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going West

Using landscape to regenerate urban form

By PG Smit



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Using landscape to regenerate urban form

By PG Smit

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Samevatting

Die mens het n begeerte om in n gesonde omgewing te woon, 'n idee wat nog altyd 'n noue verband gehad het met n gesonde landskap. Pretoria se middestad bied nie meer so n landskap nie, intendeel, die stad is beknop, gevragmenteer en plekkeloos.

Mense trek na heinde en verre om die stad se negatiewe omgewings te ontvlug. Hulle jaag die welige natuur-beelde op pamflette en reklame borde wat die veiligheids komplekse van die ooste van Pretoria adverteer na, min wetende dat die nagevolge van verstedeliking kort op hulle hakke is.

Maar daar moet immers n maniere wees om die mens se begeerte vir n gesonde landskap te vervul sonder die nagevolge van verstedeliking en verwoesting van die eindste natuur waarna hy streef.

Om 'n volhoubare toekoms vir Pretoria te verseker, moet ons ondersoek instel in nuwe maniere om met die probleme van verstedeliking en verval te deal. Hierdie tesis ondersoek die potensiaal om landskap te gebruik as 'n basis waarmee 'n mens die stedelike vorm kan her-rangskik en her-kostrueer op so n manier dat mense die ideale wat hul voor soek kan kry binne n volhoubare stedelike omgewing

Die ondersoek begin op n stedelike skaal om n geheel beeld te kry van die probleme waarmee die middes-tad worstel en die geleenthede wat dit bied. Dit strek oor 'n verskeidenheid skale om eiteindelik uit te kom by ontwerp en plekmaak. Dit ondersoek kontemporere metodes om landskap te vorm deur om te werk met huidige en historiese stads vormasies, sowel as die sosiale, historiese en omgewings prosesse wat dit oor tyd gevorm het. Dit kyk na die verval, maar eerlike landskap van Pretoria Wes om hierdie voorstelling te toets.

Die voorstelling is dat as mens regtig vir mense 'n gesonde landskap aanbied, een wat hulle kan ervaar en mee vereenselwig, dan mag hul dalk in die stad wil bly en in ruil spontaan stedelike vernuwing aanwakker.

Abstract

Everyone wants to live in a healthy environment, an idea that has always been closely associated with the healthy landscape. Pretoria CBD is no longer a place that offers such a landscape; it is congested, fragmented and placeless.

People move far and wide to get away from its hostile environments, chasing after the high gloss images of nature displayed on the billboards and posters of suburbia. They race to find a patch of land within the security complexes and estates of the east, all the while being savagely pursued by the evils of urban sprawl and decentralization.

Surely there must be a way of addressing mans need and desire for landscape without perpetuating urban problems and destroying the very nature they strive for?

In order to ensure a sustainable future for Pretoria needs to investigate new ways to deal with the urban problems of sprawl and decay. This thesis explores the potential of using landscape as the basis with which one can reorder and reconstruct the urban form in a way that will offer people the ideals they search within a sustainable urban environment.

The investigation starts at a regional scale in order to holistically address urban issues and identify opportunities and then works its way across a range of scales down to detail design and place making.

It looks new methods of constructing contemporary landscapes not by mere superimposition but by working with the current and historic urban fabric as well as the social, historical and environmental processes that have shaped it over time.

It looks to the far from idyllic, yet brutally honest, post-industrial landscape of Pretoria West to construct hybrid landscapes. Arguing that if one were to genuinely offer people a healthy landscape, one they can experience and relate to, the might actually want to live in the city, in return awakening spontaneous urban renewal.



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Fig.1. Pretoria 1855, F D Oerder, Pretoria Art Museum (Bolsmann 2001)



Prologue

From the dawn of time man has always had a close connection to the land. The landscape provided and sustained life. Man has always chosen to settle where the land supplied both his wants and needs; such as safety, placemaking, beauty, recourses and opportunity. He settled near rivers for water, in fertile valleys for food and on hilltops for fortification.

This quest for land is what set the Israelites on a forty year journey through the desert before settling in Canaan, the land of milk and honey. Similarly the Voortrekkers set off from the Cape in search of a land that offered them freedom, belonging and opportunity. For this they faced mountains, disease, and fierce opponents in both man and beast. Many years later a handful of settlers finally reached the banks of the Apies River, the end of their search.

Yet unbeknown to them, this sliver of land nestled between the Magaliesberg and Apies River had been occupied for thousands of years. Before the Voortrekkers founded Pretoria, the land had been occupied by Bushmen, Tswana and Ndebele settlements and would later yield the largest finding of Stone Age implements in all of Africa.

Why is it that across the ages people have settled in this same location? It must be that the land offered them what they needed. Why is it that the city of Pretoria today stands sprawled across this same land; rivers canalized, fertile valleys paved and hills no longer fortified. Its people long to migrate east in search of new land, the greener pastures of fortified clusters and palisade estates.