified technical entity overlooking the various aspects of the management of the property, and reinforce it, especially for built heritage preservation and transdisciplinary approach as appropriate; **PRIORITY: IMMEDIATE**

Impact Assessments

24. Review existing legislation to widen the recognition of heritage related Impact Assessments, and take initiatives to increase nationwide awareness of national development actors on the principles of the World Heritage Convention and the State Party's obligation; **PRIORITY: HIGH**

Multistakeholder consultation mechanism

25. Strengthen the role of National and Provincial World Heritage Committees as advisory bodies on the issues of heritage and development; in particular, the National World Heritage Committee may have to be presided over by a Vice Prime Minister for it to be

functioning as a coordination body of all concerned agencies and ministries to enable proactive planning practice for significant development projects, informed by appropriate Impact Assessments; **PRIORITY: HIGH**

26. Allocate time and energy of the staff of the LPWHO in terms of priority and clear strategic objectives to focus on the most needed projects for the preservation of the World Heritage property; **PRIORITY: WHENEVER NECESSARY**
27. Strengthen the capacities of the LPWHO through possible additional expertise, enabling a transdisciplinary approach, consolidating both the conservation of built assets and living heritage, as well as by providing training opportunities in situ or abroad; **PRIORITY: AS SOON AS POSSIBLE**

Heritage Funds

28. Allocate the collected funds from various financial revenue in accordance with the concerned national decree, strategically to high priority activities, particularly to cope with the restoration of traditional timber structures, which constitute core attributes of OUV; **PRIORITY: HIGH**

General

29. Apply to the International Assistance Funds of the World Heritage Convention to address priority issues suggested by the Mission; **PRIORITY: AS SOON AS POSSIBLE**

Living Heritage and Stakeholder Engagement

30. Develop and implement projects to revitalize ecological and intangible heritage attributes, such as data collection and monitoring of these attributes over time, which are beneficial to strengthening stakeholder commitments and awareness of their role in safeguarding social fabric; **PRIORITY: MEDIUM**
31. To externalise and socialise the above-mentioned new policy direction, consider implementing outreach programmes, such as participatory research and exhibitions on history, memories and everyday life, and/or the development of World Heritage signature products with the involvement of the Town's inhabitants, cultural institutions and Civil Society, to promote and sustain a sense of identity and belonging in the Town. **PRIORITY: MEDIUM**

THE PROPERTY

The **Town of Luang Prabang** was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1995 as a cultural property. In 2013, a retrospective **Statement of Outstanding Universal Value (SOUV)** of the property was approved by the World Heritage Committee, also diversifying values and attributes associated with the OUV of the property, such as the natural environment and intangible heritage.

Inscribed under criteria (ii), (iv) and (v), the property is recognised as an exceptional fusion of Lao traditional architecture and 19th and 20th-century European colonial style buildings. It is an outstanding example of an architectural ensemble built over the centuries combining sophisticated architecture of religious buildings, vernacular constructions and colonial buildings. In addition, its unique townscape was considered remarkably well preserved, illustrating a key stage in the blending of two distinct cultural traditions. (see the complete Statement of the Outstanding Universal Value (SOUV) at: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/479/>)

The elements of attributes associated with OUV, integrity and authenticity as stated in the SOUV at the time of the property's inscription on the World Heritage List in 1995, and then revised in 2013 are tabulated below. The mission's analysis and views follow after the table.

Outstanding Universal Value (OUV)	Attributes supporting OUV
<p>Townscape in its unique location where the natural environment and built heritage are in perfect harmony:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The property is set on a peninsula formed by the Mekong and the Nam Khan River, encircled by mountain ranges and lush greenery. The peninsula is the political and religious centre of Luang Prabang, with its royal and noble residences and religious institutions. • The sacred Mount Phousi stands at the heart of the historic town built on a peninsula delimited by the Mekong and the Nam Khan, the domain of the mythical naga. • Natural spaces in the heart of the city and along the riverbanks and wetlands (a complex network of ponds used for fish farming and vegetable growing) complement this preserved natural environment.
<p>Coexistence of traditional buildings and colonial elements in harmony</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most of the traditional buildings are wooden structures. Many remaining traditional Lao houses are built of wood using traditional techniques and materials introduced in the colonial period, such as plaited bamboo panels coated with wattle and daub. • One- or two-storey brick colonial buildings line the main street and

	<p>the Mekong, often with balconies and other decorative features in wood, temples in stone.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The many pagodas ("Vat"), among the most sophisticated Buddhist temples in Southeast Asia, are richly decorated with sculptures, engravings, paintings, gilding and furniture pieces. Wat Xieng Thong, dating from the 16th century, is a remarkable example both from the archaeological point of view and from the Lao iconographic and aesthetic viewpoint
<p>Historical significance of the Town in the history of the region and of Laos</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many legends are associated with the Town's creation, such as the visit of Buddha on his travels and his vision of its prosperous future. • From the 14th to 16th centuries, the Town, under its name of Muang Sua, then Xieng Thong, was crowned the capital of the kingdom of Lane Xang (Kingdom of a Million Elephants) as a strategic station on the Silk Route and as a centre of Buddhism in the region. • Under the French Protectorate, in 1893, Luang Prabang became the royal residence and religious capital during the reign of King Sisavang Vong and remained as such until 1946, when Vientiane became the administrative capital.
<p>Intangible heritage, such as religious traditions and ceremonies are an integral part of its value:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ceremonies to appease the <i>nagas</i> and other evil spirits and Buddhist religious practices (Prabang procession, the monks' morning quest) perpetuate the sanctity of the place.
<p>Integrity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The integrity of the property is linked to an architectural and cultural heritage set in a natural landscape • Preservation of all of the significant elements, especially the urban fabric and major monuments (temples, public buildings, traditional houses)

Authenticity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The landscapes and urban fabric retained with a high degree of authenticity, and the site is not disturbed by any major construction. • Regular maintenance of the religious buildings; • Transmission of restoration techniques (among monks) • The Buddhist cult's living traditions and practices and the cultural traditions related to it (rites and ceremonies).
Protection requirements and management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Related laws contributing to the preservation of natural and cultural attributes of the property (see Summary of National Legislation for Heritage below) • Management document (PSMV) • Management authority (Luang Prabang World Heritage Office – LPWH, National and Provincial Committees for World Heritage)

Note: The report contains references to attributes which contribute to, support, or sustain the OUV of the property that are shown in the table above, which have a direct relationship with the original attributes that represent the thinking back in 1995 and 2013. The mission recognises that contemporary concepts and terms have a place in this report when reference is being made to the three pillars of OUV, for example the Historic Landscape Approach which includes the protection of views and vistas, the examination of intactness and wholeness in respect of integrity and Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) in respect of maintaining connections to place, spirit and feeling, and continuity.

Summary of past World Heritage Committee decisions and issues

Between 1996 and 2014, the property was regularly reviewed by the sessions of the World Heritage Committee because of the challenges it was facing in terms of the governance, management framework and increasing pressures from development and tourism activities. The enforcement of the management tool along with construction or repair activity regulations were the main concerns. However, the minor boundary modification and the addition of buffer zones, with the adoption of the Urban Plan in 2013, suggested a greater coherence in the management mechanism of the property and its surrounding areas.

In 2014, the Committee Decision **38 COM 7B.98** observed that these main concerns were addressed and encouraged the State Party to apply the Luang Prabang Conservation Plan (PSMV) in controlling the development pressure in the property and the buffer zone to prevent any threats to its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV). Furthermore, the operationalization of the Heritage Fund was expected to sustain the conservation efforts by guaranteeing an autonomous funding mechanism for the management agency of the property. Since then, the state of conservation of the property has remained subject to technical assessments and

monitoring, notably through a bilateral cooperation mechanism with France, out of the World Heritage Convention's reactive monitoring process.

However, since 2020, technical missions and third parties have repeatedly raised issues relating to large development initiatives, the Heritage Fund, the disappearance of traditional buildings, new constructions within the property, its buffer zones and wider setting and the protection of the banks of Nam Khan River.

Decision **44COM 7B.32** of the 44th session of the World Heritage Committee (Fuzhou/online, 2021) noted the application of several management tools and regulations for existing and new construction and infrastructures. Furthermore, it highlighted the need for an integrated approach and a clear policy to maintain constitutive elements of the property's Outstanding Universal Value (OUV).

Concern was raised about a decrease in the number of traditional houses and structures within the property. The necessity of a clear guideline for tourism management remains another challenge in the absence of an integrated Tourism Management Plan.

A closer review is required for the work undertaken within the framework of the Nam Khan Riverbank project, funded by the World Bank, especially its potential impact on the OUV, such as the landscape value and security/safety risks.

Besides the preservation and management of the inscribed zone, the Luang Prabang Hydropower Project (LPHPP) project, whose projected site is located 25km upstream of the property over the Mekong, was said to be complete and approved by the Lao authorities. Recalling the Decision **40 COM 7** and the provisions of Paragraph 118bis of the *Operational Guidelines*, the Committee recommended the State Party halt construction activities until necessary impact assessments have been completed in line with the guidance provided by the Advisory Bodies to the Convention. The previously conducted technical studies and documentation submitted to the Mekong River Commission for the multistakeholder consultation and additional documents provided to the World Heritage Centre did not contain a specific analysis of expected changes in the cultural and natural environments nor a specific section focusing on the potential impacts of the project on the OUV of the property, nor any mitigation measures against those potential impacts. The ICOMOS/IUCN review on the draft Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA), sent to the State Party in January 2022, concluded that the HIA had not fulfilled all requirements to identify and mitigate potential negative impacts, be they direct, indirect and/or cumulative.

SUMMARY OF THE NATIONAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM FOR THE PRESERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE WORLD HERITAGE PROPERTY

National Legislation for Heritage

The **Law on National Heritage**, amended in 2014 and recently in 2021, promulgated by a Presidential Decree, covers all heritage aspects: built, moveable, intangible, and natural. Article 2 defines national heritage as the collective legacy of the Lao national community, recognised at different levels, including World Heritage properties. The properties inscribed on the World Heritage List are mentioned in Article 22 (amended in 2014) as 'Global Level National Heritage'. Article 25 (amended in 2014) specifies, in terms of management, 'Regional or Global Level National Heritage is provided for in separate regulations'.

The Law was promulgated with amendments in 2021, with the addition of the enforcement of Heritage Impact Assessments on cultural, historical and natural heritage, as Articles 65 and 66.

Laws such as **National Urban Law** and **Environment Protection Law** determine the principles, procedures and measures to manage and track inspection in respective fields. The first refers to town planning and both protect the architecture, cultural, historic and natural heritage, aimed at meeting the needs of urban and rural development, in connection with improving the quality of life and social activities contributing to the national socio-economic development. Article 27 notably stipulates the necessity of Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) for appropriate planning and identification of mitigation measures and monitoring. The environmental law aims to protect human health, natural resources and the richness of nature to ensure the sustainable socio-economic development of the nation and reduce global warming. Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) are enforced for projects in various fields.

Additionally, the property is subject to the **Decision of the Governor regarding the management and protection of biodiversity in the protected area of Luang Prabang city and Chomphet District**, which aims to maintain the natural biodiversity system in the conservation area but also create a tourism area along the Khan and Mekong Rivers, support the conserving value of World heritage site, and contribute to the socio-economic development of Luang Prabang province, especially in Luang Prabang city and the Chomphet district. By this Decision, the 'conservation area' is divided into two contiguous zones: the Nam Khan River, starting from the mouth of the Khan River to Keng Yong, with a total area of 85,861 ha. It has a total length of 8,216 meters, a circumference of 17,140 meters and covers an area of 13 villages located on both sides of the Nam Khan river. The Mekong River from Keng Kung, the border between Xieng Lek and Phonesaat villages, descends to Pha Tang Nai, the golf club. For Chomphet district, the conservation area stretches from Pha Tat Ke along the Mekong River to Keng Kung; it is 7,720 meters long, with a circumference of 17,749 meters for a total area of 434 hectares, and covers an area of 15 villages located on both sides of the Mekong River.

A **Specific regulation for the management of natural areas along the Mekong and Nam Khan Rivers** was issued by the mayor of Luang Prabang city as a temporary regulation on the protection and use of land along the river by category: Location conditions of the store; Conditions of structure, size and materials using; The colour used to decorate; Store sign; Terms of business; Prohibited activities; Delegation of management and use rights; etc.

Institutional Framework

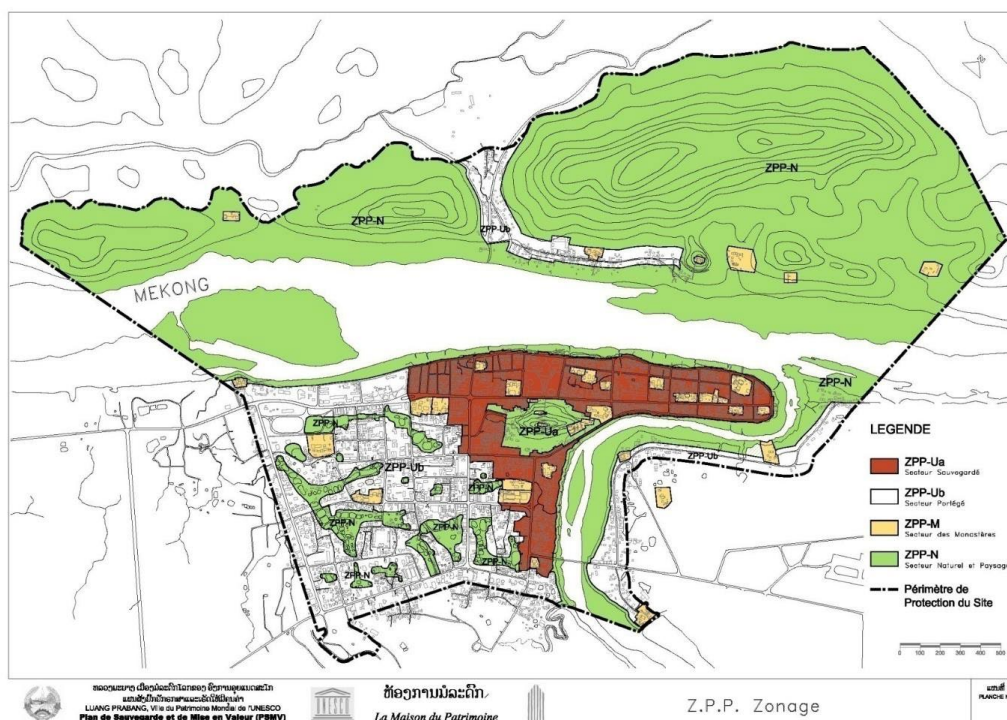
The technical management of the property is ensured by the Luang Prabang World Heritage Office (LPWHO), in cooperation with the Department of Heritage of the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism. The LPWHO is a conservation and development advisory service for inhabitants, a service of the Provincial Authorities of Luang Prabang that reports to the Local Provincial Committee for the Protection and Development of Cultural and Natural Heritage.

Several inter-agency and inter-ministerial structures coordinate the issues relating to heritage in Lao PDR. At the provincial level, the 'Provincial Committee for World Heritage', chaired by the Vice-Governor of the Province, provides the coordination platform for representatives from various departments to guide the implementation of the PSMV, urban regulation, strategic plan, and reviews important building renovations and infrastructure improvements in protected areas and buffer zone. In addition, the 'National Committee for World Heritage' chaired by the Minister of Information, Culture, and Tourism, ensures the coordination between projects and matters at the national level, including those linked with World Heritage properties.

Management Tools and System in force

The key management document for the property is the Luang Prabang Conservation Plan (PSMV- "Plan de sauvegarde et de mise en valeur") which was developed under the Luang Prabang-Chinon Decentralized Cooperation Programme and presented to the National Inter-ministerial Commission on Cultural, Historical and Natural Heritage in January 2000 and approved in 2001. This comprehensive document provides guidelines for all private or public spaces of historical, aesthetic or conservation interest. The document covers approximately 800 hectares, including 29 villages and four zones:

1. [ZPP-Ua \(Preservation Zone\)](#)
2. [ZPP-Ub \(Protection Zone\)](#)
3. [ZPP-N \(Natural and Scenery Zone\)](#)
4. [ZPP-M \(Monasteries Zone\)](#)



Map showing the zoning of inscribed areas by PSMV (source: PSMV, State Party)

THE MISSION

The World Heritage Committee, by its **Decision 44COM 7B.32** (Fuzhou/online, 2021), requested the State Party to invite a joint World Heritage Centre/ICOMOS Reactive Monitoring mission:

- To evaluate the overall state of conservation of the property, the implementation of heritage preservation policies and related regulations, the operationalisation of the Heritage Fund,
- To assess all the proposed projects, and
- To make recommendations on how development projects could support the OUV of the property.

The Mission therefore evaluated the state of conservation, governance/management, reported threats to the OUV (development projects) through the closer study of following points, and elaborated specific recommendations for the State Party and/or for the World Heritage Committee.

- Positive and/or negative developments/impacts on the conservation of the property, with reference to its Outstanding Universal Value and its attributes, including criteria, authenticity/integrity, protection and management);
- Actions conducted by the State Party (either already taken or planned) regarding the property's conservation and management;
- Review and assess the progress towards the previous Committee decisions and/or missions raised the issue of the conservation of the property, assess the implementation of previous recommendations;
- Any other urgent state of conservation issues that may have arisen based on the observations of the mission team.

ASSESSMENT OF THE STATE OF CONSERVATION OF THE PROPERTY

Issue 1: Preservation of the Town of Luang Prabang

Introduction

Previous technical missions and third parties had reported that the number of traditional houses and structures within the property is decreasing. Therefore, the World Heritage Committee has urged the State Party to adopt and implement a policy to preserve, maintain, and document these constitutive elements of the property's Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) as part of the Luang Prabang Conservation Plan (PSMV).

Assessment of the decrease in the number of traditional houses and structures

This assessment is guided by the relevant parts of the retrospective Statement of Outstanding Universal Value (SOUV) and the inventory of traditional buildings of **611 buildings** identified in the Nomination Dossier.

Lao traditional houses and structures are an integral and inseparable attribute of the Town's OUV. The SOUV states that the richness of Luang Prabang's architecture:

“reflects the mix of styles and materials. The majority of the buildings are, following tradition, wooden structures [...]. Many traditional Lao houses remain; they are built of wood using traditional techniques and materials introduced during the colonial period, such as plaited bamboo coated with wattle and daub”.

It was observed that under the “Architectural Type” identified as “Lao Traditional” in PSMV and the building inventory, two distinct variations or sub-types can be identified, which are named below for convenience, without prejudice, as:

1. Lao Traditional (Timber House) built completely out of timber with a Lao style pitched roof,
2. Lao Traditional (Colonial) House built out of brickwork on the ground floor and plaited bamboo with wattle and daub on the first floor with a Lao-style pitched roof.

In respect of the said constitutive elements, the tables below summarise the present status of the buildings' current condition:

No	Items	Religious building	Civil building	Total	Percentage(%)
1	Inventory building	168	443	611	
2	Restored or rebuilt	72	267	339	55.48
3	Demolished	7	8	15	2.46
4	Not yet restored or rebuilt	89	168	257	42.06
	- Good condition	29	86	115	44.75
	- Moderate condition	42	62	104	40.47
	- Poor condition	18	20	38	14.49

Table 1 - Status of Inventory Buildings 1995-2021 (source: State Party2022)

Condition of Unrestored Religious Remarkable Buildings

No	Item	Religious	Lao - Buddhist	Colonial
1.	Not restored	89	87	2
2.	Good condition	29	28	1
3.	Moderate condition	42	41	1
4.	Poor condition	18	18	0

Condition of Unrestored Civil Remarkable Buildings

No	Item	Civil	Lao Traditional	Colonial
1.	Not restored	168	146	22
2.	Good condition	86	83	3
3.	Moderate condition	62	49	13
4.	Poor condition	20	14	6

Table 2 - breakdown of unrestored Civil and Religious buildings (source: mission analysis)

Statistically, it is evident that the restoration and maintenance of representative architecture have progressed steadily and incrementally. 56% of the Inventory Buildings have been conserved, of which 21% are key religious complexes located on large sites with a collection of traditional religious buildings with bigger footprints and require the restoration of intricate artisanal works. The conservation works comply with the regulations of the PSMV.

The table shows that eight civil buildings have been demolished, all traditional houses and structures according to the 1995 inventory. These buildings were either in an advanced state of collapse, destroyed by fire or illegally demolished by the owners. Numerically, this constitutes 2.46% of the original total of 611 buildings.

(See in Annex 7-2 Comparison between the original state of conservation in 1995 and after rebuilding of unrestored Inventory Buildings, with images of 15 demolished buildings (Before and After)

Of the remaining 257 buildings, 146 are Lao Traditional houses (comprising of the two sub-types), which are in a moderate to poor condition when viewed visually, without the benefit of a detailed dilapidation survey.

In the case of houses of the first sub-type, namely the Lao Traditional (Timber) House, after plans for restoration/renovation are approved by the LPWHO and the subject building is stripped back and the internal walls and timber partitions (original and latter-day accretions) are removed, a conservative estimate is that 75% of the existing timber members and boards are likely to be infested and eaten away, decayed or structurally unsalvageable. The status of the building's condition would drop to "extremely poor". Nonetheless, the regulations in the PSMV would require the applicant to replace like-for-like and return the building to its original design and form, employing traditional timber construction to maintain its integrity. However, given that the extent of defective fabric is excessive, it is clear the authenticity of materials is at risk. The LPWHO expresses concerns about the affordability of such a reconstruction process.



Reconstruction of a Lao traditional timber house, showing remaining salvageable parts and the advanced decay of the foundations of wooden pillars

©L.LOH 2022

In the case of the second sub-type, namely the Lao Traditional (Colonial) House, the buildings are hardier. However, the authenticity of the building is retainable through conservation.

Based on the tables above and observations on site, it can be inferred that the “decrease in traditional buildings and structures” probably refers to existing buildings within the World Heritage Site identified in the PSMV under Article 3, Scope of prescriptions on buildings, Section 2, “Buildings not included in the inventory of the PSMV”, which include:

- “Buildings worth to be preserved and restored”,
- “Buildings which can be replaced”, and
- “Buildings perturbing urban landscape”.

Here, the prescriptions (or rules) are not as stringent as those for the Inventory Buildings.

Regarding the Inventory Buildings that have already been conserved in strict accordance with the regulations in the PSMV, the integrity of the traditional building forms and attributes of authenticity have been retained.

Positive impact on the conservation of the property

Regarding the traditional buildings and structures, the regulations of the PSMV have been enforced consistently. The regulations control roof form, height, volumetric proportions, number of storeys, size of openings, the spacing between buildings and public roads and choice of materials. In addition, the existing tree cover is conserved whenever redevelopment occurs. These efforts have ensured that the attributes of OUV carried in the traditional buildings and structures, as well as in new buildings, are retained in a well-preserved townscape and a low-density arrangement, in the design of buildings and the tree cover over them, thus conveying a harmonious setting for the built heritage in its natural environment.

These are contributing factors that define the representative traditional town’s urban tissue (or fabric), which demonstrates that the PSMV is effective with regard to the conservation and representation of built heritage in its totality, represented by different layers in the historical timeline.

Authenticity and “Civil Buildings” Types (or Typologies)

The architectural designs of new replacement buildings (under the planning category “Buildings which can be replaced”) comply with the regulations in the PSMV. Whilst new materials are permitted, their form and spatial layouts ensure that they retain the characteristics of the traditional buildings. They are a good fit within the traditional townscape, but it has left a question mark in the eyes of the heritage site manager.

The OUV defined by the criteria is expressed by the attributes and qualified by authenticity and integrity. This invariably leads to the question of how much of the collective experience is authentic. However, this is a much larger debate, and it is within the remit of the State Party to resolve this question, particularly within the purview of proposed revisions to the PSMV and the recommendation to adopt and implement, as part of the PSMV, a policy to preserve, maintain and document these constitutive elements of the property’s OUV. The revised PSMV can and should provide guidance on how much reconstruction using new material is appropriate.

In discussions with the State Party, there was mention that the *Nara Document on Authenticity*² and the *UNESCO Hoi An Protocols for best conservation practice in Asia: professional guidelines for assuring and preserving the authenticity of heritage sites in the context of the cultures of Asia*³ would offer fresh approaches which would have resonance in the Asian context concerning the restoration with new materials.

Under the heading of “Civil Buildings”, there are presently two types, namely “Traditional” and “Colonial”. It may be useful to re-categorise the types to visually define the different layers of history, which will also help interpret the Town’s cultural heritage at the granular level.

The mission discerned the following architectural types (or typologies):

1. Lao Traditional (Timber) House
2. Lao Traditional (Colonial) House
3. 20th Century Modern House
4. Lao Nouveau Traditional House

Authenticity of materials and techniques

Generally, the conservation works comply with the regulations of the PSMV, but as with most of the construction industry in the region, and Luang Prabang is no exception, there used to be a tendency to use modern materials like cement and paints as substitutes for lime mortar and lime-wash or other breathable paints. The control of this preference requires constant vigilance on the part of the LPWHO, especially where it concerns the Inventory Buildings, both Civil and Religious, in particular when the owners engage in minor renovations.

The 2022 State of Conservation Report by the State Party mentions on page 60 that it has “focused on educating, disseminating the protection of World Heritage to all sections of society to participate and contribute to the protection of Luang Prabang World Heritage City”, supported by a further statement citing management of the construction-renovation process, the restoration of traditional houses preserved in their original form and that traditional materials and techniques are used to preserve the unique architectural and handicrafts characteristics of the Luang Prabang people.

However, conspicuous by its absence is the mention of policies and programmes for the transmission of skills related to traditional materials and techniques, which is at a premium in most World Heritage Sites. The State Party is encouraged to set their sights on meeting the

2 <https://www.icomos.org/charters/nara-e.pdf>

3 <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000182617>

criterion that “A well managed historic city will maintain and strengthen its craft traditions”⁴ The State Party should consider investing in supply chains for affordable local materials and training programmes as a means of ensuring the continuity of conservation with authenticity. It could also look into producing information materials and publishing successful case studies to demonstrate the merits of the PSMV.

Assessment of representative traditional town fabric consisting of traditional houses and features in the town, its physical and visual setting and consideration of changes to its attributes.

Taken as a whole, the integrity of the traditional town fabric, the town plan and the physical and visual setting of the town in accordance with the SOUV remains intact. The said attributes which convey the property’s OUV are well-embedded and present as articulated in the SOUV, from the fusion of traditional Lao urban architecture with European colonial architecture, the scale and vistas and to the religious architecture of the Buddhist wat and temples, all of which continue to retain a high degree of authenticity. This has been achieved through the implementation and enforcement of the regulations in the PSMV.

In relation to the boundaries of the Core and Buffer Zones, the protection of the visual landscape of greenery as a backdrop to the Town is intact, although there are third party observations that some green areas have been lost. The long vistas along the main thoroughfares are also unimpeded.

Actions by the State Party for traditional buildings and structures

The State Party acknowledges that the regulations in the PSMV are very prescriptive, and there is very little flexibility for making judgement calls (mentioned in the PSMV as “case by case”) in unique situations, for example, when there are no funds for saving the building, let alone embarking on an expensive restoration process. The resolution would come partially through the Heritage Fund, but public subsidies would have to be considered to prevent the multiplication of cases where no solutions are provided rather than demolition or transfer of ownership.

The LPWHO has suggested that after 20 years of applying the regulations, there is room for updating the PSMV to improve regulatory functions, incorporate the recognition and conservation of intangible cultural heritage, climate impact and current international frameworks, for example, Sustainable Developments Goals and the Historic Urban Landscape Approach.

The programme to undertake this task is being planned, subject to the availability of funds and human resources to facilitate it.

Actions by the State Party in relation to improving the state of conservation of the Property and the public realm

The following actions are being studied and carried out in phases depending on fund availability. The proposals should undergo an urban design audit to ensure that they improve the state of conservation of the property.

1. Conservation of Wetlands & Ponds (also refer to the cautionary comment below)
2. Household water treatment system – ongoing in conjunction with item 1
3. Wetlands infrastructure upgrading of drainage, footpaths and bridges
4. Street lighting (repair and new additions)
5. Pedestrian pathways (repair)

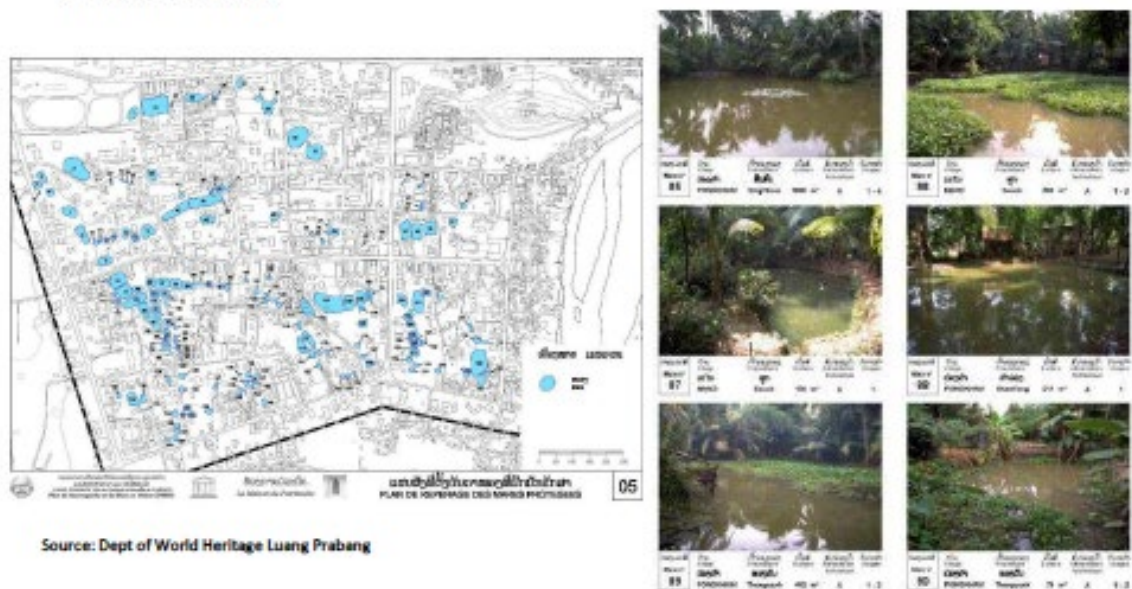
⁴ Stovel, H., Approaches to Managing Urban Transformation for Historic Cities, The Conservation of Urban Heritage: Macao Vision, 10-12 September 2002.

6. Secondary roads upgrading
7. Enhancing security (CCTV system)
8. Fire Hydrant System
9. Relocation of overhead cables underground
10. Public Amenities – toilets, free WIFI, access to listed sites (upgrade and new installations)
11. Interpretation signage
12. Installation of boundary markers – awaiting funding

Cautionary Comment: an underrated attribute of the high ecological value of the OUV

The integrated wetlands and ponds system in Zone ZPP-Ub represents a distinct ecosystem that was recognized at the outset in 1995 as possessing OUV. It was an integral part of the Town’s mixed heritage landscape, a rarity of the day. That it was given equal recognition with the built landscape meant that it deserved conservation, safeguarding and protection under the umbrella of World Heritage.

2.2 ຫຼັກຖານພູມສັນຖານ
ມີທັງຜົນ 183 ຫຼັກຖານ



- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| ສື່ນາຄອນໄມ້ / Alimentations hydrauliques des mares | ຖິດຈະກຳ / Usages des mares |
| A ດ່ອງໄມ້ / Cours d'eau | 1 ປ່າ / Pisciculture |
| B ມ້າງນ້ຳ / Eaux pluviales | 2 ວິເສາສັບພັນ / Maraichage |
| C ມືອງ / Mare en amont | 3 ວິເສາສັບພັນ / Plantes fourragères |
| | 4 ວິເສາສັບພັນ / Bassin d'ornement |
| | 5 ບໍ່ຜະລິດ / Non exploitée |

Wetland mapping and images of natural ponds
(source: State Party)

Going back in time, the natural setting originally would have been an area of wetlands populated by local flora and fauna. Humankind then migrated into the area and settled down on the dry edges bordering the wetlands, next to existing natural ponds, or created new ponds imitating the natural ponds, giving access to a constant supply of fresh water and the means for aquafarming. This is the intrinsic value embedded in the story of the evolution of Luang Prabang, the origin of a very rudimentary cultural landscape.

The function of the wetlands in their natural state would have been to absorb heavy rainfall, provide protection against flooding and release water slowly, ensuring a supply of fresh water throughout the year. Its symbiotic relationship with the ponds meant that it was a functioning self-renewing natural cycle. The Mission is of the view that today it is an attribute that is highly underrated.

The State Party has begun to rehabilitate the ponds, which is timely. Most of them are silted up, full of debris, polluted and compromised in terms of their bio-ecological functions. Their seamless connection with the wetlands is disrupted in many places. At one time, they would have collectively had the appearance of wetlands with human interventions bordering the natural features, a water parkland. Here the question of how the attribute is qualified by authenticity arises again.



A rehabilitated natural pond (©N.HAYASHI2022)

It is recommended that the rehabilitation works continue in earnest. However, the method of rehabilitation should be reviewed holistically to recognise its original function of water retention and bio-filtration, together with the natural drainage channels which have now been turned into urban drains. Illegal structures that have encroached beyond the biological boundaries should be removed as they detract from the natural setting of green spaces. The rehabilitation process will also have a knock-on effect of cleaning up the local environment and improving the living conditions.

The ultimate goal would be to restore part of the area as a reflection of the ecosystem within the original cultural landscape to demonstrate the principles of biodiversity and its interpretation.

The erection of new buildings in the zone has also intensified and reduced the size of open spaces previously left in their natural state as sponge areas. Concomitant with an area revitalisation programme, cultural and social surveys should be undertaken. These would include an assessment of the needs of long-term residents, cultural mapping and gathering of oral history to uncover the folk history and myths of the place, all of which would also come under the gamut of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Assessment of Gaps

In considering changes to the attributes of authenticity, the preservation of linkages of intangible values to tangible, information sources manifested in the built heritage, namely form and design, materials and substance, use and function, traditions and techniques, location and setting, are very crucial corollaries for the retention of **spirit and feeling**.

Costs for the rehabilitation of traditional wooden houses and availability of high-quality local materials and skilled labour both for repair and production of appropriate materials such as tiles represent a major concern for the proper maintenance of the houses and prevention of outmigration from the protected and preserved areas.

Currently, gentrification in the core zone, exacerbated by the outmigration of much of the existing local resident population, due to personal and financial choices, has led to a loss of spirit and feeling. There is a critical need to start focusing more extensively on intangible cultural heritage (ICH), which had not been identified as part of the property's OUV in 1995. In the SOUV, references are made to religious traditions and ceremonies and legends that define the historical significance of the Town. This provides the scope to deepen the mapping and recording of ICH.

Living heritage is captured in an ICH inventory, but this is limited to a discrete listing of individual ICH items rather than a holistic understanding of living heritage. In relation to the PSMV and its upgrading, it is critical to understand how the social fabric is connected to sustaining the urban fabric of the town as a living entity. (On this point, see issue 4 below)

Management of buffer zones

Concerning the management of the buffer zone, it is defined by the LPWHO as “a screen to preserve an expanded site, and it comes to preserve landscapes as well as the banks of the river, as an essential part of the property and related directly to the protected area. The riverbanks are also considered “support of the intangible heritage of the city but also its traditional economic base”.

The possible impacts on the OUV of the pending LPHPP and the rise in water levels being experienced, the preservation of the banks of the river and possible negative changes to its attributes have become a major concern requiring close management. The possible ramifications are discussed further in Issue 2 – Development Projects.

Issue 2: Development projects

The Committee Decision requests the Mission to evaluate major development projects and to suggest the ways they could support the OUV of the property.

Nam Khan Riverbank protection project

Brief Summary

The erosion of the riverbank of the Nam Khan has been observed for several years⁵. The causes were discussed, amongst which were the domestic sullage water discharge and the absence of a treatment system and the increase in the water level because of the upstream and downstream dams. Following the severe flood of 2016, the government of Lao PDR undertook consolidation projects under Mount Phousy and in the district of Aphy. The project was supported by the World Bank and constructed gabions and Rip Rap along the peninsula.

The World Heritage Committee expressed its concern regarding the project, both due to its potential visual impact on the landscape and the arising security and safety risks and requested the State Party to ensure that the project does not have any negative impact on the property's OUV (Decision: **44 COM 7B.32**). This follows from the observations of a technical mission report in November 2019 drafted by the *Association des Biens Français du Patrimoine Mondial (ABFPM)*.

The report recognized that:

“The World Bank with funds allocated to Laos to fight risks of floods, proposes to participate in this project and its components, namely the protection of the left bank of the Nam Khan, along the peninsula and participating in the financing of water gates. The representative of the Bank requested the opinion of the Maison du Patrimoine regarding the constraint framework applicable to the protected site.”

It is in this capacity that the ABFPM's views were sought.

Preceding Conclusion of the Association (ABFPM)

The report went on to conclude that

“Given the many concerns raised by this project, both at the level of the causes of erosion, the relevance of systems adopted for the protection of retained banks, at a time when the choice of soft protection techniques is becoming more generally adopted, it seems essential to have a general study allowing to propose a coherent and reasoned project.

The same applies to the envisaged flood control system, which must be accompanied by an impact study to assess the relevance of the proposed project. The absence of a domestic water treatment system should not be without impacts after the construction of water gates that will retain these volumes of dirty water at the interior of the peninsula. The impact of the system in terms of health needs to be assessed before it is retained.

Also the impact in terms of health, of the rise of the waters of the Mekong which becomes a lake at Luang Prabang, since the impoundment of a dam downstream,

⁵ Riverine flooding poses the highest risk in terms of Average Annual Loss to the capital stock in Lao PDR, which places the country second highest after Myanmar in global comparison (UNISDR, 2015).

modifying thus the nature of the dilution of domestic water hitherto discharged and scattered in the current of the river.

For the water pumps envisaged, hydraulic studies should evaluate the volumes of runoff, before defining their flow, both in the peninsula and in wetlands whose watersheds collect water joining the Mekong and Nam Khan.

In addition to the visual aspect of the works, which must not distort the protected landscape, the answers to these questions involving the comfort and health of the inhabitants are as essential to the title of World Heritage as the aesthetic aspects. It is the reason why answers must be given before selecting a particular solution.”

Situation to date

Since the recommendations were submitted in 2019, the State Party has not reverted with answers to the salient points (flood control systems, health, hydraulic studies related to water pumps) in the mission report, as reproduced above, including an examination of possible soft protection techniques.

During the course of the mission, the State Party had suggested that the appearance of the gabions with natural vegetation on them has softened the visual impact of the structure, which to a large extent is true. However, the appearance does distort the protected landscape in its natural state if the materials and techniques used do not consider natural morphology and environment.



View of the natural riverbank (source: State Party)



View of the riverbank protection work (©N.HAYASHI2022)



Segment of riverbank protection by gabions and RipRap, with vegetation ©N.HAYASHI2022

Analysis

Essentially, there are three interrelated technical concerns which can be classified in terms of priorities and actions:

1. Slope stabilisation and earth protection systems and where they will be relevant;
2. Flood control systems are linked to water pumping systems;
3. Domestic grey water treatment systems and their final discharge.

The comparative study of slope stabilisation and earth protection systems, including alternative soft techniques, for example, soil-nailing in combination with geotextiles and/or wire-mesh or a supplementary landscape layer (soil and endemic plants) over the gabion system, should be prioritised as a matter of disaster risk preparedness. A hybrid system could be considered to suit different site situations as opposed to a one-size-fits-all approach.

The studies for Items 2 and 3 would require a longer lead time as there are more variables to be studied and coordinated by multi-disciplinary teams. When these studies are completed, a management plan to coordinate the three technical concerns can be created.

Conclusion

The technical studies highlighted in the 2019 Technical Review could be implemented to move the future projects along in a proactive manner, especially in the area of slope stabilisation and earth protection in the interest of risk preparedness. As the preservation of the landscape of the rivers' banks has the primary aim to protect attributes carrying the OUV, suitable landscape consultants and soil specialists should be engaged in a timely fashion to design a hybrid system to suit different site situations as opposed to a one-size-fits-all approach. The designs would take into account the findings of soil investigation, slope analysis and simulations of rising water levels in order to build back better in the interest of sustainable development.

Nam Khanh river bridge replacement project

Brief Summary

ICOMOS undertook a Technical Review, which was submitted in November 2021 after it received information on 30 April 2021 from the State Party, via the World Heritage Centre, regarding the proposal of the Luang Prabang Provincial Government to demolish and rebuild the old Nam Khan Bridge, located within the boundaries of the World Heritage property.



View of the bridge (source: State Party)



Central pathway of the bridge for motored vehicles
(source: State Party)



Pedestrian pathway of the bridge ©UNESCO N.
Hayashi 2022

Previous Conclusions

Based on its analysis, especially the potential impacts on the attributes that convey the property's OUV, ICOMOS concluded and advised that:

1. No works should be carried out before a full Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) of the project is completed by the relevant Lao authorities in line with the 2011 ICOMOS *Guidance on Heritage Impact Assessments for Cultural World Heritage Properties*.

2. In conjunction with the preparation of the HIA, the proposed bridge design should be reviewed and adjusted where possible and appropriate to remove or reduce impacts on the attributes of the World Heritage property that convey its Outstanding Universal Value.
3. The HIA should be submitted to the World Heritage Centre for review by ICOMOS, in accordance with Paragraph 172 of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*.
4. If the bridge replacement does proceed, the existing trees and shrubs at both ends of the bridge should be maintained to the extent possible, and new trees and shrubs of the same or other local species should be planted.
5. If the bridge replacement does proceed, traffic flows should be carefully controlled to ensure that congestion, noise and air pollution do not impact negatively on the town's OUV and especially the tranquil ambience of the Buddhist *wat* located on and near the peninsula.

Mission's guidance sought on the proposed bridge design

Notwithstanding the above and pending the submission of the HIA mentioned in point 1 above, the State Party engaged the Mission to seek guidance on point 2, namely a review of the proposed bridge design.

It is suggested that in the interest of time, their designer apply the following criteria for "New Designs in Historic Contexts" (as per regulations in the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Heritage Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation) to assess the degree of excellence of the three designs that have been submitted that come closest to meeting the criteria, and to make modifications deemed necessary by the HIA:

Contextual Design:

1. *Outstanding design concept that demonstrates critical thinking in articulating an innovative response to the specific heritage context.*
2. *How well the new design helps to reveal the qualities of the place, including historical, architectural, cultural, and social significance.*
3. *The compatibility and appropriateness of the new design's programme/function in its context.*
4. *How well the new design relates to the existing built and natural context. Factors include, but are not limited to, the following: typology, siting, massing, form, scale, character, colour and texture.*
5. *The justification of selection and quality control of materials and building techniques (contemporary, vernacular or a combination of both).*

Sustainability and Impact:

6. *How well the project contributes to environmental sustainability and resilience of the heritage place.*
7. *How does the project contributes to the local community's socio-economic wellbeing, cultural continuum, and development needs.*
8. *The influence of the project on architectural practice and design policy locally, nationally, regionally or internationally.*

Besides the three options reviewed by ICOMOS that the mission supports, it is worth noting that the historicity of the Bailey bridge can be preserved if the bridge is replaced like-for-like as it is still being manufactured today, subject to structural modifications to foundations and

upright supports in the same locations. Its low linear design and structure have lesser impacts on the vista.

See <https://www.ibeehivesteelstructures.com/steel-baileybridge>.

Conclusion

The mission suggests, in addition to the three options evaluated earlier by ICOMOS, an alternative solution to moderate the need for a comprehensive HIA, of a like-for-like replacement of the Nam Khan Old Bridge with a present-day model of the Bailey bridge, which is still being manufactured.

Luang Prabang Hydropower project

Introduction

The issues of dam construction and World Heritage are subject to a specific Committee **Decision 40 COM 7**, stating that it 'considers that the construction of dams with large reservoirs within the boundaries of World Heritage properties is incompatible with their World Heritage status, and urges States Parties to ensure that the impacts from dams that could affect properties located upstream or downstream within the same river basin are rigorously assessed in order to avoid impacts on the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV);'.

While the abovementioned principle refers to dams with large reservoirs, the recent declaration of the **International Hydropower Association** calls for 'the duty of care commitment', which also applies to hydropower projects, which are planned outside World Heritage sites, but which could potentially negatively impact their values. **Paragraph 118bis** of the Operational Guidelines also strongly urges the States Parties to implement necessary Impact Assessments on development projects which would have potential impacts on the OUV of World Heritage properties.

Previously in 2012, in Decision **36 COM 7B.63**, the Committee requested the State Party of Laos to submit the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) for the Mekong dam to be constructed 60 km upstream of the property.

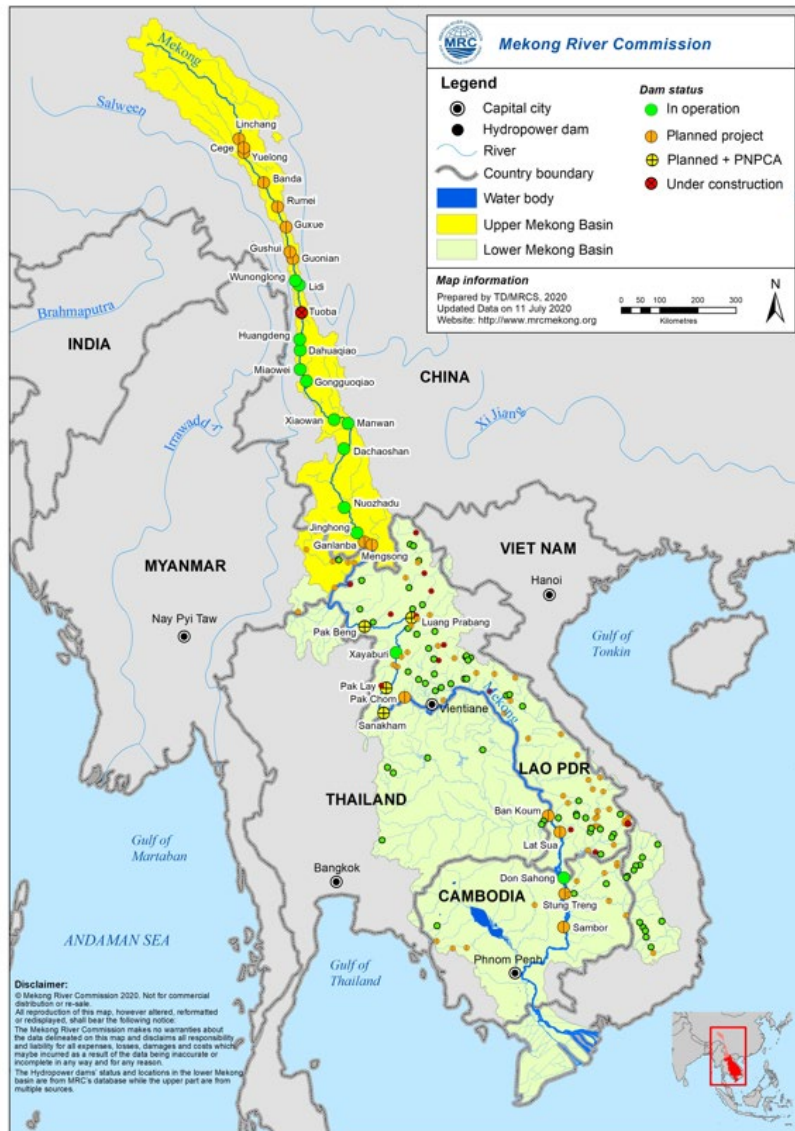
Since then, concerns have been raised about the successive construction of upstream and downstream dams over the Mekong and on its tributaries, as reports had already been received about them impacting the property with a higher level of water and the modification of the natural environment, in addition to the risks of dam failure.

Current status

From March 2020, alerted by several civil society organisations and media on the newly announced Luang Prabang Hydropower Project (LPHPP), the World Heritage Centre requested the State Party to provide it with complete information on this initiative and subsequently commission a thorough Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA). In November 2021, the authorities of Lao PDR submitted a final draft of the HIA. The technical review by ICOMOS and IUCN of this HIA was provided to the State Party in January 2022, taking into consideration independent reviews by four experts in December 2021. This joint review concluded that the HIA was not sufficient to prove the absence of negative impacts on the OUV and requests the government of Lao PDR to rectify this with additional considerations.

Positive and/or negative developments/impacts on the conservation of the property

Recent years saw numerous constructions of dams and hydropower structures along the Mekong and its tributaries throughout the country. Concerns were raised in relation to their various effects on the environment and socio-economic fabrics over time, through individual and cumulative impacts.



Location and key metrics of the proposed Luang Prabang Hydropower Project (Source: Mekong River Commission)

The LPHPP has also been subject of a prior consultation process through the Mekong River Commission, which also issued two technical evaluations in 2019 and 2020⁶ recognizing great risk of damage to the property in case of major incidents, such as dam break and flood, as well as a number of precautionary views on its socio-economic and environmental impacts.

The SOUV of the Town of Luang Prabang underlines the importance of its location on the peninsula, encircled by the Mekong River and Nam Khan River, and their relationship with the environment, the rivers and waters, with intangible and spiritual attributes such as the dwellings of snake gods-spirits or *Nagas*. Religious practices and ethnographical elements are considered as those providing a sense of place to the Town. Natural spaces within the town and riverbanks, wetlands and greenery are all mentioned in the SOUV.

⁶ <https://www.mrcmekong.org/news-and-events/consultations/pnpca-prior-consultations/luang-prabang-hydropower-project/>

The mission observes that the HIA lacks critical consideration of these attributes, layered in both physical and immaterial essences carrying the OUV and analysis relating to the impacts of the project over time on them.

The inscribed zone includes right and left riverbanks, the river, riparian areas and the confluence with the Nam Khan River as an urban landscape combined with natural features.

The buffer zones, as defined by LPWHO, function as a screen to preserve an expanded site, and to:

- Preserve landscapes: Preserving the richness offered by the incomparable view from the summit of Mount Phousi, located in the centre of the city in the wooded mountains that surround the city.
- Preserve the banks of the river, which are an essential part of the site of Luang Prabang, in direct relation to the protected area. The landscape of the riverbank is the support of the intangible heritage of the city but also its traditional economic base.

Because of the existence of numerous dams already upstream and downstream, cumulative impacts from siltation, decreased sediment, change in water flow and velocity, their possible impact on the peninsula morphology, riverbank contours, aquatic productivity, ecosystem and food chains, acceleration of riverbanks erosion and fragilization are suspected, in the situation where the peninsula will be transformed from a riverside town into an artificial lakeside town.

One of the types of evidence of such a change is that the naturally formed sandbank, located in the Mekong, which once existed and was used by local populations as a place of religious practices and new year celebrations, was submerged under water, and an island was artificially created as a compensatory measure to allow the local populations continuing rituals and festivities on it as they did on the submerged island.



Natural sandbank (source: State Party)



Artificially constructed structure replacing submerged natural sandbank in the river (source: State Party)

A reduction in capture fisheries is also raised as a vital concern. Rich culinary traditions, represented by its fish dishes and algae-based products, which contribute to the Town of Luang Prabang's uniqueness and help sustain traditional skills and knowledge, are also dependent on the aquatic ecosystems and productivity.

Before and during the mission, reports also came in concerning the relocation of inhabitants of the dam-affected villages and their discontentment with an insufficient compensatory scheme⁷. Socio-economic changes already affect the relocated communities, and over time,

⁷ <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/laos/luang-prabang-dam-03232022175321.html>

the impacts of change in fisheries and other livelihood practices, sedimentation and silting could most probably occur, as also mentioned in technical review reports.

Despite the Committee's recommendation to halt all construction and operational work till the completion of an HIA, the mission witnessed, during its field visit by boat on the Mekong, that a preparation site including a road of 14km, workers' camps, bridges and installation of cranes are already in place and dislocation of the affected population started.



Hydropower construction preparatory site, as seen on 7 April 2022 (©N.HAYASHI2022)

These operations also could place considerable impacts on subterranean archaeological layers and possibly on caves, such as Pak Ou cave, used for worship and other cultural practices in the immediate vicinity of the hydropower construction.



Pak Ou Cave in the immediate vicinity of the hydropower construction site (©N.HAYASHI2022)

After visiting the dam preparation site and projected site, as well as considering the technical planning documents, the technical reviews of the Mekong River Commission and their recommendations, the scoping report of the HIA, the draft HIA, five independent technical reviews of experts and ICOMOS/IUCN technical review on the HIA, the Mission concludes

that the current status of technical data and resultant analysis prepared by the project team composed of a majority of dam and infrastructure experts, transmitted to the WHC by the State Party, is insufficient to provide reliable foundations and proof of absence of the possible direct, indirect and cumulative impacts of the LPHPP and other dams upstream and downstream to the World Heritage property's OUV and its attributes.

These attributes of the OUV include the natural environment of the Mekong, associated religious and cultural practices and living conditions of local communities.

The Mission therefore recommends that the State Party take a precautionary approach not to pursuing this hydropower project and relocate the project and other future and similar projects where there is no suspected causality with the World Heritage properties, their associated values or their environmental setting.

Revisiting existing academic and ethnographical research and further reflecting on the nature-culture link, associated religious and spiritual practices related to the Mekong and waterways would contribute to the renewed understanding of the sense of place in the Town and the attributes associated with the OUV in a clearer way. In general, these viewpoints seem drastically lacking in the current practice of impact assessments of development projects within the country.

How development projects could support the OUV of the property

The LPWHO reported several development projects under study/negotiation.

- The Project for Expansion of Water Supply System in Luang Prabang City (supported by JICA, implementation by Luang Prabang Water Supply State Enterprise) involves pipeline distribution and fire hydrant installations
- Project for capacity enhancement for Sustainable World Heritage management and Preservation in Luang Prabang (supported by JICA, implementation by World Heritage Office) involving house restoration, information signs, water ponds conservation
- Flooding disaster risk management project (supported by World Bank, implementation by DPWT) involving the protection of Khan riverbank with Gabions and Rip-Rap (2,198 m), four water gates construction for mitigation of floods, improvement of wetland areas, pond conservation, water treatment, drainage system construction
- Urban Environment Improvement Investment Project (loans from the Asian Development Bank, implementation by DPWT)
- Smart City project (supported by Policy Bureau Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism of Japan, implementation by Luang Prabang City)

The Province and the Town of Luang Prabang are enjoying the great attention of development partners and their engagement in feasibility studies of projects in a variety of fields, most of which involve direct intervention within the Town and buffer zones. While the exact procedure of selecting and engaging in feasibility studies for these projects is unknown to the mission, the objectives of these projects should incorporate benefits in preserving and enhancing the OUV of the property. A wider range of stakeholders and partners need to be made knowledgeable about the obligations of the State Party to the World Heritage Convention. The project partners should provide the necessary budget for proactive planning to respond to the requirements of Impact Assessments to identify and cope with potential impacts, monitoring and mitigation measures when elaborating on project proposals. Participation of the LPWHO in the planning and conceptualization process of development projects should be encouraged to increase the knowledge of the LPWHO staff on how development projects are conceived as well as for the development stakeholders to take advantage of the LPWHO's expertise in the safeguarding of the World Heritage property.

Most of the projects for enhancing the quality of life of the Town mentioned in the previous sections are all new construction works reliant on new designs and technology. Whilst the PSMV has design guidelines mostly at the building level, at the level of streetscapes, there appears to be a gap, for example original and local designs based on precedents versus generic designs.

Given that the quantum of new project proposals within the Town in terms of costs, quantity and monetary value far exceed the investment in conservation works, their cumulative visual impact must be considered. It would be timely that improved Urban Design Guidelines, which also control the neighbourhood setting, improve the overall streetscapes and navigation throughout urban heritage space, are drafted to ensure that collectively there is no negative heritage impact. Future development programmes, in particular the SmartCity project, should take into consideration this point so that the equipment, infrastructure design and materials will not disturb the Town's atmosphere.

Issue 3: Governance

Efficiency of PSMV

The LPWHO supervises building construction and restoration, covering approximately 800 hectares, including 29 villages and four zones, as shown below. It studies ongoing projects with the Construction Management Committee for approval, monitors and inspects new construction and infrastructure improvement, and copes with unauthorized or inappropriate construction or repair projects. From 2014 to 2020, 1755 applications were received for construction and restoration, and 839 cases were approved. For the restoration of Inventory Buildings, the authority carries out on-site inspections to ensure the quality of intervention, considering the building's specifics, including materials.



Protected area of PSMV (source: Department of Luang Prabang)

In the past, the violations of and non-compliance with the PSMV were repeatedly reported in regard to illegal construction, demolition and development project implementation, including those conducted by the national authorities (Urban Development Administrative Authority (UDAA) and international development partners (Asian Development Bank loan..).

Through the documentation and statistics, the current control capacity of the LPWHO based on the regulations provided by the PSMV as a solid institutional framework for the zonings and related rules for physical intervention should be recognised.

However, within the wider framework of the development planning, with the involvement of various stakeholders at national and international levels, the extent to which the principles stated in the PSMV and the OUV of the property are systematically reflected remain ambiguous. The World Heritage Convention's related guidelines could be integrated into a wider context of territorial and development planning relative to the inscribed area and buffer zones as well as in a wider setting to ensure that the overall management framework becomes coherent and cohesive.

The wider context could include the tertiary zone beyond the footprint of the Town and its buffer zone, which acknowledges its importance as the primary economic urban node and ecological space in the region. A larger planning framework to guide planning in the socio-cultural and environmental catchment area of Luang Prabang, which provides guidance at the

outset of project planning and design, is worthy of consideration. Laos already has good examples of integrated spatial planning that considers both development needs and the underlying environmental and social assets and fabric. Templates of guidelines initiated by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE), for example, the 2010 “Guideline on Integrated Spatial Planning for Sustainable Development in Lao PDR” by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), are good references.

The 21-year-old PSMV was established when the notion of holistic heritage preservation was nascent, and the dynamics of modern life started slowly in the country. Its conceptual framework was built largely on the safeguarding of physical aspects of the constituencies of the property. Considering the shift of heritage paradigm, demographic changes, the transformation of lifestyles, and the effects of ever-increasing tourism activities, a renewed policy for a living heritage town, embedded in its environment and intangible attributes, has become imperative.

The mission recommends the management authority consider the integration of the principles of the Historic Urban Landscape Approach (2011) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as the Intangible Heritage Convention (2003) as references in a supplementary policy text to guide future management practices. Consideration should also be given to the management and protection of biodiversity, requiring a new set of skills and expertise. In the case of Luang Prabang, it has a great potential to provide a reflection on the preservation of a living heritage town and the application of concepts of authenticity applicable to the Asian context (ref: Nara Document, Hoi An Protocols).

Tourism management

The Integrated Tourism Management Plan, a long-term concern expressed by the Committee, remains to be elaborated. At this point in time, because of the Covid-19 Pandemic and long periods of lockdowns, the threats from strong economic pressures and conversions of residential to commercial use related to tourism and high visitor volumes previously observed cannot be discerned. Presently there are no significant negative developments/impacts on the conservation of the property other than the potential projects to be discussed further on in the report.

However, as the Covid-19 Pandemic enters the endemic stage, an increase in visitor arrivals is expected, in particular with the full operation of the high-speed train linking Luang Prabang, Vientiane and China. The State Party should address the pressures in the medium to long term.

It is important that this particular planning document, whose elaboration is foreseen within the Second GMS Tourism Infrastructure for Inclusive Growth Project, funded by the Asian Development Bank, be set by the LPWHO considering the pressure of visitor numbers and their behaviour over time on the property. Such a Plan may require a carrying capacity study on tourism hotspots and itineraries and inform the establishment of strategies for the human influx, flows, visitor education and information, as well as the need assessments and planning for tourism related infrastructures. The State Party should be encouraged to apply to the International Assistance Funds for the World Heritage Convention for this purpose.

Actions for the safety and security of visitors, contributing to the regulation of flux on hot spots (e.g. Mount Phousi), should be prioritised.

The Plan should incorporate the proposed ICOMOS International Charter for Cultural Heritage Tourism 2021: *reinforcing cultural heritage protection and community resilience through responsible and sustainable tourism management* when the final draft has been approved and endorsed. It should also advance the creation of a circular economy in the tourism sector.

This Destination Management Plan itself should also reflect the particular concerns for the preservation of core and buffer zones of the World Heritage property.

Governance and management framework

In view of the above-mentioned analysis and subsequent recommendations, the LPWHO would have an important role in the process of integration and continuity. It is a well-trained, responsive and cohesive heritage management unit that is clear about its duties and responsibilities and the State Party's international obligations under the World Heritage Convention. It has benefitted from over two decades of technical and management development under the Luang Prabang-Chinon Decentralized Cooperation Programme. The transfer of knowledge, administration framework and work ethics are very apparent. Its performance at the technical level has been firm but fair, given the needs of the Town's communities and the limited understanding of ever-evolving technical matters at the local level.

The State Party recognises the necessity of upgrading the existing management apparatus to actualise the recommendation of creating an integrated management framework that embraces the wider context. Such an integration exercise would benefit from good balance between centralisation, inter-ministry challenges of coordination and a strong partnership with local authorities.

Recognising the challenges ahead and, in the interest of the expediency of time and seamless upgrading of skills and expertise, the Mission recommends the necessity of maintaining the LPWHO as the sole and unified technical entity for the management of the property. As the SOUV states, the management of a Historic Townscape associated with values embedded in its environment and intangible attributes requires an integrated management mechanism rather than fragmenting responsibilities over several entities by fields.

The Government of Lao PDR should be commended on the amended Law on National Heritage which enforces the implementation of Heritage Impact Assessments on the projects having potential impacts on the OUV. However, this obligation should be known to a wider range of stakeholders who are in the chain of decision-making processes in the development planning, and other necessary studies such as Environmental Impact Assessments and Strategic Impact Assessment should also be mentioned in connection with heritage properties, depending on the contexts and necessity of related development projects.

Mechanism of multistakeholder consultation

The LPWHO has the technical mandate concerning the preservation of the property and issues in the buffer zone and reports to the provincial governor controlling their budget and programme, as well as to the Heritage Department of the Ministry of Culture, Information and Tourism.

The three Committees having the mandate in the coordination of the management of the property are Construction Permits Committee, Provincial Heritage Committee and National Heritage Committee.

While recognizing the fact that the Provincial Heritage Committee, chaired by the Vice Governor, has close control of the heritage management at the provincial level, major infrastructure projects, including the dams, whose planning and decision making are operating beyond the provincial mandate, would require a clear mechanism for proactive planning and controlling the projects, with appropriate consideration on minimizing impacts on heritage and maximizing socio-economic gains. These projects include the recently opened expressway linking Vientiane and Luang Prabang and China, a number of dam and hydropower construction upstream and downstream of the Mekong River, and those on the tributaries of the Nam Khan and Nam Ou rivers.

Like many other States Parties, Lao PDR may have considered the dam issues from the viewpoint of their geographical distance from the World Heritage property. The newly adopted lawful obligation to conduct HIA could lead to a more proactive planning practice in the future and needs to be nationally known, together with the understanding of EIA and SEA specifically

related to heritage, by related laws. Overall, there is a need for stronger national and regional capacities to control development initiatives, design and implement impact assessments, enabling planning based on an in-depth understanding of the OUV and other related heritage values (also for heritage recognised at the national level) to make these assessments relevant to heritage.

The National and Provincial World Heritage Committees should continue playing a coordination role as advisory bodies on the issues of heritage and development; in particular, where the decision-making needs the involvement of a wider range of actors, such as Ministries and Agencies, the National World Heritage Committee's function should be strengthened with the return of presidency to a Vice Prime Minister to enable proactive planning practice for major development projects, informed by appropriate Impact Assessments.

International cooperation

Concerning the planning of international cooperation, Luang Prabang Strategic Plan included five programmes and 20 projects for the LPWHO for the period 2021-2025, and the international partners have selected these projects to suggest feasibility studies.

The LPWHO has been engaged in consultation and cooperation with various partner institutions, and feasibility studies have been implemented by different partners on the subject of SMART CITY (JICA, Japan), an Urban environmental project by ADB and Fostering Sustainable Green Mobility by the World Bank.

Such opportunity for cooperation could be optimized if the selection of the subjects is made in accordance with priorities set by the LPWHO and in a way to contribute to its personnel's experience and capacity.

Human and financial resources

The LPWHO's 23 in-house staff includes technical experts, including architects, urban planners, and GIS engineers, supported by the administrative unit, headed by the Director trained in urban planning (see Annex 7-3). Based on the Mission's observations of contemporary preservation requirements, the team requires additional financial and human resources to strengthen its transdisciplinary approach, in particular for addressing the conservation of built assets and living heritage.

Operationalization of financial mechanism for self-benefitting and sustainable funding (Heritage Funds)

The creation and operationalisation of the Heritage Funds have been subject to discussions for years, and it was reported suspended in 2012 and finally re-activated in 2019. The 2014 decree on this Funds stipulates that this funds is to be fed partially by governmental budget and a percentage of activities in the fields of activities relating to heritage, such as tourism, infrastructure development, archaeological and cultural activities. It is to be allocated to contribute to preserving heritage. Currently, the global sanitary situation related to COVID-19 hinders the Funds from being fed, yet the LPWHO ensures that the re-opening of the country to tourists will reactivate the influx of the funds. In the absence of an immediate solution to financially support the local owners to cope with house repair and maintenance, the funds collected should be allocated in a strategic order, particularly to ensure the restoration of traditional timber structures, which constitute core attributes of the OUV.

Issue 4: Living Heritage Town and Stakeholder Engagement

The retrospective Statement of OUV (SOUV) was adopted in 2013, aiming to integrate a broader view of the original OUV by embracing environmental concerns (natural spaces such

as wetlands inside the inscribed zones) and intangible heritage practices associated with the history and environment of the Town.

However, the recent technical studies for the hydropower project, for instance, show the concerns expressed in the SOUV have not been taken into account in the planning process of the proponents, in particular when the physical location of the project is outside the inscribed zones.

The maintenance of these vital ecological and intangible attributes of the property, and the continued mapping of living heritage practices to show how the social fabric is connected to sustaining the urban fabric of the Town as a living entity, were mentioned by representatives of local communities during several consultation meetings with the Mission. The currently available Intangible Cultural Heritage Inventory remains limited to a relatively discrete listing of individual items without capturing a holistic view of the living heritage of the Town and its surrounding areas.

Concerning the conservation of wetlands in the inscribed zones, the LPWHO undertook, in cooperation with JICA, interesting initiatives to revive the urban wetlands, some of which were suffering from disappearance, infestation or decay. On this point, see 'An underrated attribute of the high ecological value of OUV' in the analysis of Issue 1.

Looking inward to the Town's preservation work, the management policies stated in the PSMV, and the LPWHO's mandate needs to embrace this broader view of Luang Prabang's heritage values.

Such policies would promote projects that revitalize ecological and intangible heritage aspects and sustain the urban fabric of Luang Prabang as a living entity, supported by data collection and monitoring of these attributes over time. This will strengthen the stakeholders' commitment and awareness of their role in safeguarding the social fabric and provide opportunities to inhabitants and visitors from outside to deepen their understanding of the property.

As a way to externalise and socialise the above-mentioned new policy's direction, outreach programmes such as participatory research and exhibitions on history, memories and everyday life, and the development of World Heritage signature products with the involvement of the Town's inhabitants could be considered to promote and sustain a sense of identity and belonging to the Town and its shared history.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

General

The analysis of the available data, field visits, and interviews concluded that the OUV and associated attributes of the property remain satisfactory concerning the physical architecture, townscape, and environment within the inscribed property and buffer zones. However, the Mission recognises that foreseeable threats should be addressed as soon as possible and proactively through managerial and governance arrangements to enhance the preservation of all attributes which support OUV. The most complex issues include the authenticity and integrity of the living heritage town: if they are considered as sustained by the sole means of preserving traditional architecture (where necessary through replacement of defective fabric with new fabric of the same design), the result will inevitably be continued gentrification arising from the outmigration of the Town's residential population, as well as changes to its environment and a loss of the spirit of place. Modern life pressures, brought about by demographic shifts, over-densification, high costs for repair and maintenance of habitat in the property, and larger development planning, make this issue challenging to resolve using straightforward solutions. Further reflection is required on the viability of the management framework and principles by revisiting the PSMV in light of relevant heritage and social references including UNESCO Conventions on built and intangible heritage, the 2011 UNESCO Recommendation on Historic Urban Landscape (HUL), the Nara Document on Authenticity, other United Nations frameworks such as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Regarding governance and capacity, the State Party needs assistance to align different policy frameworks and enhance consultation mechanisms, especially for large-scale development projects. As demonstrated by the development of several cooperation projects, including the Luang Prabang hydropower project, the critical challenge persists in providing coherent and cohesive responses in project design, scale and scope to sustain heritage values and achieve sustainable development goals without compromising the benefits of both. Solid national capacities can be developed through investments in awareness-raising, training, proactive human resource planning, and selective and strategic exposure to international cooperation proposals.

Governance and Management

The PSMV functions, through the services of the LPWHO, as the primary framework to regulate the built and material assets of the inscribed and buffer zones of the property, and its integration with the Provincial Strategic Plan and Urban Plan is effective. However, its conceptual framework needs to be updated, in light of the situations described above, as a renewed policy to provide solutions to complex challenges. The Tourism Management Plan must be elaborated as soon as possible, in view of the post-COVID return of the mass tourism and pending the full operation of the new high-speed train linking Luang Prabang with Vientiane and Chinese cities. The long-term concern of the World Heritage Committee to provide a solid autonomous financial base for the preservation of the Town could partially be addressed with the resumption of the Heritage Funds, as stipulated in the 2014 Decree, with the return of tourists. Still, a complementary financial arrangement is necessary to cope with the absence of public subsidies to assist in the high-cost repair and maintenance of some significant traditional architectures.

Governance has to be enhanced in all its layers. As the primary technical service, the LPWHO should remain the sole and multidisciplinary entity to supervise the various aspects of the inscribed zones, with necessary human and financial reinforcement to ensure the core

competencies of the preservation of physical assets and the introduction of a transdisciplinary approach. The roles of the Provincial and National Committees for World Heritage should be maintained and reinforced, especially to bring a more robust coordination mechanism for decision-making relating to national-level development projects (e.g. hydropower). Investing the time and energy of the concerned staff and authorities in only prioritised development projects and feasibility studies suggested by private and international partners, is an interesting challenge in maximising the benefits of external expertise for appropriation by the State Party.

The importance of local communities, religious, secular and business, may have to be re-evaluated and formally recognised, especially in terms of a new course of policy ensuring the Town's preservation as a living entity, embedded with ecological and intangible essence.

Reported threats to the OUV of the property

The moderate changes to major attributes of OUV over time that were observed above are supported by the spatial analysis through GIS and satellite images, providing a variety of comparative data on the urban fabric and its constituencies through a quantitative analysis by category, materials, use, appearance of traditional and colonial houses, religious buildings, ecological spaces such as wetlands and natural ponds. The continued deployment of such monitoring is recommended to track the evolution of all the attributes and serve as the foundations of policy formulation. In addition, the Mission suggests some adjustments to the sub-categories of architecture to include modern architectures previously excluded or not itemized on the inventory, and monitoring of landscapes, particularly the riverbank morphology and water-related information.

The Mission suggests a set of technical studies to refine the methods for the future intervention relating to the riverbank protection so that it could further contribute to the endemic landscape conservation and interest in a sustainable development approach.

The Mission was deeply concerned by progress made with the site preparation for the LPHPP without the conclusion of a satisfactory HIA or defined mitigation measures, and the possible negative impacts of the project both on cultural and natural, tangible and intangible attributes of the OUV of the property.

Highly suspected cumulative impacts of numerous dams upstream and downstream, combined with climate change effects, include the modification or collapse of geomorphology and terrestrial and aquatic environment of the property and its surroundings, and longer impacts on spiritual practices, beliefs, culinary traditions and other immaterial but integral parts of the property's OUV. Therefore, in the absence of firm evidence and proof that cumulative negative impacts will not alter the physical, ecological and intangible attributes of the property, the Mission recommends that the State Party does not pursue any further advancement of the Luang Prabang Hydropower project or any other new hydropower or dam structures in the areas where there could potentially be impacts on World Heritage properties.

The Nam Khan Bridge replacement has become an urgent matter because of the passengers' safety and security. Therefore, the Mission suggests the State Party to consider the ICOMOS technical review on the suggested three options, as well as an alternative option to replace the bridge with the reproduction of the current bridge to keep the vista and visual memory through the view over the Mekong.

The State Party is advised to move carefully with other large scale international cooperation projects by considering their direct, indirect and cumulative impacts on the attributes of the OUV, their consistency with and degree of contribution to the objectives of preservation of the property and its buffer zones. One crucial point is the necessity of visual coherence of all infrastructure and materials foreseen under these projects, which often conflict with the Town's atmosphere and potentially disturb townscapes because of their generic design.

Lastly, given the importance of the World Heritage property's sense of place and spirit, the Mission wishes to suggest that the authorities invest, when possible, in a programme to contribute to holistic interpretation through participatory projects such as documentation, exhibitions, the development of World Heritage signature products, in collaboration with the Town's inhabitants of different generations and social classes, and in close association with various cultural institutions (e.g. museums, cultural centres) and social actors (e.g. NGOs, associations, cooperatives).

Mission Recommendations

Based on the analysis above, the Mission recommends and invites the State Party to take the actions below.

Conservation/Preservation of Attributes within the Inscribed Property and Buffer Zones

1. Address the threats to the remaining 257 buildings listed in the 1995 inventory, especially 142 religious and civil buildings under poor and moderate conditions, identified as the first sub-type, namely those wholly constructed out of wood, in a contingency plan; This includes the setting up of a sustainable financial mechanism, along with the Heritage Fund, to provide financial assistance in cases where the owner is unable to cover the reconstruction costs; **PRIORITY: HIGH**
2. Address the course of action when traditional buildings are beyond reasonable repair norms. Presently the only legal course of action is to reconstruct the buildings in strict accordance with the regulations of the PSMV. **PRIORITY: HIGH**
3. Recognise that the term "Civil Buildings" be defined by a new list of architectural types (or typologies) that correspond to different periods of construction and styles, as suggested in the above analysis under issue 1; **PRIORITY: HIGH**
4. Pursue its work on revisiting and updating the PSMV to adopt supplementary policy documents, integrate contemporary concepts of management of all attributes of the OUV, as well as to enable to respond to new contingencies; as well as introduce, within this updating process, international frameworks, such as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially related to climate change and sustainable tourism, the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) Approach, Intangible Heritage and universal access; **PRIORITY: HIGH**
5. Update regularly GIS inventories to include early 20th-century modern buildings, contour levels of the embankments, and depth soundings of the Mekong and Nam Khan Rivers in the vicinity of the property, amongst others, to enable the chronological tracking of all attributes of the OUV; **PRIORITY: HIGH**
6. Consider investing in supply chains of affordable local materials for construction and repair, as well as training programmes as a means of ensuring the continuity of conservation with authenticity; **PRIORITY: MEDIUM**
7. Consider, as necessary, a broader awareness campaign about the rules stated in the PSMV targeting the inhabitants and homeowners of the property, including some successful case studies to demonstrate the merits of the PSMV; **PRIORITY: MEDIUM**
8. Support the rehabilitation programme for wetlands and ponds reserves with a scientific approach to save the bio-ecological climatic functions, especially as it is an attribute of the high ecological value of the OUV that is underrated; over-densification and encroachment around these natural spaces should be controlled; **PRIORITY: HIGH**
9. Expand the inhouse Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) research team to ensure that data on how the social fabric is connected to sustaining the urban fabric of the town as a living

entity is collected and collated to inform on the planning process, especially as gentrification in the core zone, exacerbated by the outmigration of much of the existing resident population, has led to the loss of spirit and feeling; **PRIORITY: MEDIUM**

10. Revisit and strengthen the management of the buffer zones, in light of their essential role in preserving the inscribed zones and in particular in considering the large-scale development projects; **PRIORITY: HIGH**

Development Projects

Nam Khan Riverbank Protection

11. Prioritise the technical areas of study highlighted in the 2019 technical review to move the future projects along in a proactive manner, especially in the area of slope stabilisation and earth protection in the interest of risk preparedness; **PRIORITY: HIGH**
12. Preserve the landscape of the riverbanks to protect the attributes sustaining the property's OUV by designing a hybrid system to suit different site situations as opposed to a one-size-fits-all approach, with the assistance of landscape consultants and soil specialists, and In taking into account the findings of soil investigation, slope analysis and simulations of rising water levels to build back better in the interest of sustainable development; **PRIORITY: WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE CONCERNED PROJECT**

Nam Khan Old Bridge

13. Consider, to moderate the need for a comprehensive HIA, an option of a like-for-like replacement of the Nam Khan Old Bridge with a present-day model of the Bailey bridge, which is still being manufactured (See <https://www.ibeehivesteelstructures.com/steel-baileybridge>), besides the three options reviewed by ICOMOS; **PRIORITY: HIGH**

Luang Prabang Hydropower project

14. In the underlying situation where the previous studies and the HIA have not provided satisfactory analysis and solid proof and certainty that the LPHPP upstream will not further affect the attributes of the OUV relating to the natural environment of the Mekong and Nam Khan Rivers, associated religious and cultural practices and living conditions of local communities, take the precautionary approach not to pursuing the LPHPP and relocate the project and other future and similar projects to where there is no suspected causality for the World Heritage properties, their associated values or their environmental setting; **PRIORITY: IMMEDIATE**
15. Further revisit existing research and compilation of documentation related to the attributes of the OUV, including nature-culture link, associated religious and spiritual practices related to the Mekong and waterways, deepen the understanding of the sense of place of the Town more straightforwardly to inform future assessments of impacts of development projects on the OUV of the property; **PRIORITY: MEDIUM**

Other development projects under study or implementation

16. Provide the World Heritage Centre with an update on all planned development projects in and around the World Heritage property if they are suspected of having potential impacts on the OUV of the property, and ensure that adequate Impact Assessments are undertaken in line with laws of the Lao PDR, paragraphs 118 bis and 169 of the *Operational Guidelines* of the World Heritage Convention, following the guidelines provided by the World Heritage Convention's Advisory Bodies; **PRIORITY: WHENEVER APPROPRIATE AND BEFORE ANY IRREVERSIBLE DECISIONS**

17. Promote the participation of the LPWHO in the conceptualization and feasibility studies of development projects, as a way of increasing their exposure to the development project design and providing specific expertise and views to the development stakeholders; **PRIORITY: WHENEVER NECESSARY**
18. Draft and implement an improved Urban Design Guidelines, which also control the vista at the level of streetscapes to fill the gap between original and local designs based on precedents and generic designs. This Guidelines could apply to neighbourhood settings, public infrastructure and materials suggested by new development projects within the inscribed zones and buffer zones to ensure that collectively there is no negative heritage impact in terms of coherence in design and materials; **PRIORITY: HIGH**
19. Incorporate in the objectives of the development and aid projects benefits in preserving and enhancing the OUV of the World Heritage properties and sensitize stakeholders and partners about the obligations of the State Party to the World Heritage Convention, as well as ensuring the financial provision to implement necessary Impact Assessments in the project planning and conceptualisation process, with the participation of the LPWHO; **PRIORITY: WHENEVER NECESSARY**

Governance

Integrated management framework

20. Integrate the World Heritage Convention's related guidelines into a broader context of territorial and development planning relative to the inscribed and buffer zones as well as in the wider setting so that the overall management framework becomes coherent and cohesive; **PRIORITY: MEDIUM**

Integrated Tourism Management Plan

21. Entrust the coordination of the draft Tourism Management plan to the LPWHO, including carrying capacity studies on some hotspots on the tourism itineraries, to guide the regulation of the visitor influx, flow and education, and prioritise tourism-related infrastructure development (e.g. Phousi mountain). The Plan should integrate the principles of World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism and the ICOMOS International Charter for Cultural Heritage Tourism **PRIORITY: HIGH**

Management Plan (PSMV)

22. Consider the integration of specific aspects of a living heritage town and the application of concepts of authenticity applicable to the Asian context (e.g. Nara Document, Hoi An Protocols) to make the renewed policy provided by the PSMV viable and workable in a real-life context; **PRIORITY: HIGH**

Luang Prabang World Heritage Office (LPWHO)

23. Maintain, considering the criteria for the World Heritage property's nomination and management, the current structure of the LPWHO as the sole and unified technical entity overlooking the various aspects of the management of the property, and reinforce it, especially for built heritage preservation and transdisciplinary approach as appropriate; **PRIORITY: IMMEDIATE**

Impact Assessments

24. Review existing legislation to widen the recognition of heritage related Impact Assessments, and take initiatives to increase nationwide awareness of national

development actors on the principles of the World Heritage Convention and the State Party's obligation; **PRIORITY: HIGH**

Multistakeholder consultation mechanism

25. Strengthen the role of National and Provincial World Heritage Committees as advisory bodies on the issues of heritage and development; in particular, the National World Heritage Committee may have to be presided over by a Vice Prime Minister for it to be functioning as a coordination body of all concerned agencies and ministries to enable proactive planning practice for significant development projects, informed by appropriate Impact Assessments; **PRIORITY: HIGH**
26. Allocate time and energy of the staff of the LPWHO in terms of priority and clear strategic objectives to focus on the most needed projects for the preservation of the World Heritage property; **PRIORITY: WHENEVER NECESSARY**
27. Strengthen the capacities of the LPWHO through possible additional expertise, enabling a transdisciplinary approach, consolidating both the conservation of built assets and living heritage, as well as by providing training opportunities in situ or abroad; **PRIORITY: AS SOON AS POSSIBLE**

Heritage Funds

28. Allocate the collected funds from various financial revenue in accordance with the concerned national decree, strategically to high priority activities, particularly to cope with the restoration of traditional timber structures, which constitute core attributes of OUV; **PRIORITY: HIGH**

General

29. Apply to the International Assistance Funds of the World Heritage Convention to address priority issues suggested by the Mission; **PRIORITY: AS SOON AS POSSIBLE**

Living Heritage and Stakeholder Engagement

30. Develop and implement projects to revitalize ecological and intangible heritage attributes, such as data collection and monitoring of these attributes over time, which are beneficial to strengthening stakeholder commitments and awareness of their role in safeguarding social fabric; **PRIORITY: MEDIUM**
31. To externalise and socialise the above-mentioned new policy direction, consider implementing outreach programmes, such as participatory research and exhibitions on history, memories and everyday life, and/or the development of World Heritage signature products with the involvement of the Town's inhabitants, cultural institutions and Civil Society, to promote and sustain a sense of identity and belonging in the Town. **PRIORITY: MEDIUM**

ANNEXES

Annex 1: Terms of Reference of the Joint World Heritage Centre / ICOMOS Reactive Monitoring Mission to the “Town of Luang Prabang” (Lao PDR)

April 2022

At its extended 44th session, the World Heritage Committee requested the State Party of Lao PDR to invite a joint World Heritage Centre/ICOMOS Reactive Monitoring mission to the World Heritage property “**Town of Luang Prabang**” (Decision **44 COM 7B.32**, Annex 1). The objective of the mission is to evaluate the overall state of conservation of the property, the implementation of heritage preservation policies and related regulations, the operationalization of the Heritage Fund, to undertake an assessment of all proposed projects, and to make recommendations on how development projects could support the OUV of the property.

In particular, the mission should undertake the following:

General

1. Assess the overall state of conservation of the property in relation to all criteria for which the property was inscribed on the World Heritage List, the conditions of integrity and authenticity and protection and management;
2. Provide advice to the State Party in order to strengthen governance and increase capacities for planning and for the development of measures to cope with elements of potential threats to the attributes which support the property’s OUV;

Governance and management

3. Review the implementation and development of heritage preservation policies, including the Luang Prabang Conservation Plan (PSMV) and its upgrade into the World Heritage Preservation Programme and integration into the Provincial Strategic Plan, as well as the Infrastructure Development Plan;
4. Review the state of elaboration of the Tourism Management Plan;
5. Review the operationalization of the Heritage Fund for the property;
6. Review the governance and management structure and the planning capacity, including an appropriate consultation mechanism within the management authority and among all stakeholders of the property, including local communities;
7. Review human and financial resources available to support the conservation of the property;

Reported threats to the OUV of the property

8. Review the state of major attributes which support the OUV of the property, in particular representative traditional town fabrics, including traditional houses and other features in the Town, and the physical and visual setting of the town, including consideration of changes to these attributes over time;
9. Visit the Nam Khan Riverbank project site and consider the potential visual impact on the landscape and the arising security and safety risks;

10. Visit the proposed construction site of the Luang Prabang Hydropower Project, considering previous reviews and relevant documentation pertaining to the Luang Prabang Hydropower Project, including the draft Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA), peer reviews of the HIA and the ICOMOS/IUCN Technical Review of January 2022;
11. Consider any other on-going projects, including the review relevant documentation pertaining to the old Nam Khan Bridge project, including the ICOMOS Technical Review of November 2021;

Others

12. In line with paragraph 173 of the *Operational Guidelines*, assess any other relevant issues that may negatively impact on the Outstanding Universal Value of the property, including its setting and the conditions of integrity and protection and management.

The State Party is requested to facilitate necessary consultations with stakeholders and field visits to key locations within the property previously mentioned by the Committee's Decisions and concerned by the elements listed above.

To enable the preparation for the mission, the following items should be provided to the World Heritage Centre (keeping ICOMOS International in copy of the exchanges) as soon as possible and no later than **3 weeks prior to the mission**:

- a) Elements concerning management and planning under application and/or elaboration for the property, notably the Luang Prabang Conservation Plan (PSMV), its upgrade into the World Heritage Preservation Programme and integration into the Provincial Strategic Plan, as well as the Infrastructure Development Plan and Tourism Management Plan, and any other regulations in place for the expansion and restoration of existing buildings and new construction;
- b) All available documentation and information concerning the management authority, including its organization chart, mission statement, and details on human and financial resources and operational relationship to other organizations;
- c) Existing legal regulations concerning the property (laws, decrees and sub-decrees), and information about any proposed changes or new legal regulations;
- d) All available documentation and information about possible on-going and future major projects (development, construction, conservation, research, tourism related projects) within and around the property that may have impact on the OUV of the property, such as project designs, locations, and impact assessments where available. In particular, any updated documentation (excluding those previously received by the World Heritage Centre) should be provided regarding the old Nam Khan Bridge project and the Luang Prabang Hydropower Project;
- e) Maps allowing comparison between the overall landscapes at the time of inscription and at present;

- f) All available information about visitor facilities and services, such as interpretation, educational, and outreach activities (targeting local, national and international citizens);
- g) Reports of the monitoring and surveillance of the property, including time series figures (2019-2021) on:
 - i. Visitor numbers by month, tourism facility statistics, tour operators statistics;
 - ii. Cases of submitted proposals concerning constructions/facilities studied by the management authority;
 - iii. Seizures of illegal constructions/initiatives (any type).

The mission should also consult with the Lao PDR authorities at the national, provincial, and municipal levels, and with other relevant governmental and provincial authorities involved in the management of the property and in the development of major projects within and around the property. In addition, the mission should consult with relevant stakeholders, including tour operators, NGOs and representatives of local communities.

Based on the results of the abovementioned assessments and discussions with the State Party representatives and stakeholders, the mission will develop recommendations to the Government of Lao PDR and the World Heritage Committee with the objective of providing guidance to the State Party regarding actions to be taken to address identified threats to the property and to improve the conservation of its Outstanding Universal Value.

Recommendations will be provided within the mission report (see below) and not during the mission implementation.

The mission will prepare a concise report on the findings and recommendations within six weeks following the site visit, following the World Heritage Centre and Advisory Bodies' Reactive Monitoring mission report format (Annex 2).

Annex 2: Decision **44 COM 7B.32**

Town of Luang Prabang (Lao PDR)

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined Document WHC/21/44.COM/7B.Add,
2. Recalling Decision **38 COM 7B.98**, adopted at its 38th session (Doha, 2014)
3. Notes that the Luang Prabang Conservation Plan (PSMV) is implemented, upgraded into the World Heritage Preservation Programme and integrated into the Provincial Strategic Plan, also notes that regulations are in place for the expansion and restoration of existing buildings and new construction and that an Infrastructure Development Plan is being developed within the framework of the Provincial Strategic Plan, and urges the State Party to submit the World Heritage Preservation Programme and the Infrastructure Development Plan to the World Heritage Centre, for review by the Advisory Bodies prior to their final approval and implementation;
4. Notes with concern that the number of traditional houses and structures within the property is decreasing, and also urges the State Party to adopt and implement, as part of the PSMV, a policy to preserve, maintain and document these constitutive elements of the property's Outstanding Universal Value (OUV);
5. Also notes with concern that there is no indication of an integrated Tourism Management Plan, and requests the State Party to urgently develop such a plan, which should be integrated into the World Heritage Preservation Programme;
6. Expresses its concern regarding the Nam Khan Riverbank project, both due to its potential visual impact on the landscape and the arising security and safety risks, and also requests the State Party to ensure that the project does not have any negative impact on the property's OUV;
7. Further notes that the design of the Luang Prabang Hydropower Project (LPHPP) has been completed by the project developers and approved by the relevant Lao authorities and, also recalling Decision **40 COM 7** and the provisions of Paragraph 118bis of the *Operational Guidelines*, recommends that the State Party halt construction activities until the State Party has undertaken the following and submitted them to the World Heritage Centre for review by the Advisory Bodies:
 - a) Carry out a full Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA), in conformity with the ICOMOS Guidelines on Heritage Impact Assessments for World Heritage Cultural Properties, including the potential impact of the LPHPP project on the property and its OUV, with a risk analysis of the potential impacts, including those of natural flooding of the Mekong river, taking into consideration the findings of the 2019 Environmental and Social Impact Assessment, and identifying whether and how mitigation measures are required and how they might be implemented, with support from the International Assistance project approved under the World Heritage Fund,
 - b) Integrate appropriate measures both into the property's planning and management and hydropower planning processes and prepare an Emergency Preparedness Plan in order to prevent, to the greatest extent possible, any damage to the property,
 - c) Submit these documents to the World Heritage Centre for review by the Advisory Bodies;
8. Further requests the State Party to invite a joint World Heritage Centre/ICOMOS Reactive Monitoring mission to evaluate the overall state of conservation of the property, the implementation of heritage preservation policies and related regulations, the operationalisation of the Heritage Fund, to undertake an assessment of all the proposed

projects, and to make recommendations on how development projects could support the OUV of the property;

9. Finally requests the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Centre, by **1 February 2022**, an updated report on the state of conservation of the property and the implementation of the above, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 45th session.

Annex 3: Composition of mission team

Nao HAYASHI, representing the World Heritage Centre and UNESCO for the mission, is a Japanese historian, trained in Japan (Sophia University, Graduate School of University of Tokyo), France (Paris IV-Sorbonne, Ecole Normale Supérieure, Ecole pratique des hautes études) on Classical Studies, archaeology and comparative religious studies of Roman Empire's eastern provinces (North Africa, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon) and in the UK (University of London) on sustainable development. She joined UNESCO in 2002 as programme specialist and directed large scale operational projects and capacity building programmes for World Heritage sites and museums in Asia, Arab States and Africa. Her work includes several international conferences, notably as the commissioner of the UNESCO's first High Level Forum on Museums in 2016, held in Shenzhen, China. She produced several international exhibitions such as 'Museums for Intercultural Dialogue' linking National Museums of Syria and Egypt, and 'Exploring the World Heritage sites in Cambodia, Laos and Viet Nam', as a collaboration of 6 World Heritage sites and 9 museums.

Laurence LOH, representing ICOMOS International for the mission, from Malaysia, is an architect by profession. He has spent the past 37 years protecting, conserving, managing and sustaining the cultural heritage of Malaysia. Trained at the Architectural Association in London, he currently practises under the name of Arkitek LLA Sdn. Bhd. Professor Loh's expertise and contributions in built heritage have been acknowledged nationally and regionally. He has been involved in ICOMOS' activities in relation to World Heritage properties for over two decades. In parallel with his professional career path, Professor Loh devotes his time to education. He currently teaches at the University of Hong Kong and formerly taught at the International Centre for the Study of Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property in Rome. He has been a regular member of jury for the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation since its inception in 2000 and recently participated in a UNESCO Heritage Masterclass on the Cheong Fatt Tze Mansion which he restored. He is a Fellow of the Hong Kong Institute of Conservationists and contributes regularly to its CPD activities.

Annex 4: Itinerary and programme of the mission as implemented

Date	Place	Activities
02/04/2022	Vientiane	Arrival of the mission members in Vientiane and quarantine of 48 hours
04/04/2022 PM	Vientiane - Luang Prabang	End of the quarantine and arrival of the mission members in Luang Prabang by high-speed train
05/04/2022	Luang Prabang	Morning: Visits to riverbanks, Nam Khan Old River bridge, Mount Phousi, timber houses restoration projects, wetlands and ecological ponds, townscapes in zone UA Afternoon: Meeting and consultations at the Luang Prabang World Heritage Office (LPWHO) on the objectives of the mission, questions and replies from the authorities
06/04/2022	Luang Prabang	Morning: Stakeholder meeting with representatives and business, hotel and tourism associations, city authorities, village chiefs Afternoon: Meeting with the Vice-Governor of the Province, Chairman of the Provincial Committee for World Heritage, followed by the visit to the zone UB of the property, including the ancient city delimitation, example of difficult case of large traditional house restoration and Heuan Chan Heritage House (former UNESCO museum project site)
07/04/2022	Luang Prabang	Morning: meeting with the experts of JICA project for Nam Khan Old Bridge, religious ceremony at the LPWHO for New Year, with the presence of the chief venerable monk of Luang Prabang Afternoon: Visit to the preparatory site of the Luang Prabang Hydropower Project by ship on the Mekong
08/04/2022	Luang Prabang – Vientiane	Morning: Concluding meeting and debriefing of the mission with the LPWHO on the technical details of the concerned issues Afternoon: Luncheon with local cultural institution representatives, visit to the LPWHO for database and information centre, followed by the departure to Vientiane by high speed train
09/04/2022	Vientiane – Singapore	Morning: Meeting and debriefing with the HE Minister of Information, Culture and Tourism Afternoon: Departure of the mission to Singapore

Annex 5: List of people met

Luang Prabang

Mr Bounleum MANYVONG, Vice-Governor of Luang Prabang and Chairman of the Provincial Committee for World Heritage

LPWHO

Mr Saveuy SILAVANH, Director

Mr Sengthong LUEYANG, Deputy Director (Administration)

Mr Souvalith PHOMPADIT, Deputy Director (Management, Construction and Repairation)

Mr Khampheth SOMMALITH, Head of Administration & Personnel Section

Mr Anda YANGSENSAY, Head of Heritage Planning and Management Section

Mr Xaykone PHONSAVATH, Deputy Head, Management, Construction and Repairation

Mr Phanthong SENGNALY, Management, Construction and Repairation

Ms Sengphet KHOUTHAO, Management, Construction and Repairation

Mr Sisoumung SOMSAMONE, Management, Construction and Repairation

Mr Bounheunang DAVANH, Management, Construction and Repairation

Mr Soulisack SISANA, Deputy Head, Heritage Planning and Management Section

Mr Vilabunsa SOMMALATH, Heritage Planning and Management Section

Mr Sisomphone SAYSAVATH, Deputy Head, Water and Environment Section

Mr Bounpasong THAMMAVONG, Water and Environment Section

Mr Chanhpheng PHONGSAWATDY, Water and Environment Section

Ms Mingkhouane SISOUPHANH, Deputy Head, Administration & Personnel Section

Mr Sathiane KITTIKHOUN, Administration & Personnel Section (Inspection Unit)

Ms Dalasavanh LATTANAPHENGST (Personnel Unit)

Mr Somchanh PHOUMMASOUK (Planning Unit)

Ms Chanthavy NANTHASONE (Cash Unit)

Ms Pany KHAMMAPADITH, Administration & Personnel Section (Library)

Ms Latsamy PHONGSAVANH (Secretariat Unit)

Ms Chanthavone HOUNGDOUANGCHAN (Account Unit)

Vientiane

H.E. Mrs Suansavanh Viyaket, Minister of Information, Culture and Tourism of Lao PDR

Mr. Sern PHETSANGHAN, World Heritage Site Advisor to the Chairperson of the National Committee for the World Heritage (also accompanying the mission to Luang Prabang)

Mrs. Phengchanch PHENGMEUANG, Director General, Planning and International Department

Mr. Phakhanxay SIKHANXAY, Director General, Heritage Department

Mr. Bualay PHANOUVONG, Head of the Office of Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism

Mr Paxa Nyordsavanh, World Heritage Management Division, Heritage Department (also accompanying the mission to Luang Prabang)

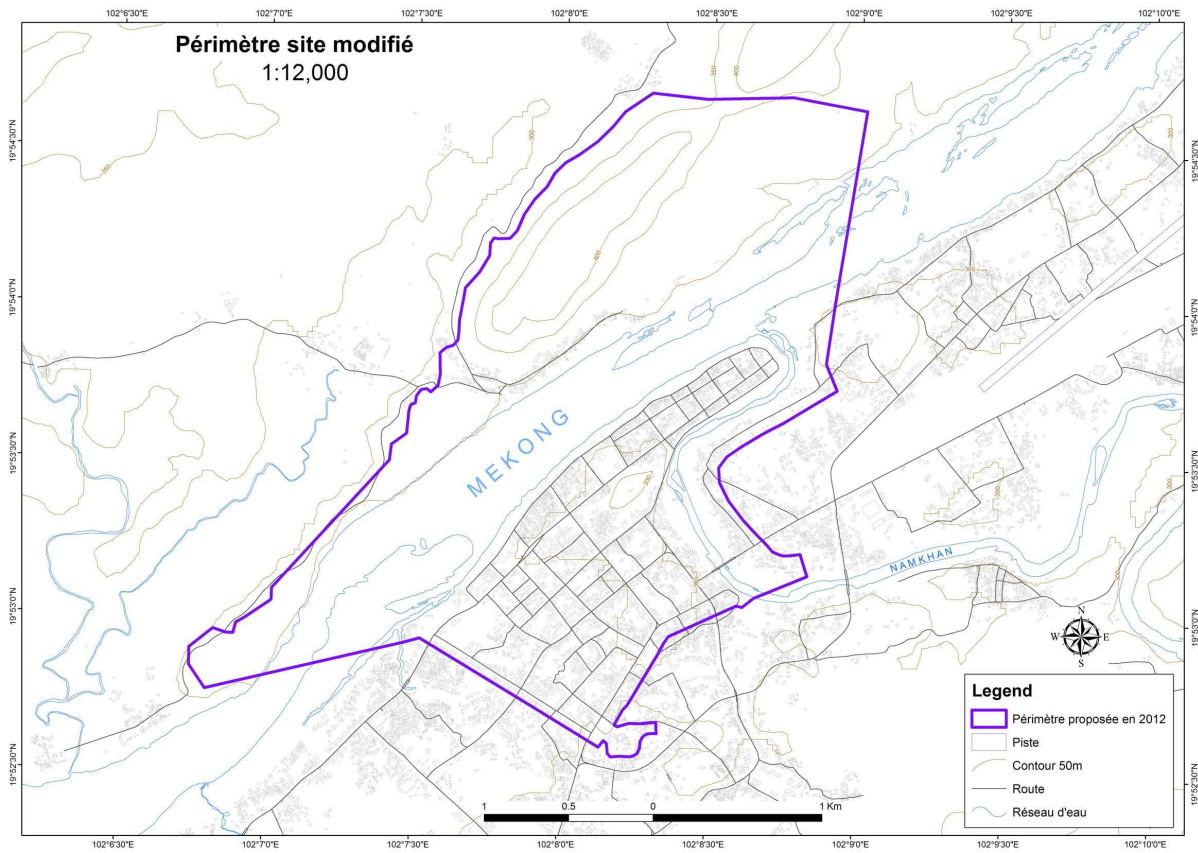
Mr Pheunh Nanthavongdouangsy, World Heritage Management Division, Heritage Department (also accompanying the mission to Luang Prabang)

Annex 6: SOUV of the property

<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/479/>

Annex 7: Maps, photographs and other graphical material required to illustrate issues

Map of the property



Source: State Party

15 buildings as reported demolished since 1995 (source: State Party)

- 7 Religious buildings





596

1995



2022 Under Construction



600

1995



Rebuilt



609

1995



Rebuilt

- 8 Civil buildings





202

1995



2022 Not yet Rebuilt



237

1995



Rebuilt



263

1995



Rebuilt



394

1995



2022 Not Yet Rebuilt

Annex 8: List of key documents which have informed the mission

National Legislations

- National Heritage Law (revision 2021)
- Urban Law (revision 2017)
- Environmental Protection Law (2013)
- Decret du Gouvernement sur l'établissement du Comité National pour le Patrimoine Mondial

Regulations concerning Luang Prabang

- Plan de sauvegarde et mise en valeur (PSMV) (2001)
- Règlement Urbain de Luang Prabang (2012)
- Decision of the Governor for management and protection of Biodiversity in the protected area of Luang Prabang city and Chomphet District
- Specific regulation for the management of natural areas along the Mekong and Nam Khan river
- Decree on the National Heritage Fund
- Decision of the Governor of Luang Prabang Province on the management of Luang Prabang city

Planning Document

- Luang Prabang Province Strategic Plan (2021-2025) with 20 specific proposals for the Town

Information documents

- Documents provided by the Luang Prabang World Heritage Office

Development projects

Luang Prabang Hydropower project (LPHPP)

Technical studies

- Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (part I) May 2019
- Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (part II) May 2019
- Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (part III) May 2019
- Feasibility Study (Annex to Environmental and Social Impact Assessment) May 2019
- LUANG PRABANG POWER COMPANY LTD. Luang Prabang Hydropower Project Environmental Impact Assessment (vol 4-1 of ESIA) Oct 2019 (received in June 2020)

- Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (part II) Oct 2019 (received in June 2020)
 - o The impacts to WH are briefly analyzed in relation to the large labour population influx to Luang Prabang which should be controlled;
 - o Cultural components analysis
 - Archaeological sites
 - o Public consultation report
 - Resettlement
 - Compensation
- Social impact assessment (vol 4-2 of ESIA) Oct 2019 (received in June 2020)
- Environmental Management and Monitoring Plan (vol 4-3 of ESIA) Oct 2019 (received in June 2020)
-
- Social Management and Monitoring Plan (vol 4-4 of ESIA) Oct 2019 (received in June 2020)
- Resettlement Action Plan (vol 4-5 of ESIA) Oct 2019 (received in June 2020)
- Executive Summary (vol 4-6 of ESIA) Oct 2019 (received in June 2020)
-
- Lao Electric Power Technical Standards (December 2018) (received in January 2021)
- Report by LUANG PRABANG POWER COMPANY LTD on Luang Prabang Hydropower Project: Assessment of Potential Impact on the World Heritage Property (report) (observation in the briefing) (received in January 2021)
- Annexes 1 and 2 (received in January 2021)
-
- Basic Design Review report (Jan 2021) (Received in March-April 2021)
- Environmental and Social Impact Assessment Executive Summary (Jan 2021) (Received in March-April 2021)
- Environmental Impact Assessment (Jan 2021) (Received in March-April 2021)
- Social Impact Assessment (Jan 2021) (Received in March-April 2021)
- Annex J – Full supply level maps of the project (Received in March-April 2021)
- Cumulative and transboundary impact assessment (Jan 2021) (Received in March-April 2021)
- The Scoping Report on Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) of the Luang Prabang World Heritage Town (June 2021)
- Final Draft Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) (November 2021)

Evaluation by third party

- Two technical evaluation reports from the Mekong River Commission dated December 2019 and June 2020
-
- Dam Safety Inception and initial review by Dr Patrice Droz, in collaboration with Dr Bernard Joos, Hydrologist and Dr Thierry Bussard, Geologist, (July 2021)
- World Heritage Impact Assessment of the Luang Prabang Hydroelectrical Power Project HIA Report Review' by Ms Julie Van Den Bergh (December 2021)
- 'Environmental Review – The Heritage Impact Assessment Report of the Luang Prabang Hydroelectric Power Project', by Mr Peter Jensen (December 2021)

- 'Comments on Heritage Impact Assessment Report – Luang Prabang Hydropower Project', by Dr James Chamberlain
- 'Review of the draft Heritage Impact Assessment report for the Luang Prabang Hydropower Project' by Mr Joerg Hartmann (December 2021)
- ICOMOS and IUCN Technical Review on Luang Prabang Hydroelectric Power Project: Heritage Impact Assessment (February 2022)

Nam Khan Riverbank protection project

- RAPPORT DE MISSION LUANG PRABANG Site inscrit sur la liste du Patrimoine Mondial by Michel Brodovitch, architecte du patrimoine, inspecteur général honoraire de l'administration du développement durable. (November 2019)

Nam Khan River Bridge replacement project

- Preliminary Survey Report for Turnkey Construction Project of old Nam Khan Bridge (Luang Prabang), prepared by State Enterprise of Communication Construction, Vientiane, September 2020 (additional information April 2021).
- ICOMOS technical review on Nam Khan Bridge project (November 2021)

Others:

- Luang Prabang Tourism Destination Management Plan 2021-2025
- CDIA Lao Urban Environment Improvement Investment Project Preparation Study Final Report, Volume 1: Main Report (Main Text) (August 2021)
- Master Planning Study for Smart City, Development in Luang Prabang City, Lao PDR Final Report, by Policy Bureau, Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism of Japan and Oriental Consultants Global Co., Ltd. (March 2022)
- Feasibility Study on the Disaster Risk Management Project in the Mekong and Nam Khan Rivers, Luang Prabang Province, ISAN Corporation In association with LTEC (September 2021) (PPT)
-