



# Exploring the Future of African Landscape Architecture at UJ



In April 2025, the University of Johannesburg (UJ) participated in the transformative conference “African Landscape Architectures: Alternative Futures for the Field,” hosted by Harvard Graduate School of Design. The event gathered global scholars, practitioners, and artists to discuss the evolving role of landscape architecture in Africa, emphasizing culturally grounded approaches shaped by the continent’s diverse ecosystems and histories.

A key highlight was Dr. Finzi Saidi, a distinguished faculty member at UJ's Faculty of Art, Design, and Architecture. Known for his pioneering work in African landscape architecture, Dr. Saidi’s contributions focused on context-specific designs for post-colonial African societies. His innovative approaches at UJ’s Graduate School of Architecture, particularly with Unit 15x, address Africa's dynamic ecological and cultural landscapes.

The conference, organized by Gareth Doherty (DDes ’10), emphasized developing socially relevant, climate-resilient urban spaces for Africa’s rapidly growing and youthful population. Discussions centered on decolonizing landscape architecture, advocating for an African-centric approach that embraces local knowledge, cultural values, and spirituality in design.

Dr. Saidi was instrumental in discussions around developing an African landscape architecture curriculum, aiming to reflect the continent’s unique challenges and opportunities. His work with Unit 15x plays a vital role in shaping future academic directions, ensuring students are prepared to tackle Africa's environmental and social issues.

The conference also showcased innovative projects, including the Kounkuey Design Initiative's community-driven spaces in Nairobi’s Kibera slum, which integrate green spaces with facilities for social and economic activities. These projects are now influencing global design practices.

Spirituality’s role in landscape design was explored by figures such as Princess Adedoyin Talabi Faniyi and Professor Jacob Olupona. Their discussions highlighted the importance of sacred landscapes and the potential for landscape architecture that honors both ecological sustainability and spiritual well-being.

As climate change and urbanization pressures mount, the conference called for a pluralistic approach to landscape architecture, drawing from diverse perspectives to create environments that reflect Africa’s cultural and ecological identity.

At UJ, Dr. Saidi’s influence continues to shape the next generation of landscape architects, promoting socially responsible, culturally aware design practices that align with Africa’s future.