problem *statement*

THE CREATION OF MEANINGFUL PLACES

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The dissertation is an investigation into the possible adaptive reuse of the Berrals building, a historically significant structure in the Tshwane Inner City, as an 'intelligent' Information Centre.

The objective of the study was to develop a design approach that would respond to both the historic and current conditions of the building, to ensure its continued use in future.

This process required gaining an understanding of the potential and inadequacies, physical attributes, historical importance and role of the chosen envelope in the context of the city, in order to establish a responsible and appropriate approach to preserve the character of the subject and to provide a program suited to the contemporary city user.

The choice of the Berrals building as the object of study was determined by its significance in the history of South African Architecture, being one of only a few remaining examples of the regional expression of the Modern Movement that originated in Pretoria in the Post-war years as well as its current deteriorating state, requiring immediate attention.

The study commences with an introduction to Pretoria Regionalism, to establish a perceptive understanding of the historical context of the building, and continues with a study of the urban context, to determine the building's orginal setting in the city, as well as the current ill-defined nature of its surroundings, the consequence of the construction of Nelson Mandela Drive in 1997.

It resulted in the fragmentation of the city's grid along its route, producing a stretch of ill-defined cityscape, in which the Berrals building is situated. This fragmented urban fabric; not only cause insufficient orientation and legibility for both the unfamiliar and habitual user of the city, but it rendered the original use of the Berrals obsolete.

The design project aims to restore a sense of place and legibility to the city context along Nelson Mandela Drive by re-establishing the Berrals as an identifiable part of the urban fabric.

This is achieved by introducing the historic character of the Berrals as part of its new identity, creating an identifiable landmark, and inserting an Information Centre as its new use, which contributes functionally to the legibility of the city.

Heidegger describes (Norberg-Schulz 1980:5) the total relationship between man and place as 'dwelling', and when a man dwells, he is simultaneously located in space and exposed to

a certain environmental character. The two psychological functions involved in 'dwelling' may be called 'orientation' and 'identification'.

"From primitive times to modern-day, man has been attached to the environment in which he finds himself. By distinguishing and naming certain parts of this environment, he formulates a visual image of his surroundings, in order to move with ease through it. If such reference should be disturbed, if way-finding cannot occur, mobile man is filled with terror of being lost" (Lynch 1960:123-125).

Christian Norberg-Shulz (1980:5) also elaborates on this in his book "Genius Loci" by stating that man dwells when he can orientate himself within and identify himself with an environment, or, in short, when he experiences the environment as meaningful. Dwelling therefore implies something more than "shelter". It implies that the spaces where life occurs are places, in the true sense of the word. A place is a space which has a distinct character and since ancient times the *genius loci*, or "spirit of place", has been recognised as the concrete reality man has to face and come to terms with in his daily life. Architecture means to visualise the *genius loci*, and the task of the architect is to create meaningful places, whereby he helps man to dwell.

The project aims to establish Berrals as a reference point in the urban fabric by emphasising its unique character and its crucial position in relation to important environmental elements, essential for way-finding in the city, in an attempt to stitch the urban fabric together.

Such a project is also backed by The Tshwane Inner City Development and Regeneration Strategy (2005:16) which proposes as one of the interventions to reposition and regenerate the Tshwane Inner City, to announce the Inner City in bold terms by defining the gateways into the city, in an attempt to increase legibility.

"*From the south the Inner City is defined by a series of significant green open spaces in an impressive natural setting, following the course of the Apies River/Canal through the city, but the entrance into the built environment should however be enhanced by creating a landmark, comprising strong vertical lines in order to make the necessary statement.*" (Tshwane Inner City Development and Regeneration Strategy 2005: 16)

The position of Berrals along Nelson Mandela Drive, the main southern entry route into the city, as well as its position on the southern edge of the Mandela Development Corridor, in a highly visible position, establishes Berrals as an ideal location for the creation of such a landmark.

information *centre*

According to Immanuel Castells (2004:83) spatial transformation must be understood in the broader context of social transformation: space does not reflect society, it expresses it, it is the fundamental dimension of society, inseperable from the overall process of social organisation and social change.

Through the ages, the urban experience has been centred on the placement and movement of the human body, the building, the street, the transportation network, the neighbourhood, and the city, but with new technology becoming such an integral part of our daily rituals, the contemporary urban experience has entered uncharted territory:

"The human body now exists on two levels: the real and the virtual. The primitive body that a human being has always possessed, and the virtual body that has come into being with the spread of media. The former seeks the beautiful light and fresh breeze found in nature and the other body, which responds to the electronic environment, might be called 'a media-like body in search of information'. The relationship between these two is constantly shifting and it is through them that we connect to architecture and the city." (Ito 2007:7)

Core to the determinining an appropriate new program for the Berrals, was this co-evolving relationship that has developed between the ever growing urban landscape and the digital world, the context within which the Information Society transact.

The concept developed of an 'intelligent' Information Centre, a new type of public resource facility combining a general Information Centre and Médiathèque, in order to provide a comprehensive information service to all city users.

The centre functions as an information and orientation node, forming a foyer for users entering into the city, as well as a general point of orientation in the urban fabric, while providing media(information) facilities for use, either for browsing, business or education.

The Information Centre is there to receive new and habitual users, provide information which will improve their ability to further move through, and make use of the city and its facilities, as well as provide an additional resource relevant to the local community situated in the area.

The combination of an Information Centre with a Mediatheque developed out of the differing needs of users in the city, Jan Gehl defines them

in three broad categories:

1. Familiar users:

This category addresses the current users of the city. These users work, live in, or frequently make use of the city's facilities and have developed a sufficient sense of orientation through the regular use of functional routes. These users develop individual landmarks and an environmental image through personal experience. Familiar users should be catered for, through the provision of necessary facilities, and thus be attracted to the site. The activities provided by the proposed project should encourage lingering of the city's current users, displaying city life as an attraction to potential users.

2. Unfamiliar users:

These include potential users of the city, which currently do not use the city for security, locality or discomfort reasons. These users are the primary focus of the project. They enter the CBD for unavoidable activities, inaccessible elsewhere. As occasional visitors of necessity, they experience the greatest frustration, their ignorance of the city structure causing disorientation. The formulation of a point of reference, providing necessary information on orientation and usage would facilitate city use. A positive experience could thus decrease the animosity felt by such users, encouraging further exploration of possibilities. Regular use would lead to ease of use. One 'at home' within the

urban environment, a fondness and affinity for the city can be developed.

3. Sporadic users:

These are temporary visitors, for example, tourists. As short term users of the city, their perception of the city is formulated predominantly through visual experience of character. Here, navigability and transcending legibility is essential, due to the unfamiliarity of the surroundings. Urban culture displayed, will create points of unique interest and ensure lasting visual images. With the approach of the 2010 FIFA world cup, this category of users will be of particular interest. Although not the major concern of the project, the manner in which visitors, whether local or international, perceive the city and its inhabitants should be positive and memorable.

To allow for the integration of users from varying demographical contexts- the accessibility for each of the space, and ultimately the city context, being the primary goal. A strong interactive component is necessary… Actgive and passive continual participation from users is to contribute to the 'identity of place'. Activities provided and generated should encourage the fostering of a vernacular urban culture.