

# Fall 2009 International PUARL Symposium

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## Current Challenges for Patterns, Pattern Languages & Sustainability

The theories of Patterns and Pattern Languages, originally developed by Christopher Alexander and others at the Center for Environmental Structure (CES) in Berkeley, California, can be generally summed as atoms of the environment that can be combined language-like in various combinations and structures for the creation of whole neighborhoods, buildings, streets, benches, walls, etc. Patterns and Pattern Languages have served as useful tools to design, plan and build communities according to the principles of sustainability and living architecture. Patterns and Pattern Languages have been instrumental in bridging gaps between the professional world of architecture, the technical and artistic fields, and the community-at-large.

### Participating Speakers:

Frances Bronet, Hajo Neis, Howard Davis, Christine Theodoropoulos, Sara Ishikawa, Murray Silverstein, Max Jacobson, Ingrid King, Shlomo Angel, Chris Ramey, Ross Chapin, Thomas Collins, Matthew Hogan, Demetrius Gonzalez, Hubert Froyen, Robert Walsh, Rob Thallon, Stuart Cowen, Michael Tavel, Gabriel Brown, Pete Dykema, Jenny Young, David Week, Kyriakos Pontikis, Michael Mehaffy, Ward Cunningham, Douglas Schuler, Don Corner, Rob Thallon, Stephen Duff, John Rowell, Courtney Nunez, Randy Schmidt, Christopher Alexander, Kent Duffy, Erica Ceder, Becca Cavell, Susan Zuniga, Susan Ingham, Chris Andrews, Jenny Quillen, Besim Hakim, Kenny Asher, Katy Langstaff, Calvert Helms, Ramzi Kawar and others.

The Portland Urban Architecture Research Laboratory engages in basic and applied research throughout Portland and beyond.

The Symposium is organized by the PUARL in cooperation with CES, BPA, ESRG.

### PUARL LECTURE

A Presentation & Panel by the Original  
Authors of *A Pattern Language*  
Sara Ishikawa, Murray Silverstein  
Max Jacobson & Ingrid King

Friday, October 30 - Open to the Public  
Event Room - White Stag Building

5p Welcome & Introductions  
7 PUARL LECTURE & PANEL  
820 Reception

### PUARL SYMPOSIUM

Hajo Neis & Howard Davis

Saturday, October 31  
Event Room - White Stag Building

9a Keynote by Chris Ramey  
1015 Sessions on Pattern Application and Theory  
1p Keynote by Stuart Cowan  
145 Sessions on Pattern Development & Sustainability  
245 Award Ceremony  
3 Book Signing by Pattern Language Authors  
315 Keynote by David Week  
4 Sessions on Criticism & Challenges of Pattern Theory  
530 Panel Discussion on Criticism & Challenges

Sunday, November 1

9a Keynote by Michael Mehaffy & Howard Davis  
1015 Sessions on Horizons of Pattern Theory & Practice  
1130 Panel Discussion on Critiques & Horizons

Books and Projects Exhibit in the Glass Box

Special Thanks to the Portland Family of Funds. For updated information about this symposium see: [puarl.uoregon.edu](http://puarl.uoregon.edu)  
For additional information please contact Kirstsen Poulsen-House - [pdxarch@uoregon.edu](mailto:pdxarch@uoregon.edu) | 503.412.3718



UNIVERSITY OF OREGON  
PORTLAND

Portland Urban Architecture Research Lab  
Architecture & Allied Arts, UO Portland  
70 NW Couch Street  
Portland, Oregon 97209

# CALL FOR PAPERS

## CURRENT CHALLENGES FOR: PATTERNS, PATTERN LANGUAGE, AND SUSTAINABILITY

**PUARL SYMPOSIUM 2009**  
October 30 - November 1, 2009

### OUR GOALS

Patterns and A Pattern Language, originally developed by Alexander, Ishikawa, Silverstein and others at the Center for Environmental Structure (CES), can be simply defined as atoms of the environment that can be combined language-like in various ways for the creation of neighborhoods, buildings, streets, benches, walls, etc. Patterns and Pattern Languages have served as useful tools to design, plan, and build communities according to principles of sustainability and living architecture. Patterns have been instrumental in bridging the gap between the community and the professional world and the technical and the artistic world.

At this PUARL Symposium, we will focus on the general theme of Morphology, Typology, and Sustainability, and in particular we will explore the theme 'Patterns, Pattern Language, and Sustainability.' It is the development over time, current uses, and future perspectives of patterns and pattern languages that will be highlighted here.

### TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

#### Friday, October 30

*Origins of Patterns & A Pattern Language*

Evening: Reception & Keynote  
Lecture (tba) & Roundtable  
Discussion

#### Saturday, October 31

*Case Studies & Current Challenges  
for Pattern Languages*

Morning: Keynote Lecture (tba)  
Sessions on Pattern Development  
Lunch: Keynote Lecture (tba)  
Sessions on Pattern Development  
and Sustainability  
Evening: Keynote Lecture (tba)

#### Sunday, November 1

*Future Horizons for Patterns  
& Pattern Languages*

Sessions on Challenges for  
Pattern Language  
Noon: Final Forum

**COST:** We ask the participants for a fee of \$100 for symposium organization, for the reception and coffee and snacks. A symposium publication will be produced after the symposium at a separate cost. Please make checks payable to the University of Oregon Foundation and include in the memo line the title of the event, "2009 PUARL Symposium". Checks should be mailed to:

Kirsten Poulsen House  
School of Architecture and Allied Arts  
University of Oregon, Portland  
70 NW Couch Street  
Portland, Oregon 97209

The symposium will be organized with a balanced mix of invited lectures and open papers. The call for papers for this symposium asks for paper proposals that fall under the following broad categories:

- 1) Papers that probe the historical, sociological, and theoretical origins of patterns and pattern languages and their applications.
- 2) Papers that demonstrate exceptional application of patterns in design, building, and planning projects (i.e. The Oregon Experiment), papers that focus on the theoretical and practical expansion of patterns and pattern languages (i.e. sustainability and green design), or challenges and criticism of patterns or pattern language application.
- 3) Papers that explore future horizons of pattern language application and theory at all scales (i.e. regional or urban planning, new construction typologies, hybrid or integrated design).

We ask for an abstract of 250 words to be sent electronically to the email address below (K. Poulsen). There will be space for all contributions in the symposium. We are also asking for exhibit of exceptional projects during the symposium.

The Symposium is organized by PUARL in cooperation with CES, BPA and ESRG.

For information contact:

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**UNIVERSITY OF OREGON PORTLAND**  
**PUARL: Portland Urban Architecture Research Laboratory**  
**FALL 2009 SYMPOSIUM: October 30 - November 1**  
puarl.uoregon.edu

**CURRENT CHALLENGES FOR  
PATTERNS, PATTERN LANGUAGE, AND SUSTAINABILITY**

PRELIMINARY PROGRAM

*October 30, Friday evening:*

- 5pm – 6 Initial Reception (Event Room and White Stag Lobby)
- 6 – 6:15 Welcoming Remarks by Dean Frances Bronet and Dr. Hajo Neis (Event Room)
- 6:15 – 7 Keynote: Origins and Challenges of Pattern Language (H.Davis/H.Neis, Event Room)
- 7 – 7:40 PUARL Lecture Presentation: Murray Silverstein & Max Jacobson
- 7:40 – 8:20 Panel discussion with original Pattern Language authors (Sara Ishikawa, Murray Silverstein, Dr. Max Jacobson, Ingrid King, Dr. Shlomo Angel, Event Room)
- 8:20 – 9:30 Reception (Event Room and Whitestag Lobby)

*October 31, Saturday:*

- 9am – 10 Keynote: Current Challenges for the Oregon Experiment (Chris Ramey, Event Room)
- 10:15 – 12pm Sessions on Pattern Application, Case Studies, and Pattern Development  
Session A: Projects by Portland professional offices (Event Room)
- Session B: Projects in the US and abroad (Room 152)
- Ross Chapin: Patterns of Pocket Neighborhoods
- Thomas Collins and Matthew Hogan: Living in the Agate and Amazon Apartments.
- Demetrius Gonzalez: The Sun Ridge House, California.
- Session C: Open Session on Pattern Application and Theory (BPA, Room 151)
- Hubert Froyen: Universal Design
- Robert Walsh: Origins of the Vancouver Model.
- 12 – 1 Lunch Presentation (tba) Rob Thallon: Design of Lawrence Hall Complex at the UO.
- 1:15 – 2 Keynote: Pattern Language and Sustainability (Dr. Stuart Cowan, Event Room)
- 2:15 – 4 Sessions on Pattern Development and Sustainability  
Session A: Projects on Patterns and Sustainability (Event Room)
- Michael Tavel: A Case Study in Patterns for Sustainable Urbanism: The Geos Net-Zero Energy Neighborhood.



Gabriel Brown and Pete Dykema: Eco-Pattern Districts

Session B: Projects on Patterns and Performance in Sustainability (Room 152)

Session C: Workshop on Pattern Language Application (Jenny Young, Glass Box 105)

4:15 – 5 Keynote: Criticism and Challenges of Pattern Language (Dr. David Week, Event Room)

5:15 – 6:30 Sessions on Critique and Challenges for Pattern Languages  
Session A: Critique and Challenges (Continuation of the Web-Discussion, Room 151)

Kyriakos Pontikis: Generative and Sustainable Building and Urban Design Processes.

Session B: Open Session on Critique and Challenges (B. Hakim, Room 152)

6:30 – 8 Panel Discussion: Criticism and Challenges (TBA, Event Room)

*November 1, Sunday morning:*

9am – 10 Keynotes: Horizons of Pattern Languages (M. Mehaffy/H.Davis, Event Room)

10:15 – 12pm Sessions on Challenges and Horizon of Pattern Language (Ward Cunningham)  
Session A: Interdisciplinary Applications of Pattern Languages (Room 151)

Ward Cunningham: Wikis and Patterns.

Douglas Schuler: PublicSphereProject

Session B: Horizons and Futures of Pattern and Pattern Language (Room 152)

12:15 – 1:15 Final Forum Session, Panel Discussion: Critique and Horizons (Event Room)

1:15 – 1:30 Prospect and Tasks for next Meeting 2010 (Event Room)

Note: Meetings for participating Organizations can be held in the Library Room 72

**2009 PUARL Symposium – Roundtable – A Pattern Language**  
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**Portland Urban Architecture Research Lab**  
University of Oregon, Portland  
70 NW Couch  
Portland, OR 97209

Questions posed by Robert Walsh, BPN

- 1) **What pattern or patterns in the original book A Pattern Language changed the way you understand architecture, the making of places, your work, or your life?**

**Michael Mehaffy, President, Structura Naturallis Inc:**

All of the patterns, and the structure of the patterns, profoundly changed my way of thinking of human spaces. I had the reaction, “Yes, of course, this has always intuitively been the way I’ve seen things!”

The key insight was the notion that there is something good from history that can be re-incorporated. It is not a mere formal shell of something else, but a deep pattern that has a resonance with the other thing. This clicked with my ideas of tradition, evolution, adaptation – the way things really work, instead of the way mere visual ideas are presented and manipulated in novel ways.

I was also struck by the timeless, classic quality of the book itself – the layout, type, colors, photos, etc. The logic of it and the aesthetics of it were deeply integrated, and that stood out immediately.

As for particular patterns to single out, the urban patterns were most powerful to me – especially the ones that brought experience to natural phenomena, e.g. “High Places,” “Pools and Streams,” and also “Market of Many Shops,” “Small Public Squares,” “Street Café,” Promenade,” etc. They reminded me that design can include a landscape of meaning and deep experience, instead of a mere assemblage of visual ideas aimed at some abstract functionalist program.

In fact, this is when my focus began to shift from architecture and the building scale to urbanism and the fabric that connects buildings.

**David Week, Chairman, Assai:**

I wouldn’t say any patterns in particular, but A Pattern Language as a whole changed my architectural education, because for the first time:

- I could get clear architectural knowledge in bite-size capsules.
- I could relate architectural form to social life.

-I could start relating my logico-mathematical knowledge to my architectural knowledge by thinking of architecture as generative process, rather than creative process.

Later, in my seven years in Papua New Guinea, the idea of patterns and pattern language allowed me to interpret my observations and experience of the traditional architecture into usable, “rational” patterns and arguments, and translate those into a language, a construction system, a firm, and a client base.

Later again, during my PhD research, which flowed out of certain realizations about my PNG experience, I came to re-understand pattern languages not as a special kind of language, but rather as a particular way of describing natural languages, and thus I was able to connect in my mind architectural practice, ways of thinking, and ways of life, through natural language, rather than through a methodology. And that in turn allowed me to normalize all of that knowledge, so it was no longer a “theory” or a “methodology,” but integrated into the rest of my interdisciplinary knowledge.

**Yodan Rofe, Senior Lecturer, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev:**

I read A Pattern Language before starting my architectural education. By then, I had read a lot of books about architecture, as well as having seen some of the work of the masters of modernism. I also know from first-hand experience that urbanistically, modernism doesn't work at all. A Pattern Language just made perfect sense to me and resonated with my experience of places, more than anything I read before then.

I particularly liked “Alcoves” which described perfectly an experience I once had at the home of friends who lived in an old Arab house in Ein Karm and having been to Bern just a couple of years before, “Arcades.” My other favorites are Positive Open Space, which is so fundamental that it basically describes what we are doing when we are making places (granted that it may not be so for PNG, but in most of the rest of the world it is, Common Areas at the Heart and Paths and Goals.

When I started studying in 1979, I tried to use A Pattern Language in my projects – and started learning of the difficulties of actually doing so, and the impact of the results in terms of incongruence with what was being taught.

**Bob Theis, architect:**

Fresh out of an undergraduate architecture program that was all about Modern Architecture, the entire book reactivated my common sense about place-making. When I first found it, and people came over for dinner, I loved to press the book into their hands and sit them in the living room while I worked away in the (distant) kitchen. Within 5 minutes, they would invariably appear the kitchen door, book in hand, pointing and exclaiming, “I've always felt this way!” The book encourages trusting in your experience.

The patterns about boundaries (neighborhoods, entries, intimacy gradients, floor surfaces, trim) were very important, as I was so steeped in the sleek, frameless look, and to celebrate high contrasts.

Similarly, the patterns that described the benefits of relaxed surfaces and thick, solid construction were a great counterpoint to that pared down, machined aesthetic. I'd been looking for a good way to do thick walls, thanks in part to the book, so when straw-bale construction appeared, I was primed for it.

But most important was the affirmation that delight in living is the fundamental criterion in design.

**2) Have you come up with anything in your own work that you can now formulate as a pattern that others might find of interest?**

**MM** I have written quite a few patterns, starting when I was at Berkeley. (Two from then are "Household Food Production" and "Courtyard House") I think this topic of writing new patterns is an urgent one – how do we compile them into repositories (like the software people do), how do we address a number of issues, like geometry, etc?

**DW** I find I formulate patterns, or semi-patterns (rough patterns without all the formal bits) on a continuous basis. (In fact, I think that the idea that one can correctly describe an environment with just a few patterns is a result of methodological practicality, rather than anywhere near the truth.) A few patterns from around my neighborhood include "Basement Supermarkets," "Historical Eclecticism," and "Multiple Modes of Transport."

**YR** I still think it's a great way to start programming for a project. If you read the fifth part of the Boulevard Book called "Building Boulevards," you will see that the guidelines are organized as patterns done to the way that they start with a problem statement, and end with a solution. In a similar way to the way A Pattern Language was constructed, they were based on our empirical observation of what worked best in the many boulevards we looked at, they also go down from the scale of the city as a whole and the role boulevards have in it, to the scale of the curb details.

**BT** One, just as what's in a vision cone of about 30° below the horizontal seems to define our sense of connection to the land under our feet. Stand on land steeper than that, and there is little sense of foreground; the spot is all about the view.

Two, we appear to make our walking path decisions at least 15 feet in front of us, so make any choices in path visible from at least that distance, or people

will not navigate it with ease. This is especially important when coming around a corner.

Three, blame it on my decades in California, but people seem to get the most delight from interior spaces that are towards the ends of the enclosure spectrum, i.e. they feel either wide open like a pavilion, or snug like a den.

Four, Light from above feels very good in those snug spaces. It can obviate the need for light from two sides, if done well. If you can't get light from two sides into a room, raise the window heads very high and keep the room shallow, so the back walls reflect the window light sufficiently to balance the interior.

Five, break stair runs, and level changes in general, into elevation differences of five feet or less. We seem to like seeing the floor level we're headed up to, and perhaps knowing that if we stumble down, we won't fall that far.

Six, try like hell to use ramps instead of steps wherever possible for heavy foot traffic, and 1:20 ramps at that. Sure, it's safer and more accessible, but it's fundamentally easier to walk as it doesn't interrupt your gait.

Seven, A layout that has proven itself over decades is the kitchen as a C-shaped alcove opening off the dining room with a free-standing work table in its center. This seems to balance the needs for social connection and keeping guests out of the kitchen traffic paths as well. And a pantry opening off the kitchen (Is "pantry" really not in A Pattern Language!?)

**3) Does any pattern in the book seem potentially wrong or at odds with your experience?**

**MM** Yes, there is a lot that "needs work," or that I think about very differently now. (And I suspect [Christopher Alexander] does too in many cases.) Ring roads, parallel roads...the way the car is handled is rather anti-urban. And there is an anti-urban strain in some other large-scale patterns, particularly dealing with streets and cars. Too much faith in pedestrian-only spaces, perhaps.

**DW** A few in particular:

**Four-Story Limit**

Living in Melbourne and Sydney, I don't find the high-rise CBDs a problem for me. At street level, you just don't notice them. I wonder if the streets would be as vibrant as they are without the density of people. I know a few people who live in high-rise apartments. They seem to like it. I've never tried it. When I stayed in a fourth-floor Parisian apartment, I was distanced from the street as if I'd been on the 40<sup>th</sup> floor. If I imagine a four-story Chicago or a four-story Manhattan, it would seem like an act of vandalism.



## Positive Outdoor Space

Just seems too crude a pattern to be useful. I think working in PNG shaped my understanding. The shape of outdoor space is just much more complex, and these are people who understand outdoor space, since that's where they live most of their lives. I think one of the problems arises out of the lack of organicism. Most of the famous examples of POS arose from piecemeal growth and organic development. Unless we understand the generative process, how can we understand the spaces? But now I see POS treated as a visual art: by studying plans, which are schematized birds-eye views, or by "eyeballing" positive space as some kind of painterly art... This is a completely different (and highly positive) process.

Answered in the general:

In some general sense, I think all of the patterns have some to be "wrong." In one earlier format for the publication, it was envisaged as a loose-leaf binder, with each pattern a separate pattern, with the basics on one side, and the small print (the argument) on the reverse. These then could be replaced, as the pattern evolved. The whole book was titled A Pattern Language, to indicate that it was an example, and not "The Pattern Language."

This idea of a living, evolving language has not come to fruition. Instead, A Pattern Language is treated, even if only tacitly, as "The Pattern Language," and the Berkeley snipe of the time about the fact that it was printed on "Bible paper" seems to have acquired some validity. Real language does not stand still. Real languages are not captured in 256 (or any number of) rules.

- YR** The political patterns at the beginning of the book are naïve politically and economically. They express a very anarchistic worldview and probably do not work in reality – small communities may be accessible by they are also the most prone to abuse of power and corruption. They also assume that the only relation between people and space is through territorial belonging – and that is not the case (as shown by Hillier). The traffic planning patterns are also wrong because they assumed that speed is essential in cities and therefore conflict between pedestrian and car endemic. If you accept slow travel in cities and then a traffic calming and shared space approach allows you to have cars and people co-exist in the same spaces, which simplifies things to a great degree. There is little in A Pattern Language about large-scale infrastructure, issues of energy and food production, so there is much to do there. I really don't see these as problems, I think as a first guess of a theory of how the human environment works and can be built, it's remarkable – it just needs a lot more work by many people, both in research and in practice and this has not been done.
- BT** I've had some really interesting discussions with an Episcopal priest I work with about pattern 66, "Holy Ground." He consults with churches all over the country helping them bring their spaces to life, and while he loves A Pattern

Language, he's convinced that the nested precincts archetype is more an expression of the hierarchies that the church devolved into rather than a true expression of Christianity.

He shows how the early church services were more like a café or a communal meal than what we've inherited, and that Christianity was more an everyday practice of the marketplace than the removed, contemplative services we have now.

Given the way the messages of most prophets ossify into dictum, it might have implications for other religions as well.

**4) Computer programmers have come up with a concept that they call the "anti-pattern" to refer to patterns that lead to undesirable outcomes. Are there architectural, planning or perhaps design education "anti-patterns" that we ought to be aware of and avoid? How would you succinctly define them?**

**MM** Well, perhaps Ring Roads! Seriously, there are anti-patterns everywhere I look in the failures of the modern built environment. Blank pedestrian walls, excessive minimalism, unnatural precision, various violations of basic biophilic principles (and other related ordering principles) everywhere you look. In fact, along with a repository of patterns, it would be good to have a repository of anti-patterns. The only real test might be that a group of people have diagnostically found them to be damaging, through qualitative consensus methodologies (like feeling maps).

**DW** Here are two, which I would describe as anti-patterns of theoretical development:

Aestheticisation (or Formalism)

From the observation that some geometric properties are very common in natural forms or organic towns and unselfconscious buildings, it does not follow that by creating those properties one will end up with natural forms, organic towns, or unselfconscious buildings. Both Aestheticism and Formalism are distinctly modern anti-patterns, which affect equally International Style buildings, PoMo buildings, and the "ornamental" aspect of PL buildings.

Isolationism

In parallel, I don't see much "organic growth" of the PL theory itself. Most works I see are either apologetics or commentaries on the original CES works. As a body of work, it doesn't seem to be questioning or sharpening hypotheses of thirty years ago. It seems isolated from the rest of the academic and practical world. I see the word "Alexandrian" being used, like the word "Miesian." This is not how science, or any discipline, progresses. This pattern

looks like a typical arch-school pattern: an isolated “school” develops around a charismatic figure. This seems to me to be an anti-pattern, and not something that should be replicated.

**YR** The greatest of all are the functional hierarchy of roads and the neighborhood unit. Together they combined to create most of the mess we have created in the world since 1945. Le Corbusier’s five points in Towards a New Architecture were also quite devastating – “liberating” architecture as tectonics from both the social structure of the institution housed by the building, as well as the building’s mediating skin (which carries most of its symbolic content as well), has directly led to the kind of environmental and aesthetic mess we find ourselves in today.

**BT** One, make your creations stand apart, even in a context as communal as a row house.

Two, traditional elements of design can be sampled sparingly, but modern architecture is the “spirit of the age” (despite almost a century of failure to interest the public in buying it).

Three, even if you curve them, taut surfaces are required. Buildings are not relaxed; they are “edgy” creations.