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Type: **Panel**

Architecture and Politics in Africa: making, living and imagining identities through buildings - panel 1

Wednesday, 17 June 2020 13:00 (1h 30m)

This double-panel explores the way architecture helps us understand politics across Africa. Its aim is to establish cross-disciplinary discussions, using a variety of examples and perspectives, and to explain the complex relationships between international and domestic politics.

Architecture is possibly the most political of all the arts. Because it usually requires large capital investment, it is predominantly determined by elites and in Africa, where such capital is often scarce, it is hugely influenced by foreign investors and international aid agencies, as well as international sources of technical expertise, materials and labour. And yet architecture also creates and shapes citizens' lives, defining the landscapes of daily activities, giving a face to political institutions, and measuring out the quality of facilities, services and housing. Architecture, more than any other art, is thus linked to the material realm of politics, illustrating and shaping wealth distribution and access to power. But more than any other art, it also carries collective symbolic meaning, defining the public sphere, embodying history, international relationships and mediating and shaping collective experience.

In one powerful example, most African countries have inherited buildings from the colonial era, and have since grappled with the challenge of how to reimagine and repurpose such buildings after independence. The panel explores questions around statehood, pan-Africanism, international investment and political influence; tradition and modernity; and decolonisation – all through the medium of public buildings.

Track Classification: Africa and International Studies Working Group