

Enhancing Outdoor Public Spaces Through Sculpture and Landscape Integration in Kabale Municipality, Southwestern Uganda

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Abstract: Most public spaces in Kabale feel blank. People walk through, but they rarely stop. The reasons are familiar: little shade, no seating, and water pooling when it rains. This study asks whether sculpture and landscape, designed together, can change that. We worked with three sites — Central Park, Kigongi Roundabout, and Makanga Hill Viewpoint — using site visits, workshops with 62 residents, and design drafts. The pattern was consistent: “when art also functions... people use and care for it” (Francis, 2003, p. 161). In Kabale, that means shade, seating, drainage, and local planting. For a small highland town, the mix is less about decoration and more about practical infrastructure.

Keywords: Public Space, Sculpture, Landscape Design, Kabale, Community Participation, Urban Design.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Kabale sits on steep, volcanic ground with a strong Bakiga identity. That should produce distinct public spaces. Right now, it doesn't. Central Park is exposed. Roundabouts move traffic but have no character. Viewpoints over Lake Bunyonyi are eroded and lack seating.

Other cities have tried a different approach. As Francis (2003) argues, urban open space should be “designed for user needs” (p. 153). Maputo, Medellín, and Windhoek used art with landscape to improve safety and local identity. In Uganda, that conversation mostly stays in Kampala. This paper narrows it to Kabale: if sculpture and landscape are integrated, can spaces work better, feel more local, and handle the weather?

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

From field visits and KMC records, three problems keep repeating.

First, *_use_*. There is little shade, few places to sit, and water collects after rain. By midday, spaces are empty.

Second, *_identity_*. The town plan notes a gap: “Kigezi patterns, stone, and local materials are missing” from public areas (Kabale Municipal Council, 2020, p. 34).

Third, *_maintenance_*. Budgets go to mowing, but empty spaces don't get community care. As one KMC engineer told us in a workshop, “Decoration without use doesn't last.”

Art dropped on a lawn gets ignored. Lawns without purpose cost water. Combining the two may solve both.

III. METHODOLOGY

This is a design-based case study. We chose three sites for different roles: Central Park for civic space, Kigongi for transport, and Makanga Hill for tourism.

➤ *We Worked in Four Stages:*

- *_Site visits_*: Three days at each site to map sun, wind, movement, and actual use.
- *_Workshops_*: Four sessions with 62 people — elders, youth, vendors, boda riders, KMC engineers, and local makers. We used Matsiko and Twinomugisha's (2023) community-art approach, which they describe as “painting for empowerment... through local participation” (p. 1785).
- *_Design work_*: Each concept had to solve a landscape issue — hold soil, make shade, or guide movement.
- *_Measures_*: We set simple indicators for later: footfall, maintenance cost, and resident feedback.

IV. FINDINGS AND PROPOSED FRAMEWORK

➤ *Making Art Useful*

Workshop participants were direct: art must work. Three ideas came out.

Central Park — “The Gathering Hill”: A low earth mound with terraces, planted with *Erythrina abyssinica* and lemongrass. Basalt sculptures carved with Bakiga proverbs act as retaining walls and backrests. The mound cuts street noise, and the trees give shade within 18 months.

Kigongi Roundabout — “The Weave”: Steel bollards shaped like Kigezi baskets replace concrete barriers. Papyrus planters absorb runoff, and solar tops light the area at night.

Makanga Hill Viewpoint — “Terraces of Memory”: Stone terraces modeled on Kigezi hillside farms. Benches shaped like granary posts face the lake and help stabilize the slope.

➤ *Landscape as Local Identity*

Participants preferred local species over imports. *Erythrina abyssinica* and papyrus are part of Kigezi farming and handle Kabale’s rainfall. As the National Culture Policy puts it, culture is “expressed through the environment and the way communities shape it” (Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2019, p. 12). So planting itself became a way to signal identity without signs.

➤ *Building and Maintaining It*

The plan has four steps: co-design, pilot at Central Park, review, then expand. To avoid the usual breakdown, everything uses local materials and skills. Katuna welders can repair steel. Mwanjari masons can work stone. As Matsiko and Twinomugisha (2023) found, “when communities feel ownership, vandalism drops” (p. 1789).

V. DISCUSSION

Kabale’s terrain forces the issue. Steep land needs walls that can also be seats. Heavy rain needs drainage that also looks good. Tight budgets mean every piece must do more than one job.

When sculpture and landscape are integrated, three things happen. You save money because one structure holds soil, seats people, and marks the place. Local stone and patterns keep Kabale from looking generic. And memorable spaces get used. Francis (2003) puts it simply: spaces that meet real needs “are used, and therefore cared for” (p. 161).

Maintenance is still the risk. But artisans in the workshops said it plainly: design for local repair skills and it will survive. That matches Matsiko and Twinomugisha’s (2023) finding that local ownership reduces damage.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

➤ *Sculpture Plus Landscape can Turn Kabale’s Spaces from Corridors into Places. But Only If Three Rules Hold:*

- Function first: Every piece must solve a problem — shade, water, seating, safety.
- *Local materials and makers*: Volcanic stone, scrap metal, local plants, built by Kabale people.
- *Design with care*: Involve users, then give schools or SACCOs responsibility to maintain.

KMC should pilot “The Gathering Hill” at Central Park, measure what happens, and scale only what works. More research should track use after construction so other Ugandan towns have evidence to use.

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