



The aim of this dissertation is not a study of the evolution of humankind, but the development of an architectural symbol system that can be applied as a framework tool to emphasise the importance of the Cradle of Humankind World Heritage Site.

The principles that guided the development of this framework tool were informed by the theoretical works, *Intentions In Architecture and Genius Loci - Towards a Phenomenology In Architecture* By Christian Norberg-Schultz.

The development and origins of a suitable symbol-system necessitates the study of the context in more depth. The site derives its importance from its inherent natural properties that facilitated the process of human evolution within its borders. The process of evolution presupposes a dynamic interaction between the natural environment and the Hominid development. The study of this dynamic interaction demanded that a distinction be made between the Hominid and the ecosystem in which the Hominid had its origins.

The interaction process brings us to the human processes critical to survival and primary to the process of evolution, perception and socialization. Perception gives an organism knowledge and insight of his immediate environment, on the basis of this knowledge, choices are made that influence future circumstances of the particular individual. The knowledge an individual obtains over a period of time forms the basis of his/her frame of reference. Study revealed that a multitude of factors influence perception. It is a fundamental misunderstanding that a similar world is given a priori to all. Perception is based on the individual's history and frame of reference. This frame of reference is in turn based on the society in which he is a participating member. Interaction between members of a society gives rise to a collective creation of a symbol-system. The creation of a symbol-system is thus crucial for a successful interaction between community members.

The perception of space is a gradual construction and is dependant on education of the individual within a society. A symbol-system can thus be described as an interpretation medium between individuals. A symbol-system parallels complexity in the society context and is developed according to interpretation need. Socialization can be seen as the process of adjustment of an organism to its environment. One of the products of the socialization process is the development of common signs and symbols that makes communication possible. Communication can be seen as necessary to integrate the individual in the common world and give him a sense of security.

It can be seen that order can be given to our environment by assigning symbols to it.

The COH WHS can be considered as a stage that made the above activities possible during the process of evolution. According to Norberg-Schultz, the natural landscape can be divided into Romantic, Cosmic, and Classic archetypal categories, each with its own characteristics. The COH WHS can according to these categories be described as having Classic characteristics. The Classic landscape can be described as a meaningful order of distinct, individual places with a "human" dimension.

The "Classic" landscape was first discovered in Greece and played a large role in the later Roman environment. The character of the classic landscape is neither monotonous nor multifarious, but we find a composition of distinct elements. Valleys and ridges are clearly defined and can be described as creating individual, defined spaces in the environment. In the classic landscape neither the ground surface nor sky dominates and a human scale is perceived where all is in equilibrium and in order. In this landscape human fellowship is possible and every part conserves its identity within the totality. The individual is neither absorbed by an abstract system nor has to find his private hiding space.

This then, can be described as the most suitable environment for the promotion of the process of evolution. In the COH WHS context, man could see himself as equal partner to nature and as nature complementing his own being. This stable relationship helped to release human vitality and it is not difficult to understand why the process of human evolution had its roots in this classic landscape.

To arrive at a suitable architectural framework that can be utilized as a interpretational tool, a symbol-system needs to be developed. For the framework to be suitable, it must be able to present a coherent, holistic image of the site and the role it played in the process of evolution. This informed the choice to model the symbol-system on the natural landscape. The natural environment will thus be used to inform a metaphoric language based on mass-, space-, and surface-elements. These elements will be further interpreted in terms of form, texture, order, character, light and time. This nature based symbol-system will ensure an accessible, multi-functional and adaptable architectural framework. A suitable framework will also aid the generation of identification and orientation. "The existential purpose of building (architecture) is therefore to make a site become a place that is to uncover the meanings potentially present in the given environment." Norberg-Schultz further describes how man can create an existential foothold through the acts of visualisation, complementation and symbolization.

The ultimate goal therefore, is the creation of an architectural product that can, by its mere identity, aid in the interpretation of the importance of the Cradle of Humankind World Heritage Site. What clues then, can we find in the physical context of the proposed Mohale's Gate site? How can this be used to emphasize the meaning of the COH? A study of the topography of the site area reveals a natural gateway or entrance to the COH WHS. This relates to the need to create a centre that forms a introductory landmark in the natural landscape. The topography of the Mohale's Gate site reveals a dynamic character where a certain level of instability exists.

How can this relate to evolution?

We know that everything in nature tends towards a state of equilibrium. A state of instability can be compared to the process of evolution in that it remains in a state of change or flux. Through the act of building, man reveals his understanding of nature. By creating a landmark in the landscape, a higher level of worth can be associated to the process of evolution in this particular landscape.

To whom must this meaning be revealed? Who will benefit from an increase in meaning in this concept?

Ultimately all of humankind, because the process of evolution is something all humans can relate to. The manner in which the meaning and importance of the COH can be revealed to the users must form the basis of this investigation. This will generate the most appropriate solution. The natural context and its characteristics must form the basis of the design concept.

How will this context be presented to the users?

This experience can be equated to the process of evolution where humanoids had a close relationship with nature. It was experienced through all the senses. All levels of perception were utilized in the interpretation of the environment, this also ensured survival. The interaction between the individual and his perception of the physical environment is thus the basis that informs the design concept. Contrast creates voids to be filled by individual interpretation. The aim of this project is to construct a framework of architectural systems able to evoke individual interpretation of the context.