SECOND COMMENT

on Angel and Salingaros's
"CHRISTOPHER ALEXANDER'S ARCHITECTURAL INSIGHTS AND
LIMITATIONS"[*]

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With regard to the issue of image versus real experience, I wonder if it is true that Alexander's buildings do not photograph well? Perhaps they do not photograph in the way that the design professions, becoming part of the marketing industry, defined as 'photographed well'. Nevertheless, Alexander used photos extensively to illustrate ideas in his books, and the photographs of his buildings often evoke similar values as can be seen in modern 'artistic' film and photography.

And yet historical architecture photographs quite well doesn't it? I appreciate what Solly (Shlomo) says about the difficulty of photographing place, but I think the issue goes beyond — it is interesting that of all the 20th century arts, photography and film were the ones that Alexander referred to most to provide images that contain the feelings he's talking about. Perhaps because often they sought to capture (photography) and re-create (cinema) the quality without a name, or life in the sense that Alexander intended.

Now as to the claim that Chris rejected the whole profession. This point is perhaps true for *A Pattern Language* related works, but is less so for *The Nature of Order*, where at the end of book II Alexander discusses quite in depth what the architecture profession needs to be like to achieve his vision of a living world (see *The Process of Creating Life*, chapters 20 and 21) (Alexander, 2001-2005). He imagines architects as curators of the life and wholeness of the environment, working together with builders and craftsmen throughout communities, as service providers, not unlike health providers.

I doubt that Chris saw himself as the leader of a cult, and if it were so, then he was pretty dismal at it. A more serious accusation is that Chris despised the profession and everything about it. That is probably more true, but it is interesting that even within the profession there was, and is, very little criticism of its *modus operandi*. The strongest criticism is that of the Prince now King Charles III, and the Krier brothers, Léon and Rob — and they became quite successful within the profession too. And yet Chris never attempted to connect with people who were closer to his views like N. John Habraken, Bill Hillier and similar individuals particularly in the Green Architecture movement, which started off at a similar time (early 70's) and shared much of the criticism of modern architecture, but was not critical of its foundations.

This is what his former student and our late friend Kyriakos Pontikis tried to do in his edited book (which I completed after his death) (Pontikis, 2016), and what we are trying to do at Building Beauty (www.buildingbeauty.org/): building bridges to architects and built environment professionals who may not be aware of Alexander's ideas, and to other scientific and professional disciplines. This is particularly important now, with the climate emergency looming, to remind us that no single-minded or singly-identified goal is going to help us out of the crisis of our capitalist-scientific-technological civilization, but only an understanding of the wholeness of the earth, the interconnectedness of the problems, and the need to address this wholeness in whatever we do.

Among the architectural figures that influenced the future development of architecture, Frank Lloyd Wright also wasn't able to influence it as much as Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius did, although he did start a school and had many disciples. Perhaps his 'organicism' and individualism did not lend itself to proliferating in the financial-industrial complex that the real-estate industry became after the second world war. Perhaps Alexander failed to gain influence for similar reasons. His vision was too 'organic', almost anarchist at its core, for example the radical devolution of power envisaged by patterns like *Community of 7000* (Pattern 12), or *Identifiable Neighborhood* (Pattern 14), giving small-scale communities power over local police and land-use decisions.

Nikos talks about the coming architectural revolution. I think both your analyses are a little shallow, and here I go with Michael. Chris was very single-minded in his purpose, and was struggling to find a way that made sense to a modern-day scientifically educated person to make buildings that have life. He was confronting not only the profession of architecture and its follies, but also the fact that there was no way in which what is of value in architecture made sense within the scientific world view which he shared and greatly respected — in that respect he went much more far out than in architecture.

Here, there is perhaps an interesting counterexample in urban design, where the ideas of Jacobs, Alexander and others have gained prominence — but still more than 90% of urban plans still use modernist planning approaches of separation and hierarchy. So it's not the failure of ideas to gain hold in the schools, but their difficulty in penetrating a complex and interconnected development profession (not controlled by architects or planners, but by engineers and economists) that determines to what degree ideas proliferate in the built world.

I totally agree with Solly about the value of the American dream of owning your own house. And with time these places also became richer and denser in urban values — for example the San Fernando Valley in Los Angeles. The early street-car suburbs are among the most wonderful places to live in the US. The problem is not necessarily the suburbs, but the geometries brought on by car dominated planning.

The proliferation of capital did enable people to have a house of their own for the first time. That's been mostly true up to the 1980's. It is less and less true now.

20th century architecture blended design with social engineering. Yet there is a humanist tradition in modern architecture: early Frank Lloyd Wright, Richard Neutra, Erich Mendelsohn, Alvar Aalto, and in the second generation Aldo van Eyck, Giancarlo De Carlo and others. The terrible thing is the elimination from architectural history of early

20th century architects that were not modernists. People like Gunnar Asplund, Bernard Maybeck, Julia Morgan, Jože Plečnik, Albert Kahn and many others. They are mostly known and respected only regionally, while they actually showed that it was possible to build human and beautiful buildings within the constraints of a modern industrial economy.

You mentioned the wealth of pattern languages developed by computer scientists but not by architects. There aren't many, but there are some pattern languages for different things. One of them was a pattern language we developed (as guidelines) for multi-way boulevards (Jacobs *et al.,* 2002). Another example is the *Smart Growth Manual* written by Andrés Duany and Jeff Speck, while not exactly in the pattern format, it is very much a pattern language (Duany *et al.*, 2009). The architectural practice of The Kubala Washatko Architects (TKWA) should also be mentioned, they formally include the creation of a project pattern language as part of their design process, and have created thousands of patterns (https://tkwa.com). Alexander himself was moving away from patterns to developing generative sequences which are like recipes for creating and recreating patterns that recur in the environment. See for example the Gatemaker application he developed with our colleague Greg Bryant (Bryant, 2014). Greg is now continuing this connection between Alexander's ideas of beauty and the software community in the Beautiful Software initiative we're running within Building Beauty (https://www.buildingbeauty.org/beautiful-software).

Solly argues that governments now see value in the income generated from tourism in traditional neighborhoods, which could protect those from being replaced by modernist buildings. And yet there is much confusion about what exactly is of value in historic environments. In some places, like Italy, where historic buildings are declared on the basis of years passed since they were built, this has now caused monstrous modern buildings to become protected by the Cultural and Historical Heritage Authority. In Beer-Sheva, Israel, they want to protect Brutalist monuments and residential blocks because that is what the historic fabric of the city, mostly built from the 1950's and onwards consists of.

I do want to address the issue of the responsibility of the architect. One of the problems of current architectural education is perhaps the fact that it doesn't acknowledge the diminished role of the architect in decision making, and doesn't prepare architects to make responsible choices on matters that are completely within their purview. In the end architects design and plan ordinary buildings, schools, offices and stores — the stuff of ordinary life, and they make thousands of decisions — with very little knowledge or understanding of the impact of those decisions. Also, their education does not prepare them to operate in the real world, except as marketers of themselves. The level of ignorance that I have seen surrounding issues of, to give an example, density and how to calculate it at different levels, and whether high-rise building actually contributes to increased density (it does not significantly in new neighborhoods in Israel, and saying nothing of the other negative impacts of high-rise residential buildings (Mehaffy & Alterman, 2019), is simply incredible, and that was from major architects, not beginners.

I also think that one of the reasons that Alexander did not succeed so much was that he was too much of a modernist, and too little a traditionalist. He tried to invent everything from scratch, including building systems and construction methods. Building is a very

risk-aversive industry, and tends to consolidate ways of doing things. It's hard to teach workers and tradespeople new tricks, and it's hard to reach high architectural quality with innovative methods. Those have to be consolidated over time and a whole career — and most great architects devoted their lives to refining methods that they have learned, or developed in the beginning of their careers, and their best buildings are those at a mature age (Antoni Gaudí for example). Many of them are also part of a group, or milieu, but Alexander was a loner — that also made it difficult for him to be influential.

I think that some of Solly's criticism of *A Pattern Language* was realized and shared by Chris, and that's why he embarked on *The Nature of Order*. Patterns are just a small part of this much larger theory, but perhaps what is needed is some hierarchy — what are the really universal patterns that always have to be there, and what are the nice-to-have and local or project-specific patterns? That shouldn't be very hard to agree on.

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