

Conference promotes world heritage conservation

Notebook: article imv

Created: 24/11/2015 10:00

URL: <http://www.vietmaz.com/2015/11/conference-promotes-world-heritage-conserva...>

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VN heritage: Vietnamese and foreign experts discussed about conservation of different world heritage sites, including Thang Long Imperial Citadel in Ha Noi at the conference yesterday. — VNA/VNS Photo Minh Duc

HA NOI (VNS) — An international conference yesterday that gathered more than 200 Vietnamese and foreign experts focused on the conservation and promotion of world heritage sites such as the Thang Long Imperial Citadel.

Dozens of reports by both local and foreign experts were submitted at the conference.

“There have been more than 3,000 reports on world heritage sites conducted by UNESCO in Viet Nam, including 34 State of Conservation reports since 1994,” Mechtild Rossler, director of the Division for Heritage and the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, said at the opening session.

She stressed that these sites “belong to the future generation and they have the right to see them in the future”.

“The Thang Long Imperial Citadel has great significance not only to Viet Nam, but also to the world’s archaeological circle,” Prof William Logan, UNESCO Chair of Heritage and Urbanism, said.

Many buildings inside the citadel were constructed by the French colonists in the 1880s during their occupation of Ha Noi. He expressed concern over the construction and reparation of these areas since they might interfere with research into the French influence on these buildings.

According to Nicholas Viste, UNESCO Culture Programme Officer in Ha Noi, local officers and authorities must be more aware of the French construction to be able to control the restoration process.

Participants at the conference also raised the question about why research into restoring the citadel was still ongoing after more than a decade.

In response to this, experts from Japan and South Korea presented their cases about the process of research and restoration.

Prof Kazuto Inoue, Department Head of the Research and Investigation Department at the National Research Institute for Cultural Properties in Japan, gave the example of the Nara Citadel in Japan, which underwent a 50-year-research period before being rebuilt.

"It not only requires a long-term plan, but also advanced and deliberate skills," he said.

Cho Kyuhung, vice director of the Changdeokgung Palace management office, expressed similar views. He said the process of research and preservation used to be an issue in Korea. He suggested that traditional techniques had proved ineffective so using modern technology could be the way forward, but it should not influence the style or appearance of the structure.

Phan Thanh Hai, Director of the Hue Monuments Conservation Centre, made the comparison with the Hue Citadel.

"The Thang Long Imperial Citadel has had more restoration work conducted by experts from around the world," he said.

Preservation must be a priority under any circumstances, he added.

"Many people have criticised me for being overly concerned about the preservation work. However, a few months ago, Japanese experts said to me that if Viet Nam continued to exploit its heritage sites, they would be regretful as the Japanese were," he continued.

According to Pham Sanh Chau from the Department of External Culture and UNESCO under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and general secretary of UNESCO's National Committee of Viet Nam, any recognition by UNESCO was intended to promote preservation rather than tourism.

Hai said to acknowledge the value of the citadels was to turn them into "living heritages", and this should involve the whole community.

Chau also raised the question about whether Viet Nam should restore the ancient palaces in the Thang Long Imperial Citadel, instead of just maintaining the walls.

"I think we can associate this case with the situation of restoring Korean palaces that UNESCO has recently objected to," he said.

Talking about this matter, Cho said: "As an architect, I do not agree with the reconstruction of the whole building. However, if the value of a damaged construction matters to the whole site, we can consider that." — VNS