

African Architectural Practices (Johannesburg, 3–9 Jul 24)

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa, Jul 3–09, 2024

Deadline: Mar 21, 2024

Eva Branscome

African architecture: Ongoing and Emerging Discourses on African Architectural Practices.

Joint Bartlett and Wits University conference run by Campus Innovation Laboratory (CIL) and The South African Chair in Spatial Analysis & City Planning, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. In collaboration with The Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London, and The African Architectural & Urban History Network (AFRAUHN).

Alongside Professor Nnamdi Elleh of the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, the Bartlett's Professor Murray Fraser and Professor Eva Branscome are co-organising a major international conference titled Ongoing and Emerging Discourses on African Architectural Practices.

Recognizing that discourses about African architecture and urban planning are more complex than the bifurcated 'traditional'/'colonial' or 'African'/'Western' models which tend to dominate current research, writing, environmental design and spatial design practices in the continent, this conference welcomes contributions that critically examine the status quo(s) of these disciplines, be that in terms of academic, practice, national or regulatory institutions, or as imagined by policy-makers through forms of urban development that are then disseminated to the public.

The conference is also part of a continuing initiative by the African Architectural and Urban History Network (AFRAUHN), of which Professor Fraser is a founder-member. AFRAUHN has been set up to promote, support, develop and disseminate high-quality research about the architectural and urban history of the African continent and its diaspora.

The conference will start off the evening before with an introductory discussion about the newly founded African Architectural and Urban History Network (AFRAUHN) in a roundtable format. The main conference itself will then be arranged around four themes – EDUCATION AND RESEARCH, GLOBALISING FORCES, TRANSFORMING PRACTICES, ENVIRONMENTAL INNOVATIONS – each of them including a range of topics that are organized into the separate panels outlined below.

Titles, Abstracts & Venues:

We invite abstracts of a minimum of 300 words and maximum of 500 words for this major collaborative conference that will be hosted at the University of Witwatersrand's Campus and at the Rural Facilities in the vicinity of the world-known Kruger Park.

Since the conference will be held both at WITS Johannesburg Campus, and at the Rural Facility,

space is limited (max of 60 persons). Participants should submit titles and abstracts to <https://form.jotform.com/applications.soap/cil2024Conference> by Thursday 21st March, with confirmed participation by 4th April. Please select the link for the theme of the conference you are responding to. A maximum of two example images can also be included in the submitted document but it must be sent as a single file in Adobe PDF format. Also, please include correct email address where you can be reached by the Scientific Committee. Submissions that fail to comply with the required format will not be accepted. The Scientific Committee will assess each submission anonymously. Queries can be sent to CIL2024conference.soap@wits.ac.za. Registration and the auxiliary information portal will open on Thursday 28th March.

Excursion en route to Wits Rural Facility:

Travel by coach from Johannesburg to the WITS Rural Facility (WRF) takes about 6 hours; there will be a brief excursion to the Iziko Museum to view the Lydenburg Heads (sculptures which date to about 500AD).

Attendance and Funding:

In order to support African scholarship, we have funds on offer to pay for air travel/full-board accommodation for a few of the speakers who are accepted from countries on the African continent outside South Africa, as well as for travel/full-board accommodation for some speakers from within South Africa. This funding is being provided through collaboration between Wits University, Campus Innovation Laboratory (CIL), South African Chair in Spatial Analysis & City Planning, WITS University, University College London, and the African Architectural and Urban History Network (AFRAUHN). As however the funding is limited, those from the continent who are proposing papers should indicate if they wish to be considered for financial support and tell us where they will be travelling from. These funds will be allocated on the basis of creating the widest possible geographical and cultural spread among the speakers.

Otherwise, we encourage all conference participants (speakers or attendees) to arrange for their funding via their respective academic or professional institutions.

Schedule and Sessions:

3rd July 2024, Wits University, John Moffat Building.

Pre-conference lecture: African Architectural and Urban History Network (AFRAUHN).

Prof Ikem Okoye

The African Architectural and Urban History Network (AFRAUHN) aims to promote, support, develop and disseminate high-quality research about the architectural and urban history of the African continent and its diaspora.

AFRAUHN is an open, inclusive, and comprehensive research network for architects and scholars. AFRAUHN offers a shared platform that aims to promote, support, develop and disseminate high-quality research about the architectural and urban history of the African continent and the African diaspora, including studying the links to cultural practices, socio-economic conditions, material traditions, building techniques, environmental factors, gender/identity politics, and such like. To achieve these aims, it will work alongside all existing bodies to increase the quality, breadth, and significance of research in the subject area. This lecture will be followed by a roundtable discussion about its aims and objectives.

Respondents + Q&A session:

Prof Nnamdi Elleh, Prof Murray Fraser, Prof Ola Uduku + other AFRAUHN members

4th July 2024:

Coaches to take conference participants/attendees to the WITS Rural Facility in the Eastern Cape (cost included within the conference fee), which is approximately a 6-hour drive from Johannesburg.

5th July 2024: Conference Day 1 at the Wits Rural Facility

Breakfast: 06:00-06:30

Game tour: 06:30-09:30 (Optional)

Tea break: 09:30-10:00

1. Education and Research

1a: 10:00-12:00

The Lost Spaces and Material Cultures of Africa [4 papers x 20 minutes each]

Dr. Irene Appeaning Addo + Prof Julia Gallagher

It is widely known that Africans and peoples in the 'East' (a region typically defined as including the 'Middle East, China and India'), and also African and those in the 'West', have long engaged in trade and cultural exchanges that were also manifested through architecture and art. While such exchanges can be seen as enriching architecturally and culturally, they have also had a major impact on the way in which the production of Africa's built environment in the modern era is continually situated as having originated from elsewhere outside the continent. How, then, might we rethink these ancient links among global cultures without reducing the contemporary African architectural experience to simply being the receptor of external ideas of modernity? What kind of lost or ignored spaces and practices in Africa should we be re-examining to create a broader and more balanced account? This session therefore welcomes papers that examine how 'African', 'Eastern', and 'Western' cultures interacted and produced spatial manifestations which are still extant and/or being practiced within present-day cultures on the continent, and which hence help us to understand better Africa's own significant contributions to modernity.

Lunch: 12:00-13:00

1b: 13:00-15:00

Decolonizing African Modern Architectural Epistememes [4 papers x 20 minutes each]

Prof Hilton Judin

The main question to be examined in this session is whether there can be other intellectual registers through which to frame and understand modern-day African architecture and planning, beyond the paradigms of European colonialism and then independence? To date the histories written about modern architecture in Africa are framed in this manner, even though we know that by the late-1400s Africans and Europeans were already engaged in manifold exchanges – material or otherwise – which included architectural influences, even if it was then still largely limited to the coastal areas of the continent. This attribution of African modern architecture always to factors from the colonial era thus negates the important exchanges between Europeans and Africans in the Early Modern period, including during the Italian Renaissance. How can we rethink conceptions about the emergence of modern architecture and planning in Africa to help decolonize knowledge in these fields?

Tea break: 15:00-15:30

1c: 15:30-17:30

African Architectural and Planning Scholarship within the Global Context – A workshop for emerging scholars

Prof Murray Fraser

Critical studies of architectural design, education, practice and production have been written for many years in all global regions. Yet with the recent proliferation, indeed explosion, of new avenues for information/data flows – largely due to the internet – how does this affect those who are writing about historical and contemporary architecture and urban planning in Africa and its diasporas? Who should be producing these accounts, and how should they be being conceived in relation to broader surveys of historical and current practice? While it is vital to encourage students and scholars to learn more about their own heritage, it also remains paramount for them to know about other parts of the world too. This workshop draws upon lessons such as compiling the two-volume Sir Banister Fletcher's Global History of Architecture (2020) to discuss new processes and techniques for thinking about how to engage with and write global architectural and planning history from an African perspective.

Dinner: 18:30-19:30

19:30-21:00 Keynote lecture:

Contributions of African-American and African Architects in the Diaspora to Architectural Discourses

Prof Marshall Brown

This lecture will examine the contributions made by African-American and African architects in the wider diaspora to modern and contemporary discourses about architecture at a global level. What were the interactions and exchanges between these African-American and diasporic African architects with those who were working in countries in the African continent? How might such connections be developed and consolidated for present and future collaborations that can enrich architectural and cultural practices in Africa?

Respondents and Q&A session:

Prof William Williams, Jack Travis, Dr Itohan Osayimwese

6th July 2024: Conference Day 2 at the Wits Rural Facility

Breakfast: 06:00-06:30

Game tour: 06:30-09:30 (Optional)

Tea break: 09:30-10:00

2. Globalising Forces

2a: 10:00-12:00

Constructing Coloniality: Building the Architectural Knowledge Gaps among Africans and Africans in the Diaspora [4 papers x 20 minutes each]

Dr Neal Shasore

We are all familiar with studies of African art, and of the arts produced by Africans living in North American and the wider diaspora. However, parallel studies about the production and exchange of ideas about African architecture, or indeed the buildings produced by Africans in the diaspora, remain far scarcer. Moreover, whereas by now many Africans have been educated in architectural and planning courses in Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), rarely do we find discourse about this topic. How might these knowledge gaps be remedied, made more current, and

then sustained as an aspect of cultural heritage in the academy, the profession and popular culture? We welcome papers that explore these longstanding transnational connections, seen across multiple spheres of art and life, yet which are still unknown or underdeveloped within the fields of architecture and planning.

Lunch: 12:00-13:00

2b: 13:00-15:00

Constructing Coloniality: Heritage, Memorialization and the African Built Environment [4 papers x 20 minutes each]

Prof Eva Branscome

Our built environment is never coincidental and as such it continually reasserts existing power imbalances. We need to be aware of this. At the same time architecture, monuments and urban spaces also embody our collective memories as material history. Buildings are important as individual structures, but also as clusters which interact with the spaces in between. All host shared interactions and act as stages for society to take place. This session seeks to reassess the architecture which remains from British, Dutch, French, Portuguese, German and Spanish colonialism on the African continent, as well as in the settlements of the African diaspora more globally, for their agency in the past that can act as quasi-Trojan horses for today's existing inequalities.

Tea break: 15:00-15:30

2c: 15:30-17:30

Constructing Coloniality: Infrastructures of Imperialism and the African Built Environment [4 papers x 20 minutes each]

Dr Tsepang Leuta

For the past decade the renaming of roads has become a strategy across those nations bound together by troubling legacies of European imperialism and the transatlantic slave trade. Arguably, road names are among the most tenacious devices imposed to structure and orient human dis-/connectivity, and changing them can evoke both a feeling of empowerment and disorientation. But roads and the association with those in power are not the only infrastructures of persistent coloniality. This session seeks to explore other networks of connectivity, such as railway systems, shipping terminals and airfields, and also schools and religious institutions, to dislodge how they have functioned as devices of racial stratification.

Dinner: 18:30-19:30

19:30-21:00 Keynote lecture:

Collecting, Archiving and Documenting African Architectural Production

Prof Amira Osman

Government archives, university libraries, Public Works Department files and architects' archives are the best-known locations for finding written resources about African architecture. However, these locations are also scarce and often not even accessible. This lecture will discuss the experiences and methods for collecting, archiving and documenting African architectural research, looking also at the potential offered by the study of professional journals from the continent and other kinds of associated publications.

7th July 2024: Conference Day 3 at the Wits Rural Facility

Breakfast: 06:00-06:30

Game tour: 06:30-09:30 (Optional)

Tea break: 09:30-10:00

3. Transforming Practice

3a: 10:00-12:00

Black Women Architects [4 papers x 20 minutes each]

Associate Prof Philippa Tumubweinee

When we speak about African architecture, the spaces of practice remain those of male architects – often those from Europe, or in recent years, Chinese companies. The reality however is that Black female architects have long been contributing to architectural practice, they have agency, yet the contributions they make are generally never heard and recognized. They contribute across diverse professional practice spectrums including in design, critical studies, lecturing, and in curating exhibitions. This session welcomes papers about Black women architects from the continent or in the diaspora which explore their voices and contributions to the discourses about the production of architecture and the built environment.

Lunch: 12:00-13:00

3b: 13:00-15:00

The Historiography of Architectural and Planning Education in Africa [4 papers x 20 minutes each]

Prof Nnamdi Elleh + Prof Phil Harrison

This session is interested in collaborative learning about the aims, histories and indeed historiographies of the established centres for architectural and planning education across the African continent. This kind of foundational knowledge is crucial as otherwise projects of architecture and urbanization in contemporary Africa are typically attributed entirely to factors relating to European colonization. Instead, we welcome more diverse accounts about schools of architecture and planning in Africa from the colonial times to the present day. Who founded these schools? What were their missions, and how have they fared over the years? How can we take advantage of these institutional histories today to help expand the network of architects and planners on the African continent?

Tea break: 15:00-15:30

3c: 15:30 – 17:30

Aligning the Architectural Curriculum with Innovation and Industry [4 papers x 20 minutes each]

Garret Gantner + Heather Dodd

In South Africa, students go out to work in the profession/industry before returning to the fourth year of their Bachelor's degree in Architectural Studies (BAS Honours) and then take the Master of Architecture degree. The aim is for students to gain experience prior to these final two years of their architectural education, part of the long period it takes to educate an architect and for them to develop levels of competency. However, the important changes in technology which are driving the field are not coming from architecture but from engineering and allied building industries.

Consequently, people in the architectural profession find themselves in need of catching up with these developments. How can architecture remain a leading profession in the built environment field while it is always catching up with emerging technologies? What role does architectural education play in educating architects of the present and future to learn about and support changes in the industry? We invite papers which interrogate professional architectural practice and the sta-

tus of architectural education in African countries along lines which can encourage technological innovation while still minding the atelier-based traditions in which students hone their skills and grow into architects.

Dinner: 18:30-19:30

19:30-21:00 Keynote lecture:

Bringing Planning into the Discussion: Promises, Disappointment and Pathways Forward

Prof Philip Harrison

Discussions on architecture cannot take place in a vacuum and must always refer to the contexts of politics, governance and planning. This lecture will thus direct specific attention to a troubling trajectory of urban planning in post-apartheid South Africa.

Planning after apartheid brought the promise of spatial transformation and of integrated development. A raft of new laws, policies, programmes, and planning instruments were introduced to give effect to these promises. However, in undertaking research for a book on planning since 2008, jointly authored with Alison Todes, we encountered a pervasive sense of let-down, frustration, and even despondency among planners in South Africa. This is even though internationally, as well as in South Africa, the period from 2008 has seen positive developments surrounding planning such as the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 and the New Urban Agenda in 2016. In South Africa, there has also been new legislation such as the Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act of 2013, plans and policies which including the National Development Plan, the Integrated Urban Development Framework, and District Development Model (DDM), and also promises of smart new cities. This left a paradox that requires explanation. Why then is there this sense of disappointment when the period since 2008 has seen significant advances in the systems and status of planning in South Africa and globally?

8th July 2024: Conference Day 4 at the Wits Rural Facility

Breakfast: 06:00-06:30

Game tour: 06:30-09:30 (Optional)

Tea break: 09:30-10:00

4. Environmental Innovations and Transformations

4a: 10:00-12:00

Smart Cities and Artificial Intelligence in the African Context [4 papers x 20 minutes each]

Geci Karuri-Sabena

The concept of Smart Cities seems novel and intriguing to architectural educators, students and policy-makers alike. The unanimous understanding is that a lot of technical and social knowledge needs to be learned and put in place before coordinated smart cities can work safely. In many African countries there are reports of 'New Smart Cities' which are intended to be built. For instance, in South Africa in two consecutive State of the Nation addresses in 2020 and 2021, President Cyril Ramaphosa referred to Smart Cities that would be built in major urban regions such as Gauteng. Other African countries, such as Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana and Nigeria, are discussing similar proposals and implementing initiatives for Smart Cities – often in relation to existing urban centres. What is interesting is that most of these proposals are accompanied by computer-rendered images of 'super glitzy' buildings and elevated electric public train systems which showcase the

notion of Smart Cities being based on movement at high speed. Besides, the application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) machines for problem-solving or for design seems to make these visions of Smart Cities achievable realities. Some also propose that AI can be a tool to retrieve and rehabilitate previously forgotten or repressed cultural systems into contemporary African culture. How might Smart Cities be facilitated by the growth in Artificial Intelligence machines, and what steps should we be taking to develop such cities as part of contemporary practices? We welcome papers which engage with the promises and challenges of Smart Cities and the linked cultural role of AI technology.

Lunch: 12:00-13:00

4b: 13:00-15:00

Traditional, Modern and Contemporary Architectural Production and the Alienation of Africans from Urban Space [4 papers x 20 minutes each]

Prof Stefan Winter

Urban space is where the rapidly changing traditions in the lived experiences of Africans are being manifested in different media: art, dance, film, music, commerce and other ways of life, all often captured through graffiti and different visual representations. These modes of representation in built urban environments constitute an urban scripting of cultural memories. However, these inscribed memories often have little roots because the discourses on African architectural productions are engaged along two diametrically and artificially opposed traditions: indigenous and colonial structures, envisaged as distinct categories.

This dualistic classification of African architecture is based upon the premise that any structure built with industrially manufactured materials is either an imitation of the Western tradition or indeed a Western construction, and through that claim, Africans are alienated from their cities and from modernity as projects of European/North American ownership and dissemination. This session welcomes papers that interrogate the received concepts of African modern architecture and its cities as primarily Western contributions to the continent, and which instead propose alternative readings which discuss African agency within such processes.

Tea break: 15:00-15:30

4c: 15:30-17:30

Spatial and Urban Design Implications of Historical African Universities [4 papers x 20 minutes each]

Dr Ludwig Hansen + Jenna Stelli

Shortly after many African countries achieved independence in the 1960s, universities were established in the outskirts of the cities on large landscaped sites to provide room for growth. Unfortunately, the distances that were involved isolated these campuses and made them 'ivory towers' with little connection to their nearby cities. This isolation was not just physical and measurable according to distance, but also in terms of a lack of engagement with the wider society. Moreover, connections with the commercial and cultural experiences of the local communities that the universities were supposed to educate were limited. Even in cases where the cities have grown and encircled the university, the idea of keeping lecturers and students away from the public influences associated with urban vibrancy and complexity has increased cultural and political alienation between the academy and society. This session calls for papers that engage with the historical origins of African universities within their host urban communities from colonial through to post-colonial times. What types of relationships might be re-envisioned that would mutually bene-

fit these universities and their host communities today?

Dinner: 18:30-19:30

9th July 2024: OPTIONAL

Conference participants/attendees can either choose to take coaches back to Johannesburg (cost included within the conference fee) or else visit the nearby Kruger National Park (as an additional cost item).

<https://www.wits.ac.za/media/wits-university/faculties-and-schools/-engineering-and-the-built-environment/architecture-and-planning/documents/call-for-papers-cil-conference.pdf>

Reference:

CFP: African Architectural Practices (Johannesburg, 3-9 Jul 24). In: ArtHist.net, Mar 16, 2024 (accessed Apr 9, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/41443>>.