



Communication and Marketing Department
Isebe loThungelwano neNtengiso
Kommunikasie en Bemerkingsdepartement

Private Bag X3, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa
Welgelegen House, Chapel Road Extension, Rosebank, Cape Town
Tel: +27 (0) 21 650 5427/5428/5674 Fax: +27 (0) 21 650 5628

www.uct.ac.za

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UCT students reconceptualising District Six

Honours students from the University of Cape Town's (UCT) School of Architecture, Planning and Geomatics have been hard at work exploring ways of reconceptualising District Six, while accommodating the ongoing restitution process and residents' ultimate return to the neighbourhood. This work is being done under the supervision of Professor of Architecture, Iain Low.

This year, students participated in the Cape Town Spatial Justice Laboratory: Writing/Righting the City Otherwise, a multidisciplinary partnership between the School of Architecture, Planning and Geomatics, the District Six Museum, and the Spatial Justice in the Postcolony: Legacies of the Nomos of Apartheid Research Project.

The previous honours projects on display in the exhibition proposed introducing a combination of housing options, which included one- and two-bedroom units, to suit residents' financial commitments. They also explored introducing the community to "vertical streets", in a bid to replicate life on the streets of District Six before the forced removals.

According to Professor Jaco Barnard-Naudé, co-director of the Centre for Rhetoric Studies (CRhS) and professor of Jurisprudence in the Department of Private Law at UCT, the lab aimed to assist current students in designing transformative buildings for District Six through which the community can be reimagined, while meeting the imperative of restitution.

Low said the project represents a speculation of a reimagined District Six, built on the pre-existent social and physical fabric of the district. Before they began, he explained, students had to contemplate, and answer in architectural form, a single question: "How might we live – together?".

This year the laboratory invited students to present a mix of ideas on some of the best ways to rebuild and develop District Six. According to Barnard-Naudé, the laboratory used a range of interventions to enable and deliver a transfer in knowledge.

One multipronged approach to this project was titled: "Theatre of the Everyday: A home for all". The project adapted the brief from its social housing format to include recreational facilities, community businesses and student housing.

It combined the traditional with the alternatively modern and encompassed memories of the district that included the *klopse* and other cultural performances that featured prominently in residents' everyday life.

Other initiatives that formed part of the laboratory included a Spatial Justice Manifesto Writing Community Engagement Workshop, facilitated by Professor Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, director of the Westminster Law and Theory Lab.

The workshop took place at the District Six Homecoming Centre and community members joined an open discussion and exploration of what spatial justice means to them. The exploratory activities culminated in a spatial justice manifesto, written by the workshop participants.

Additional events in the laboratory included a public masterclass and laboratory launch lecture at the District Six Homecoming Centre, titled "Apartheid Remains: Nomos in the Postcolony", during which Barnard-Naudé and Chryssostalis shared their research on the project over the past six years.

The assignment was first presented to students following the #FeesMustFall protests in 2016 with a view to providing a multidisciplinary approach to altering the architecture programme's "stratified" curriculum.

The mechanics were simple, Low said. The students were required to develop new and alternative forms of housing for the area, while keeping up with the demands and trends of a modern and evolving world.

ENDS



Students study the past architecture honours students' work that was displayed at the District Six Museum Homecoming Centre.

Photo: Michael Hammond/UCT

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Aamirah Sunday

Media Liaison and Monitoring Officer
Communication and Marketing Department
University of Cape Town
Rondebosch
Tel: (021) 650 5427
Cell: (076) 947 6071

Email: aamirah.sunday@uct.ac.za

Website: www.uct.ac.za