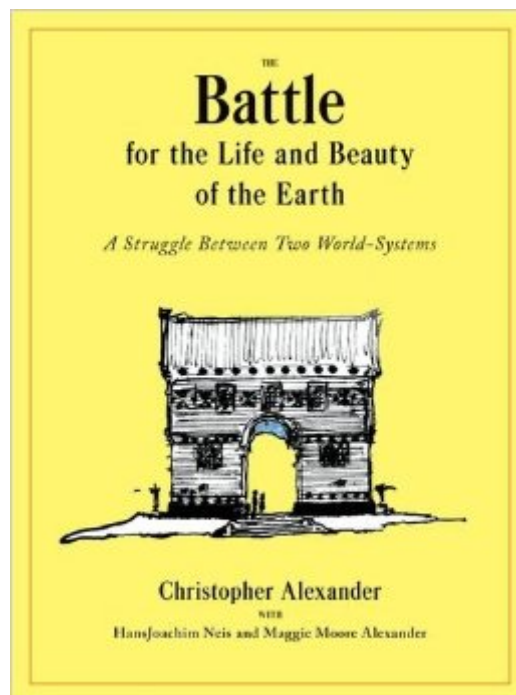


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# The Battle For The Life And Beauty Of The Earth: A Struggle Between Two World-Systems (Center For Environmental Structure)



## Synopsis

The purpose of all architecture, writes Christopher Alexander, is to encourage and support life-giving activity, dreams, and playfulness. But in recent decades, while our buildings are technically better--more sturdy, more waterproof, more energy efficient-- they have also become progressively more sterile, rarely providing the kind of environment in which people are emotionally nourished, genuinely happy, and deeply contented. Using the example of his building of the Eishin Campus in Japan, Christopher Alexander and his collaborators reveal an ongoing dispute between two fundamentally different ways of shaping our world. One system places emphasis on subtleties, on finesse, on the structure of adaptation that makes each tiny part fit into the larger context. The other system is concerned with efficiency, with money, power and control, stressing the more gross aspects of size, speed, and profit. This second, "business-as-usual" system, Alexander argues, is incapable of creating the kind of environment that is able to genuinely support the emotional, whole-making side of human life. To confront this sterile system, the book presents a new architecture that we--both as a world-wide civilization, and as individual people and cultures--can create, using new processes that allow us to build places of human energy and beauty. The book outlines nine ways of working, each one fully dedicated to wholeness, and able to support day-to-day activities that will make planning, design and construction possible in an entirely new way, and in more humane ways. An innovative thinker about building techniques and planning, Christopher Alexander has attracted a devoted following. Here he introduces a way of building that includes the best current practices, enriched by a range of new processes that support the houses, communities, and health of all who inhabit the Earth.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The 1977 book *A Pattern Language* remains a classic in humane and sustainable design, along with series companions including *The Timeless Way of Building* and *A New Theory of Urban Design*. But the books left many readers wanting to know more. How do we actually build such places? What are the challenges, and how do we overcome them? In this long-awaited response - over 25 years in the making - the authors deliver the goods, and then some. The book is a fascinating case study of a remarkable project "from the trenches" - the authors' design and construction of the Eishin School campus near Tokyo, Japan. But it is, more broadly, a moving and compelling essay on what has happened to our built environment over the last century. It joins other cautionary books of recent years - Jane Jacobs' *Dark Age Ahead* comes to mind - warning that we have a choice, and indeed a struggle, if we want to avert an unfolding planetary disaster. The choice is between a more beautiful, more humane, and more sustainable basis for design, or a continuation of the status quo - a default option that looks increasingly untenable. The principal author, Christopher Alexander, knows a little something about the subject of design, having played a major role in several design fields including software, urban planning and architecture. Indeed, he is widely regarded as one of the most influential design theorists and practitioners of the last century, as principal author of *Notes on the Synthesis of Form*, "A City is Not a Tree," the aforementioned *A Pattern Language*, and other landmarks. Here he offers concrete ideas about what will be required for a sustainable future, and his case study is an acid test, vividly illustrating the complex issues we face.

Alexander is a visionary. *Battle* reads like the rantings of somebody at the end of a frustrating career. At one level, it is about the design and building of a school campus in Japan in the 1980's. He spends over 300 pages providing a blow-by-blow history of the project. By his own accounts, he had extreme difficulty working with the (rather corrupt) Japanese construction companies. He blames this on their 'System B' methods, focused on engineering and profit (and pretty pictures in architecture magazines). However, it seems to me Alexander is intolerant of anybody, and any company, which doesn't have his extraordinary vision. This excessive expectation lessens the practicality of his vision. At another level, the book is about 'the old way' of building, 'System A'. In

this system, the goal is creating an environment (buildings, benches, foliage, light, etc.) which is highly livable - a place people want to be. It requires constantly adjusting during construction, feeling how the pieces work together and making decisions and changes as you go. Obviously, this is an uncertain and expensive proposition. I admire the vision, but Alexander's constant ravings at the failings of the construction company to work within this system (and on a fixed budget, no less) is a great distraction. After reading hundreds of pages of Alexander complaining about how impossible it was to work correctly with tight timelines, limited budget, constant politicking, and especially 'System B' construction companies, one would expect a conclusion about how the result was a mediocre campus. Quite the opposite: Chapter 19 is dedicated to extolling the virtues of the finished product. Which is fine, except: doesn't that rather weaken the argument? He lost the battles but won the war?

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