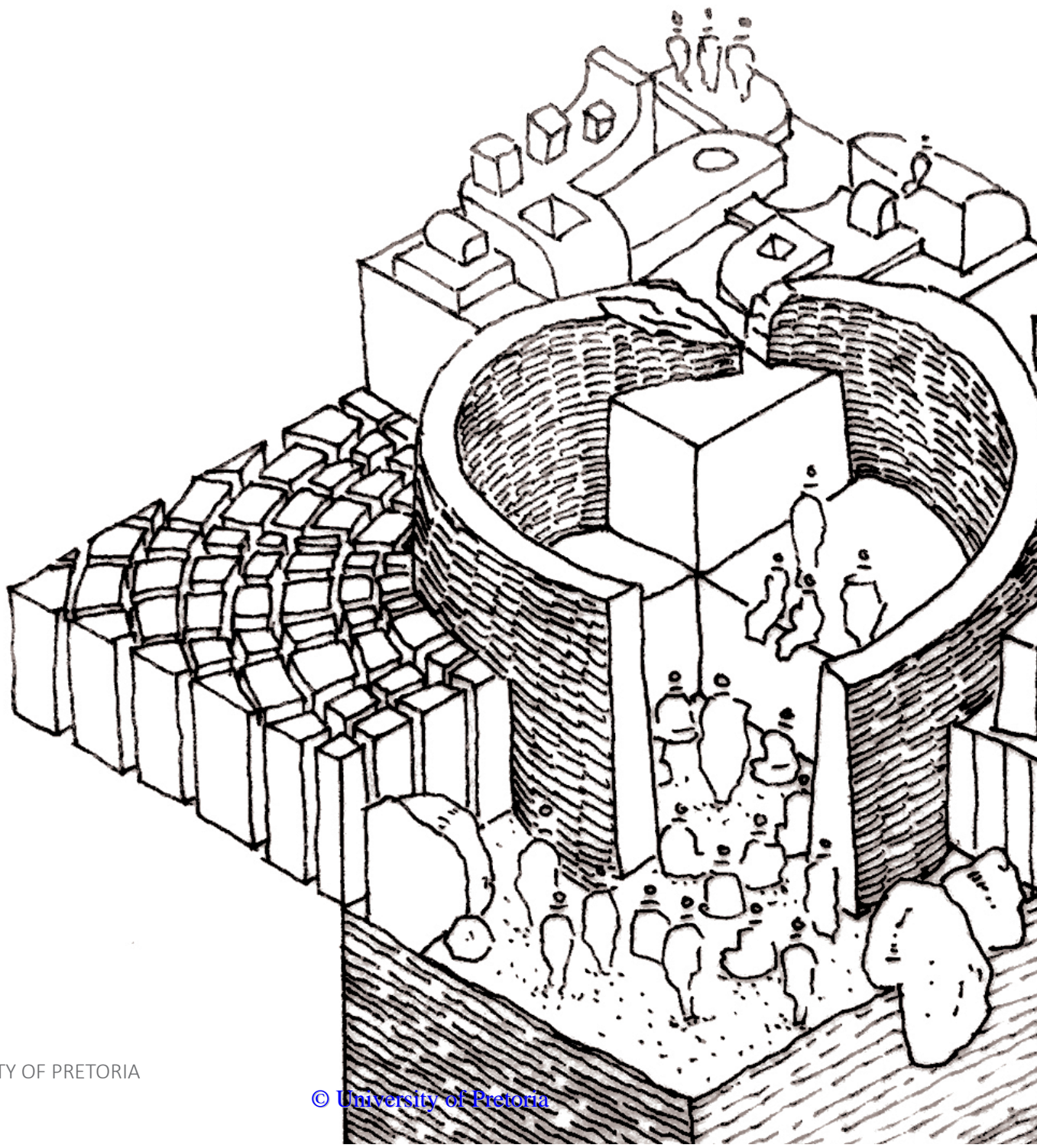# Chapter 1

From preservation to living heritage: a critical conceptualisation of conservation practice with application to iron age ruins in the Transvaal region.

1. Introduction

For the purpose of this chapter as the introductory component of this mini-dissertation, the following research question is proposed: *How can the integration of iron age ruin landscapes with developing cityscapes be shaped in a way so as to encourage their sensitive occupation, programmatic longevity and communal value, in turn, extending the cultural significance of such sites into the future?*
Considering a critical intention, the normative stance of the author in pursuing architectural possibilities throughout the course of this project is aligned according to the following points:

•   Critical designer autonomy
•   Considered projectivity
•   Framework design – situationalism

The first is a means to resist globalisation for the sake of commercial identities through considered architectural exploration. This stance is informed by the writings of Hays on criticality (Hays, 1984), James Curtis' retrospective on the autonomous work of architectural practice RCR arquitectas (Curtis, 2017) and Phillip Plowright's call for practice-theory unification (Plowright, 2009). The second point ideates the consideration of consequences, phasing and programmatic connection beyond the bounds of a singular site, termed by Somol & Whiting in Notes on the doppler effect and other moods of modernism (Somol & Whiting, 2002) and the readings on post-critical projectivity by Robert Cowheard (Cowherd, 2009). The final point describes the resultant process of gathering informants regarding context, which arises from meditating the notions of criticality (designer autonomy) and post-criticality (projectivity). Contained within a site are its cultural and historical narratives, as well as its physical condition. As a means of creating a framework within which a project can be situated and measured according to, these facets of a site restrict, inform and shape the production of an architectural scheme[1].

To lay the foundation of the project framework, a review of globally accepted heritage charters and declarations is conducted. This yields a continuum of practices and offers opportunities for their critique and critical response in the context of this project. From this analysis, shifts in paradigms form a genealogy of conservation mindsets. Framing the response in this project, the review will inform a critical stance, determining applicable heritage tactics for use at the site.

Issues are then identified at four tiers, ranging from the macro to the micro, which guide the project's intention. The change of an artefact's meaning over time is an ongoing event and potentially, a global phenomenon (Young, 1994). On a national scale this results in the consideration and shaping of the relevance of ruin sites (Fontein, 2006), extending into questions of integration on an urban scale and interface on an architectural scale.

A living heritage approach to iron age ruins attempts to consider their potential in the process of urban development. But first, the notion that ruins are spaces of heritage as well as heritage production, needs to be argued. This chapter will inspect the language used to describe ruin sites and attempt to frame iron age ruins (predominantly unoccupied and unprogrammed (van Vuuren, 2010)) as spaces where living heritage can occur. A wide variety of iron age ruin sites are present in South Africa (Anderson, 2009), with the greater Transvaal region bearing no exception. Three potential sites have been identified and an analysis and selection process will be undertaken to determine which is most suitable for the nature of this project.

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[1]This theoretical stance is established in a previous essay titled *The possibility of being both* (Forder, 2018), completed by the author for previous normative stance determination tasks.

2. Global standards & approaches to heritage sites

2.1. Charter review: A genealogy of accepted heritage practices

The project starts with an investigation into the paradigms that have shaped heritage practices. Marking the earliest point of internationally accepted standards for heritage practice is the *International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites*[2] (ICOMOS, 1964). It offers guidelines for the restoration of monuments and sites, which advocates strongly for their maintenance and the prevention of further deterioration (ICOMOS, 1964:1). In cases where enough information is available, restoration may be undertaken by specialised practitioners (ICOMOS, 1964:2). Heritage is classified as a non-renewable resource, which can be used to educate future generations (ICOMOS, 1964:1). A common trend mentioned in all subsequent charters is the inherent characteristic of universal value – heritage is defined as a global asset pertaining to mankind's history as a whole (ICOMOS, 1964). In 1983 the complexity of heritage practice is elaborated upon in the form of the *Appleton Charter for the Protection and Enhancement of the Built Environment* [3] (ICOMOS, 1983). The charter starts to consider alternatives to strict preservation as a means of encouraging the significance of heritage places. It defines terminology associated with the field and suggests a situational approach to conservation (ICOMOS, 1983:2-4). The scope of classification is furthered by the proceeding *Charter for the Protection and Management of the Archaeological Heritage* [4] (ICOMOS, 1990) and *Charter on the Built Vernacular Heritage*[5] (ICOMOS, 1999). The focus on these later charters tends more towards research and documentation for the sake of education and longevity. To build on the paradigm shift from static preservation towards situational upliftment and considered rehabilitation, the concept of living heritage is coined. Created in 2003, the *Living heritage article* (ICCROM, 2003) advocates for the protection of continuous practices and traditions as an aspect of intangible heritage. Leniency is granted in the management of change, and spaces shaped by occupation are considered items of living heritage. Hereafter two supplementary charters, namely the *Charter for Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites* (ICOMOS, 2008) and the *Burra Charter* (ICOMOS, 2013) are provided, containing detailed descriptions of conservation practices. The intention of these charters considers the nuanced manner in which heritage is communicated (ICOMOS, 2008). A higher-level legislative recommendation is considered in the Burra Charter where local regimes should undergo processes of management-plan construction, to utilise heritage resources effectively (ICOMOS, 2013:12).
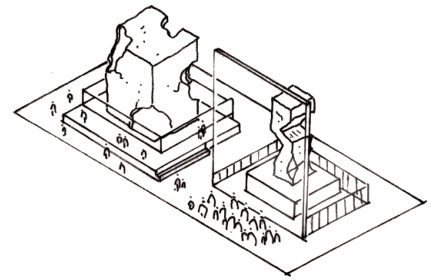

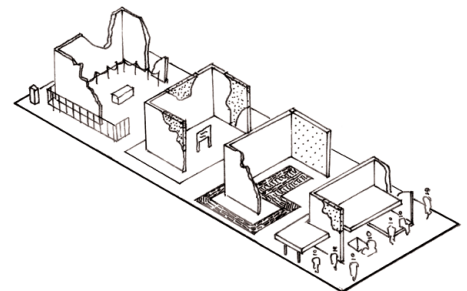*Figure 1: The Venice Charter of 1964 as a diagram (Author, 2021).*

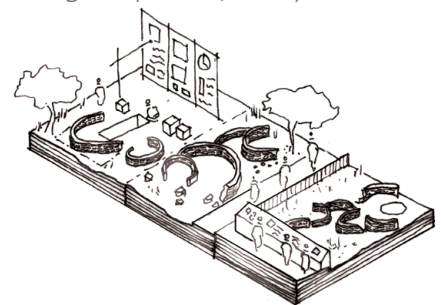*Figure 2: The Appleton Charter of 1983 as a diagram (Author, 2021).*

Figure 3: The Archaeological Charter of 1990 as a diagram (Author, 2021).
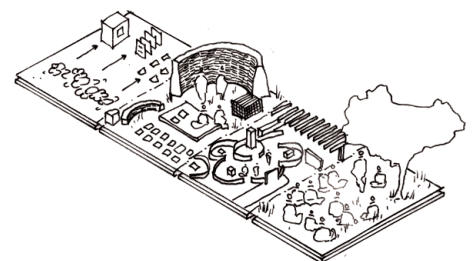

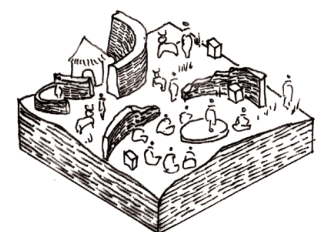*Figure 4: The Built Vernacular Charter of 1999 as a diagram (Author, 2021).*

Figure 5: Living heritage article of 2003 as a diagram (Author, 2021).

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[2]Hereafter referred to as the Venice Charter
[3]Hereafter referred to as the Appleton Charter
[4]Hereafter referred to as the Archaeological Charter
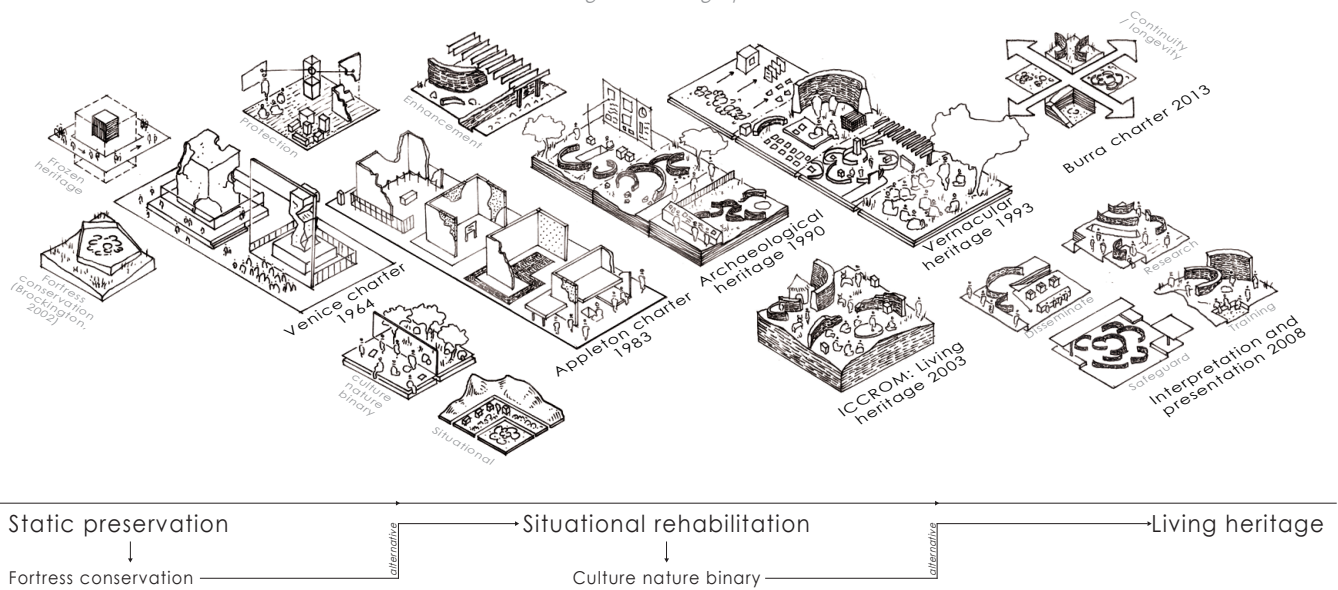[5]Hereafter referred to as the Built Vernacular Charter

Figure 6: A genealogy graph illustrating the various ideas contained within heritage charters, and the overarching paradigm shift that occurs over time, tending from static preservation to situational rehabilitation, and later, a living heritage approach (Author, 2021). (Refer to appendix A for larger scale).

2.2. Declaration review: Managing change within cultural heritage

After the broader paradigm discussion of charters above, where static preservation tends towards situational rehabilitation and later, towards living heritage consideration, the question of external change as a threat is discussed by additional declarations. The first of these, published by ICOMOS in 1994, is the Nara Document on Authenticity . Associating strongly with the earlier Venice Charter (ICOMOS, 1964), the Nara document describes the processes of documentation, meaning understanding, representation and the reflective process revision and updating. Prevention of further decay is prioritised, but the process of revising established truths is incorporated in cases where conditions change or new data is found.


Nara: Document on authenticity 1994

Quebec: Preservation of spirit of place 2008

Paris: Heritage driving development 2011

Documenting change

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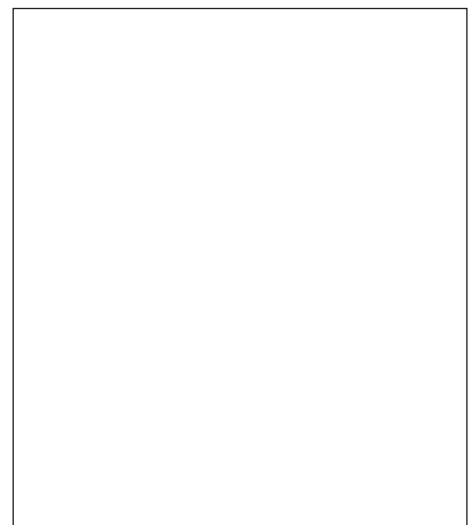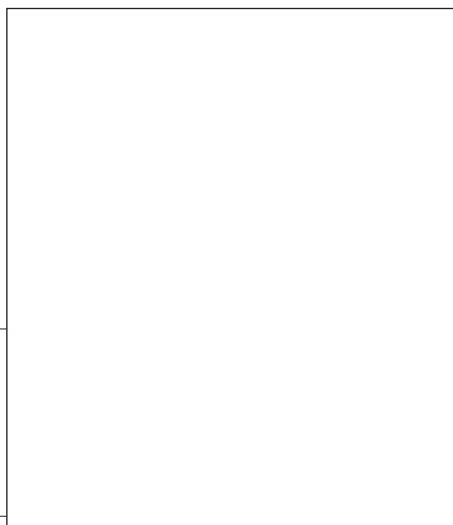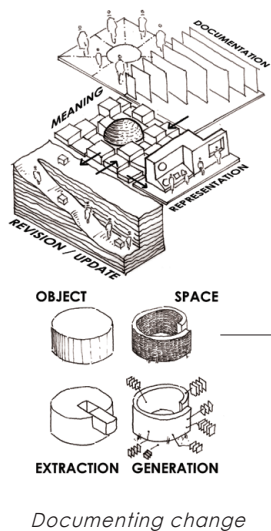
[6]Hereafter referred to as the Nara Document

Thereafter the Quebec Declaration on the Preservation of the Spirit of Place (ICOMOS, 2008) highlights the notion of spirit of place as a classification of heritage. Intangible facets as cultural manifestations on tangible sites are seen as inseparable and combined objects. This shows a tendency towards living heritage preservation and begins to acknowledge change as an inevitable, and important component of heritage sites (Baillie, 2020).
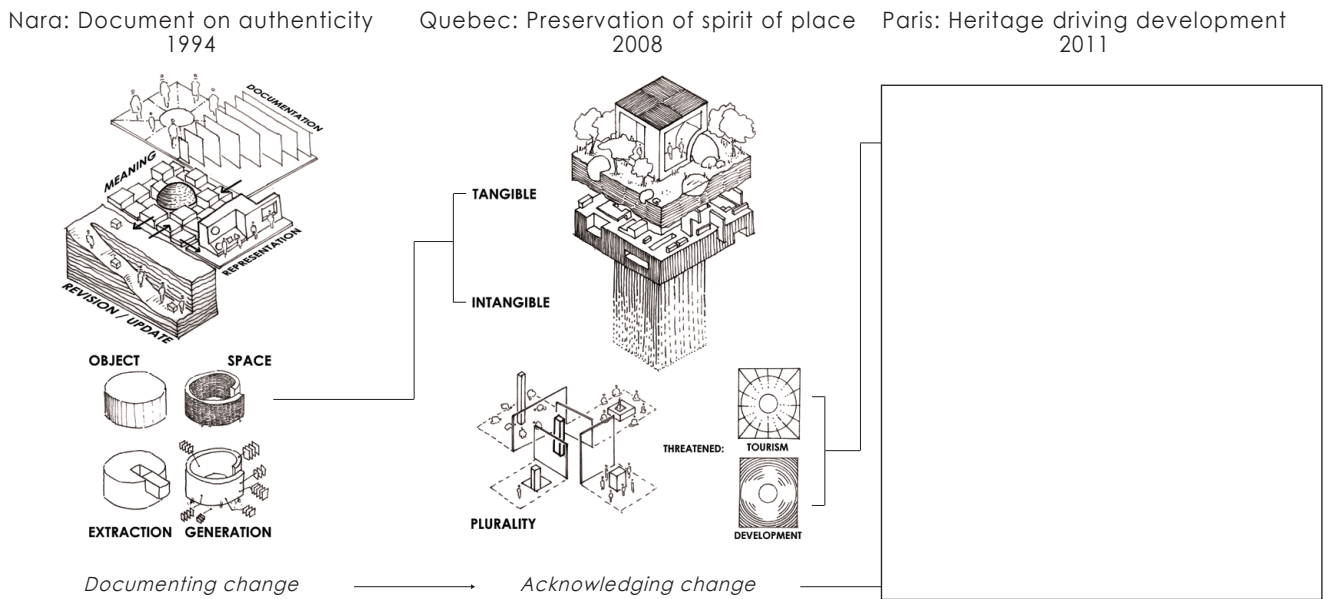
The most recent document on responding to external change within heritage sites is the Paris Declaration on Heritage as a Driver for Development (ICOMOS, 2011). Contained herein is the awareness of internal change due to ongoing practices, but also an awareness of external globalisation and homoginisation. To incorporate the idea of longevity into the management of heritage sites, the notion that these sites can be used to drive change outwardly is considered. The approach towards heritage management grows from documenting change to acknowledging change, and ultimately, guiding change.
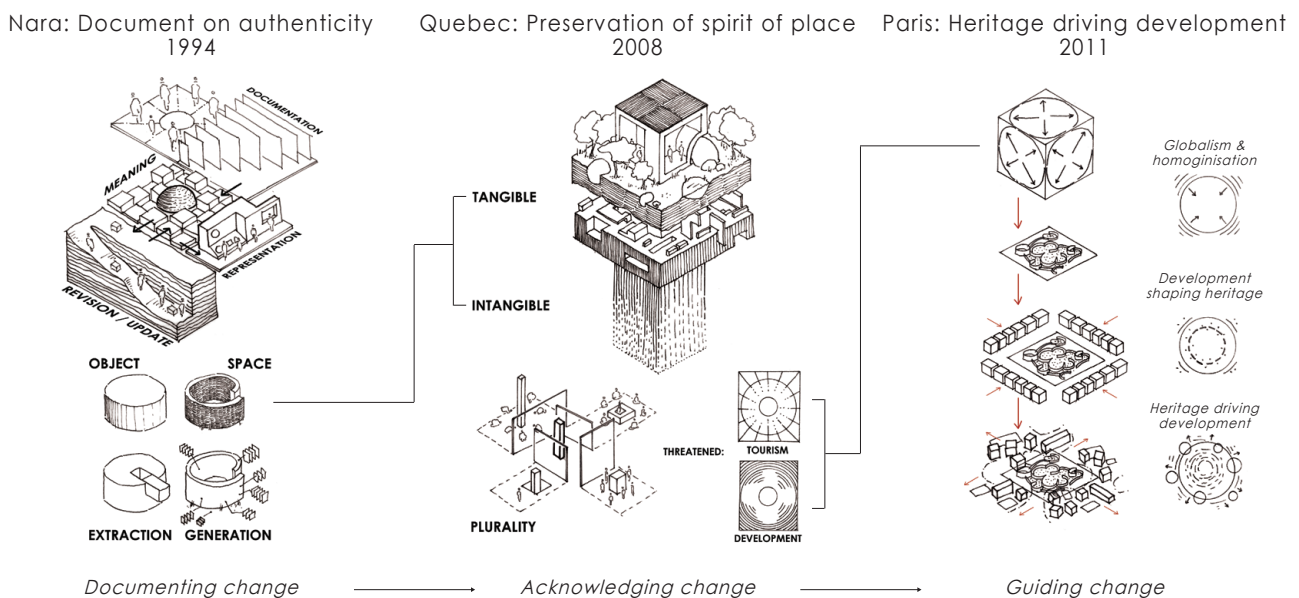

Figure 7: Three declarations illustrated in a continuum where approaches to managing change sit at the core of conservation practice. A shift from heritage as objects for extraction, towards spaces for generation is noted. Tangible significance paired with an active programme, presents a counter to the threat of globalisation and deterioration. Heritage can be protected and change can be guided to drive development outward (Author, 2021). (Refer to appendix B for larger scale).

2.3. Scales of issues at iron age heritage sites

Arising out of these practices are certain issues, additionally, issues can arise from a dearth of enacted practices. Paradigmatic heritage approaches are of global concern, but the means by which conservation is enacted (or not enacted) on a national scale, results in consequences felt closest to home (South African department of arts and culture, 2009:54). Globally, the question of meaning arises, with the aforementioned notion of universal value raising questions about the agency and ownership of iron age ruins (South African department of arts and culture, 2009:15). On a national scale the relevance of iron age heritage is at play (South African department of arts and culture, 2009:42). These sites fall on a spectrum of protected islands without relevant quotidian relations to unprotected sites where irrelevance succeeds deterioration. The urban scale questions how the response employed at these sites can drive the manner in which they are integrated into urban contexts (ICOMOS, 2011). The possibilities include loss due to urban expansion, but also the opportunity for overlap improving contemporary relevance. More intimately still, is the architectural issue of interface. Arising questions of 'what kind of practitioners are involved?' (Latour, 2014), 'how is the public exposed to the site?', 'what role does the site play in the community?', are necessary considerations (ICOMOS, 2008).

Lastly, how can a living heritage mindset, which implies continuity from the past, apply to ruins which have long since been predominantly unprogrammed. For the case of this project (and argued below) living heritage is considered for its critical stance in the heritage continuum, and its possible relevance in an African context (Ballie, 2021).
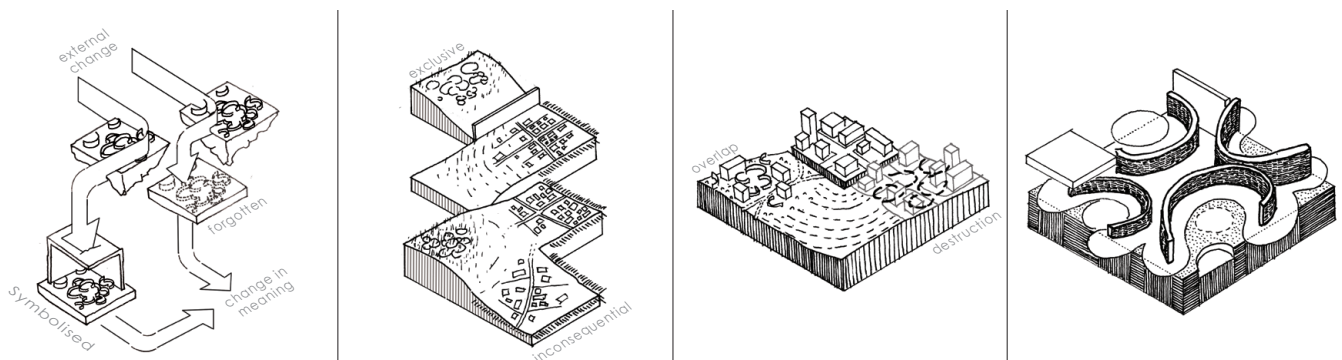

Figure 8: Diagrams describing the four scales of issues identified in this project (Author, 2021).

3. Conceptualising the heritage category of iron age ruins

3.1. Heritage as objects

The Venice Charter (ICOMOS, 1964) defines protection of heritage assets as the ultimate goal. This allows documentation, education and dissemination of heritage meaning. This suggests that material value protection, protects cultural significance as well. For heritage objects (artwork, sculpture, artefacts) this static preservation mindset seems relevant. However, sites, spaces and places that are treated in the same manner (as objects of heritage) fall prey to a fortress conservation flaw (Brockington, 2002). Brockington (2002:4,10) critiques the manner in which natural landscapes are protected in favour of sublime natural beauty. Enforced by the eviction of communities who sustain themselves by means of these landscapes, this mindset can be applied to spaces of heritage. If the significance of the physical place is prioritised over the quotidian practices associated with such spaces, the conservation project will fail its communities.

Ruins fall under heritage classification in line with the Archaeological Charter (ICOMOC, 1990) and the Built Vernacular Charter (ICOMOS, 1999). These documents align with the preceding Venice Charter (1964) and describe heritage as a non-renewable resource, to be documented and maintained by multi-disciplinary teams of expert practitioners. Heritage inclusivity is extended here, to encompass artefactual data (ICOMOS, 1990:3), building and crafting methods, ways of life and traditions (ICOMOS, 1999:2). However, these facets are demarcated as assets for protection and agency over change is in the hands of external parties, rather than the hands of inhabitants (Latour, 1014).
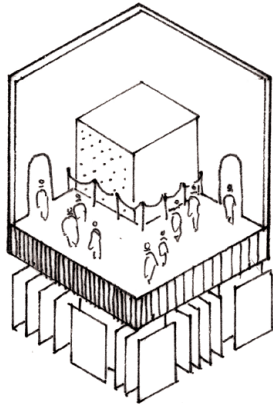
Figure 9: (left) A diagram showing the notion of heritage as a protected resource for the sake of knowledge extraction (Author, 2021).
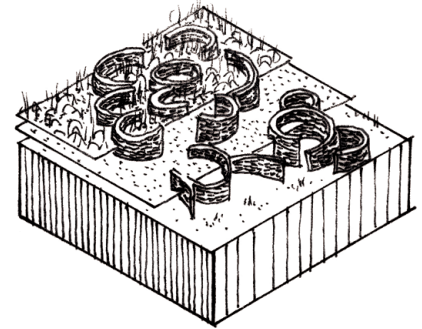
Figure 10: (right) A diagram showing ruins as non-renewable heritage resources with universal value (Author, 2021).

3.2. Heritage as space

The aforementioned Quebec Declaration (2008) in which the concept of spirit of place is first noted, introduces a shift from heritage as an object to heritage as a space. Intangible aspects of a site are tied inextricably to the physicality of cultural landscapes. Programme as an architectural concept is fortified as a spatial instigator in Bernard Tschumi's Spaces and events (Tschumi, 1994). In this article Tschumi (1994:9) describes the variability in perception of form dependent on its associated programme. Tschumi (1994:11-12) describes experiments of superimposition in which the effects of overlaying counterintuitive programmes on top of iconographic typologies results in complex iterations of both programme and architectural form. This is relevant in the context of heritage spaces as a means to apply contemporarily relevant programmes with sites that have significant material value, but little quotidian relevance. In the perspective of both the Built Vernacular Charter (ICOMOS, 1999) and the Living heritage charter (ICCROM, 2003) ruin sites (specifically iron age ruins) are not classified as having living heritage, due to their lack of continuous programme throughout their existence. This can be contested in some cases where certain sites still have traditional meaning and significant memory attached to them, as in the case of Great Zimbabwe (Fontein, 2006) and Mothong traditional medicine village in Mamelodi (Ledwaba, 2018). However, in a majority of the ruins around the Transvaal, the use of these sites is symbolic and often not of the speculative original intention, usually pastoral (Steyn, 2011:108). The paragraph to follow argues that despite lacking continuous programmes, there is still value in viewing and utilising iron age ruins as spaces for contemporary heritage production, rather than simply preserved objects for knowledge extraction.
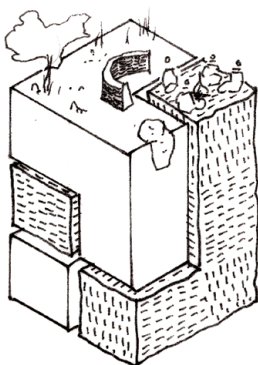

Figure 11: (left) A diagram showing the notion of heritage as a protected resource for the sake of knowledge extraction (Author, 2021).
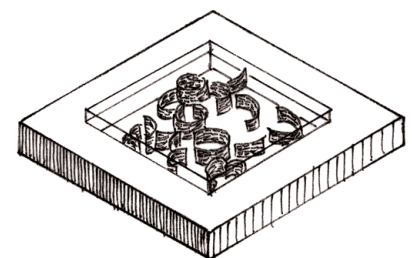
Figure 12: (right) A diagram showing ruins as non-renewable heritage resources with universal value (Author, 2021).

3.3. Ruins as spaces of heritage production

Five texts are used below to argue in favour of the application of a living heritage framework at iron age ruins. Firstly, Viljoen (2011) discusses the dialectic nature of ruins, representing both the past and the future in the present. Tied to the past, ruins hold intrinsic historical value, but the absence of completed form raises questions about possibilities for the future as well (Viljoen, 2011:157-158). Conceptually, Viljoen (2011:160) argues that ruins result from both passivity (abandonment and dereliction) and activity (occupation and destruction) and that the effects of ruination, or the act of destruction does not remove the ideology (in this case, memory) of a place.
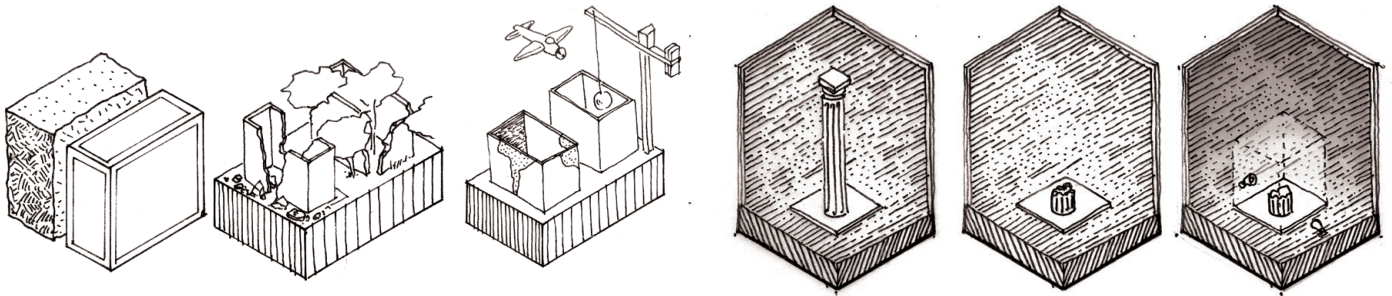
Architectural writer Jonathan Hill (2019:300-301) describes the architecture of ruins as the result of coproduction, a process of spatial production that results from the human creation of culture and its occupational effect on nature. Ruination from coproduction is a continuous process that happens regardless of age or heritage value, but that is specifically prevalent at ruin sites (Hill, 2019:294-295). Consequently, ruins can be considered spaces where a form of programme is inevitable (whether passively or actively conducted) and the effects of programme are most legible. The way in which programme is designed in the case of iron age ruins in South Africa can be shaped by the discussion above, in the form of a living heritage framework.
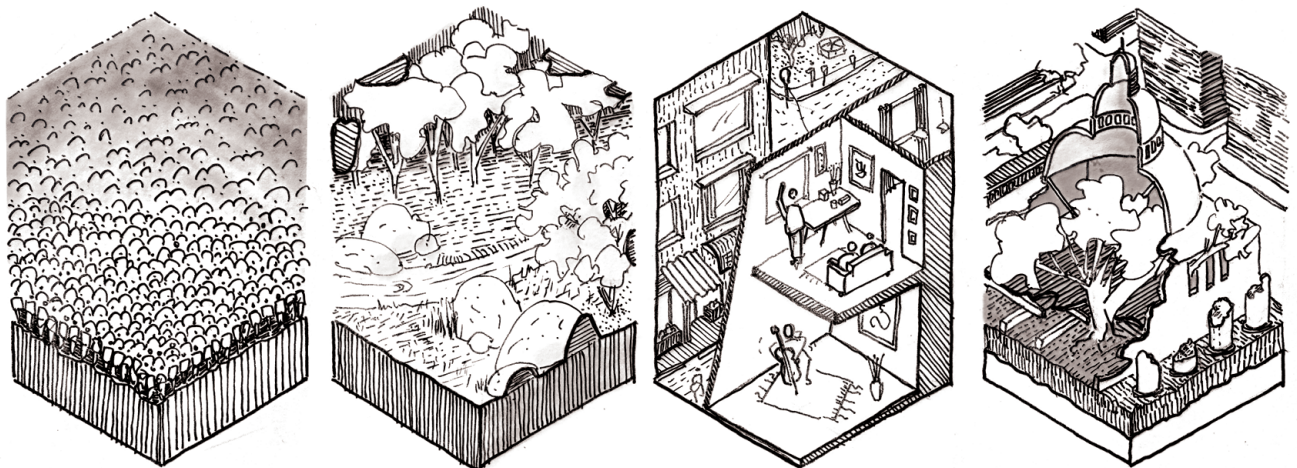

Figure 13: (top) Sketches describing the dialectic nature of the ruin (Viljoen, 2011) and how its nature of absence and presence arises questions regarding the truth of the past and the potential of the future (Author, 2021).

Figure 14: (bottom) Coproduction, as defined by Hill (2019) as a continuous process of ruination brought about by the interaction of man-made culture upon nature- opening the conceptual opportunity for ruins to become spaces of continuous heritage production (Author, 2020).

Related to the aforementioned Tschumi (1994) discussion on the altering effect of events on the perception of form above, James Young (1994) describes ruins and monuments as having variable meaning through time, according to paradigm and situation. This variability seems to be an inescapable fact and should be considered from the genesis of a project.

Driving change from within and shaping development around ruins is a concept advocated for in the Paris declaration (ICOMOS, 2011) as well. Conceptually reinforced by academic scholars; Coppolino (n.d.) who describes ruins as narrative instigators, and Jordaan (2014) who tends towards the fantastical and metaphysical role ruins can play in inspiration and ideating new possibilities.
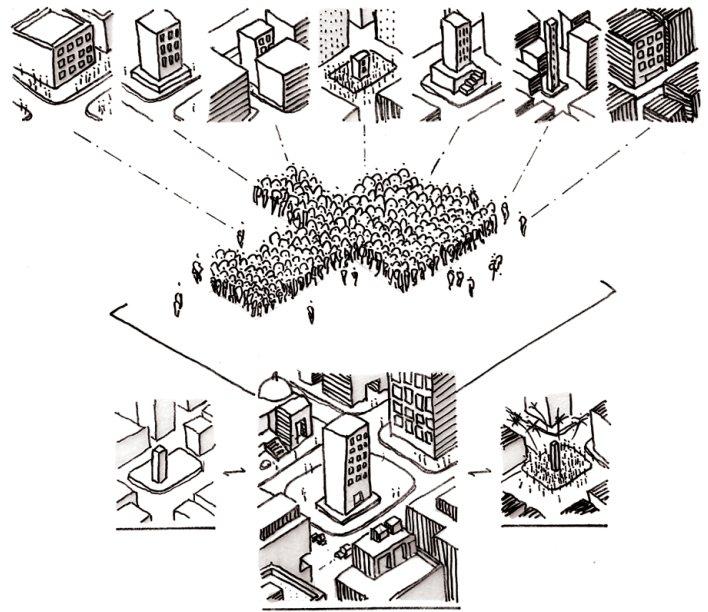
Lastly, architectural writer Gevork Hartoonian (2012) describes Alvar Aalto's idea of tectonic landscapes in architecture being landscapes inspired by heterotopias[7], or conceptual other worlds. In this case, ruins are tied to the past in their inception. They present a contemporary interactable surface that results from the heterotopic past penetrating time and existing in the present. Ruins become contact points with which humans of today can exist in space enriched by history, simultaneously working towards creating the future on top of it. From these texts, it is argued that there exists potential for ruins to be read as spaces of continual living heritage, and consequently, spaces of heritage production.
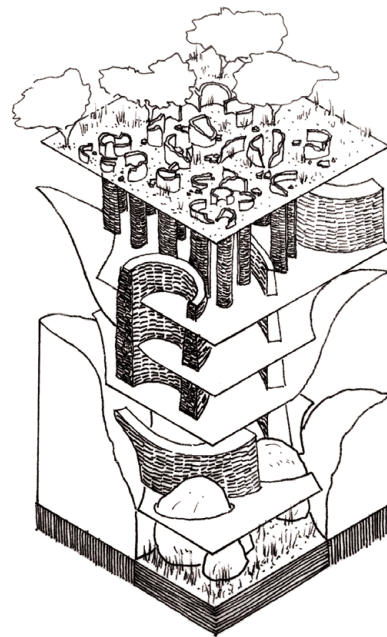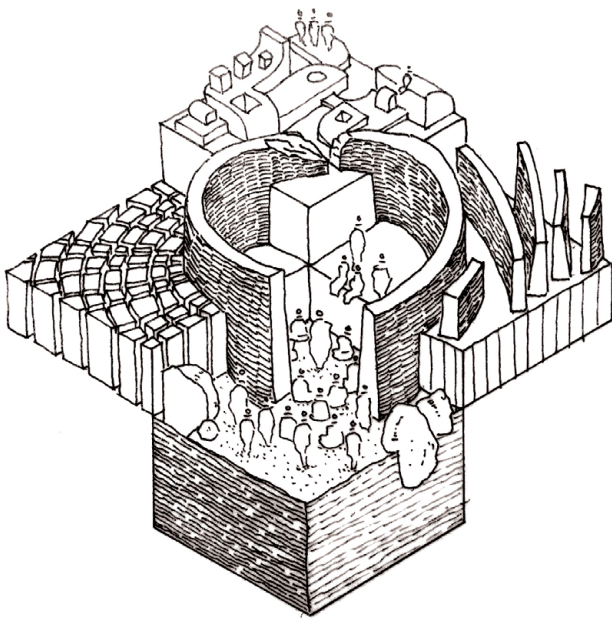

Figure 15: (top) A set of diagrams describing Young's (1994) description of memory dynamism over time, dependent on periodic context and the resultant potential of plural interpretations as sites for future development.
Figure 16: (bottom row, left) Thereafter, the ruin as a narrative instigator (Coppolino n.d. & Jordaan, 2014), showcasing the potential of driving development outward from within (Author, 2020).
Figure 17: (bottom row, right) Lastly, the notion of the tectonic landscape (Hartoonian, 2012) as a site where historical remnants permeate into the present and allow for the attachment of the future onto the past (Author, 2021).

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[7]Physical characteristics that make up the stable condition of conceptual spaces that are 'other' to the present (Jordaan, et. al. 2014)

4. Considering sites for ruin heritage projects

4.1. Introducing potential sites

Three potential iron age ruin landscapes are considered as stages for this project. Surrounding the town of Emgwenya there are various clusters of ruins. The town sits amidst the ancient landscape and is home to a tourism scheme called the Stone Circle Museum. Their call to service is the dissemination of a pseudo-scientific truth regarding the construction of these sites (Stone Circle Tours, 2021). This truth threatens the meaning of these sites, but yields the benefit of elevated significance and interest in the conversation regarding these sites within a more public domain. Thereafter, the northern ridge of the Bronkhorstspruit dam contains two clusters of ruins that abut the upper-class residences. Confronted from the south by potential suburban encroachment and from the north by sand mining industry, these sites are at risk of destruction, but retain potential for valuable urban integration. Lastly, a remote site containing a large and coalesced group of ruins is situated to the west of Rustenburg on what is today private property. The bucolic context offers the beneficence of minimal active destruction. However, long term inactivity will result in the loss of the site's memory. Its contemporary value is underutilised and the heritage potential of the site could drive valuable and complex developments.
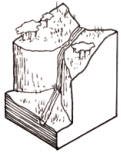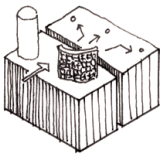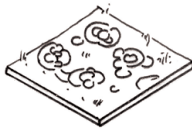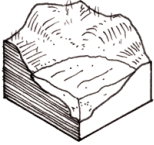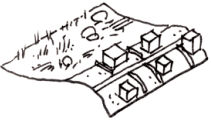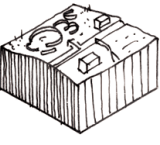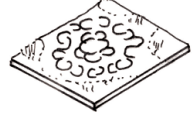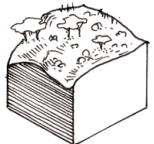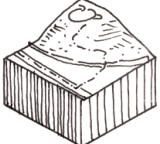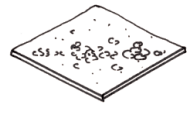
	Topography	Setting	Access	Condition	External threats
Emgwenya Sotoho/Tswana ruins	Cliffs and hills	Town, agricultural	Museum tour	Semi-protected	Esoteric truth, urban development
Bronkhorstspruit dam Ndebele ruins	Hills and dam	Sloping suburb, open land	roadside / suburb	Unprotected	Urban development, mining
Molokwane Bakwane ruins	Hills and veld	bucolic / agricultural	road, hike, private land	Semi-unprotected	Loss and deterioration

Figure 18: Tables discussing various characteristics of the potential sites, as a means of creating an identifiable caricature of each site (Author, 2021).

4.2. Site selection

The Bronkhorstspruit site is selected based on factors concerning its contextual threats, namely mining and urban expansion. Situated in close proximity to an existing suburban area offers an attachment point for quotidian programmes, but also necessitates a response to possible developmental encroachment in the future. Upon inspection of aerial photographs, the ruins present in good condition with plans of various enclosures legible, and pathways well marked. Lastly, there is a depth of research available on the cultural history of the site and Ndebele culture from which it emerges, completed by prominent South African archaeologist and academic, Chris van Vuuren, which will offer essential insight when considering possible programmes. Van Vuuren's research often relates archaeological data and cultural concepts with architectural and spatial principles- improving the interoperability of the research in the context of this project. For practical reasons, it is possible to access the Bronkhorstspruit site in person, unlike the Molokwane site which is situated on private property. The omittance of the Emgwenya site is due to its overall composition of smaller sites scattered between agricultural land and distanced from larger settlements in sections of remote land. The vastness and detachment from nearby contemporary settlements shift the nature of such a project away from urban integration, in contrast to the intention of this project.

4.3. Issues and potentials of the Bronkhorstspruit site

In his 2008 article, van Vuuren discusses the issue of tangible and intangible heritage distinction (van Vuuren 2008). Taking note of the global academic discourse surrounding heritage practice, van Vuuren (2008:1-2) highlights the publishment of the Living heritage article (ICOMOS, 2003) and the condition it creates as a document proceeding the earlier Venice Charter (ICOMOS, 1994). Acknowledgement of the value of intangible heritage represents a crucial change in mindset for heritage practice, but van Vuuren argues that it dichotomises intangible aspects from tangible aspects (which he argues are inextricably connected). His advocation for their mutual consideration and understanding tends more towards the thinking of the Quebec Declaration (2008) which unifies the concepts under the term spirit of place (ICOMOS, 2008). Anthropologist Bruno Latour (2014) further discusses this un-dichotomisation of heritage facets in his article *Another way to compose the common world*. Here, Latour (2014:305) suggests a bridging in the analysis of subject and object and insists on their unsegregated consideration – often requiring altered practices enacted by alternative practitioners. Beyond this need for nuanced consideration of culture and nature, object and subject, as integrated components of place, the site offers the opportunity for urban integration and advocation for heritage protection in the face of confrontational external change. A framework that guides the way in which development occurs around the iron age ruins into the future, and development driven from within the ruins outwards, becomes the crucial outcome for consideration in this project.

5. Conclusion

As a means of creating a critical framework that can shape, inform and restrict the project, a broader context of heritage practice has been analysed. The resultant paradigm of living heritage as a means of conservation, and simultaneously, heritage production for future longevity is established. As a tectonic landscape, the selected site is read as a heritage site with inherent material value, but also valuable associated meaning and potential that can drive development outwards. Upon the selected site in Bronkhorstspruit, this approach will endeavor to address the potential threats of suburban encroachment and sand mining. Iron age ruins in South Africa present a unique spatial condition, more specifically, the nuances of Ndebele oral history and cultural building practices pertaining to the history of the selected site will be explored. The subsequent parts of this project will also investigate potential programmes as heritage devices and possible architecture that could be created to house such programmes.