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Bourdieu's Sociology as Lens to Consider the Retention-Transformation Nexus in South Africa's Architecture Profession

PETA DE JAGER

ABSTRACT

Despite two decades of policy interventions and expanded educational access, the profession remains demographically unrepresentative and structurally precarious. This article interrogates the observed phenomenon of demographic stagnation and professional attrition within South Africa's architecture profession through Pierre Bourdieu's sociological lens. Drawing on mixed-methods research combining demographic register data, document analysis and qualitative interviews, the study conceptualises the 'retention–transformation nexus' as a contest over forms of capital – economic, cultural, social and symbolic – mediated by habitus, doxa, illusio and field hysteresis. It argues that persistent inequalities are not only pipeline failures but also expressions of inherited dispositions, institutional inertia and commodification of design labour that constrain capital conversion for historically marginalised actors. Arguing that the KwaZulu-Natal province may be a counter-case, the analysis posits that locally embedded educational pathways and resilient professional networks may shorten hysteresis and enable durable transformation. The article contributes to Southern scholarship on professions in transition by inquiring how Bourdieu's framework could be deployed to reveal the impact of interplay between structure

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and agency in post-apartheid professional fields. It concludes that sustainable transformation demands reconfiguring the profession's symbolic economy and field structures to render cultural capital convertible and economic participation viable for diverse practitioners.

INTRODUCTION

Professions, arguably through presumptive status, occupy unique positions in societies. Their roles may be inherently more contentious and unstable in circumstances marked by imperatives to achieve socio-political transformation, such as those experienced in post-apartheid South Africa. As a case study, the architecture profession exemplifies these dynamics: despite exponential population growth and expanding access to tertiary education, this sector has exhibited a paradoxical stagnation in demographic transformation and professional growth over the first two decades of the 21st century. This stagnation is particularly striking given the critical role that the built environment plays in society – as a domain that both shapes and reflects social, economic and cultural dynamics. Built environment professionals are jointly entrusted with the manifestation of place and spaces that serve diverse communities, yet despite modest demographic transformation, the profession's profile remains largely unrepresentative of the broader South African population. This situation is compounded by a retention–transformation nexus, wherein the architecture profession experiences significant attrition that disproportionately affects historically marginalised groups, notably black African, Indian, Chinese, Asian and coloured individuals (henceforth collectively denoted 'black') and female practitioners.

The costs associated with producing qualified graduates are substantial, and the loss of these professionals undermines national goals of demographic equity and transformation in workplaces. Moreover, this attrition occurs despite considerable sustained efforts and investment by government, regulatory bodies and some professional associations, practices and practitioners to promote inclusivity and redress past inequities. The retention–transformation nexus poses a problem for the profession's viability that is shaped by mechanisms – field hysteresis, capital conversion failures and market commodification – that are traceable in other national contexts and therefore amenable to comparative investigation.

The architecture profession in South Africa is shaped by a complex interplay of historical legacies, economic conditions, institutional practices and sociocultural forces that collectively impact who enters, remains and advances within the field. Understanding the dynamics of this suggests a nuanced exploration of both structural and individual factors that propel professional trajectories.

This article argues for a liberal application of Bourdieu's theories to analyse the history and contemporary roles of professions as a means to stimulate debate on their futures. It posits that Bourdieu's apparatus – comprising interrelated concepts of field, capital, habitus, doxa and illusion – could provide a robust framework for dissecting how social positions are constructed, maintained and contested within professional domains. This work conceptualises professions as social fields, substituting Bourdieu's class categories for demographic ones, as in our context race and gender remain the dominant predictors of inequality (Friedman 2019; Posel 2014). This approach proposes a view of the architectural domain as a formal and informally constituted space of relations where actors compete and cooperate to accumulate various forms of capital – cultural, social, economic and symbolic – that serve to negotiate (define, confer, navigate, augment) desirability, distinction and influence.

BACKGROUND

The proliferation of legislation and policy, resource mobilisation and the emergence of digital support communities illustrate that transformation is a general priority for the government, is on the agenda of some professional bodies and is an intensifying topic of interest among architecture professionals.

Numerous statutory instruments aimed at driving structural transformation, achieving demographic representation and effecting economic redress provide evidence that transformation was a high priority for our nation emerging from its apartheid past. Authorities incorporated transformation into their strategic statements,[2] established committees (Council for the Built Environment) (CBE 2022; SACAP 2016) and hosted events to engage stakeholders and to communicate this as a priority (CBE, 2019b; SACAP 2021a; SACAP, 2024a; SACAP 2024b).

Transformation was also on the agenda of some of the profession's voluntary associations. This can be discerned in policy (SAIA 2016; Cape Institute for Architecture

2019), through the appointment of transformation champions and through a variety of initiatives aimed at increasing awareness on topics related to transformation, such as SAIA's Transformation Webinar Series (SAIA 2021a).

Internationally, since about 2010, there has been a notable increase in globally accessible digital forums to advocate for and raise awareness on issues of justice, diversity, equity and inclusion in workplaces. These platforms have hosted peer networks, represented and coordinated specific interests and offered resources and support. Some were initiated by architecture's professional bodies. Locally, the South African Council for the Architectural Profession (SACAP) established WiASA (SACAP 2021b), following international precedent of the American Institute of Architects (AIA 2016; AIA 2020), Female Architects and Minority Ethnic (FAME) at the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA n.d.) and others. Platforms were established with equity or justice as a founding purpose and objective in its own right, for example, the National Organisation for Minority Architects (NOMA n.d.), Parlour (n.d.) and The African Women Architects for Humanity (TAWAH n.d.).

Demographic representation in the workplace has also been of widespread and growing popular concern, both locally and internationally, as evidenced by extensive media coverage calling out and explicating perspectives on prejudice, microaggression, racism and sexism (Campbell and Manning 2014). Architecture professionals have ventilated these matters using social media platforms, blog sites and so forth. Local examples include Her Perspective (n.d.), The W.H.Y Project (n.d.), Jus't Spatial Design ZA (n.d.) and Matri-Archi(tecture) (n.d.).

Access to the profession has been enhanced through significant general investments in education (SALDRU 2016). The number of accredited tertiary academic institutions was increased and degree formats were revised to improve access. Barriers to direct entry into the profession were removed. For example, additional professional categories with a variety of new options to access and articulate through the profession, recognition of prior learning (RPL), special consent and limited special dispensation (LSD) were introduced (SACAP 2012; SACAP 2013). Accountability and governance of the built environment professions was enhanced through the expansion of professional oversight structures.

The contemporaneous proliferation of legislation, policy, resource mobilisation and emergence of digital support communities in numerous jurisdictions illustrates that transformation is a priority for many governments, is on the agenda of numerous professional bodies and is globally an intensifying topic of interest among architecture professionals.

Despite all these efforts, at the end of 2019, women (all categories considered) accounted for 25 per cent of the professional register, against a national demographic of 52 per cent (SACAP 2020). Black individuals accounted for 35 per cent of the professional register (all categories considered) against a national demographic of 92 per cent (SACAP 2020; StatsSA 2022). Figure 1 graphically presents the proportion per major demographic category of all registered professionals per decade, based on SACAP register data. Although this indicates a significant transformation towards gender and race representativity, the top panel reflects the national population demographic, which provides an aspirational frame of reference. Figure 1 not only visualises the profession's decade by decade demographic composition but also highlights register volatility: a peak cumulative register of ~11,500 in 2008 that declined to ~8,700 by 2021 signals that intake gains are insufficiently converted into sustained professional presence, implying the need for retention oriented benchmarks such as candidacy completion rates and five year survival measures (SACAP 2010; SACAP 2022). When disaggregated by cohort entry and region, these temporal patterns reveal that short term increases in graduate numbers can be easily eroded unless supported by opportunities to enter into candidacy (a buoyant job market) and graduate aspirations to do so (Division for Institutional Strategy, Research and Analytics 2025). This points to a great dependency of the profession on macroeconomic externalities.

A quantitative review was performed comparing other built environment professions, consulting engineering, law and health sciences for benchmarking and to glean lessons for the architecture profession. A systematic comparison of the registration demographics of South Africa's built environment professions shows that none of the constituent professional councils' registration numbers reflect the population demographics from a race or gender perspective (De Jager 2025, 239). Similarly, registration data for law and medicine in South Africa, as tabulated in Table 1, demonstrate failure to achieve demographic representation in these other professional cohorts in South Africa. This demonstrates that architecture's demographic shortfall

is neither unique nor uniform across professions; rather, it aligns with a broader pattern of under representation in regulated fields, signalling systemic pipeline and conversion problems that transcend single profession explanations (De Jager 2025).

Table 1: Comparative demographic representation of other registered South African professionals

	black ♀	**black ♂**	**white ♂**	**white ♀**
Law[1]	13%	23%	40%	24%
Medicine[2]	13%	43%	27%	18%
Architecture[3]	4%	26%	50%	20%

Sources: 1. CALS 2014; 2. Tiwari and Wildschut-February et al. 2021; 3. CBE 2019a

A qualitative examination of the consulting engineering and legal professions noted similar challenges to the architecture sector (De Jager 2025, 239–247). It noted that economic capital accumulation was similarly hindered in engineering, with high attrition rates attributed to poor economic conditions and inadequate remuneration. The legal profession, while initially demonstrating high translation rates from graduation to practice, faced subsequent challenges in maintaining demographic representation and addressing attrition, particularly among black women.

Although there is a dearth of scholarship on attrition and transformation in the architecture field from the global South, there is a considerable and growing literature on transformation and retention from workplaces in other fields. Recent examples include business management and financial services (De Sousa Sabbagh and Ledimo et al. 2018; João and Coetzee 2012; Schlechter et al. 2016; Wöcke and Heymann 2012), academia (Booi and Vincent et al.,2017; Gani and Potgieter et al. 2020; Makondo 2014; Pienaar and Bester 2008; Takawira 2012), advertising (Ferreira and Mujajati 2017), research psychology (Rascher 2016) and more. Findings mirrored those of international studies, emphasising a multiplicity of factors and the significance of context on observed variations in retention, attrition and transformation of professions (De Jager 2025, 68–89).

The quantitative analysis and extensive literature review suggest similar intractable challenges in other professional sectors in South Africa. This points to a need for

robust scholarship that can develop credible claims about common transformation mechanisms at play.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This article emerged from a broader doctoral study that employed a pragmatic mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, to examine the complex and multifaceted nature of mentorship within South Africa's architecture profession. The study used a convergent parallel mixed-methods design (Creswell 2014, 32), whereby desktop document analysis was used, quantitative survey data and qualitative interview data were collected concurrently, analysed separately and then merged during interpretation to provide complementary insights into the field. Supplied, published and archival data were used.

SACAP has been collecting data on professional registrations in its capacity as the registrar since 1969. In 2019 the cumulative professional registrar's data consisted of:

- Full names of individuals, registration number, standing, original and current date of registration, partially complete disability, gender and race categories (22,538 records).
- Suspensions from the register (2016 to 2019). Demographic data and personal identifiers are not included.
- Architectural graduates from public institution statistics (2012 to 2018), with graduate numbers, institution, programme, gender and race.
- SACAP annual reports 2009/10 to 2022/23.

Although the register provided data input fields to indicate disability, gender (in binary terms) and race, these were not comprehensively filled out. SACAP consented to share data in its custody as listed above, subject to ethical use, compliance with the Protection of Personal Information Act 4 (POPIA) and governed under a Memorandum of Understanding. This data provided crucial insight into the state of the profession and, when compared over time, some insight into transformation. Incomplete data on the demographic makeup of the voluntary associations was secured for 2018/19 from SACAP. Data were processed and visualised in Excel.

During data collection, analysis and validation, extensive use was made of modern technological tools, including well-accepted, comprehensive internet research

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methods. Conventional digital literature search logic, assisted by information specialists, was deployed.[3] Open-source natural language artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used to identify primary resources quickly, as interlocutor, to generate critical feedback and propose grammatical refinements to my original thoughts and text. AI use was strictly subject to critical assessment, careful use and verification of the quality and accuracy in accordance with ASSAf and SciELO Guidelines (2024).

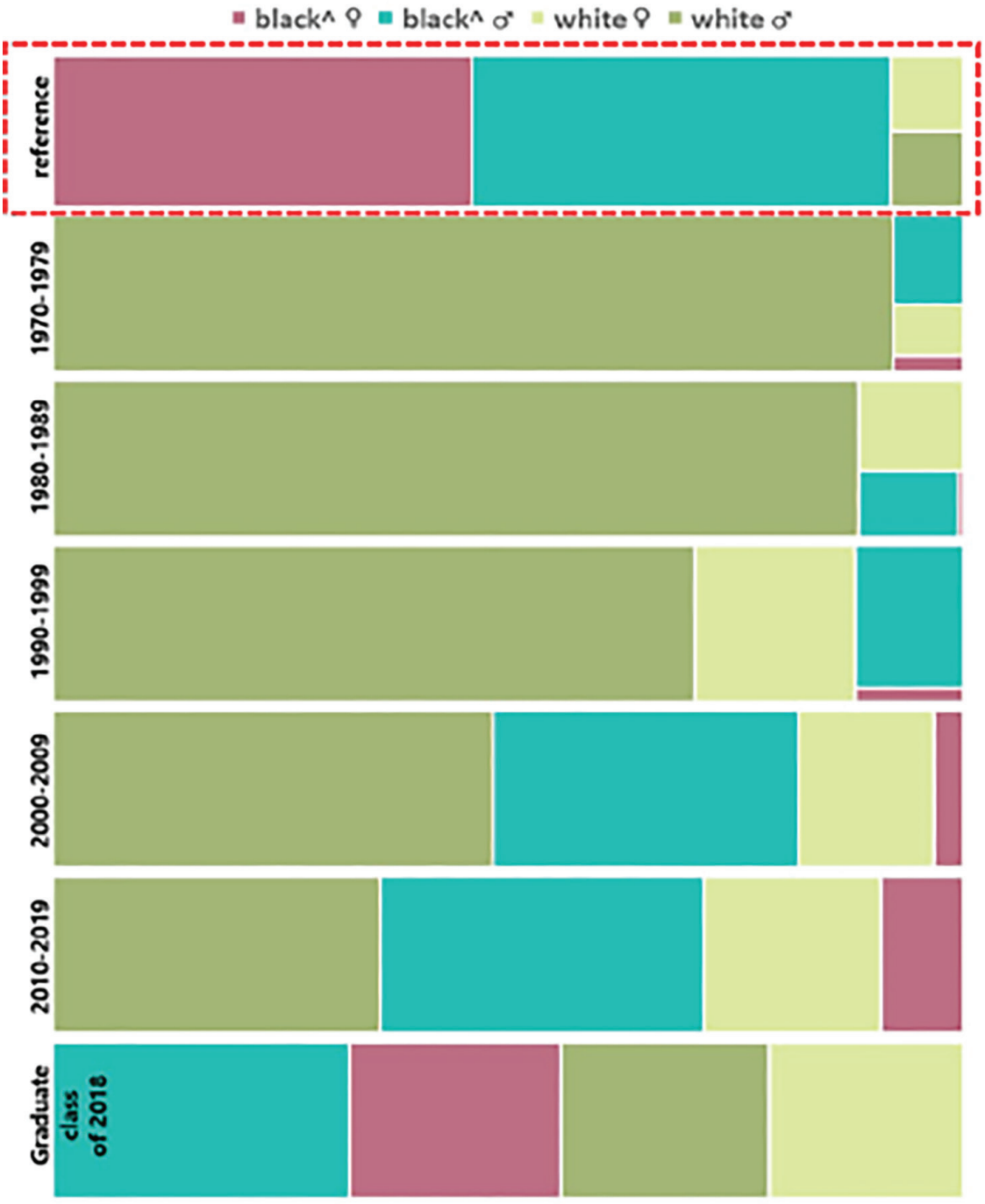


Figure 1: Decadal demographic transformation of registered professionals

Source: SACAP date; visual representation by author

Pierre Bourdieu's sociological framework was identified as potentially useful to interrogate these issues. By contriving a lens that considered both structure and agency, it was hoped that a nuanced view could be gained on antagonists of transformation and drivers of attrition, which seemed both interconnected and 'wicked' (Rittel and Webber 1973), that is, a nexus. Comparable patterns of attrition and representational stagnation have been documented across professions in middle-income and post-authoritarian contexts, where institutional legacies and market pressures shape professional trajectories and limit diversity (Evetts 2003; Freund and Padayachee 1998; Hom and Lee et al. 2017). It was posited that insight gleaned through this lens might support the design of more inclusive structures, effective interventions and representative outcomes, fostering a profession that better relates to and serves the diverse needs of society.

Bourdieu endeavoured to provide a framework that acknowledged structure and agency in shaping social life, conceiving them to be mutually constitutive and in reciprocal interaction (Bourdieu 1990; 1984). He challenged the dichotomies of objectivism versus subjectivism, structure versus agency, and determinism versus phenomenology (Grenfell and James 2004, 507–510). Using a series of concepts that have been introduced below, Bourdieu proposed an analytical framework depicting actors as socially embedded, embodying historically informed dispositions moulded by their position within social fields, constrained, but with both opportunity and capability to improvise and freedom to act (Bourdieu 1984).

Recognising context as a significant driver, Bourdieu advocated for integration between theory, empirical research and data analysis to gain a better understanding of societal dynamics (Bourdieu 1990, 25–29). His own life experiences illustrate this point. Coming from a humble, rural background, Bourdieu faced challenges when he attended the elite École Normale Supérieure in Paris to study philosophy. This contrast made him aware of how geography, biography and history shape the preferences, behaviours and tastes of individuals and societies (Jenkins 2014, 13). After his studies and a brief teaching assignment, Bourdieu was conscripted to serve in the French army in Algeria (Steinmetz 2022, 326). He stayed on for four years afterwards to research and document Algerians' perspectives, as he felt these were not adequately comprehended by French intellectuals (Jenkins 2014, 13). He aimed to go beyond recording and describing ethnographic phenomena and theorising

to developing a nuanced and keen understanding of interactions of mechanisms at play, while developing cognisance of the *a priori* paradigms brought into the research by the researcher (Steinmetz 2022, 326–327). Calhoun (2006) underscores the importance of Bourdieu's work in transcending the gap between practical knowledge and universal structures, and in addressing theoretical questions. Astute scholars identify the emergence of Bourdieu's neologisms and nascent concepts in this early work, which he was to refine over the remaining course of a prolific career (Calhoun 2006; Jenkins 2014; Steinmetz 2022). In Algeria, Bourdieu shifted from a philosophical focus to an anthropological focus. Bourdieu's work undertook a further disciplinary turn when he returned to France, and the elite intellectual circles of Paris, and began work regarded as sociological. He researched and published widely in France, becoming the Director of Centre de Sociologie Européenne (Jenkins 2014, 14). Bourdieu's works were translated into English from 1962 and have since attracted the imagination of numerous anglophone scholars, with his conceptual apparatus applied to many fields, including architecture and the sociology of the architecture profession. It has been applied to analyse education among architecture students by Chamberlin (2010) and Payne (2015); the profession (Sahin-Dikmen 2013); and the history of the Indian architecture profession (Melsens 2020). It has been set to work to consider cultural production in architecture and the media (Parnell 2011), to argue that signs and socio-aesthetic codes embodied in the built environment operate as 'symbolic capital' that reflects and reinforces power dynamics within society (Malone 2020), to frame sociocultural dynamics and systemic inequalities in the profession (Fowler and Wilson 2016; Roan and Stead 2016; Sánchez De Madariaga 2010) and to analyse the use of cultural capital to 'produce' creativity and distinction (Stevens 1998).

From the brief overview of Bourdieu's biography above, the reader is invited to conclude that Bourdieu's concepts were born from his first-hand experiences of being placed and misplaced in the institutions of his professions. His concepts emerged when he was immersed in a setting, part insider, part outsider, offering analytical and visual recordings and commentaries on French and Algerian societies in transition. Transition, such as would inevitably be catalysed by the demise of apartheid, brings a variety of cultural paradigms together, and, it is argued, Bourdieu's work exemplified an authentic effort to apprehend the meeting of previously separated cultural paradigms, considering actors' positions and social relations within societies, in a non-reductive

way. It is this origin and application in societies in transition that Bourdieu's work resonates with this article's themes and pragmatic, eclectic methods.[4]

In essence, every individual's sociological journey is unique and reflects their personal dispositions within a slowly evolving and contested societal framework (Steinmetz 2022, 341). People interact with their surroundings in diverse and tactical ways, engaging the particular opportunities and troubles they identify and face in those fields. Apparent peculiarities in response, per Bourdieu, are not random but are shaped through habitus, capital, doxa and illusio. Certain groups, or individuals, by virtue of belonging to those groups, are given, or are able to negotiate, preferential access to opportunities, resources and experiences. This mechanism results in a tendency to produce somewhat predictable outcomes, although they are never the same. Each of Bourdieu's terms above will now be defined.

'Fields' are relational social spaces where multiple actors compete or cooperate for various forms of capital (Bourdieu 1990, 66). Bourdieu intended a double entendre to convey both a metaphoric battleground (or sports field) and a force field through actors exerting forces, which acted upon their constituents. Bourdieu likened the field to a 'game', not to trivialise it, but to capture the essence of its dynamics (Jenkins 2014, 70). The 'realm of possibilities', as Bourdieu termed it, was heavily controlled and characterised by clear barriers, hindrances and disparities that promoted common patterns within class groups. Field boundaries overlapped, were contested and continually redefined; actors could 'play' on multiple fields. For example, one could participate in both the academic and architectural fields.

Each field has its own rules, norms and values defining what counts as legitimate and valuable in that field. For example, the architectural field has its own criteria for recognising its members' skills, knowledge and credentials. Stevens (1998, 75) proposes that the field of architecture comprises architects, critics, architectural academics, builders, all forms of clients, the part of the state concerned with construction, financial institutions and architectural discourse and building regulations, among others.

I construed the game to include beliefs, practices, experiences, contingent geographies and institutions. According to Bourdieu, 'habitus' is the set of embodied dispositions that shape the attitudes, practices and perceptions of actors in relation to

the cultural milieu and the field (Bourdieu 1990, 52–65). Habitus is acquired through socialisation and experience in different fields (Bourdieu 1990, 52–65). Habitus is largely unconscious and taken for granted by actors, enabling them to adapt to and perform largely reflexively in a given field. It also constrains their expectations and predisposes them to particular preferences, perceptions and choices (Bourdieu 1990, 52–65). In general, habitus is significantly formed in childhood and early adulthood, after which it becomes less receptive to change (Bourdieu 1990, 52–65). Through engagement with its formal structures, aspiring professionals, including those in architecture, are immersed into a potentially exclusionary culture, which they may in turn acquire and transmit. This enculturation involves a dynamic interplay of shared and contested dispositions, practices and symbolic systems. It encompasses the shared materials, experiences, affectations and traditions that shape how these professionals generally perceive, conceive and reproduce architectural knowledge and practices. Habitus serves as the underlying framework through which professional identities are formulated, alliances forged and aesthetic and ideological discourse negotiated. It is through the medium of its culture that practitioners engage in a continual process of exchange, innovation and evolution, enriching the profession and its products while perpetuating and reinventing its traditions and legacies. This infusion occurs in multiple sites and through multiple mediums, including architecture schools, workplaces, architecture imagery conveyed in magazines, books and through social media, voluntary associations, etc.

Per Bourdieu, it is not only the content and competency development that renders universities powerful actors in society. Architecture schools play a dual role in that they produce producers, and they produce and transmit discourse *about* architecture. Hence, the university is a critical site for acquiring habitus, shaping students' identities and launching social trajectories (1984). For Bourdieu, 'practical mastery is transmitted through practice, in a practical state, without rising to the level of discourse' through mimicry embodied as habitus (1990, 73–74). Established professionals also contribute to cultural capital production and reproduction in the field. They transmit legitimate habitus to newcomers by exposure to work and established practice, and by contact, through employment, internship and mentorship.

Bourdieu expanded upon Marxist class theory by recognising additional forms of capital beyond the economic, including cultural, social and symbolic (Bourdieu

1986). These forms of capital play a significant role in the struggles within a given field, influencing (and influenced by) social class, class faction and class trajectory (Bourdieu 1984). Following Bourdieu, 'capital' is a form of resources that can be accumulated, disposed of or exchanged to establish more or less status within a field (or fields). Bourdieu distinguishes between cultural (encompassing educational and symbolic capital), social and economic capital. The field-evaluated composite value of all capitals is strongly predictive of actors' social status. For Bourdieu, not only is the accreted status of accumulation, that is, volume of capital germane but also the history and trajectory of prospects. The field is the forum to negotiate what is valued and rates of exchange, as generally determined by the prevailing dominant class.

'Economic capital', following Marx, Bourdieu regards as material goods to subsist, plus surplus. Economic capital is the dominant capital, and in the architectural field is generated as remuneration (for employees) and fees (for practice owners).

'Cultural capital' is used to denote symbols, ideas, tastes and preferences strategically deployed as resources in social endeavours. In the field of architecture, cultural capital comprises degrees and certifications, portfolios (both built buildings and design) and academic article/manifestoes, for example. According to Bourdieu, mutual reinforcement of economic and cultural capital occurs through the conversion of initial social capital into educational credentials for successive generations, which leads to access to more lucrative occupations. This intergenerational cycle (intergenerational wealth) is central to the perpetuation of class differences (Calhoun 2002; Piraino 2015).

'Social capital' refers to the aggregate of resources that accrue to individuals or groups through durable networks of relationships, acquaintances among and mutual connection between people who live and work in a particular society that enable that society to function effectively. This form of capital enables individuals to exert influence and access resources within their social networks, broadly reflective of their societal position and status (Bourdieu 1986).

'Symbolic capital' is a type of capital that gains power through recognition or

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perception within particular social schemes. It is rendered visible via honour, prestige or recognition, and it represents a given culture's valuation of the individual or group, imposing categories of perception that tend to reproduce and reinforce the power relations structuring the social space (Lebaron 2014). These could include awards, social media followers, citations and professional titles.

In Bourdieu's framework, 'doxa' refers to a set of internalised beliefs and orientations towards the world, in which various elements and their relationships – including people, objects, social circumstances and customs – are perceived as self-evident and natural, and thus are often accepted without question (Bourdieu 2001, 2) and without being considered problematic (Bourdieu 1990, 26, 30, 36). Two related concepts are 'objective chances' and 'making a virtue of necessity'. Bourdieu suggests that individuals develop tastes and preferences by aligning their expectations and aspirations with a tacit estimation, shaped by their historical experiences, of the likelihood of their attainment or 'objective chances'. These assessed chances are internalised, accepted and expressed as preferences, thereby making a virtue of necessity. The regularities encoded in a set of arbitrary conditions – such as in South Africa's built environment emerging from legacies of segregationist spatial planning, land dispossession and state housing programmes – come to be seen as necessary and even natural.

> If a very close correlation is regularly observed between the scientifically constructed objective probabilities (for example, the chances of access to a particular good) and agents' subjective aspirations ('motivations' and 'needs'), this is not because the agents consciously adjust their aspirations to the exact evaluation of their chances of success, like a gambler organizing his stakes on the basis of perfect information about his chances of winning. In reality, the dispositions durably inculcated by the possibilities and impossibilities, freedoms and necessities, opportunities and prohibitions inscribed in the objective conditions ... generate dispositions objectively compatible with these conditions and in a sense pre-adapted to their demands. Improbable practices are therefore excluded, as unthinkable, by a kind of immediate submission to order that inclines agents to make a virtue of necessity, that is, to refuse what is in any way denied and to will the inevitable (Bourdieu 1990, 52–53).

Ergo, internalised beliefs (doxa) predicate tastes, preferences and illusio.

Following Bourdieu, 'illusio' refers to individuals' subjective investment and belief in a particular field of activity (Bourdieu 1990, 66–67). Illusio is the sense of commitment, engagement and attachment individuals develop towards a specific social practice or field. This commitment is not merely rational or calculated but is deeply ingrained in doxa and habitus. Bourdieu argued that illusio is a crucial element in understanding social reproduction and the maintenance of social hierarchies. Individuals who participate in a particular field invest their time, energy and resources into it because they believe in its inherent value. Illusio also perpetuates social distinctions. Subjective investment in a particular field contributes to the reproduction of social hierarchies, as those who possess the necessary cultural and social capital to participate in a given field are more likely to succeed and maintain their privileged positions.

According to Bourdieu, culture is arbitrary, in that it cannot be logically deduced or justified based on notions of appropriateness or comparative value; rather, it is shaped by a historically contingent process:

> [T]he imposition of systems of symbolism and meaning (i.e. culture) upon groups or classes in such a way that they are experienced as legitimate. This legitimacy obscures the power relations which permit that imposition to be successful. Insofar as it is accepted as legitimate, culture adds its own force to those power relations, contributing to their systematic reproduction. This is achieved through a process of misrecognition: 'the process whereby power relations are perceived not for what they objectively are but in a form which renders them legitimate in the eyes of the beholder' (Jenkins 2014, 109).

By this theory, architecture professionals enter the field, by and large, convinced (via illusio and doxa) of the legitimacy of their discourse and role, and its continuing applicability. Then, as society undergoes rapid change, people might adhere to old practices or mindsets that no longer fit the new context, producing a hysteresis effect in the field, as in the disjunction between past and present conditions, individuals or groups continuing to act or react based on outdated structures, norms or expectations. This concept explains how actors might cling to habits and dispositions formed in

a previous social environment (such as segregationist ones formed in apartheid), even when those are no longer suitable, acting as a mechanism of friction against societal transformation. It helps explain why patterns of inclusion and exclusion persist despite formal transformation efforts, as the unconscious dispositions shaped by historical and social contexts continue to shape professional trajectories and experiences. The professional structures of regulatory and oversight bodies, architecture schools, registered persons and their firms, and voluntary associations entered the new democracy as the gatekeepers to the profession. Collectively and individually, these entities determined pathways to entry, and could erect, protect and dismantle barriers and determine admission and acceptance criteria. They could endorse social hierarchies and prescribe acceptable conduct in the field.

For example, admission to architecture schools could inadvertently have been susceptible to gatekeeping or bias (Botes 2018, 142). In addition to secondary school results, and in line with international practice (Goldschmidt and Sebba et al. 2002), first-year students were accepted based on matric results and, variously, interviews, entrance exams, portfolios or assignments. While ostensibly in place to determine merit and aptitude, some of these procedures were discretionary, unvalidated and, therefore, at least theoretically, subject to bias. For example, interview and portfolio review processes may have posed barriers to entry for prospective students from previously disadvantaged backgrounds, requiring resources and know-how compatible with habitus associated with more privileged backgrounds (Lombard 2007). Individuals who had the opportunity to attend art lessons, generally not offered in former black schools,[5] may have had a significant familiarity with the tacit rules associated with putting a portfolio together. Applicants whose first language matched university mediums may have had more aligned interview and language skills. Well-meant entry procedures may thereby have played a role in field reproduction, disproportionately disadvantaging the historically disadvantaged. However, universities and other institutions were also confronted with increasing scrutiny and pressure to diversify (Janse Van Rensburg 2015; King 1998). This included international pressure. For example RIBA, whose accreditation has been coveted since architecture schools became the mainstream of professional development (Architectural Record 1927), began pressurising architectural schools to diversify amid mounting civic pressure (Architects Against Apartheid 1971; Architectural Association 1973).

At the beginning of the 2000s, although universities had become open to all races, the number of matriculants from previously disadvantaged communities achieving university exemption and meeting other entry requirements was very low (Cronje 2009; Le Roux 2014). This shortage, alongside moderate (but potentially diminishing) resistance to transformation pressures (Archer 2017) and gatekeeping practices, was met with policies aimed at diversifying both the student body and faculty. Although initial pipeline disparities gradually improved, demographic representativity issues persist in the profile of architecture graduates to this day, which has become a critical upstream constraint to transformation of the profession.

When professional fields open up rapidly (in our case study, through regime change), some actors' contingent habitus – emerging from systematic exclusion – may not align with expectations from the field (which is subject to hysteresis). Actors with misaligned habitus may experience disjunctions that inhibit participation, thwart retention and impede transformation. Conversely, actors with compatible habitus and forms of capital (economic, social, cultural, symbolic) may not encounter this requirement to recalibrate quite so starkly, needing only to evolve as the field hysteresis resolves. Those endowed with least field-aligned cultural and social capital may be the ones required to adapt most and more quickly while the field overcomes its hysteresis. The field and its hysteresis are therefore experienced differentially by different actors, with negative implications for retention of the previously excluded, and weakened impetus for transformation.

Per Bourdieu, transformative change is possible. The following mechanism is identified: collectivist social movements challenge a prevailing doxa, gain traction and successively supplant and displace previous orders in a somewhat generational fashion (Grenfell and James 2004, 510–511). In the art and architecture fields, avant-garde movements have produced membership groups that have made unique contributions to the evolution of culture, theory and practice through discourse and artefact (Butcher and Pearson 2019; Subotić 2019). There are numerous international examples from history where 'other' membership groups have emerged from their cultural contexts to address local social and political issues, such as the Mexican muralist movement (Malott 2019) and the global socialist movement (Stanek 2020). By this line of reasoning, voluntary associations, other professional membership groups, digitally organised pressure and consciousness-raising groups, and unions

theoretically have transformative powers, working at the intersection of structure and agency.

However, empirical evidence indicates that, at least between 2000 and 2020, these powers were rarely effectively mobilised to accelerate change at scale. Membership of voluntary associations remained largely untransformed, and the profession increasingly marginalised (SAIA 2023, 91). Although a number of media initiatives emerged centring on social justice issues in the profession (as described above), these tended to remain localised, have only recently been gaining traction, predominantly coalesce around gender rather than race and often have short-lived energy propelling their activities, which are underpinned by volunteerism. Although there are a few contemporary international examples in the United States of America (Architectural Workers United n.d.) and the United Kingdom (Sultan, 2022), unions are virtually unheard of in the local architectural field.

ARCHITECTURAL HABITUS AND CAPITAL IN SOUTH AFRICA: PRE- AND POST-1994 DISTINCTIVENESS

Professions require their members to convert cultural capital (expert knowledge) and symbolic capital (recognition) into economic capital (livelihood) through the institutional games of credentialism, submission to regulation (registration) and market positioning. Professions translate their interpretation of abstract social needs into codified expertise. To do so effectively, their articulated *raison d'être* must translate into societal mandate. As divergent stakes are introduced, valued ends must be defined and redefined to renegotiate meaning. In medicine, meaning coalesces around healing bodies; in law, around arbitrating rights; in engineering, stakes are centred on solving material problems; and in architecture, on mediating space, place and form. While there are similarities, for each of these classic professions, meaning emerges through a unique cultural economy, rendered legitimate through prescribed social capital arrangements, celebrated through particular systems of symbolic reward and defended via particular logical approaches. Engineering disciplines apply rationality, with success judged by reliable performance more than by aesthetic or moral narrative. Law is anchored in interpretive authority over language of rules, where meaning is realised through persuasive argument and the supremacy of justification. Medicine is predicated on ethical paternalism, and an

imperative to 'do no harm'. The appeal of these professions does not centre on taste and culture.

The architecture profession is unique in that it produces durable public objects. Ostensibly, it trades in a subtle amalgam of spatial imagination, aesthetic judgement and political brinkmanship. When those traits are mapped through Bourdieu's triad of habitus, cultural capital and social capital, the architect's position emerges as singular. Architects are widely understood to prize aesthetics, to have a capacity to imagine form at multiple scales and to 'see' space before it exists (Cuff 1992), although those in the field are wont to assert that 'there is more to it' and that 'they are misunderstood' (de Jager 2025). Architecture professionals primarily exhibit their expertise in design portfolios and through their built works – assets whose value depends on shared taste codes. Embodied capital is cultivated through crit sessions, precedent sketching and site diaries; it is tacit and its appreciation and acceptance are reliant to a great extent on a corresponding illusio among stakeholders and patrons.

This article argues – with reference to the prevalent procurement regime, since 1994 – that the architecture profession's unique habitus and capital arrangement has produced a precariousness because design 'knowledge' has come to be considered a dispensable luxury, whereas law and medicine have not. In contrast to medical specialists or senior counsel who still enjoy clear premium over generalists, Act 44 (2000) replaced a single professional category with four. While this move widened access, it also obfuscated symbolic value. Other instruments intended to remove barriers to access were confounded. For example, the implementation of SACAP's fee guidelines and Identification-of-Work policies were delayed for nearly two decades under competition-law challenge, and RPL initiatives failed to yield transformative results (De Jager 2025).

Until the mid-20th century the South African architectural community was an enclave of white, male, designer entrepreneurs who accrued distinction by displaying fluency in imported canon (Beaux-Arts classicism, Cape Dutch revival, modernism, etc.). Habitus was anchored in the right to define public taste, the moral claim that 'good' design serves (and even shapes) society in benevolent ways, and entrepreneurial agility in securing patronage from the business and government elite (Churchill 1943; Fry 2004; Larson 2017; Stevens 1998). Under statutory segregation

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of the apartheid government, that habitus congealed into what Larson (2017) calls foreclosure. Architects presented themselves as culturally neutral experts while, either consciously or insouciantly, producing space that materially entrenched racial hierarchy. Architectural schooling likewise naturalised studio culture and reference to eurocentric precedent as rites of passage, embedding doxa of supremacy of western method and form. Black aspirants were excluded (Fame Productions Media 2021) or, occasionally, routed to draughting courses, establishing a two-tier field: prestige versus technologist subordination.

Transformation of the architectural field following democracy exhibited hysteresis. The profession had to mediate township upgrades, land-claim restitutions and social infrastructure – tasks that demanded fluency in histories, practices and overcoming resource deprivation that the former order had stigmatised. Because apartheid restricted black authorship, very little objectified capital from black practices fed into the canonical archive before the late 1990s, and exposure to codes was among new stakeholders and emerging potential patrons who had been structurally excluded from the production of the built environment. Some early democratic building projects, such as Constitutional Court and Freedom Park, were commissioned through design competition. However, practice soon shifted towards turnkey packages that rewarded 'deliverables' rather than authorial vision, relegating portfolio weight below cost and (for state projects) B-BBEE credential.

Apart from open tender processes, architecture professionals convert cultural into economic capital chiefly through social capital – being placed in prestigious firms or government, professional networks, mentorship, being shortlisted by developers or by cultivating officials. However, there has been a significant trend to atomisation of architectural practices, with solo or small firm sizes becoming an increasing feature of the profession (SAIA 2020). This provides a professional landscape difficult to penetrate for the neophyte who must, by virtue of registrar policy, enter the legitimate field by way of candidacy under supervision of a registered professional.

Public sector building is awarded under the Preferential Procurement Policy Framework Act (2000) and Treasury Regulations that equate architectural services with commodity 'line items'. The default 80/20 and 90/10 adjudication formulation gives a premium to price, with a 10 or 20 per cent consideration on B-BBEE score – and

zero per cent on design quality. Engineers and project managers adapted easily: their deliverables are legible to bill-of-quantities adjudicators. Architectural value – site-specific form, cultural resonance – is, in general, neither priced nor scored, converting design from added value into avoidable expense. This is compounded because, to promote competition, the tender calls use the generic term 'professional service provider', which could be architectural practitioners, engineers, quantity surveyors, construction project managers or others. This blurs the distinctive professional boundaries, roles and responsibilities traditionally cultivated by the professions.

Developers exploit highly competitive market conditions by demanding significant fee cuts or 'work at risk', and architectural practitioners hope to recoup losses through variation fees or repeat business (SACAP 2024a). Fee discounting, disallowed for doctors and advocates, has become endemic, lowering median incomes and driving attrition from the profession (De Jager 2025). Economic capital thus fails to accrue commensurately with study duration (five-plus years) and professional liability. As a result, young architecture professionals gravitate to project-management or building information modelling where remuneration is better aligned with effort, or they exit the field completely. While this article mentions commodification, fee discounting and their micro level effects on retention, it does not fully situate these phenomena within broader macroeconomic trends, procurement policy shifts and market concentration dynamics – a limitation that constrains elaboration on how economic capital shortages systemically drive attrition and impede transformation, which, per Bourdieu, is the most significant of capitals.

The prevailing commodification of design under which 'any competent agent' can supply form (for government and the private sector, albeit for different reasons) is not a mere curiosity; it undermines the foundations of architecture professionals' distinctive cultural capital, for all but a marginal number of projects. The relationship between client and professional becomes transactional, with the client-is-always-right logic placing bias towards satisfying clients' specific requirements, rather than placing broader social and environmental effects at the centre. Clients receive generic 'plan-and-spec' buildings, further eroding lay appreciation of architectural distinctiveness. In Bourdieusian terms the economic field of restricted production upon which the profession was originally predicated has been colonised by the field of large-scale production. The foregoing analysis implies that the remedy is not, as some scholars

suggest, for individual professionals to articulate more clear value propositions, to redouble marketing or to become more entrepreneurial, which could redistribute market share but which is unlikely to increase the sector size as a whole. Rather, the profession should champion new ways for it to ply its trade through collective action, for example, through open design call as demonstrated by the Team Vlaams Bouwmeester (2024), to raise its profile and demand for cultural capital.

THE KWAZULU-NATAL ANOMALY

During the apartheid era, The Extension of University Education Act 45 (O'Malley n.d.b) criminalised the registration of black students at formerly open universities. The Universities Amendment Act 24 allowed for the admission of small quotas of black students into white universities. However, this was rarely exercised (Bryer 1977, 35–36), resulting in strict segregation. Black institutions of higher learning simply did not offer architecture or engineering studies (Jansen 2023,24), which eliminated all but white prospects. A unique exception was the ML Sultan Technical College located in KwaZulu-Natal, which offered architectural draughting courses to its predominantly Indian students from 1956. This presents a natural experiment of sorts: with Bourdieu's concepts providing a vocabulary for thinking through the effects of this on the current state. Further thwarting access to the profession, black practitioners were precluded from practising as architects during apartheid (O'Malley n.d.a; The Archive of Design and Architecture 2023). This entailed that the objective chances of entering the profession approached zero for black individuals, which created self-reinforcing cycles in which lack of representation discouraged aspiration. This aligns with Bourdieu's principle of 'making a virtue of necessity', when individuals align expectations with perceived possibilities.

Each province has universities of technology and universities offering architectural learning programmes. Similar proportions of female graduates (between 40 and 50 per cent) (Division for Institutional Strategy, Research and Analytics 2025) are achieved across institutions. Universities of technology are generally better transformed from a race perspective than their university counterparts. For example, 2020 data show that 74 per cent of Free State University graduates were white, whereas only two per cent of Central University of Technology graduates were white (Division for Institutional Strategy, Research and Analytics 2025). Furthermore, the variation in race demographics when combining university of technology and university graduate

race demographics remains considerable and cannot be explained by the underlying population demographic variability alone.

Table 2: Comparison of variance between percentage black architectural learning site graduates and background population by province, 2020

	Graduates[1]	Population[2]	Variance
Free State	63%	92%	29%
Western Cape	71%	84%	13%
KwaZulu-Natal	95%	96%	1%
Eastern Cape	83%	94%	11%
Gauteng	71%	90%	19%

Sources: 1. Division for Institutional Strategy, Research and Analytics 2025; StatsSA 2022

In 2020, KwaZulu-Natal was the only province exhibiting combined university of technology and university graduate race demographics similar to the background population. It is likely that this powerful pipeline impetus contributed to a seemingly more demographically representative profession in that province (SAIA 2020, 22).[7] A prior question was this: how and why was the pipeline more transformed? Table 2 identifies KwaZulu Natal as an empirical outlier: its 2020 graduate profile (95% black) almost matches the provincial background (96%), a 1 percentage point variance that suggests durable, locally embedded vocational pipelines could plausibly materially shorten hysteresis and improve graduate to professional conversion (Division for Institutional Strategy, Research and Analytics 2025; Sooklal 2005). This article now applies Bourdieu's conceptual vocabulary to suggest a partial explanation of this observation.

THE HYSTERESIS EFFECT AND PIPELINE TRANSFORMATION

The pipeline lag phenomenon explains why architectural transformation requires generational time frames. As a consequence of the apartheid-era exclusion of black entrants to universities, there was still only a very meagre pipeline of black architecture professionals at the onset of the millennium. 'Born-frees'[8] would start graduating from high (secondary) school in about 2012, although even before this, the pipeline began racially transforming. As an indication of pipeline transformation, the first universal

opportunity to access architecture courses in 1995 (immediately following the first democratic election) would have been eligible for professional architect (Pr. Arch) registration in 2002. The first born-frees would be eligible to enrol in the Pr. Arch category in 2020. In addition, studying architecture may not even have occurred to the black majority who had never been exposed to architecture professionals or discourse:

> The evolution of Architecture as a profession has resulted in an elitist image, remote from the sweat and dirt of construction. The chances of craftsmen and the massed experience of the labour force informing the process is diminished. Add to this the polarising effect of colonisation and apartheid, the development of a South African society, culture and economy that is simultaneously First World and Third World, and the whole situation of Architecture as a profession in South Africa is exacerbated. It is little known or understood and seldom contemplated as an option amongst the previously disadvantaged vast majority (Murray 2001).[9]

The hysteresis effect manifests when social actors continue operating with outdated dispositions despite structural changes, creating 'maladjusted habitus' that resists transformation. At the dawn of democracy, there was an acute shortage of black graduates emerging into the workplace in a context where new opportunities arose from a pressing need for demographic diversification (Janse van Rensburg 2015). Positions in academia, the public sector and business required stakeholders, particularly credentialed shareholders and employees, who embodied the values of the new non-sexist, non-racist democratic ethos of the post-apartheid dispensation. In the first few years after new democratic elections, this scenario saw the very limited pool of architecture practitioners from historically disadvantaged backgrounds fall short of demand. As part of a broader formation of a new black bourgeoisie class (Freund and Padayachee 1998, 1178–1179), attractive opportunities for locally and internationally trained African practitioners became available, providing accelerated paths to leadership and visibility for the rare individuals who had early benefit of development opportunities.

In most provinces, the architecture profession exhibits this phenomenon, where legacy demographic participation patterns persist despite democratic reforms. Contemporary

voluntary associations predated the regulator as the profession's self-regulating structure. For architects, these had their origins in various regional institutes. Of these the Cape Institute for Architects, Port Elizabeth Society of Architects, Transvaal Institute and Natal Institute of Architects date back to at least the early 20th century. The first national body was established in 1927 (South African Architectural Record 1927) when the individual professional institutes and associations of the colonies united to form the Institute of South African Architects (ISAA). Enabled by the promulgation of Architects Act 44 of 2000, some voluntary associations that had existed in the periphery before 1994 moved into the officially recognised ambit of the profession.

From 1994, when the first democratic elections were held, to 2000, when Act 44 was promulgated, the country's inherited institutions (such as voluntary associations) remained largely intact (Viruly 2009, 2), and many of the key actors remained in place, if only provisionally and subject to critical review and revision. Consequently, the South African architecture profession remains deeply segmented along geographical lines. Despite subscribing to a national body, the regions of SAIA continue to operate with functional autonomy, reinforcing localised professional identities that discourage cross-regional mobility and cohesion. Fragmentation is also strongly evident in the professions' urban-centric concentration of resources and opportunities.[10] Although recognised statutorily as one profession, the field remains stratified by registration category, with distinction made by different educational pathways and professional structures. This category segmentation contributes to professional insularity.

EARLY EDUCATIONAL PROVISIONS AND ALTERED OBJECTIVE CHANCES

ML Sultan Technical College occupies a pivotal place in KwaZulu Natal's history of technical education. It is visible as both a community response to exclusion and a pragmatic pathway into skilled work for marginalised populations. Founded through Hajee ML Sultan's philanthropy and sustained by local initiative, the college expanded mid 20th century to offer commercial and technical training when access to mainstream vocational education was severely constrained for Indian South Africans. Its curriculum and outreach provided practical routes into building trades and draughting at a time when formal professional pipelines remained largely closed, making ML Sultan a durable entry point for students otherwise excluded from tertiary pathways (ML Sultan n.d.).

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The institution's evolution – from a community technical college through subsequent reclassification as a college of advanced technical education and later technikon status to its eventual merger into wider Durban tertiary structures – mirrors sectoral shifts in South African higher education and the state's changing relationship with vocational providers (Sooklal 2005).

The ML Sultan Technical College and the small cohort of black students at Natal University may have countered apartheid exclusionary dynamics by creating tangible pathways for black participation. Early black graduates could establish local professional networks that provided mentorship, employment opportunities and symbolic validation of professional aspirations, which functioned as social capital that could be leveraged by subsequent generations, providing both practical support and demonstration that architectural careers were achievable. This trajectory illustrates both the potential of resilience and transformation of education structures: this community driven institution carved valuable professional openings within an exclusionary system, and it prevailed under constrained funding, regulatory ambiguity and segregated labour markets.

REJECTION AND RESILIENCE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NATAL

Ruben Reddy (1982–1988), Mthembeni Mkhize (enrolled 1978, graduated 1992), Karuni Naidu (1988) Luyanda Mpahlwa (started 1978) and Khotso Moleko (enrolled 1978, graduated 1991) were among the first black Africans permitted to study architecture in South Africa at the University of Natal (Fame Productions Media 2021; Tromp n.d.). Each achieved notable professional success.

Luyanda Mpahlwa received the inaugural Curry Stone Design Prize in 2008 and served as SAIA President (2018–2020). His experiences of incarceration and exile inspired him to address social justice through architecture, deepening the symbolic value of his work. Similarly, Ruben Reddy's 37-year career, marked by high-profile projects including the Nelson Mandela Children's Hospital and FIFA World Cup 2010 infrastructure, established his status as a master architect. He achieved international recognition for technical excellence, which reinforced his symbolic capital. His served as SAIA President, enabling him to influence the profession and national architectural discourse. As the first black woman to graduate with a bachelor of architecture degree

from the University of Natal in 1988, Karuni Naidu's professional trajectory represented a powerful disruption of exclusion within the architectural domain. Naidu founded CNN Architects in 1995, mentored many, served on professional bodies and earned accolades such as the Women in Architecture Award (2017) and Businesswoman of the Year (2018), thereby leveraging her pioneering role to cultivate symbolic capital that opened doors for others.

These early architecture professionals were influential to an emerging generation of leaders, such as Skura Mthembu and Adheema Davis, demonstrating the intergenerational transfer of habitus (Fame Productions Media 2021). The professional values espoused by this new generation therefore aligns with and extends the social justice orientation established by early mentors such as Mpahlwa and Mkhize, demonstrating the successful transmission of transformative professional values. Skura Mthembu's role as the first African president of SAIA-KZN represents the successful realisation of the transformation agenda established by his mentors, while his approach to leadership incorporates contemporary concerns about professional development and international engagement. Davis's academic leadership, including her roles in architectural education and her research on decolonising architectural pedagogy, demonstrates how emerging leaders are adapting transformation principles to address contemporary educational and professional challenges. Her involvement in international academic networks and her contributions to architectural discourse show how mentorship relationships enable emerging leaders to engage with global professional communities while maintaining focus on local transformation imperatives. The compounding effects of transformative leadership on social and cultural capital generation is further lent credence by the establishment in 2000 in KwaZulu-Natal of the first, and until recently, the only, SACAP-recognised voluntary association which antedated democracy.[11]

However, this raises an important question. Why did the early black architects graduating from other institutions such as the University of Cape Town at a similar time, such as Mphethi Morojele and Sindile Alfred Ngonyama (graduated 1986), who also championed transformative practice and inclusive education, seemingly fail to galvanise transformation in the Western Cape comparable to that achieved in KwaZulu-Natal? These actors received individual acclaim and recognition. Perhaps recourse to Bourdieu can provide insight?

KwaZulu-Natal's success in building a deep bench of black architectural leaders, in Bourdieusian terms, could be told as a story of both building a critical mass in the field *and* of the production of durable dispositions predisposed to challenging structural constraint. Bourdieu posits that actors who are consistently refused full legitimacy in a field can occasionally cultivate a habitus clivé, or cleft habitus, that is acutely aware of its misfit with the dominant order, yet converts that awareness into an impulse for action (Friedman 2016). Repeated rejection does not automatically lead to withdrawal; it may foster radical reflexivity and sharpen the 'ceaseless vigilance' that Bourdieu credited with accelerating his own intellectual maturation (Mu 2021). Testimony at the memorial service for architect Mkhize suggests that the cohort of early architectural professionals in the late 1970s and 1980s confronted with apartheid-era exclusion hardened a resolve to participate in and transform the field from within (Fame Productions Media 2021).[12] Their setbacks were countered with resilience which led them to humble, 'authentic' service to the profession (Fame Productions Media 2021).

Mu (2021) invokes Bourdieu's vocabulary to conceptualise resilience as a purposeful response to structural realities of social inequality, explicitly linking it to struggles against symbolic violence in education and employment fields. Likewise, Fowler (2020) shows that crises that challenge expectations and disrupt objective chances open a 'margin of liberty' for transformative practice. Rejection, it seems, can, but does not necessarily, lead agents to position themselves inside the field while simultaneously contesting its doxa. This requires a suspension of illusio, while simultaneously remaining faithful to the presumptive mandate of the field. This resonates with Bourdieu's contention that 'miracle' successes are prone to misrecognition as evidence that the field is already open: dampening impetus to collective mobilisation (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990).

The extent to which transformation success can be shown to derive from hysteresis, social capital and cultural capital can provide insight into how transformation requires mechanisms fundamentally altering cultural and social contexts within which professional aspirations are formed and realised as supplementary to removal of access barriers. Such insight has implications for understanding why transformation initiatives often fail and suggests alternate approaches and mechanisms to achieve desirable demographic outcomes. The foregoing analysis demonstrates how Bourdieu's

framework could be applied to explain some of the mechanisms that affect differential transformation across geographical regions. It posits that hysteresis, social capital and cultural capital are interconnected, with early states of affairs having disproportionate long-term effects. The extent to which the existence of the ML Sultan Technical College and a small but resilient cohort of black students at Natal University really affected transformation is speculative, and various other factors have undoubtedly contributed to KwaZulu-Natal's stellar performance. However, this can be tested in future scholarship with reference to other professions since the severe developmental restrictions of apartheid created natural experiments such as this example.

LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

Bourdieu's conceptual apparatus aligns with other theories that locate sources of social change in marginalised groups, notably subaltern studies (Spivak 1988) and intersectionality (Crenshaw 2017). Subaltern scholarship stresses that people situated at the intersections of class, race, gender and colonial legacies often have histories and perspectives rendered invisible by dominant institutional narratives, and that these perspectives can generate distinctive forms of contestation and transformation (Chakrabarty 2000; Spivak 1988). Intersectionality highlights how overlapping demographic attributes produce asymmetric and cumulative effects on lived experience. While these approaches recognise the particular agency of marginalised actors in challenging top down transformation agendas, their concepts fall outside the primary focus of this manuscript. Finally, while race and gender are foregrounded throughout this study, its focus does not fully unpack how these axes intersect with class, geography, language and other structural variables to produce compounded effects on professional trajectories – a limitation that calls for intersectional analyses that link habitus and capital conversion to socio-economic status, local labour markets and cultural capital.

DISCUSSION

Bourdieu wrote extensively and evolved his concepts (Lebaron 2003). His style is cumbersome and nuanced, and his apparatus can be challenging to apply (Calhoun 2002; Grenfell and James 2004). Some scholars, notably Sayer (1999) and Lebaron (2003), consider that Bourdieu's theories have some important limitations. Notwithstanding his intentions to the contrary, critics consider that Bourdieu's work – particularly his empirical work – risks oversimplification or reductionism, for

example, in pigeonholing actors into stereotypical – especially class – categories and underplaying individuals' agency (Lebaron 2003; Sayer 1999). Critics find Bourdieu dismissive of moral sentiments, which can play a substantive role in the reproduction of social order and are not reducible to interest or instrumental impetus to act (Lebaron 2003; Sayer 1999, 412).

The interplay between individual agency and structural conditions, as conceptualised through habitus and capital, underscores the difficulty of achieving meaningful transformation. Individuals' dispositions and trajectories are shaped by their social backgrounds and experiences, which interact with the objective conditions of the professional field to either enable or constrain their retention and advancement. The persistence of doxa – the taken-for-granted norms and values within the profession – further complicates efforts to disrupt established patterns of exclusion and marginalisation. Black professionals negotiate double hysteresis: adapting to post-apartheid opportunity while still compensating for apartheid's dispossessions through persistent lack of resources, black tax and spatial assignment.

Augmenting considerable literature on student attrition, there was also a voluminous corpus of international scholarly literature on workplace attrition, retention and turnover in the literature, spanning over 100 years of research (Hom and Lee et al. 2017). In these works, topics were commonly approached from the perspectives of human resource management, general management, economics, psychology and organisational psychology, among others. There are important concerns regarding the direct applicability of workplace attrition or turnover and retention literature to the present study.

Firstly, optimising for retention may sometimes be at odds with optimising for transformation. For example, Heavey and Holwerda et al. (2013, 13–14) found job embeddedness was less strong among women as their family obligations were more likely to interrupt employment.

Secondly, this literature predominantly examined attrition from specific organisations, such as educational institutions and workplaces. As highlighted by Hom and Lee et al. (2017, 538), it aligned mostly to corporate or academic leadership interests. These were strategically positioned and intrinsically motivated to mitigate unwanted or

costly attrition (Wallace 2023). Contrasting this, sole practitioners and small practices, which predominate South Africa's architectural scene (SAIA 2020), could be unlikely to have dedicated human resource functions (Adendorff 2015) and could be motivated to release staff when there was insufficient work or interpersonal incompatibility.

CONCLUSION

Bourdieu's conceptual vocabulary permits us to recast retention not as a leak to be plugged, but a contest over capital encountered through habitus. This article invites a holistic approach that permits a view on structures and potential reforms with support for individual agency, with the goal of fostering environments where diverse practitioners can accumulate and convert various forms of capital in ways that define their professional identities and, crucially, affirm their contributions.

This article has argued that the problem of retention and transformation can be read as a contest over forms of capital mediated by habitus, doxa, illusio and the field's hysteresis. To translate diagnosis into measurable reform, interventions must target the specific mechanisms that enable or block capital conversion. These can include strengthening cultural–capital conversion by creating certainty or security of supervised candidacy places (perhaps through incentives), structured portfolio building programmes and team rotations that make tacit design skills visible and transferable to novices. Economic capital can be protected by reworking procurement and fee practices (procurement clauses that weight cultural and symbolic capital (design dividend); transparent fee guidelines; modest contract linked retention funds) so that cultural competence can be monetised into viable careers.

Addressing doxa and hysteresis requires interventions that reshape institutional routines and expectations: embed public engagement and improve the profession's visibility (competitions, regional prizes, strategic media) to shift symbolic valuations of architectural work; and adopt simple, repeatable place based tracer and cohort studies that measure articulation rates, graduate–registration conversion and rural conversion indices to detect where habitus recalibration is failing, and intervene. Operational targets should be measured, explicit and testable: increase mentorship density by X; raise articulation rates TVET–degree by Y; improve five year professional survival for targeted cohorts by Z. Use pilots and longitudinal tracer studies to evaluate causal effects of interventions and to refine policy levers. Viewed through Bourdieu's

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lens, these measures do not merely redistribute numbers; they alter the field's value exchanges, making cultural capital convertible, expanding social networks, protecting economic returns and changing taken for granted norms.

Concerns about the erosion of professional distinctiveness are not unique to architecture, nor to South Africa. Similar dynamics have emerged across disciplines and geographies, shaped by shifting developmental paradigms and fiscal constraints. For architecture practitioners, the interplay of embodied craft, built environment stewardship and cultural symbolism presents a distinctive configuration that underpins vocational identity. While this article foregrounds architecture, the analytical framework may offer insights into other professions confronted with comparable pressures.

These insights suggest that transformation of professions requires more than surface-level demographic adjustments; it demands a fundamental reconfiguration of field structures, practices and symbolic orders. Strategies to enhance retention must address the material realities of economic capital, the social networks and mentorship opportunities that constitute social capital, and the cultural and symbolic recognition that confer legitimacy and belonging. Moreover, transformation initiatives must be reflexive and cognisant of the profession's transitional state, acknowledging the 'wicked' nature of the problem and the potential for unintended consequences to interventions.

NOTES

1. This was anticipated in the founding provisions and Section 217 of the Constitution and given effect through several legislative instruments, including, as amended, the Education White Paper 3: A Programme for Higher Education Transformation; the Higher Education Act 101; the Skills Development Act 97; the Employment Equity Act 55; the Preferential Procurement Policy Framework Act 5; the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) Act; and the Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill.
2. In its 'What we do' CBE states 'The CBE was established for the purpose of instilling good conduct within built environment professions, mobilising transformation in the built environment professions, protecting the interest of the public and advising the South African Government on Built Environment related issues' (CBE. n.d.a). SACAP stands for 'a transformed architectural leader serving society in a sustainable built environment. Its mission is to achieve a SACAP that is inclusive and transparent...' (SACAP n.d.).
3. • (TITLE-ABS-KEY ("demographic transformation") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ((retention OR attrition)) TITLE-ABS-KEY ((gender OR race OR intersectionality OR network* OR connect* OR ubuntu))

AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (workplace) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("South Africa")) – 0 HITS

- [Publication Title: retention] OR [Publication Title: attrition]] AND [[All: gender] OR [All: race] OR [All: intersectionality] OR [All: network*] OR [All: connect*] OR [All: ubuntu]] AND [All: "south africa"] AND [[All: workplace] OR [All: profession]] AND [Publication Date: (01/01/2010 TO 12/31/2020)]
- [All: loss or attrition or retention or retain] AND [All: workplace or profession] AND [All: demography or demographic] AND [All: race or gender] AND [All: "south africa"] AND [[All: workplace] OR [All: employment] OR [All: jobs] OR [All: profession] OR [All: work]] AND [Publication Date: (01/01/2010 TO 12/31/2020)]
- Google: allintitle: demographic transformation gender "South Africa" employment OR work OR job OR profession OR architect OR workplace "attrition
- "demographic transformation" AND (intersectionality OR networks OR connectedness OR ubuntu) AND (attrition OR turnover OR retain OR retention) AND (employment OR work OR job OR profession OR architect OR workplace) AND "South Africa"
- "demographic transformation" AND (retention OR attrition) AND (workplace OR profession OR architecture*)

4. According to Jenkins, Bourdieu's journal, 'Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales', was 'an innovative academic publishing venture which mixed text, photographs and illustrations in a refreshing ... style' (2014, 14). This blurring of disciplinary lines, and eclectic use of methods and materials, was a personal impetus for my selecting Bourdieu as a theoretician to 'think with' for the preparation of a thesis, from whence this article emerges.
5. At least not in the decade leading up to the democratic elections (Magaziner 2016).
6. ML Sultan Technical College became a Technikon in 1979.
7. Until professional registration data include region, the exact level of professional transformation is indicative only, here based on voluntary association membership.
8. Colloquial term for those born in South Africa after the first democratic elections of April 1994.
9. A faculty member involved in the selection of applicants for the oversubscribed Bachelor of Architecture Studies undergraduate degree at the University of Cape Town between 1998 and 2001.
10. For example, compare urban/rural success rates in professional practice examinations (De Jager 2025, 130).
11. Freedom Architecture Consulting Empowerment (FACE).
12. For example, Luyanda Mpahlwa at 00:46:03–00:49:02; Ruben Reddy at 00:57:20; Adheema Davis at 1:36:00-1:39:36.

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