

Sustainable architectural practice in the space of engagement

 By [Yashaen Luckan](#)

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Architecture has more to offer the South African context than ever before, largely due to the opportunities offered by transformative development frameworks. One important framework, in the context of architectural practice, is the National Development Plan (NDP), which identifies spatial transformation as one of its key objectives.



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Responsive approach necessary

A responsive approach to design is therefore necessary; a different form of practice, which I refer to as “engaged practice”. Such practice, however, is greater than architects and allied professionals working together to create new products. However, collaboration across a wider, inclusive community is necessary in order to respond to the complexity of spatial transformation. Engaged practice is essentially an inclusive process which may be very inconvenient but absolutely vital to developing sustainable, humanistic built environments, and for the spatial transformation of historically marginalised communities. I argue that an increase in the societal value of architecture may emanate from engaging with people and place (context); with other disciplines such as the allied built environment professions as well as other key disciplines. Society and all stakeholders must therefore be part of such process in order to have any real impact on spatial transformation and the generation of positive urban environments.

Beyond project design phase

Engaged practice further translates into professional work stages beyond the project design phase. At a technical level, the changes in regulation and the introduction of many new building, planning and environmental regulations requires expert technical and scientific input at the early stages of architectural design. The project design process, therefore, cannot continue to be linear but rather cyclic and iterative, wherein the interdisciplinary engagement of expert technical knowledge has to be factored in much earlier in the process of architectural design. This design process will thereby ultimately result in better quality and more sustainable projects.

Clients involved early in design process

The added benefit of engaged practice, from a business perspective, is that clients are involved early in the design process and thereby become aware of the intellectual capital invested in the process of design, rather than functioning solely as recipients of the products of design. As built environment professionals, including architectural professionals, seek alternate ways of ensuring business sustainability and growth, could an alternate mode of practice – engaged practice – become a viable business model for built environment professionals?

ABOUT YASHAEN LUCKAN

Yashaen Luckan is the president of the South African Council for the Architectural Profession (SACAP). A registered practising architect himself, he is also an academic at the School of Architecture, Planning and Housing at University of Kwazulu-Natal (UKZN). As an academic and professional in the field, he continuously studies the profession in order to evaluate the role and impact of architectural studies and practice to the broader society.

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