

**Hasselt University / PHL University College**  
**An Honorary Doctorate for Christopher Alexander**  
**Laudatio – Sylvain De Bleeckere**  
**Dies Natalis – 28 mei 2008 (aula A6)**

Geachte dames en heren,  
Highly esteemed Professor doctor Alexander, dear Chris,

This is truly a day of celebration for our faculty association for architecture and interior architecture. In the history of our courses of instruction, you are the first person to whom we show appreciation by granting an honorary doctorate. We are doing this at a time when our educational programme has reached an historical watershed. With the support of the University of Hasselt, our programme is moving in the direction of full academic recognition.

By honouring you here today we are examining ourselves in a mirror. We see you as a model on which we can pattern our identity in academic education. In your versatile work as a internationally well-known researcher in architectural sciences, as a distinguished professor of architecture, and as a successful practising architect, you have continually advocated an academic approach to architecture that is extremely relevant to our future.

In this approach research and design are twins. The father of these twins is the consistent humane approach to architecture in your oeuvre. You have risen above the crisis of modernism in architecture in a highly personal, ingenious and, at the same time, pragmatic manner. Your extensive fundamental and applied research has been directed to the social-spatial structures of man-made environments and to substantial characteristics of design and construction processes, leading to elegance, beauty and meaning for all users.

Under your leadership in the seventies *The Center for Environmental Structure* described 253 urban-development and architectonic patterns that offer empirically-based morphological solutions to current functional problems. Thus, an extremely important work-instrument for architecture came into being, one that is being used with appreciation by our students and former students.

For us, it is also an inspiration that you have never approached architectural design as a detached object. You see each design as an intervention in an existing physical human environment, so that you rightly describe architectural design as 'structure preserving transformations'. Especially for our research areas of universal design and adaptive reuse, this approach opens fertile perspectives. In our programme for interior architecture, the retail-

research section can find much inspiration for a critical rethink of the retail concept in the context of the current consumption society.

Much thinking is now being done on research by design. Theoretically and practically, you have approached architectural design as 'a science-informed art' with its structural roots in modern developments in the sciences, especially in the anthropologically-oriented disciplines. We want our courses of study to develop further along these same lines.

Highly respected honorary doctor Alexander,

in the example that you present to us we see very much that we can emulate. And this is no doubt the most suitable way for us to honor your heritage. Not by solidifying it, but by investing it in our future.

You understand that I am speaking, not only in my own name, but in the first place on behalf of my colleague and co-promoter, Hubert Froyen, your former student, on behalf of all of my colleagues, and on behalf of the University of Hasselt. By presenting you with this honorary doctorate, we all thank you sincerely, and express the wish that in the coming years you will be able to develop your work even further. This will give us an even sharper image to emulate.

Dames en heren,

Het is een grote eer voor de associatiefaculteit architectuur en interieurarchitectuur dat de rector nu het doctoraat honoris causa wil uitreiken aan prof. dr. Christopher Alexander.