

The African Urbanities Summer Institute (2022) Kicks off at Makerere

The African Urbanities Summer Institute 2022 for the Andrew W. Mellon-funded project, “Entanglements, Mobility and Improvisation: Culture and the Arts in Contemporary African Urbanism and its Hinterlands”, kicked off at Makerere University, Kampala on 17th October 2022.

The project, whose principal investigator is Prof James Ogude from the University of Pretoria, is a collaborative effort by the University of Pretoria, the center of the project, and the Universities of Ghana, Cape Town, Pretoria and Makerere.

The five-year project was flagged off in 2019 and features two PhD students, one post-doctoral fellow, and one early career academic from each of the collaborating universities, and senior scholars and advisors from all over the world.

Through in-depth case studies of the African cities, the project aim is to help young participants to grasp both intellectually and viscerally the intricate workings of urban spaces and their hinterlands by examining music, literature, visual arts, festivals, leisure sites and film among others.

The week-long event, hosted by the College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHUSS), saw delegates from the Universities of Ghana, Cape Town, Pretoria, Indiana and Makerere argue for an interface between the urban and the rural in the emergence of the African city.

In her welcome remarks, the Co-Principal Investigator of Makerere University, Prof. Dominic Dipio, explained that while cities have similar characteristics, there are also unique flavours to every city.

“While there would be no maps provided of the city as in most other cities, I insist that delegates can tour the city and rely on the conversational culture of the people to navigate the city. I want to thank you our dear delegates for your determination to defy all odds to physically be present despite the recent Ebola epidemic news in the country”, Prof. Dipio appreciated.

She said the event comes a week after the grand centenary celebrations of Makerere University describing it as a greater honor and one of the key events of the centenary celebration.

In his welcome remarks, the Deputy Principal CHUSS Dr. Eric Awich Ocen commended the collaborative nature of the project stressing that no university could work alone at a time when the university landscape and ways of engaging have changed.

“On behalf of the principal, the college and Makerere university I would like to thank the project partners and sponsors. This project is a move in the right direction in the advancement of scholarship. The fast rate at which Africa is urbanizing makes the exploration of the dynamics that influence its urban space all the more important”, Dr. Awich said.

Prof James Ogude, concluded the first day of the institute with a recap of the first summer institute. Describing Makerere as a special place, Prof. Ogude, located Makerere University within the intellectual tradition of the continent recalling with nostalgia the dream of his generation of East Africans to study at Makerere University and the shattering of that dream by the disintegration of the East African community.

“This project is different from many others on African urbanities in its resistance to view the African city through “international formats”. Whereas the African city engages with international formats, there was always a silence about the urban-rural interface. It is this silence that the project seeks to disrupt”, Prof. Ogude observed.

The highlight of the event came on the fourth day of the Summer Institute at the Margaret Trowell Gallery of Makerere University. The afternoon, a tone down from days of theorizing and intellectual engagements, was marked by an exhibition of the work of the PhD student and visual artist, Stephen Gwoktcho, whose research interest lies in the synergy between the visual arts and cultural dance, particularly the migration of bwola dance from its traditional context into city spaces. The dance was brought alive, at the gallery, the Watmon Dance Group.

Another PhD student, Sophie Lakot, whose research interest is in how Ugandan poets conceptualise urbanity in their poetry, showcased poetry performances by the Third-year students of the Department of Literature.

Delegates were also treated to poetry performances by the exquisite and elegant Hawa Nnanjobe Kimbugwe, the prophesying Kagaayi Ngobi, and the celebrated poet and scholar, Prof Susan Kiguli, whom Prof Ogude referred to as “one of the region’s leading poets”.

From Makerere University, the third session of the African Urbanities Summer Institute will move to the University of Ghana, Accra, in 2023 before returning to the South African University of Cape Town in 2024. The inaugural session of the Institute was held at the University of Pretoria in 2021.

Read more about the project by clicking on the link below:

<https://www.up.ac.za/centre-for-the-advancement-of-scholarship/article/2947814/urbanities-project-entanglement-mobility-and-improvisation-culture-and-arts-in-contemporary-african-urbanism-and-its-hinterlands>

Article by:

By Sister Prof. Dipio