The following points will be discussed in the exploration of the aforementioned buildings:

- A general description discussing the purpose of the building, important events/circumstances that led the building to be constructed in the location and in the manner it has been, and the general political context of its creation.
- Analysis of the site at a city and locality scale
- An understanding of form, function and power portrayal as seen in the architecture
- Analysis of the building against the theoretical context
- Important lessons taken from the building and a conclusion of the exploration

Provincial Legislatures
Mpumalanga Provincial Government Legislature and Office Complex; Nelspruit, Mpumalanga, South Africa; by Meyer Pienaar Tayob Schnepal Architects & Urban Designers

Photo of Mpumalanga Provincial Government Legislature (Shepard ed. 2006:14)
“The building is as a result of the first open architectural competition in post apartheid South Africa. It provides a new chamber of parliament and offices for the Mpumalanga Provincial Legislature, as well as new offices for all the executive government department of the newly established Mpumalanga Province into a single centralized complex.” (Shepard et 2006:15)

The realignment of the provincial boundaries transformed the South African political landscape with the nine new provinces replacing the four of the apartheid government, post 1994 which marks the historic date of the first democratic elections in the country. While the previous apartheid Bantustans legislative complexes fulfilled the needs of some of the provinces there was a need for new complexes for the provincial government of the Mpumalanga and Northern Cape provinces. (Low et al. ed. 2004:140)

**Site Analysis**
The site is located on the outskirts of the provincial capital, Nelspruit, overlooking the “confluence of two rivers, against the edge of natural gorges and riverine forests.” (Shepard ed. 2006:15)

The site is along a provincial road and marks the entrance to Nelspruit, bordered by a regional shopping mall to the west with a panoramic view of the Lowveld hills to the north, east and south.
The building in that sense follows the postcolonial perhaps the post apartheid, strategy of using a site out of the “historic, political and spatial context.” (Vale 1992:134)

Although the building houses the legislative function and all other provincial offices aimed at an administrative centralization for the purposes of efficiency and common accessibility, the location of the site at a distance from the people of Nelspruit, illustrates a different stance. While the site may be an attempt at distancing itself from the provincial capital to signify greater connection to the larger extents of the province, and other provinces such as Gauteng, the choice of site distances itself from the base of the populous and reveals an elitist nature.

The site ensures that the building becomes a destination point, however this might be slightly mitigated due to the proximity of a regional attractor in the form of the neighboring mall. However, even if the architecture attempted to signify a connection to the people the site retains an elitist profile assuming a location that favors government administrators by providing them with splendid views of the natural surroundings at their expense to the connection to the people.

**Architectural response: form, function and the portrayal of power**

The building houses two functions of the provincial government, namely the legislative and executive arms and these are expressed differently through the built form.

The offices of the executive portfolios are positioned on the edge of the site, close to natural gorges overlooking the landscape. The legislative function is located at the vehicular entrance to the site and is marked by a ‘public piazza’. The complex buildings seen on site plan resemble a bow and this creates a central space, which is occupied by the complexes parking facilities of the campus.

The legislative complex is the dominant landmark featuring a dome that resembles and anthill or beehive, or dome hut. The office blocks are capped with shallow pyramid like roofs, that extend far beyond the face of the facade to shade the large windows and timber decked balconies.
The entrance of each of the six office wing housing a different portfolio, are emphasized by two tall face brick towers that taper outward towards the top. These towers presumably contain vertical circulation and/or vertical reticulation of services. The legislative function is marked by the dominant debating chamber, partly encloses a ‘public piazza’, with the legislative offices flanking this space to the south. The piazza opens up on plan to the entrance point on the service road. Although aerial photography and architectural plans suggest that, this space is accessible, visitor accounts suggest otherwise. The piazza is thus classified as a civic square that is “state owned, enclosed and ceremonial in nature.” (Goodsell 1988:11)

The complex makes use of perimeter security in the form of boundary fencing and is watched over by security guards.
From the above we see the use of architectural strategies and articulation used to portray power:

- The buildings occupy the perimeter of the site and are joined together both physically and by means of architectural language to make the complex appear as one building, and thus creating a larger profile.
- The building makes use of tall vertical elements as landmark features that read above the surrounding natural landscape.
- “The profile of the complex echoes the prominent granite domes of the Lowveld landscape” (Shepard ed, 2006:15) creating a strong sense of foreground and background and thus a strong building profile against the horizon.

The building in relation to the theoretical context

The use of architecture to construct nationalism
We see the building constructed in the early years of post-apartheid South Africa. By its choice of site, architectural articulation and overall composition, we see the building attempting to counter the political
architecture of the apartheid government by adopting the following:

- By locating the building on a neutral site outside the political, historical and spatial context of Nelspruit, along a major provincial road, the complex seeks to connect to the larger extents of the province that might have been marginalized under the previous administration.
- By the buildings being arranged along the contours of the site (Shepard ed, 2006:15) it creates a contrast to buildings defined largely by the street grid within Nelspruit signaling a departure from the site arrangement strategies of the previous administration.
- By the building profile favoring large overhangs, strong tower elements and a prominent domed debating chamber the architecture emphasizes a departure from the orthogonal flat roofed modernist office blocks associated with the old regime.

The landscape, site and architectural articulation refer more to the natural landscape, than to the man made cityscape. The use of “luxurious indigenous landscaping”, roofs with wide overhangs supported by tree branch like support structures, echo the indigenous trees and domed structure that resembles an anthill, (or traditional domed hut) reinforce this. The architecture, by these means refers to a time that is in harmony with the natural and sublime, contrasting to the modernist orthogonal cityscape that could be associated with the previous apartheid regime that needs to be left behind or forgotten.

The use of natural colors and textures reinforce this imagery and by associating it to the natural and unspoiled landscape, legitimates the political position of the patron of the architecture, namely the provincial government.

Below: Photos of the complex (Shepard ed. 2006:17)
The role of the elite in political architecture that reinforces the political status quo

- Although the selection of the site might have been based on connectivity to the rest of the province, the complex is an isolated destination point, reinforces the gap between the powerful elite and the powerless masses.
- The site locates itself on the outskirts at the entry point to Nelspruit, highlighting itself to visitors and residents returning to the town, reinforcing the idea of the governments primary importance.
- Through the use of architectural elements and strategies used to embody power and create a sense of awe and wonder to the visitor and onlooker, the architecture highlights the important of the patron, i.e. the provincial government.
- By the use of highly viable security measures the complex highlights the exclusivity of both the physical property and of the provincial government above ordinary citizens.

The postcolonial project that in trying to counter colonialist spatial and architectural legacies actually recoup these methodologies

In an earlier portion of this chapter the various colonial architectural strategies used to ‘domesticate’ colonial subjects were discussed. These are:

- Using of a new and different architectural expression to highlight itself and prove supremacy over the existing context
- Using architecture to form and remold collective memories using processors that include neutralization, re-creation and reconstruction of site and landscape in contrast to existing values
- Using architecture as a symbol of hope

We see the project complying to the above:

- The use of architectural language that contrasts the orthogonal flat roofed architecture associated with the previous regime
- The use of a neutral site away from the city, the arrangement of buildings of contours as opposed to city grids and the privileging of the perimeter as opposed to the center of the site, affirms this.
- The building through its location and architectural articulation acts as a landmark of positive change, viewed from the approaching road and Nelspruit in the distance.
Architecture as an icon of economic development

- The building is a prominent 'gateway' to Nelspruit and is highly visible. By its unique architectural language that resonates with the landscape and its portrayal of power, it makes itself a strong icon for post-apartheid development.

Conclusion

Through its use of site located on the outskirts of Nelspruit overlooking the convergence of two rivers and the natural landscape, the complex simultaneously highlights itself as being distinct from the historical narrative of apartheid, a symbol of change and hope, yet at the same time distancing itself from the proximity to its citizens and reinforcing an elitist perception of government.

By use of architectural strategies such as the differentiation from the flat roofed modernist office blocks associated with the previous regime, use of architectural articulation that resonates with natural imagery such as treetop canopies and anthills, the spreading of buildings to create a larger footprint, and other strategies, the building becomes a strong landmark that portrays power.

By the same means the complex is used to create nationalism, embody elitist ideals, and becoming a citadel of hope and change, however using the same architectural strategies as colonial and apartheid regimes.

Northern Cape Provincial Government Legislature,
by Louis Ferrara da Silva architects, completed 2004
“The year 2004 represents an important moment in the development of South Africa, marking 10 years of democratic rule... as such it establishes some form of datum or measure for the construction of 'new histories'. This is even more significant for a society that tends to overwrite its past. The history of power relations in South Africa demonstrates a tendency for one homogeny to exchange itself for another.”
(Low in Low et al ed.; 2004:133)

2004 marked the year that the Northern Cape Provincial Legislature was officially opened. This project aimed to mark a departure from the conventional form and location of governmental architecture in the context of the democratization of South Africa.

“The Northern Cape Province, with Kimberly as its capital was born out of the first democratic elections in 1994. Kimberly portrayed two things: a glittering, diamond-mining industry of wealth and exploitation, and a discriminatory past of apartheid planning. The new Legislature, beyond its mediate administrative functions, marks a new beginning in the city’s history: as a symbol of remembrance and healing and as a landscape that connects the city’s people to their divided past and shared future.”
(Shepard ed. 2006:11)
The site is positioned on the outskirts of Kimberly and was “strategically positioned to merge the fabric of the ‘black’ township of Galashewa and the main ‘white’ town of Kimberly.” (Shepard ed. 2006:11) This was done to counter the apartheid era political and geographic division between the white ruling class and the predominantly black workers (Woode ed 2005:50).

However, if one analyzed aerial photographs it is discovered that the site is geographically closer to the township although access to the site is on a service road equidistant to the two portions. The ‘peoples square’ and major building are orientated to the complex’s point of entry. This illustrates a closer affinity to the township while attempting to symbolize unity.

From aerial photography, the site is located on a piece of land within the veld between the township fabric to the northwest and the suburban landscape of Kimberly to the southeast. The site does not front any existing roads, the access road that is used to enter the complex had to be specifically constructed. To the west of the site is the main road leading into Galashewa, which connects onto the service road of the complex. As such, the site is located in the apartheid ‘buffer zone’ that acted as a separating element between areas of different racial profiles. This veld landscape is predominantly flat and the architecture responds to this by creating tall landmark buildings.

This reinforces the postcolonial tendency to use a site outside of the urban center to symbolize “inclusiveness and a spatial promise of unity.” (Vale 1992:135) The site is a neutral middle ground between spatial divisions created by apartheid.

The site while being a geographic symbol of stitching together segregation, in reality is only a visual symbol of connectivity. “The project provides a strategic insertion, contesting apartheid’s segregated planning that produced the emptiness and mono-functionality of the townships. Noble in its intentions, the strategy has been severely compromised by the security imperatives post occupancy.” (Woode ed. 2003:53). As the entire complex is surrounded by a perimeter fencing the good intentions of the architects, who designed spaces that follow existing footpaths in order to connect to the township fabric, have not been fulfilled and as such functions on a symbolic level only.

From this we conclude that the site is an attempt of moving out of the historic center of control to symbolize unity, between segregated portions of the apartheid landscape. The location however, shows a closer affinity to the formally marginalized township but the orientation of spaces and built form, suggest an equal platform of interaction.