

The Politics of Architecture in Africa
Workshop at the Johannesburg Institute for Advanced Study (JIAS)
organised in collaboration with the Department of Politics and International Studies, SOAS
University of London and the Graduate School of Architecture, University of Johannesburg

Call for papers

Why the 'politics' of architecture?

Architecture is possibly the most political of all the arts. Particularly within a civic and public sense, it usually requires large capital investment and is thus predominantly commissioned by political and cultural elites. Architecture defines the landscapes of our daily activities, giving a face to our political institutions, and measuring out the quality of our facilities, services and houses. More than any other art, it is linked to the material realm of politics, illustrating and shaping wealth distribution and access to power. But it also carries collective symbolic meaning, defining the public sphere, embodying history, mediating, narrating and shaping collective experience.

Architecture is therefore politically important. For historians and researchers, it provides a rich landscape within which to explore political and social organisation and meaning. Archives and newspaper accounts of building planning and execution expose the interests, arguments and constraints involved in determining resource allocation and political priorities. Looking at specific buildings – where they sit, their aesthetics – tells us about the history of the community and the ways in which values and ideas are expressed. And talking to citizens about those buildings reveals the various ways people engage with authority and with each other, allowing us to better understand common and sometimes contradictory understandings of cultural and social identities.

This workshop will exploit the rich potential architecture offers to the study of politics across Africa. The aim is to establish cross-disciplinary discussions, using a variety of examples and perspectives. We welcome scholars from any discipline to submit paper proposals and we aim to create as wide a geographical range as we can.

Background

The workshop is organised by the Department of Politics at SOAS and the Graduate School of Architecture at University of Johannesburg.



It is funded by the European Research Council-funded project Understanding Statehood through Architecture: a comparative study of Africa's state buildings, headed by Prof Julia Gallagher and the Johannesburg Institute of Advanced Studies, UJ.

The rationale for holding the workshop is to create broader networks of ideas and scholars working on architecture and politics across the continent. Johannesburg, at the heart of some of the continent's most exciting architectural innovation, is a natural place to do it.

For information on the ASA project, see www.africanstatearchitecture.co.uk

For information on Graduate School of Architecture, see www.gsa.ac.za

Logistics

The workshop will take place over one week, 1-8 December 2019, and involve 15-20 scholars.

Papers might focus on a particular building, type of building or setting; they may take aesthetic, historical, economic or social angles; and deal with empirical, theoretical, literary or methodological questions.

We would expect participants to have a full draft of a paper in advance of the workshop, and to circulate them to enrich discussion during the week. In addition to discussion, there will be periods of time devoted to editing and developing papers.

We would like to publish a collection of the best submissions as a book. Jacqueline Mitchell, the commissioning editor from James Currey has expressed interest.

Accommodation and catering costs will be met in full, and there will be some travel bursaries.

Submitting your paper

Please send a 250-word abstract and short CV to asaproject@soas.ac.uk by Friday 29 March. Please use the subject heading 'Johannesburg workshop'.

Julia Gallagher, SOAS University of London
Lesley Lokko, University of Johannesburg
February 2019

