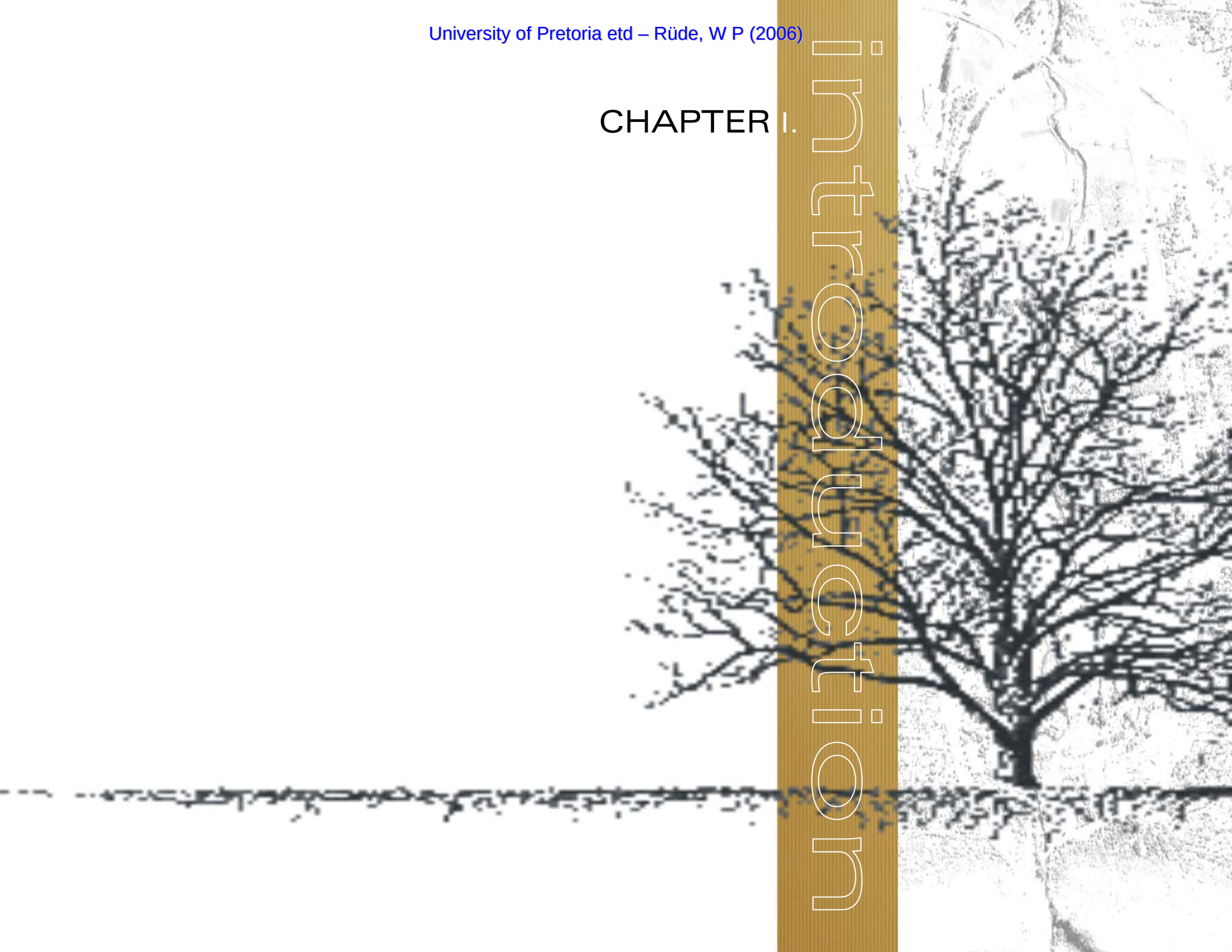
University of Pretoria etd – Rüde, W P (2006)

CHAPTER I.

Introduction



01 Introduction

1.1 Urban Nature Conservation

We each experience only a part of the earth, our own backyard plus trips, tours, vacations, movies, traveler's tales. If my tree is dying, I notice. But the earth dying, slowly, is not as obvious, not something I can see at a glance through my window. So there is a gap between what is immediately visible and what is actually happening. Buildings replace the land. "The bulk of buildings stop air, sunlight and views. The memories what we built up around that particular place, either individually or as a culture, also disappear." (Betsky 2005) In their place are structures that are new, if only for a moment, which aspire perfect form, function and appearance. To protect and re-create these memories we unfold open space in an urban place.

memory making place.....

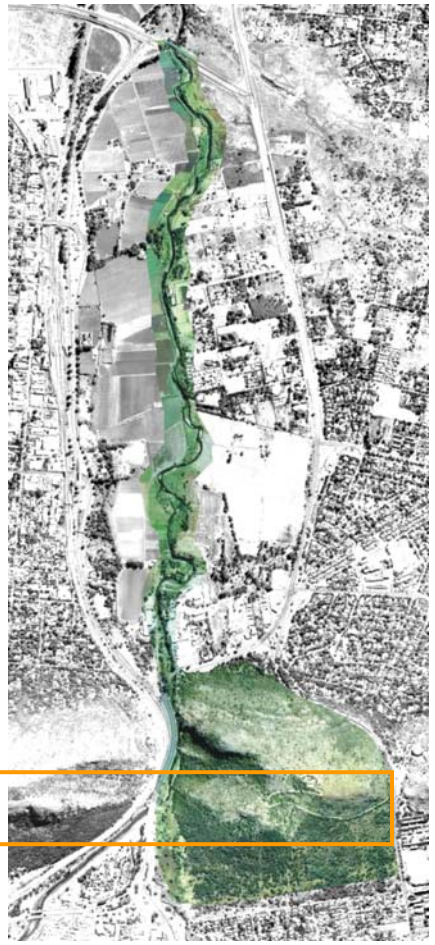


fig 1.1: green island

1.2 Urban Culture

The main reason for culture is to protect us from nature. Today our culture is disjunctured and fragmented, so the question arises what is real and what is not. This is because of the society of control in which we live today. (The Visual Culture Reader, 1998) As the late and great historian of American landscape J.B. Jackson states, "the only true vernacular is the sod hut or other structure that has no façade, no clear form and thus no way of presenting itself as part of a dominant culture. What are real are the multi cultural urban environments that we call Cities."

Urban growth is a weapon of mass destruction. A great part of the urban population in developing countries suffers, among other very serious shortages, decreasing access to pleasant environments. With the continuous growth of cities in our country, there is an increase in the proportion of people living in environments that are both unhealthy and detached from green spaces.

Aldo Leopold's argument that humans are part of a global biological community dependent on healthy land is as strong today as it was fifty years ago. Traditionally, owners of land have been allowed to perpetrate almost any act on the land that they owned. Today laws do exist that restrict some treatment of land. There is now some realization in our urban culture that the creation and conservation of urban green environments has a greater importance than just esthetical.

1.3 Urban Landscapes

Lately, any place whether natural or artificial, is considered landscape. Landscapes can be designed, to the point of becoming something artificial. Where neither natural surroundings nor the possibility of recreating them exist they are created through abstraction, symbolism and references.

In recent years, we have become more aware of the reality of the land. Guilt now pervades much of our culture (fig1.2). Perhaps it comes from a sense of what we have lost; a romantic desire to recapture the landscape.

fig 1.2: the greening of space left over after development

In many places, landscapes of great richness and beauty are replaced by cities where public spaces are few, badly designed, insalubrious, and of poor visual and environmental quality (fig 1.4). Although landscape is taken to mean a natural space, all or almost all the landscape we touch has already been changed. Farmland (fig 1.3) has been cleared, divided up, and planted. Irrigated fields, orchards or cornfields are not virgin land. Non-urban environments are considered landscape but this does not mean they are untouched by human hands.

fig 1.3: farmland

The environment that characterizes cities is public space. In many cities in developing countries, it is the public space where the sometimes dramatic economical and social conditions become obvious. The symptoms are many:

- the simple lack of public amenity because of municipal financial weakness or other socio economic reasons,
- the misuse of public space by highly polluting motor vehicles, thus expelling pedestrians, or
- public space as a place for unregulated or illegal activities that form part of the informal economy.

(Planelles, 1999)

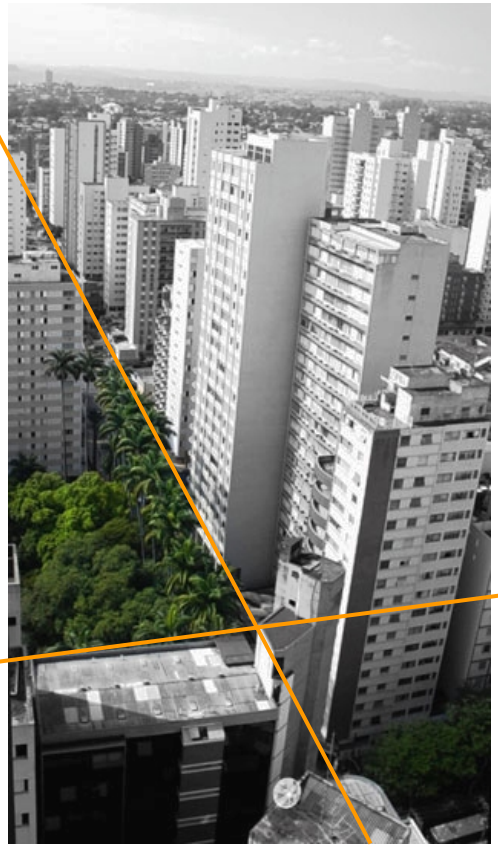


fig 1.4: Urban Amazon (Goulart)

"Public space is the stage upon which the drama of communal life unfolds." (Carr *et al*)

1.4 Energy

Energy, in all its different urban forms can be seen as a boundary constructor. The urban environment consists of roads with fast moving traffic. These roads filled with cars makes visual energy that constructs the boundaries of an urban place. Movement of people through and around the urban fabric, exploring places of historical, cultural, economical, political, and social importance, all form part of the energy lines through a city. It is these lines of energy that gives a place its internal strength.

On the other end of the scale you get Nature as energy. Nature as always, will always be the strongest form of energy and can shape and reshape any physical environment.

It's the combination of these energies and many more which help you define the constraints for designing in the landscape. Energies can guide you in making the right decisions and achieving the best form and function for a creation in the landscape.

1.5 Conservation

Conservation is a state of harmony between men and land. "Despite nearly a century of propaganda, conservation still proceeds at a snail's pace; progress still consists largely of letterhead pieties and conventional public speaking. On the back forty we still slip two steps backward for each forward stride." (Leopald, 1948) Since Leopald wrote these words about 70 years ago, we have made a lot of progress in conservation, but not in all fields. There is still a great lack in urban open space conservation while all the energy is concentrated in rural landscapes where nature is doing relatively fine on its own.

The usual answer to this dilemma is; more conservation education. No one will debate this, but is it certain that the volume of education needs stepping up? Or is something lacking in the content as well?

It is difficult to give a fair summary of its content in brief form, but, as I understand it, the content is substantially this: obey the law, vote right, join some organizations, and practice what conservation is profitable on your own land. In our attempt to make conservation easy, we have made it insignificant. (Leopald, 1948)

We must move away from this fixed idea that conservation is mainly about sustainability and preserving our recourses. There is lots more that need conservation, for example; aesthetical conservation, urban culture conservation, landform conservation, etc.

fig 1.5: landform & soil conservation (Goulart)

1.6 Conclusion

Today 57% (or 23 million) of all South Africans live in towns and cities. By the year 2010, 73% of our population will be urban - 43, 7 million people! (Botany online)

Urban open land is not merely soil; it is a fountain of energy flowing through the urban framework, a circuit of

soils, plants, and animals. Public space clearly and painfully reflects the physical deficiencies linked to low levels of 'development'. (Planelles, 1999) These deficiencies are not only physical but also physiological and emotional. The urban environment must provide environments that are adequate for the development of its inhabitants.

The city is not only inserted within an environment, within a landscape, but in addition it creates its own inner environment and landscapes where the city life takes place. (Planelles, 1999)

In recent years, there has been a radical change in the way that landscapes are designed and understood. What in the past was considered part of the job performed by architects or civil engineering has come to be considered an n independent discipline that makes use of architecture, urban design, biology, and contemporary art. This is a true step forward in understanding the complexity of the outdoor environment.

The landscape is constantly transforming and renewed and concepts such as sustainable development, globalization, mass tourism, and communication directly affect its design. Both the latest political events as well as the recent technological advances have an influence on the way we understand and design contemporary landscapes and its role in the public spaces of our cities.

With this empowered position that we have, we must explore and restore the land, and design an unfolding landscape to create memory making places and healthy environments.

fig 1.6: urban conservation area

- Urban Culture
  - ONE Urban Culture
  - Multi Culture
- Energy
  - Movement
  - Place
- Conservation
  - Nature
  - Urban open space
- Integrating frameworks
  - Urban Framework
  - Open Space Framework

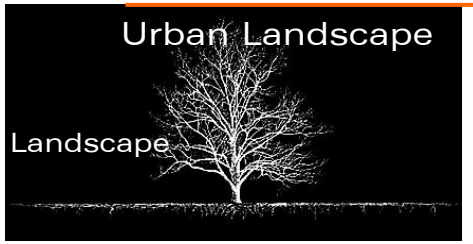


Diagram showing the dynamics of the Urban Landscape

Culture, energy, conservation, and integration are the main four aspects that will be concentrated on in this thesis. Together they form the Urban Landscape.