

CLOSING SPEECH AND CONGRESS DECLARATION BY THE UIA 2014 DURBAN GENERAL REPORTER

The UIA 2014 Congress title, ARCHITECTURE OTHERWHERE, has been interpreted, re-interpreted, adopted and adapted; it has triggered people's imagination and has translated into OTHERthinking and OTHERpractice. It has generated responses from numerous people and has influenced our vocabulary and how we look at OTHERplaces and OTHERcommunities. OTHERWHERE became an invitation, not only to invent new words, but also encouraged us to invent a new way to engage in meaningful professional conversations.

Over the last few days, we have welcomed you to this debate...

An introduction

As General Reporter, it is my hope that I have succeeded in reflecting the thinking and intentions of the Scientific Committee – a group of people that have inspired and offered a sense of direction for the event. I have been collaborating closely with, and constantly advised by, the core members of the committee: Hilton Judin, Mokena Makeka and Mphethi Morojele.

My name is Amira Omer Siddig Osman. I am Sudanese. I am South African. I am a product of Khartoum University. I have been influenced greatly by the IHS Rotterdam where I became introduced to approaches in design and teaching that still leave their mark on me. I later also became greatly influenced by my 11.5 years at the University of Pretoria where I was inspired by my mentors: Prof Schalk le Roux, Roger Fisher and my PhD supervisor Prof Karel Bakker.

I have attended numerous conferences in my career. I have organised quite a few. UIA 2014 was an opportunity to synthesise all of my conference-going and conference-organising knowledge but also to introduce some of the concepts that I was interested in and to partner with some of the research groups/topics that I was passionate about.

At least one programme partner coordinator – Prof Stephen Kendall from the USA – has stated that he has generally avoided UIA congresses. There seems to have been a perception that UIA mostly celebrates star architecture. This particular group have been integral to the UIA 2014 event and the conceptualising of the programme. Not only that, but in one session I attended, the City of Durban were engaging with the topic of Open Building. This was most exciting to see.

Some partnerships worked really well. Others did not. But in general the approach has enriched the programme and added relevance and depth to the content.

The main programme provided inspiration for the development of the Congress themes in a very deliberate manner through the statements by the South African hosts and the selection of keynote speakers. The afternoon keynote panel debates were intended to offer reflections on informal markets, public space and African practice.

We have heard various voices through these activities and also through people that have approached me directly and asked for the Congress to reflect their sentiments. I would like to mention a few:



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- We hear your plea Money Govendar – a vegetable trader at the early morning market in Warwick – for architects to partner with you against the building of a Mall at Warwick and the inevitable destruction of small-scale businesses and livelihoods.
- We hear you Ma Dhlamini – a trader at the Warwick muti market – when you ask us to help you lobby the city for better service delivery at Warwick.
- We hear you Jonathan Edkins (City Architects Durban) when you call for a return to Area Based Management and a slower, consultative process.
- We hear you Mohi el Din from the Eastern Cape when you ask us to use the opportunity of over 4200 delegates from 102 countries to recognise global human suffering.
- We hear you Yasmin Shareef from London when you ask us – as architects – to “help us help humanity”.
- We also hear you Nadia Meer when you ask us to reflect on human rights – and inherent principles – through your interactive art installation on Walnut Road and the DEC.
- We hear you Manelis when you reflect on your past and a possible future and when you grapple with the theme of “otherwhere” and what it might mean for someone outside of the architectural profession – challenging us to engage with your art.

We have not been able to avoid the difficult topics!

“We cannot be on the wrong side of history.... Or prevent history from being made at our congress...” Mokena Makeka

In the build up to the event, and in the event itself, we have been challenged by various topics.

The first being to reflect on the principles of "universal design" – and there has been disagreement among our fraternity as to how this matter needs to be addressed.

This in itself has meant that we are far from consensus as to how “access” needs to be factored into design. This topic needs further deliberation until we might achieve an understanding that universal design is beneficial to all segments of society and not just people with special needs:

- we all have "special needs" at some point or the other in our lives – temporary or permanent
- it therefore makes sense to adopt universal design as an approach in all buildings and at all times

Secondly, we became aware that this event had a role to play with regards to global and topical issues.

“We must make the platform and actors must make their noise” Mokena Makeka

In this event, we have offered ALL an equal opportunity to present at the congress, either through a specific request for a presentation slot or through the academic paper process. The academic paper process was strictly double blind peer review process which we defended strongly to ensure anonymity and fairness. The integrity of this process was important.

Where relevant and possible, I have encouraged debate and invited those involved in similar topics and/or from similar backgrounds to be involved in joint sessions. This has been my consistent approach throughout where I have combined sessions with similar concerns/themes or we have slotted them one after the other to harness potential synergies.

We have embraced and included differing viewpoints at the event. I have personally made sure that all voices are heard.



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Hilton Judin, in the opening session of the Congress, started off by saying **“Architecture is political”**. (He is also quick to state: “architecture is also many other things”).

In South Africa, with its Apartheid past, we are critically aware of the power of the built environment to segregate and disadvantage. There has been a strong voice in this Congress that has stated that we must speak up on how architecture and architects are sometimes complicit in spatial and built environment practice that disempowers, humilates, restricts opportunities, destroys livelihoods, damages eco-systems and disrupts economic networks.

We simply cannot avoid the Israeli/Palestinian issue. (The Palestinian presenter was not able to come to present her talk. But her presentation was available for the audience to see).

“We would hope that the South African experience will inspire not only the Middle East but all other regions in conflict.”
Mphethi Morojele

We cannot avoid acknowledging that the built environment professions may sometimes deepen conflict and reinforce divisions. We – in the context of South Africa’s political history and landscape – understand that architecture and space have incredible power which may be harnessed in positive or negative ways.

Thirdly, we have been criticized for not having enough representation of women in the keynotes and as South African hosts. My reply to this is first to acknowledge it, yet also to emphasise the role that women had in the conceptualising, development and implementing the vision for this event. Without dismissing the important contribution of our male counterparts, this event was mostly “carried” by women, both intellectually and practically. We hope this might make up for the fact that we only had one female speaker!

UIA 2014 Durban Congress Declaration

ARCHITECTURE OTHERWHERE has aimed to discover the “in-between”, the interface, this space where OTHER methods/systems of practice exist.

UIA 2014 DURBAN has suggested the creation of environments that are equitable, beautiful and engaging; environments that do not discriminate, that are accessible and that offer equal opportunity.

UIA 2014 DURBAN has suggested new professional guidelines for interventions in the built environment, new systems, methods and technologies and how to achieve relevance and maximum impact.

UIA 2014 DURBAN has presented you with a rich and diverse programme that has aimed to re-assess professional values, professional engagement and the interrogation the ethics associated with architectural and design practice.

UIA 2014 Durban has been – and will continue to be – a catalyst for transformation in our methods of practice as well as spatially – in our cities.

UIA 2014 Durban calls for the restructuring of the relationship between the architectural community and its regulatory and voluntary bodies towards the achievement of transformation – thus greater representation – in the profession.

UIA 2014 DURBAN has suggested that solutions, new approaches and sustainable practice could be learnt from the African continent as well as alternative forms of engagement and decision-making.

UIA 2014 DURBAN acknowledges that the spatial realities of the country and its cities pose a real threat to progress and equity.



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UIA 2014 DURBAN has re-enforced dialogue with other designers, built environment professionals and communities and has acknowledged that Innovation exists at the interface between different professions and also an understanding that real change in the built environment may only be achieved through the dissolving of the strict separation between professions in terms of decision-making structures.

UIA 2014 DURBAN has reinforced thinking on the 4th dimension of time in the built environment – and linked this conversation to sustainability and ethical professional practice.

UIA 2014 Durban hopes that its outcomes will contribute towards VISION 2030 with special focus on Chapter 8 of the National Development Plan on Human Settlements with a view towards Spatial Transformation.

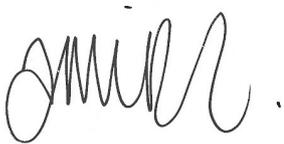
UIA 2014 DURBAN – through its partners – has explored integrated/holistic urban development systems with a focus on local systems of food production.

UIA 2014 DURBAN calls for the establishment of guidelines for community-based architecture in South Africa.

UIA 2014 Durban calls for increased debate between architectural institutes and government.

Architecture is a profession that is critical to the achievement of cities that are more equitable, more beautiful, more functional – human settlements that increase people's opportunities, offering people a better chance at improving their lives and livelihoods. It is a profession that has the potential to offer both technical and social expertise towards the enhancement of social cohesion and integration. In other words, the architectural profession has the potential to make significant contributions to environments and human settlements that are more human(e).

Welcome to an OTHER future....



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