

Olivier Walther, Thierry Renaud et Jonathan Kissling

## Heaven on Earth? The development of tourism in the Dogon Country and the Hombori Mountains (Mali)

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# Heaven on Earth? The development of tourism in the Dogon Country and the Hombori Mountains (Mali)

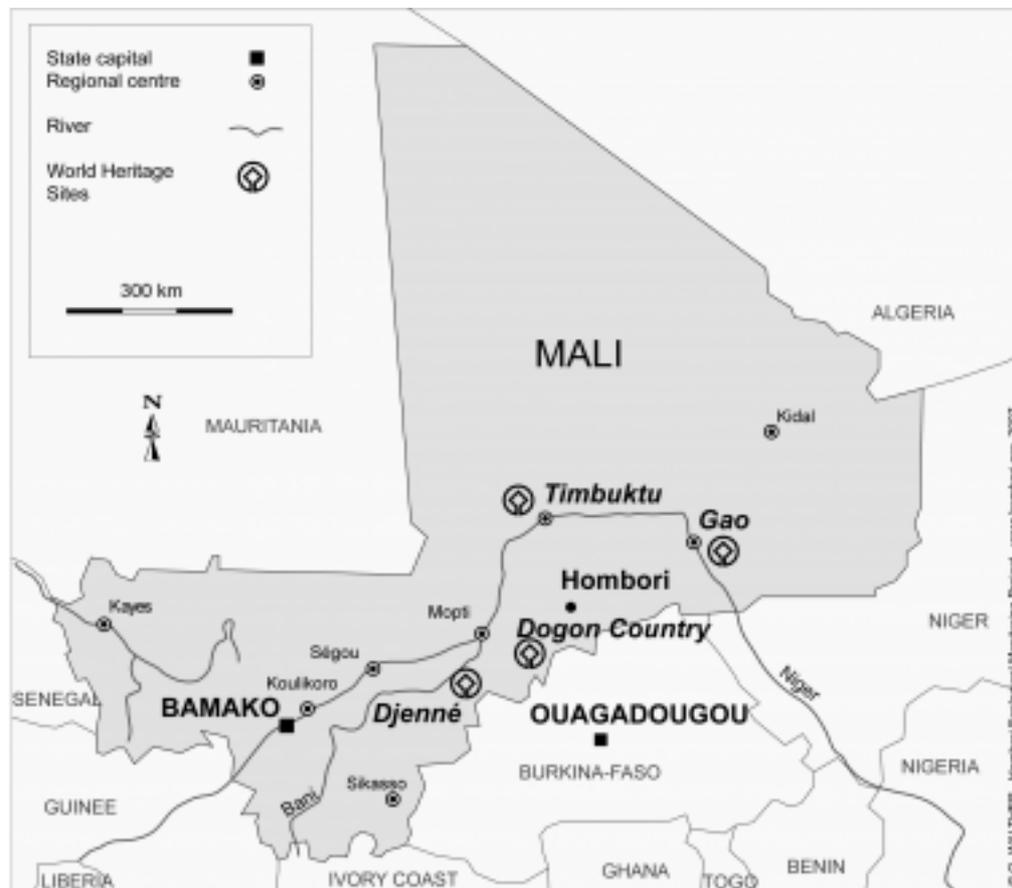
## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

- 1 Over the last 15 years, Mali has developed into a spectacular successful tourist destination. According to the World Tourism Organization (2006), the number of international arrivals increased from 40,000 to 143,000 between 1990 and 2005. Most of the tourists visit the “Golden Triangle” of Timbuktu–Djenné–Dogon Country (also known as “Cliff of Bandiagara–Land of the Dogon”), three World Heritage Sites classified by UNESCO between 1988 and 1989, and seem to ignore other secondary destinations, such as the Hombori Mountains (Figure 1). Located 750 km to the northeast of Bamako, this large mountain range reaches 1155 m at its peak, Mount Hombori.
- 2 Due to the high cliffs surrounding its summit plateau, Mount Hombori is home to unique unspoiled vegetation and fauna, which have been preserved from pasture and agriculture. With more than 150 species on only around 1.5 km<sup>2</sup>, Mount Hombori is a refuge for various plants requiring higher levels of rainfall such as the rare *Gloriosa superba*, *Amorphophallus aphyllus* and *Bombax costatum*, and those occurring only in rocky areas such as *Enteropogon rupestris*, *Kalanchoe lanceolata* and *Lansea humilis* (Kissling and Renaud, 2008). More specifically, Mount Hombori houses several plants considered useful or medicinal which are now rare in, or have completely disappeared from, the Hombori region (Kissling *et al.*, 2005), thus representing a unique opportunity to conserve *in vivo* both those species and their associated knowledge. Furthermore, preliminary studies on the fauna of the Hombori area by Nusslé *et al.* (personal communication) show that several species of rare birds and bats are to be found in the cliff of the mountain, while the plateau is inhabited by a rich wildlife, possibly including some endemic amphibians and reptiles.
- 3 The reasons why tourism has not developed in Hombori as it did in the Dogon Country, some 250 km away, are unclear as the two destinations share a large number of physical and cultural similarities, in particular high cliffs and a defensive human settlement built to survive the nomad slavery raids which occurred prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Both sites are likely to attract customers interested in mountain-based adventure tourism, an emerging but growing activity (Beedie and Hudson, 2003). Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to investigate empirically the unequal development of these two tourism destinations in Mali and suggest development perspectives that take into account both the potentials and the limitations of Hombori.
- 4 Based on existing knowledge concerning tourism in the Dogon Country (van Beek, 2003, 2005; Walther, 2003), field observations from a sample of eight villages located in the mountains have been conducted, as well as semi-directive interviews and a literature review (Walther, 2006). This study is part of the *Hombori Project*, a scientific collaboration between the Universities of Neuchâtel and Lausanne, Switzerland, the Centre for Population, Poverty and Public Policy Studies in Luxembourg, and the Traditional Medicine Department of Bamako, Mali (see [www.hombori.org](http://www.hombori.org) for more details). The aim of this project is to undertake long-term ecological monitoring of the Hombori Mountains, in order to better understand climatic changes in the Sahel as well as to locally support the protection of its biodiversity through tourism development (Ioset *et al.*, 2004). With only around 1,200 species in its around

2.8 million km<sup>2</sup> (White, 1986), the Sahel is one of the poorest ecoregions of the world, yet its biological diversity is threatened by desertification (Nicholson *et al.*, 1998). Due to current species extinction risk, there is an urgent need to identify the most threatened areas of high biodiversity in this area. Moreover, people living in this ecoregion rely directly on their environment for subsistence, and in particular health care (Fortin *et al.*, 2000; Diallo *et al.*, 1999; Kandji *et al.*, 2006).

- 5 Over the next few years, protection measures should be applied with the cooperation of scientists, tour-operators, regional/local authorities and communities. Finally, following Jha (2005), a coordinated management involving the *Hombori Project* and the local communities should make it possible to guarantee the sustainability of the ecological diversity, the infrastructure and the benefits derived from the site.

**Figure 1 - World Heritage Sites and the Hombori Mountains in Mali**



Source : Walther, 2007

## The context

### A fast-growing tourism industry

- 6 Tourists visiting Sahelian countries, Mali included, are mainly interested in cultural expeditions. The available trips, advertised by European and American tour operators, are expensive compared to the other exotic destinations, because of high plane ticket prices and long distances on bumpy roads that require the use of all-terrain vehicles (Mustal, 1997).
- 7 Tourism in Mali is heavily dependent on the political situation and has been severely affected by the Tuareg rebellion (1990-1991, 1994-1995), the civil war in Algeria and the recent “terrorist threat” in the Sahara. After a decline in the 1990s, tourism became more active again from the year 2000 onwards; the income derived from this activity is again rapidly increasing,

increasing from €19 million to €110 million between 1995 and 2002 (WTO, 2005). This occurred despite some petty crime in several areas, which brought short-term losses. Because of the difficult climatic conditions, tourism takes place during a very short period from the beginning of November to the early days of March, and again from July to August.

8 In total, about one thousand people a year stay overnight in the Hombori Mountains, mainly during the months from November to February (Walther, 2006). These figures take into account the three official camps located in the town of Hombori, but not the two sites built at Fatma's Hand, a climbing spot in the east. The new charter air links operated between Europe and Mali by Point Afrique, a French company, in addition to the proximity of Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina-Faso, have slightly increased the popularity of Hombori. Compared to Dogon Country, which welcomed roughly 30,000 visitor nights in 2005 according to the latest surveys (van Beek, 2003), the Hombori Mountains have potential for expansion in terms of the number of people visiting every year.

### A niche market in West Africa

9 Most tourists come to the Hombori Mountains and Dogon Country from France, Italy and Spain, travelling with one of the various agencies such as Nouvelles Frontières, Point Afrique, Club Aventure, Explorator, Terres d'Aventure, Allibert or Azimut. Interviews carried out among a sample of travellers who stayed at the 47 tourist accommodations of Dogon Country and the two hotels in Hombori show that they belong to two main categories, in terms of their expectations (Walther, 2003 and 2006). The first group consists of young people who are attracted by the low cost of living and the opportunity to lead an "African" way of life. The second category is made up of wealthier and older tourists who are used to travelling in countries far from their home. Attracted by the historical and cultural heritage of Mali, they visit the Hombori Mountains or Dogon Country as part of a tourist circuit that starts in Bamako, Sévaré-Mopti, Ouagadougou or Gao, most often via a travel agency. Obviously, it is this type of visitor which is most interesting for local guides, as they guarantee important benefits for the people who hire jeeps, restaurants, antique dealers and other merchants. The expatriate also fits into this category.

10 In addition to these two categories, Hombori also attracts tourists who specialise in climbing sports or hiking tours advertised by the travel agencies. These visitors take the routes that are described in the specialised magazines and visit sites that can be reached with five to six hours of daily walking. The rock climbers and hikers have financial means that are intermediate between those of the other two categories. However, without any local equipment available for hire except in the town of Hombori, they do not bring much income to the people of the district. Unlike in Dogon Country, trekking has not yet contributed to the quantitative development of the tourist camps in the villages, or the growth of a handcraft industry designed for tourism.

11 Tourists still expect less from the destination of the Hombori Mountains than from Dogon Country, one of the most famous and exotic tourist destinations in West Africa. The ones who have gathered information on the region before arriving wish to see with their own eyes the key elements which caught their interest or from the more specialised books on climbing. They are especially interested in admiring the scenic aspects of the sites located high up in the mountains. From this point of view, the collective imagination of tourists is dominated by the natural characteristics of the mountains, for example their massive appearance, often compared to Monument Valley in the United States. Through limited contact with the local people, tourists enjoy the hospitality and the quality of human interaction, for which Mali is known across the world.

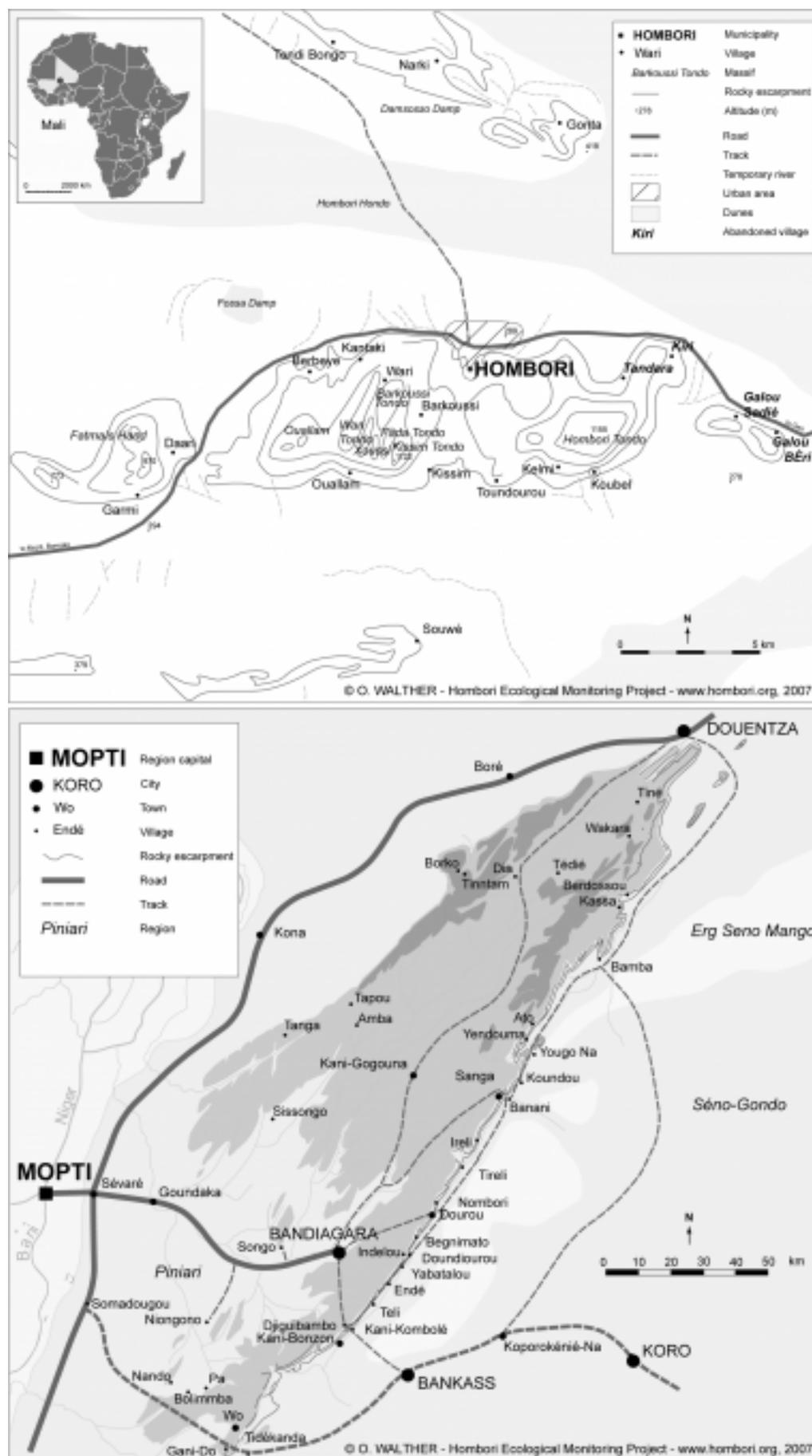
12 However, at both sites tourists sometimes have some disappointing experiences. The complaint that is most often heard is about children begging continually. This phenomenon is seen as a sign that tourism distorts the culture of the region. From an early age, children endlessly address tourists with the same insistent requests: "*Are you all right candies? Give*

*me your bottle*”. As a result, tourists go away feeling that they have been constantly pestered during their visit. Begging is therefore seen as a source of tension in the groups of visitors. The tourist guides are aware of this and recommend that nothing be given at random and that careful consideration is given as to who should receive a gift. They acknowledge that the current situation largely results from the low percentage of children in full-time primary education. At a national level, this was estimated at 45 % in 2002–2003 (UNDP, 2005), which means that children tend to follow tourists instead of going to school.

### Villages built to survive slavery raids

- 13 Hombori and Dogon Country are characterised by high cliffs and defensive settlements located on the sides of the mountains (Figure 2). Dogon inhabit both sites, although in the Hombori Mountains they cohabit with other populations such as Songhay, Fulbe and Tuareg. “Perched” houses (i.e. on the side of a cliff) were necessary to survive the nomad raids which occurred in pre-colonial times. The houses are generally compact and characterised by granaries housed in the body of the dwelling and small rooms that can include up to three floors. The general plan is conceived as a defensive maze in order to fight inside the houses, in the case of the Songhay, or to flee in the event of slavery raids in the Dogon villages (Huet, 1994).
- 14 Today, however, this is no longer required, which explains why some villagers have decided to move to the plain either temporarily or permanently (Petit, 1998; Thibaud, 2005). Studies from as early as the 1970s showed a direct relationship between the age of the villages and their inhabitants’ willingness to live high up on the sides of the mountains (Gallais, 1975). Migration to the plain is definitely linked to the stability brought by the colonial period (1899-1960), and also had important economic consequences as the productive systems were modified. The cultivated plots in very steep locations were gradually abandoned and people favoured cereal cultivation and some extensive livestock farming in the sandy plains. Between 1968 and 2005, four sites located on masses of fallen rocks from the piedmont plains (Galou Sadié, Galou Béri, Kiri and Tandara) were deserted on the east side of the Hombori Mountains. On the contrary, all the perched villages experience clear and positive demographical growth, especially in Garmi, Kantaki and Ouallam (Walther, 2006).

Figure 2 - The Hombori Mountains and the Dogon Country in Mali



Source : Walther, 2007

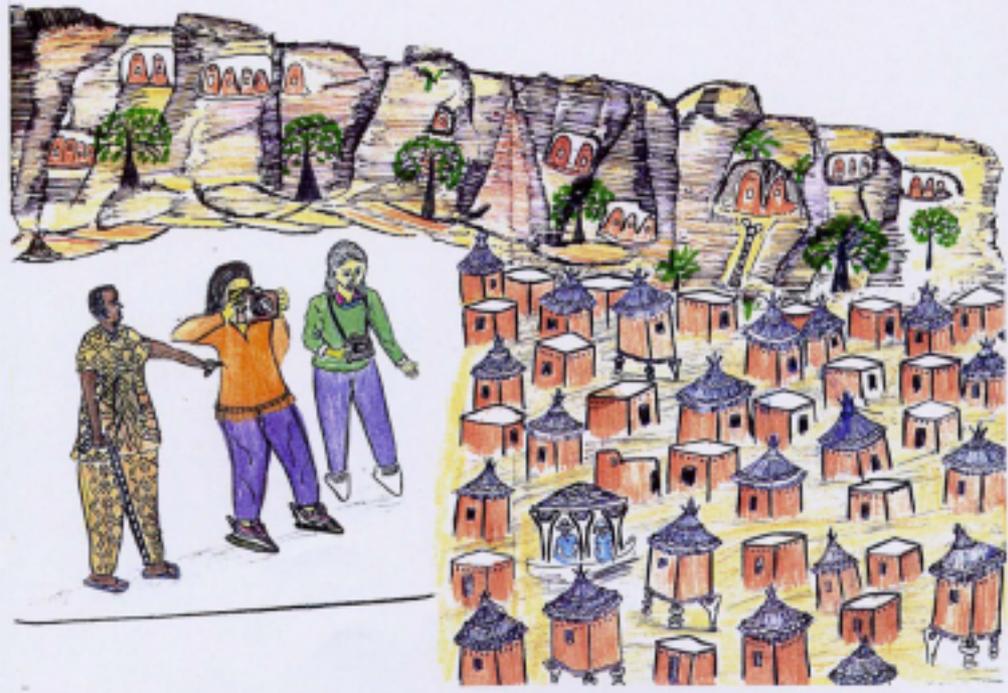
- 15 Migration toward the plain does not seem to be irreversible, despite the water supply difficulties and general climatic conditions. People living in the perched villages have been exceptionally tenacious, displaying a very intense historical and cultural attachment to their initial sites. A similar evolution can be observed in Dogon Country (Beek, Lemineur and Walther, 2007). From a tourist perspective, the perched sites are meaningful as they combine elements of culture, discovery and trekking that attract visitors.

## Building a tourist destination

- 16 Unlike the Hombori Mountains, the Dogon Country very early acquired an international reputation, thanks in particular to French anthropological literature, which created a myth around the supposed uniqueness of the Dogon culture. Furthermore, Dogon Country benefited from its classification to the World Heritage List by UNESCO on the basis of cultural and natural criteria.

## Dogon Country, a well-established tourist market area

- 17 The work of anthropologists has had important repercussions on tourism in Dogon Country and on the life cycle of this tourist destination. According to Butler's cycle of area evolution (1980), based upon the product cycle concept, tourist areas go through similar stages. Following the initial *exploration* period, during which a "discoverer" invests in an area that is as yet unknown in the geographical area from which he comes, there comes the *involvement* stage, during which a tourism system progressively develops. The number of tourists increases during the *development* and *consolidation* stages, but gradually growth begins to slow during the *stagnation* stage. The destination may decline or undergo rejuvenation with the help of man-made attractions or natural resources.
- 18 Obviously, Dogon Country is well into the development stage, characterised by a well-defined tourist market area, large facilities provided by external organisations and a deep-rooted image (Figure 3). Meanwhile, the Hombori Mountains are entering the involvement stage, in which some facilities are provided by local residents on a more regular basis during the tourist season. With reference to Butler's general scheme, the anthropologists of the 1930s can be considered as the discoverers of the present-day tourist destination. The extraordinary diversity of scientific references documenting Dogon Country has therefore indisputably played a role in supporting its subsequent developmental stages.
- 19 The work of French anthropologists, such as Marcel Griaule and Germaine Dieterlen, is a key factor in understanding the unequal development of tourism in the Hombori Mountains and Dogon Country (Ciarcia, 2003; Doquet, 1999). Building on books such as *Dieu d'Eau* (Griaule, 1948) and *Le Renard Pâle* (Griaule and Dieterlen, 1965), the most "traditional" references concerning the perched settlements still view the Dogon civilisation in the same way. Griaule was not the first European to discover the Dogon in the 1930s, but his work in *Dieu d'Eau* has contributed to a picture "in which the whole culture is understood through a deep and hidden Creation myth. As Griaule's publications have found a wide audience, tourists –at least those relying on the tourist guidebooks– come prepared with an image of a remote, mysterious and exotic society" (van Beek, 2003: 267). Even though criticism has been offered of Griaule's mytho-poetic work in *Dieu d'Eau* – particularly by van Beek (1991: 157), who argues that this literature was the result of "a complex interaction between a strong-willed researcher, a colonial situation, an intelligent and creative body of informants, and a culture with a courtesy bias and a strong tendency to incorporate foreign elements" – it is still considered as a guarantee of authenticity by travel agencies and local tourist guides.

**Figure 3 - A Dogon point of view on tourism**

Source : Original drawing from Amaga Saye, Tireli, 2001

20 Anthropological research did not abate as the number of tourists increased. On the contrary, continued research for over 70 years has allowed the destination to maintain its international status and attractiveness, which recently resulted in the listing of the Bandiagara Escarpment as a Natural/Cultural World Heritage Site by UNESCO. Several different programmes have been implemented in order to rehabilitate both natural and cultural heritages.

### Hombori, a tourist destination in its early stage

21 To date, tourism in the Hombori Mountains has been characterised by external investment. This means that the most active local players use their professional experience to their advantage, as well as utilising financial resources from outside the region. Still, they are very few in number. Indeed, less than thirty people in Hombori earn their living in whole or part from tourism. There are four official guides and four occasional ones, seventeen hotel owners and employees and a handful of craftspeople.

22 The local guides organise tours all over the Hombori Mountains. Moreover, depending on their personal expertise, they may operate tours over the whole territory. In the old city of Hombori, the guides offer trips that include a visit to the Fondikali pond, which played an important role in the foundation of the city. Another possible destination is Bonseigney, a site where sacrifices took place and where tourists can wander around craft shops and significant village places with interesting buildings such as the house of amulets (*gris-gris*) and the youth club. The visit generally lasts thirty to forty minutes. In the lower part of the city, the food and livestock markets that take place on Tuesdays remain the main places of interest. Nevertheless, some agencies prefer taking tourists to watch the sunset over the dunes some kilometres away to the northeast of the city.

23 The three hotel owners have been in competition for the last few years in Hombori. Even though tourists are offered more variety than in the surrounding area, the number of nights has not significantly increased (see Walther, 2006 for more details). This stagnation can be explained in part by the lack of specific advertising of the Hombori Mountains, in comparison to Dogon Country, which has been well known outside Mali for decades. Despite its

architectural qualities, old Hombori has neither tourist accommodation nor services. Instead, these are all located in the lower part of the city and can house twenty-five people. The sale of handicraft objects, hotel services and guiding activities obviously bring some seasonal income to the city of Hombori. However, in general, none of the other villages in the mountains has managed to develop services as attractive as those which made Dogon Country famous.

24 It is true that profits from tourism are not always a priority for the people living high up in the Hombori Mountains. Indeed, they have other urgent preoccupations such as access to water and employment. Homborians living in the least privileged areas of Wari or Barkoussi worry about adequate and regular access to water. Today, the villages in the mountains get their water from drilling in the plain and, depending on the season, from springs located in the masses of fallen rocks or in the cliffs. There is no micro dam that could guarantee a part of the water supply for the people or make it possible to grow irrigated crops, as in Dogon Country. Therefore, the water problem has to be a central issue in every project in the region. Indeed, it is by keeping people living in the perched sites that tourism can develop.

25 Keeping in mind the regional dimensions of tourism in Hombori, the current organisation could be improved by the creation of small and basic hotels in some of the villages (Kelmi, Toundourou, Kissim and Ouallam) which could provide three types of simple service: a refreshing drink, a hut or a terrace to sleep and some handicrafts. Evidence from Dogon Country shows that some individuals can play the role of pioneers, such as Christians, youngest sons of village chiefs and young or ambitious people returning from abroad. At the Bandiagara Escarpment, these categories of people progressively introduced specific services, made the effort to bring drinks to the villages and organised small camps around their house as well as handicraft shops. The question remains; whether the local financial capacity is great enough to support the investment linked to the diversification required by accommodation services in Hombori. It seems that this investment is possible because the costs of basic accommodation for tourists are low in the rural Sahel region. In Dogon Country, which is similar in terms of investment, most of the camps in the villages were opened with an extremely small amount of money. In this particular case, the hotels developed from family homes, to which were added other buildings that were more specialised for housing tourists.

26 In addition to these private activities, the development of tourism could benefit from the institutional decentralisation currently occurring in Mali. A strengthening of local capacities would doubtlessly help Hombori balance conservation and development.

### The decentralisation process

27 The beginning of the decentralisation process in Mali brings new perspectives to the tourism field. The municipalities provide a new space to think, discuss and act on local tourism within a legitimate consultation framework. Because of their small size, the municipalities are theoretically able to communicate information among the village leaders and individuals who are interested in tourist investment. Moreover these local authorities can develop infrastructure adapted to the visitors' needs and likely to generate benefits for the local populations.

28 However, as in other West African countries, municipalities face serious cash flow problems. In the Hombori Mountains, the tax collection rate is extremely low because people have become accustomed to not pay their legal contributions, especially after some bad years during which they were exempted from tax. In the present situation, the municipality is unable to conceive or support actions specifically linked to tourism. Being aware of this weakness, the people in charge of the community thought of instituting a tax on visitors who travel through the district in order to benefit from the tourism activity. They finally decided against the idea because the current cultural provision does not justify deducting taxes without a satisfactory compensation.

29 Even though the number of tourists increases when structures are organised in the city and new jobs created, the financial effects on the municipality will be almost zero because of the

absence of income tax, civil responsibilities and tax-free jobs. Therefore the only way to allow Hombori to benefit from the financial resources tourism brings is to link charges to the number of visits or to the number of bed nights. A possible way of guaranteeing stable income to the municipalities would be to set a tax for each night. At the present time, the tax on tourism, which is theoretically levied on each night by the state, is not profitable for the district and is not allocated in a transparent way. However, this tax could represent the main resource for the district in terms of tourism if the central government agreed to decentralise the allocation of these taxes to people in the local communities.

30 This long-term project could only be undertaken via close collaboration with the relevant formal and informal Malian institutions, as well as the international ones. It could also draw inspiration from achievements in Mali in the same field, such as the Rehabilitation and Conservation of Djenné's Architecture Project (1996 – 2003), the Maintenance of the Cultural Heritage in the Mali Project (2004 – 2007) and the Mission for the Documentation of the Architectural Typologies in Dogon Country (2001) which were implemented by the Netherlands and the Ministry of Culture in Mali (Bedaux, Diaby and Maas, 2003; Bedaux and Van der Waals, 2004). All these projects show that tourism in the sites is a potential development factor and, at the same time, also offer very practical solutions for the rehabilitation of the built heritage. In Hombori, this restoration would require taking into account both natural and cultural dimensions. In terms of biodiversity, international scientific acknowledgement of the importance of the mountains is necessary before the area can be developed. This first step should be followed by focused protection. In the case of the architectural heritage, it is the uniqueness of the sites located high in the mountains that should be emphasised, especially their inherited defensive character.

## Religious, political and ecological constraints

31 The development of tourism in Hombori faces obstacles of religious prohibitions applying to sacred places in the mountains, conflicting dynamics within local authorities, and ecological constraints.

### Sacred places and the development of tourism

32 Recent research shows that religious heritage provides an educational dimension likely to enrich tourist visits and preserve the vitality of cultural events (IUCN, 2008, Mallarach et Papayannis, 2007). Indeed, the example of Dogon Country shows that religious ceremonies (masked dances) have been a major tourist attraction that has been transformed to adapt to tourists' expectations (van Beek, 2001).

33 But tourism also faces the disapproval of some people who fear that this activity will damage the numerous sacred places located in the area. There is no doubt that specific religious practices took place in the mountains. Climbing the mountains has always had great social importance. It has been confirmed that people climbed the mountains to some extent in pre-colonial times. This custom also took place in the Fatma Hand's Mountains, where some peaks form an old climbing route similar to that of the Dogon at the Bandiagara Escarpment. The oral tradition recalls hunters trying to reach the top of the mountains to collect vultures' eggs, later used as decorations, as well as climbing attempts resulting from gambling. However, it seems that climbing has been strictly controlled for a long time because of many religious prohibitions that applied to these mountains. The adherents of the traditional religion were the most likely to be allowed to access the highest parts. That is why Mount Hombori, which provides shelter for the spirits protecting the surrounding villages, has a central religious role even if, since Islam became socially dominant in the Hombori Mountains (in about 1950), the frequency and intensity of animist celebrations that were directly linked to the mountains have decreased radically.

34 It is true that most of the sacred places are not spectacular and tourists often do not notice them as they are made of apparently ordinary stones. In Hombori as in Dogon Country, the prohibitions do not apply to the colour but more often to the gender and social status of people. For example, in some cases village chiefs and blacksmiths are not allowed to go to some places due to specific restrictions. In other cases, the prohibition is linked to the colour of the clothes a person is wearing. Every time that a forbidden place is defiled, most often not deliberately, the villagers have to decide how the harm can be repaired by the person responsible or by the guide who let the tourist wander too far. This always requires a sacrifice. From this point of view, the water points are particularly subject to taboos because they represent a rare resource likely to be soiled by material or symbolic actions. In order to avoid uninformed visitors walking in places they should not, tourists should be supervised by guides who are specifically trained and aware of the symbolic value of these places.

### Local political conflicts

35 Although detailed analysis of the full network of stakeholders is beyond the scope of this study, it is useful to note that political tensions are relatively high in the local communities in Hombori. Admittedly, the dynamics of conflict are not a specific characteristic of the Songhay people, but rather develop easily because of the insular nature of Hombori and their ancient tradition of resistance to many different types of adversaries. The issue of the chief group or the political power of the community remains central to the Songhay people. In the local context, the rivalries are usually among members of the families in the chief group itself, as well as from these members to others who would like to belong to the chief group.

36 In Hombori, conflicts between the current mayor, from the merchant class, and his predecessor, an aristocrat, are well known. Through his actions, the current leader wants to fight against the tradition developed by the previous mayor which says that only the son of a chief can rule. He is also trying to change the tradition which states that only an “intellectual” person can be the leader of the community. The mayor relies on the results of his recent election and his ability to persuade the voters. Thanks to this strategy, he gained the support of the ADEMA (Alliance Démocratique du Mali) advisers who had supported the previous leader.

37 These rivalries impact upon the dynamics of tourism development because they focus attention and resources on political and genealogical conflicts, thus diverting attention from socio-economic problems. As a result, many infrastructure projects have been abandoned or halted.

### Potential threat to the environment in Hombori

38 Negative impacts of human use on the environment have been widely studied (Cole *et al.*, 1987; Buckley and Pannell, 1990; Sun and Walsh, 1998, Duim van der and Caalders, 2002). These impacts on biodiversity can and do result from tourist visits, but many of them can be fully managed. Tourism, like many other forms of development, will always result in environmental impact, even at low levels of intensity and despite protection efforts (Eagle *et al.*, 2002). Because Mount Hombori is a biologically sensitive area, it is vital that the impacts of tourism be assessed as accurately as possible before tourism is intensified in these areas. Moreover, it is important to be aware that no environmental impact would have occurred to the mountain summit if the tourism industry were not present (the impact of other land use, such as agriculture, forestry or mining on the plateau, is irrelevant, as the site is too difficult to access).

39 In order to assess the environmental impact of tourism, it is convenient to categorise the environment in terms of current land use and then consider the negative impact and environmental risk from tourism. For the Hombori region, three distinct categories can be easily identified: the plains, the piedmont and the summit. A). Because cattle are bred and crops are grown here, the plains are subject to severe human impact in terms of biodiversity. B). The piedmont is much richer in terms of biological diversity because of its steep gradient. It

is subject to temporary human impact because of water abundance, but cattle are not bred there due to the difficulty of access. C). The summit is subject to no (or very little) human pressure. The following impacts of tourism development in the Hombori region are the most relevant: trail creation; campsites; litter; human waste problems; wildlife disturbance, habituation, or impact; impact on vegetation; damage to sand dunes; soil compaction or erosion; habitat loss; weeds, fungi and exotic species; firewood collection; increased fire risk; taking of souvenirs (flora, fauna, etc.); visual and noise impact. Thus, considering the current land use, tourism impact on the biodiversity of the plains is negligible compared to that of traditional human activities, while on the summit it is potentially high.

At present, tourism is mainly developing in the plains and thus has very little impact on the environment. However, the development of tourism is still in its early stages. As it becomes easier to reach the summit, the impact on the plateau is increasing from year to year, especially in terms of the collection of firewood, the increased fire risk, the human waste problem, and trail creation and deterioration and its impact on the vegetation. Moreover, weeds from the plains such as *Cenchrus biflorus* or *Aristida spp* are likely to be carried by tourists, and may affect the vegetation of Mount Hombori. Considering Hombori's uniqueness within the Sahel in terms of biological diversity, it seems necessary to rapidly establish a framework for its conservation and sustainable tourism management.

## Conclusion

Building on Butler's destination life cycle model (1980), we suggest that Dogon Country benefits from a considerable, long-term advantage in terms of image in comparison to the Hombori Mountains. This privileged position has led to its inclusion in the prestigious UNESCO World Heritage List. Therefore, current mountain tourists and the few local tourism entrepreneurs in Hombori can be considered as the trailblazers for this particular destination, whereas the pioneers of the Bandiagara Escarpment were the anthropologists who studied Dogon Country in the 1930s.

Because of the very specific and small clientele, tourism could be a great help if perched sites with simple housing infrastructure were built and could provide visitors with specific tourism services such as handicrafts or guided tours in the Hombori Mountains. This strategy could be a plausible one if access to water for the perched sites were improved with the help of a new hydraulic infrastructure. Even if current tourism resources are still limited by the number of visitors and the relatively modest reputation of Hombori compared to other attractive places in Mali, there is a large potential in this field, especially in terms of accommodation and peripheral services.

In order to build a tourism infrastructure, large financial resources are necessary, but neither the Hombori municipality nor the Malian central government can afford them. That is why this study suggests decentralising the tourism tax revenues to the local authorities. In the very short term, the income derived from tourism activities would strengthen the position of the Hombori municipality and reinforce the tourism potential of the villages in the mountains. This study shows that local support is necessary to strengthen capacity. Managing tourist operations requires skills both in terms of services provided by private firms, such as catering and hotel businesses, and collective management and redistribution of benefits resulting from tourist activities involving the community as a whole.

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## Notes

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***Résumé / Abstract***

## Le Paradis sur Terre ? Le développement du tourisme au Pays Dogon et dans les Monts Hombori (Mali)

Cet article étudie le développement touristique inégal de deux destinations touristiques du Mali: le Pays Dogon, un must du marché touristique ouest-africain, et les Monts Hombori, considérés comme un « paradis sur Terre » en raison de leur exceptionnelle biodiversité. En s'appuyant sur les travaux de Butler (1980), nos travaux suggèrent que ces lieux touristiques se situent à des stades très différents de leur cycle de vie touristique. Au Pays Dogon, l'intérêt constant manifesté par les anthropologues depuis les années 1930 a conduit au classement du site au Patrimoine de l'Humanité. Rien de tel à Hombori, où les amateurs de tourisme de montagne contemporains peuvent être considérés comme les pionniers de cette destination.

**Mots clés :** Pays Dogon, Monts Hombori, biodiversité, Mali, tourisme

This paper studies the unequal development of two tourist destinations in Mali: Dogon Country, a well-established tourist market area, and the Hombori Mountains, considered as a kind of “heaven on earth” due to their preserved biological biodiversity. Building on Butler's destination life cycle model (1980), our research suggests Dogon Country benefits from a considerable, long-term advantage in terms of image, which has led to its inclusion within UNESCO's World Heritage List. The situation is totally different in the Hombori Mountains where current mountain tourists can be considered as the trailblazers for this particular destination.

**Keywords :** Hombori, biodiversity, Dogon Country, Mali, tourism