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Architecture and the Self: Empirical Inquiry on Christopher Alexander's Theory of Living Structure

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Abstract

The Biophilia hypothesis emphasizes humanity's intrinsic desire to connect with nature, which in turn nurtures authenticity. Architectural designs that echo natural patterns can evoke feelings of wholeness, inspiration, and comfort, as proposed by architectural theorist Christopher Alexander in his Theory of Living Structure. This study empirically examined the connection between architecture and the authentic self. Participants engaged with Chinese philosophical texts from Chuang Tzu and The Analects of Confucius to explore their authentic selves. They then evaluated image pairs, assessing preference, liveliness, and self-connection, with one image exemplifying living structures characterized by multiple scales, varied patterns, and interconnected centers. Our participants exhibited a strong preference for living structures. Notably, individuals with lower susceptibility to external influence, an essential component of authenticity, were more likely to perceive living structures as self-connected. Our findings offer valuable insights into human-centered architectural design aimed at fostering authentic living.