

“Analysis of Power and Language in My Project”

WSD – Design Languages

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For my Project in this class, I have chosen to begin the conceptualization and formulation of “A Pattern Language for Ecovillages.” I have written about this Project from many angles already. Now I will provide an “analysis of power and language” regarding my Project.

Since this Project is in many ways an extension or replication of the original *A Pattern Language*, much that can be said of the original will apply to this particular application as well. The original was presented as an attempt to introduce ‘organic’ or ‘timeless’ principles into the planning profession. Since these principles were, for the most part, and ironically, way ahead of their time, their actual ability to influence the decisions made by the profession were probably negligible. Even though the specific patterns introduced were rationalized in some detail, and even though the rationalizations demonstrated that the new patterns were improvements on or solutions to the problems inherent in the old, the same old familiar patterns of the profession continued to be used universally.

There seems to be an inherent inertia to change; and when the change is revolutionary or visionary, it is resisted all the more. There is a tremendous investment in the status quo – lives and incomes, self-images and reputations, agendas and other hidden or unconscious motivations – are all at stake. The resistance does not need to be rational or even defined, much less defended, it can simply come in the inane form of “that’s just how things are done,” or, “we’ve always done it that way around here.” Generations and generations of long-established power relations, where some individuals or groups make unsubstantiated or unearned claim to the privilege of influence, will also be threatened by change. With all this incredible inertia, it’s no wonder that it usually takes a crisis for people to finally accept life-transforming change.

And so, when writing and presenting “A Pattern Language for Ecovillages,” I have no illusion that these new ideas are in any way going to change the world; in fact, I have no personal investment in the outcome whatsoever. This new language is even more revolutionary than the original *A Pattern Language*, and so will be resisted all the more by any profession or other established power structure. My purpose is simply to strike a chord for those who already “have ears to hear.”

There is a certain inevitability to the 5200-year march of civilization; it seems to be heading inexorably toward a final goal of equifinality; that is, it will reach its ultimate destination and outcome no matter how many well-meaning changes or modifications are introduced along the way. Any attempt to divert its course or halt its forward motion is not only futile, it’s counter-productive.

The ecologist would call this final outcome “overshoot” – the collapse of some vital ecological function that ripples in chain reaction throughout the entire biosphere, disrupting the planet’s ability to support higher forms of life. The fundamentalist Christian would call this final

destination “Apocalypse” – the fire and brimstone end of the world. The systems analyst would simply say that this system called ‘civilization’ has the characteristic of runaway positive feedback, with no tempering or self-regulating mechanism to bring it back into balance.

For all these reasons, I am not writing “A Pattern Language for Ecovillages” with the intention of effecting change. That would seem to me to be rather presumptuous or pretentious; for, change needs to originate in the hearts and minds of individual human beings. The purpose of this language is not to effect change but rather to provide a conceptual framework for the replacement of civilization with an ecologically-conscious world order, and that is not likely to happen any time soon.

The dissemination of this language will be, like the original, the scattering of so many seeds. Some will find fertile ground in which to sprout and grow – this fertile ground being the humus of the decaying remnants of civilization. The ones that do grow and mature will become as pabulum for a new generation of eco-consciousness seekers. The people who will be attracted to using the new language will be already pre-disposed and open to the paradigm it portrays. These people will not be so much *changed* by the language as the language will provide for them new ways of *communicating* amongst themselves concepts and visions for which they are already attuned, but for which they presently lack sufficient vocabulary.