



# In Memoriam: Professor Kongjian Yu



It is with immense sorrow and a profound sense of loss that the International Federation of Landscape Architects (IFLA) announces the passing of a true visionary and one of the most influential figures in our field, Professor Kongjian Yu. He tragically died on September 23, 2025, in a small plane crash in the rural area of Aquidauana, in the Pantanal region of Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil, where he was attending the 14th International Architecture Biennale of São Paulo. He was 62 years old.

Kongjian Yu, born in Dongyu Village, Jinhua, Zhejiang Province, China, in 1963, dedicated his life to redefining landscape architecture and urban planning as "the art of survival." After earning his Bachelor's and Master's degrees from Beijing Forestry University, he pursued a Doctor of Design at the



Upon returning to China in 1997, Professor Yu founded the College of Architecture and Landscape Architecture at Peking University, serving as its dean. In 1998, he established Turenscape, an interdisciplinary design firm that grew to become one of the largest in the world, renowned for its innovative approach to ecological restoration and climate-resilient design.

His ground-breaking "Sponge City" concept, first proposed in China, emphasises nature-based solutions for urban water management, using wetlands, permeable surfaces, and green spaces to absorb, filter, and store rainwater. This philosophy, rooted in ancient Chinese wisdom, has influenced national policies in China and has been applied globally, advocating for an "ecological security pattern" that prioritises resilience, functionality, and sustainability over purely ornamental aesthetics. Professor Yu also expanded this concept to a "Sponge Planet" approach, promoting the ecological restoration of wetlands, rivers, and coastal zones worldwide to recover and stabilise the global water cycle.

A recipient of numerous international accolades, including the IFLA Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe Award (2020), the Oberlander Landscape Architecture Prize (2023), and the RAIC International Prize (2025), Kongjian Yu was a fellow of the American Society of Landscape Architects and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. His work, including celebrated projects like Yanweizhou Park, Qunli Stormwater Park, and Red Ribbon Park, garnered multiple ASLA Excellence and Honour Awards, WAF Awards, and many more.



Professor Kongjian Yu at the IFLA World Congress 2025 in Nantes, France.

Professor Yu was not only an exceptional practitioner and academic but also a generous mentor and an inspiring advocate. His "Big Feet Revolution" philosophy challenged conventional urban development, calling for a deeper connection between humanity and the land. His commitment to global collaboration was further demonstrated by his recent leadership of IFLA's new working programme on Water Security and Management,



Members of our IFLA community fondly recall his captivating speeches, his willingness to engage with students and professionals alike, and his vibrant spirit, even just weeks before his untimely passing at events like the IFLA World Congress in Nantes and meetings in Brazil. He had a unique ability to inspire, making complex ecological principles accessible and urgent.

His loss is deeply felt across the globe, as echoed by the heartfelt tributes from IFLA members who mourn a friend, a colleague, a visionary, and an unwavering champion for a sustainable future. He leaves behind an unparalleled legacy that will continue to guide and inspire generations of landscape architects, urban planners, and environmentalists. We, as the IFLA family, are committed to continuing his vital work and ensuring his vision for a "Sponge Planet" endures.

May his memory be a blessing, and may his contributions to landscape architecture continue to inspire future generations to build a more resilient and harmonious world.

*Dr Bruno Marques,  
IFLA President*

### **Words of Tribute from the IFLA Community**

The news of Kongjian Yu's passing has sent shockwaves through our global community. Below are just a few of the many heartfelt tributes that have been shared, reflecting the profound impact he had on colleagues, students, and friends around the world.

### **On His Vision and Legacy:**





community of Stewards of the Land, climate change will not be tackled otherwise."

— Raquel Peñalosa,

IFLA Americas Past President

"His passion for landscape architecture was truly inspiring, and his legacy will continue to influence our field... may his contributions to landscape architecture continue to inspire future generations."

— Martha Fajardo,

IFLA Past President

"In my country, there is a saying: 'When a wise soul is born, the world is born anew; when a wise soul dies, the world sinks into shadow.' Today, with the passing of Kongjian Yu, I feel as though an entire world of wisdom, vision, and hope has dimmed, yet his light will continue to guide us."

— Alper Çabuk, EPD-

NET, TMMOB Peyzaj Mimarları Odası, Türkiye

### **On His Character and Generosity:**

"My last memories of this visionary man was when, at Les Machines [in Nantes], he was sitting in a 'pod' on the mechanized Crane Bird and absolutely enjoying the ride like a little kid."

— Hitesh Mehta,

Delegate, Architectural Association of Kenya

"I was impressed by the time he gave to all those students wanting to speak to him or have a selfie - a big loss."



## Architects

"Kongjian was amazing in his generosity to IFLA and the landscape architectural profession globally. He was both an educator, practitioner and advocate. We will miss him greatly."

— James Hayter, IFLA

## Past President





### Tributes from Around the World:

"We at IFLA AFRICA are saddened by the news about Kongjian Yu's sudden passing. He was a huge figure for our profession... He always had time for those interested in his work. He inspired many and will be sorely missed."

— Graham Young, IFLA

Africa President

"On behalf of IFLA Europe, I would like to express our sadness for the loss of Kongjian Yu. Our world community lost a famous scholar and a professional who was working for the quality of the Landscape Architecture profession."

— Katerina Gkoltsiou,

IFLA Europe President

"From the Colombian Society of Landscape Architects –SAP–, we are saddened by the passing of Kongjian Yu. His vision and commitment to landscape architecture paved a path that will



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Sociedad Colombiana de Arquitectos Paisajistas (SAP)

"Only two weeks ago, many of us were together with him in Brasília, sharing ideas, laughter, and the passion that he so generously radiated. The thought that such a vibrant presence is no longer among us is heartbreaking."

— Diana Wiesner, IFLA

Americas



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