Chapter 3

The Challenge of Site
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This chapter explores the challenge against the competition site. The intention of this chapter is to contextualize the challenge against the PAP competition site within an appropriate theoretical framework that will guide the search for alternative sites and provide relevant criteria for assessing these sites. The aim of this chapter is to identify a site, through a process of trial and error, that would best allow the PAP to live up to its mandate of becoming an inclusive platform for continental decision-making.

The decision of the PAP’s host country and the arrival at the competition site.

“There was a lot of politics about where the Pan African Parliament was going to be based. Libya was one of the countries that offered to host it. It has the resources to do so but many felt that while they may have a huge building there might not have been much of a parliament because of the maverick nature of the Libyan political system. In the end South Africa won and it was a good decision because despite one’s reservations about the Pan Africanisation of Apartheid power relations, the country is one of the most vibrant democracies of the continent.” (Raheem: 2006)

South Africa having won the rights to host the PAP in July 2006 took the responsibility of “providing the venue, that included the physical structure as well as the infrastructure in the venue, office accommodation for parliamentarians and staff and the residence for the president of the PAP.”


In the official offer to host the PAP, the South African department of foreign affairs offered to “construct a dedicated, state-of-the-art fully equipped unique structure to house the Pan African Parliament complex, designed to reflect the rich talent and diversity of the peoples of the continent.”

The offer included a two-step approach in which the first step would entail housing the PAP at a temporary venue for 5 years. A dedicated venue to house the PAP during this period was identified at Gallagher Estate, Midrand citing ease of accessibility from O.R Tambo International Airport and the availability of affordable, suitable hotel accommodation within the immediate vicinity of Gallagher Estate.

The second stage of the offer included the hosting of a continent wide competition to choose the best design, construct and relocate the PAP to its new premises.

The site would be chosen based on it being “situated in a convenient location in close proximity to suitable and affordable housing, hotel accommodation and modern medical facilities.”

**The competition site**

As previously discussed, the selected competition site is approximately 11km away from the PAP’s temporary home. It is Erf 442, a 20 hectare of the farm Randjiesfontein which is located adjacent to the N1 highway. The following photos show the site and surrounding context.
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Photo 7: View looking towards competition site, Road K27 and Randjesfontein Park Extension

Photo 8: View looking towards competition site and Randjesfontein Park Extension

Photo 9: View looking towards competition site and DBSA building

Photo 10: View looking towards site and DBSA building
Photo 11: View looking towards competition site, DBSA building and surrounding buildings

Photo 12: View looking towards competition site, DBSA building

Photo 13: View looking towards competition site, Lever Road and entrance road to DBSA building

Photo 14: View looking towards competition site, Lever Road and entrance road to DBSA building
Photo 15: View looking towards competition site and intersection between Road R562 and Lever Road

Photo 16: View looking towards competition site and intersection between Road R562 and Lever Road

Photo 17: View looking towards competition site and DBSA building

Photo 18: View looking towards competition site and surrounding context
Photo 17: View looking towards competition site and DBSA building

Photo 18: View looking towards competition site and surrounding context

Photo 19: View looking towards competition site and DBSA building

Photo 20: View looking towards competition site and DBSA building
Photo 21: Existing vegetation

Photo 22: Existing vegetation and birds

Photo 23: View looking from the competition site to the east, towards Randjesfontein Park Extension
Illustration 5: Photo legend

1. AU?
2. ELITIST
3. PAP
4. BRIEF
5. DESIGN METHODOLOGY
6. SITE
7. URBAN DESIGN
8. DESIGN

Photos of PAP competition site
(www.papcompetition.com cited 23 may 2007)
The basis for challenging the competition site

In the previous chapter, the site was assessed and the following positive opinions emerged regarding the site:
- It has good links to the airport and there is adequate affordable hotel accommodation nearby.
- The site is geographically central, and links to the N1 highway allow ease of access to Johannesburg and Pretoria.
- The highway allows for good visibility of the site.

However, the site was also viewed negatively:

- Although it is geographically central, it is only viable as a destination due to the largely unpopulated context.
- Although the site is visible from the highway, connection to the site is merely visual.
- The site reinforces existing postcolonial spatial tendencies to move out of the historical and political context and build on neutral ground.
- The site is unsuitable to fulfill the mandate of the PAP to become an inclusive continental decision-making platform, due to a lack of public interaction to the site, and the inherent exclusivity of the site as a destination point located away from the context of the everyday life of ordinary people.

As such, this thesis took the position of challenging the PAP competition site

Theoretical context of the challenge to the PAP competition site

The crucial question is, why the South African government chose such a site when it seems to invalidate the core mandate and role the institution is hoping to play on a continental level.

Assuming that Midrand, and in particular the competition site, were chosen on the basis of being a “convenient location in close proximity to suitable and affordable housing, hotel accommodation and modern medical facilities”, is too a simplistic answer as many locations offer the same if not greater accessibility to these amenities.

The idea is reinforced by Vale:
“The decision to build a new place for government is always a significant one, the decision on where and how are more telling still.” (1992:10)

Understanding the choice of location is further complicated by the fact that the PAP is not a national, but a continental institution. If we consider that the city of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia markets itself as the capital of the continent due to hosting the AU headquarters.