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Chapter1

Introduction



Prologue

The nature reserve is an isolated island within a city to which it cannot relate, yet the ridge line stands out in its built up environment, its peaks are prominent from afar as beacons to its importance. The mountain draws you in with its sense of peace as it lies calmly as a backdrop to the constant rush and bustle of daily life.

Within its fenced boundary, magnitudes of tiny colourful flowers surround you as you walk along the narrow pathways which cut through the grassy plain. At one point in the reserve you can turn a full 360 degrees and not see a single indication of the built environment that surrounds you. If you close your eyes and listen, you will hear birds singing in the trees around you, the rustle of the grass as a cool breeze blows through it and the distant buzzing sound of crickets. A natural rock outcrop in the spruit forms a pool known as Weaver Pool which provides a tranquil setting to rest and take note of the magnificent view. The ridge is beautiful and has changed colour over the last month. The change in season has transformed the reserve from a dull brown to a lush green which contrasts the bright blue sky. The pool has attracted birds which have built their nests in the reeds above the shimmering water.

The vegetation changes as you ascend the slope, grassland turns into open woodland. The proteas are still blackened after the fires of the previous season and bulbs are in full-flower between clumps of fleshy new grass. Atop the ridge, vegetation is scattered in clumps between golden-brown rocky outcrops. Natural gravel from eroded shale covers the path which crunches under foot as you walk between shrubs and small trees. From here you can see as far as Centurion to the south and to the Magaliesberg mountains to the north-west. Below, the spruit snakes its way through the reserve with a fertile green ribbon of vegetation to either side of it, some of it flattened by the rushing water during the last thunderstorm when the river burst its banks. The wind is stronger here than below and provides relief as the sun beats down mercilessly onto the top of the ridge.

A giant *Combretum erythrollyllum* tree grows slightly off the path – it towers above you and envelops you in a network of its branches creating a cool, shady spot to ponder the splendour of the natural environment that surrounds you. As you look across the grassy plain, wave-like patterns are visible in the grass as the breeze blows through it while it shimmers gently in the sunlight. In the background, the ridge forms an elegantly curved backdrop to the reserve.



Figure 1.1 Faerie Glen Nature Reserve

This is the story of the place. It tells of a landscape that is rich in ecological attributes and natural beauty. Is there a way that the public be made aware of this by developing the reserve in such a way that it becomes more memorable? That it becomes a landscape that society will cherish and also come to understand? Reed (2005:16) notes that parks “not only provide a connection to nature, but that they are also places for social interaction, recreation, for unimagined and unanticipated activities, and, thankfully, places to do nothing.”

Background and Rationale

Open space within the urban environment not only plays an important role in the preservation of natural systems and biodiversity, but also plays an essential role in the well being of human life and the way in which we deal with our surroundings and ever increasing pace of life. The Tshwane Open Space Framework (TOSF) defines open space as “areas predominantly free of building that provide ecological, socio-economic and place-making functions at all scales of the metropolitan area” (2006:5).

Unfortunately, the current rate of urbanisation within the city of Tshwane has resulted in the development of areas previously set aside to remain natural environments. Apart from the ecological concerns which arise as a result of this decrease in open space, negative psychological and physical effects can be observed within the populace of the city. It is therefore important to preserve existing open spaces as natural areas for human use.

Open space within the urban context is an important building block of the city for ecological, socio-economic and place-making purposes (TOSF 2006:6). It is therefore of utmost importance to design these spaces in order to extract maximum value from them. Already in 1971 Pim referred to the urgent need for “space for living” in South Africa (1971:39) – places for people to get away from the city – these open spaces provide refuge and have the capacity to provide places for escape and gratification while fulfilling important ecological roles within the radically changing urban context.

Open space in the city also has ecological importance and provides a last outpost for plant and animal species rapidly ejected from their natural environments. Waldheim (2006:43) states that we are in a time where “the general public is increasingly conscious of environmental issues,” and thus the opportunity arises to utilise open space to preserve and enhance what may be left of the natural environment and its inherent processes while



educating the public about them.

Landscape narrative is a continuous story engrained into the land. This story of the landscape includes the site, materials, and natural processes that created it and the cultural experience of being in it. Art forms an interesting position from which to view natural processes present in the landscape. Constantly in flux, the landscape becomes art – the earth as the canvas onto which nature continuously scores its changing patterns using wind, fire, water and erosion. Ecological planning forms the basis (logic) to any intervention, onto which an understanding of the narrative forms a further layer in which beauty, elegance and an overall poetry is brought to the landscape.

This narrative can be a powerful tool employed to emphasise the importance and understanding of the uniqueness of the landscape through the ‘telling’ of its own natural stories. Combined with ecological planning, an understanding of the inherent landscape narrative can be applied in the landscape to create memorable places which allow people to gain an understanding of and an appreciation for the natural environment, its intrinsic beauty and its processes that shape it over time.

The Faerie Glen Nature Reserve has been identified as a suitable site on which to identify an ecological sensitivity that will form the basis for planning and integration of a programme for the site. The reserve has been recognized as an important open space within the context of Pretoria as it is one of the last remaining eco-systems in Tshwane where both ridge (Bronberg Ridge) and floodplain (Moreleta Spruit) morphology naturally occur together and thus represents a unique “Middleveld” vegetation type (TOSF 2004:2). This recognition is sufficient reason to conserve the area as open space and not to develop it. Sensitivity mapping has been carried out on the site and this thesis will concentrate mainly on the notion of landscape narrative as the informant of the design process.

Research Goal

This thesis aims to explore ways in which open space can be made memorable through the application of sustainable, ecological design and landscape narrative principles. These principles will be applied to the planning and design of the Faerie Glen Nature Reserve.

Problem Statement

Current social and economic circumstances within the landscape of South Africa have led to isolated and undeveloped open spaces within the City of Tshwane. Although these open spaces are important, they remain underutilised by the public. Fences render them inaccessible to most people, further alienating them from their surroundings. Once isolated, these pockets of land are viewed as wasted spaces that may become lonely and dangerous, deterring visitors from enjoying the beauty of nature within the built environment. These open spaces are threatened by development and need to be transformed through landscape design into socially, economically and environmentally sustainable open space.

Hypothesis

This thesis argues that through a number of interventions, an increase in the daily use of the Faerie Glen Nature Reserve will promote the reserve as a sustainable landscape. Furthermore, through an understanding of landscape narrative principles, the realization of these interventions will not negatively affect the ecological importance or the visual aesthetic of the nature reserve. Rather, they will enhance the experience of visiting the place by introducing interventions that highlight the landscape's beauty and *genius loci*, thus making it a memorable experience.

Research Questions

1. Is the inherent landscape quality of a nature reserve enough to inform the layout of activities across the reserve while maintaining its ecological sensitivity?
2. How can interventions of a social public nature be made in a natural landscape to enhance its appeal without detracting from the visual aesthetic of the natural environment?
3. Can the concept of landscape narrative be applied to the creation of a memorable landscape?

Assumptions and Delimitations

All decisions made by the author are based on current conditions within the reserve and the surrounding context of the Faerie Glen Nature Reserve. The principles contained in the Tshwane Open Space Framework and the Tshwane Integrated Development Plan are incorporated by the author as far

as possible but will not limit the application of design ideas as expressed in this thesis. Throughout the thesis, the author will attempt to anticipate future development, but aims mainly to deal with the current issues.

Research Method and Methodology

This thesis proposes to evaluate historical precedent, contemporary theory and case studies to establish guidelines and principles for the development the Faerie Glen Nature Reserve.

The qualitative research method will be used for the purposes of this dissertation. This research method, as described by Leedy and Ormrod (2001:147), aims to gain understanding of the complexities of phenomena that occur in natural settings. This research method recognizes that the study matter may have multiple dimensions and layers, and therefore cannot be approached or understood from a singular point of view. The method for data collection is outlined in Figure 1.2. Figure 1.3 indicates a non-linear process research methodology that will be applied.

Research	Data Type
Theoretical investigation	Published documents
Site analysis	Published documents, observation
Precedent studies	Observation, interviews, reports, published documents

Figure 1.2 Qualitative data collection

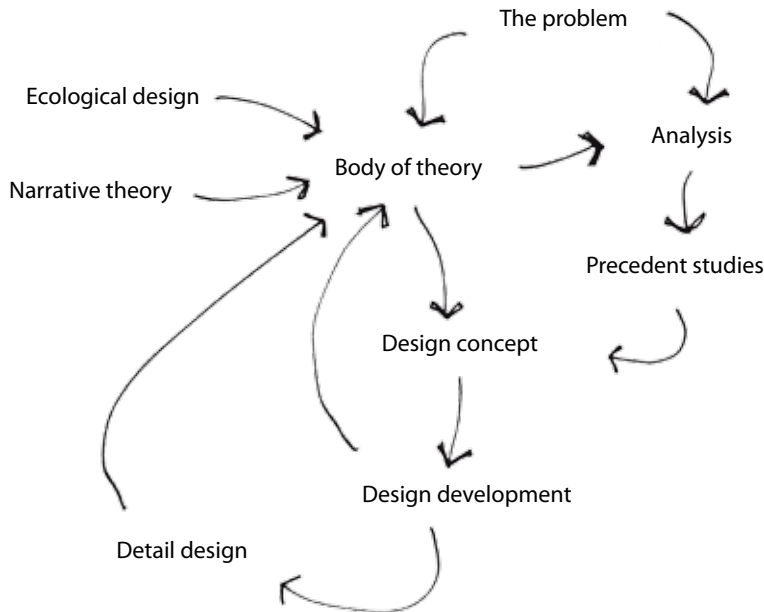


Figure 1.3 Research methodology to be followed