

“Design Language Framework”

WSD – Design Languages

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30 October 2002

For my Project, I have chosen to begin conceptualizing and assembling “A Pattern Language for Ecovillages.” Since there is already detailed documentation available for use as precedents – including the original *A Pattern Language*, *A Pattern Language for Multi-Service Centers*, and *The Oregon Experiment*, there is very little ambiguity as to the particular design language framework I will be using. I will be mimicking the same format, style, and approach of the reference works – that same recognizable mode of pattern languaging introduced by Alexander – yet applying my efforts to an entirely new set of problems (solutions). I will not be adding to nor enhancing the reference works but rather will be creating a novel language, designed for a particular application, with its own vocabulary, dialect, syntax, and semantics. This novel language will be intended to facilitate effective communication between designers of sustainable human settlements for the 21st century.

I have already laid the groundwork for this Project by formulating twelve introductory patterns for the new language. These twelve patterns are designed to create the fecund context within which the pattern ‘ecovillage’ may gracefully, organically, purposefully manifest itself. For review, the first twelve patterns are:

- 1) GAIA
- 2) WILDERNESS
- 3) BIOREGIONS
- 4) ECOREGIONS
- 5) DISTRIBUTION of HUMANS
- 6) ECOLOGICAL SYMBIOSIS
- 7) PURE WATER
- 8) FERTILE TOPSOIL
- 9) SOLAR RE-ORIENTATION
- 10) COMMUNICATION NETWORKS
- 11) ORGANIC GROWTH
- 12) DISTRIBUTION in TIME

This is the initial design framework I created some years ago with the forethought of having ‘ecovillage’ appear as pattern number ‘13.’ While this first set of patterns was intended to provide a context for the emergence of the ‘ecovillage,’ the next set of patterns will begin to describe the internal structure of the ecovillage itself. In systemic fashion, as these first twelve patterns begin with the largest, most-inclusive system levels and differentiate into more detailed subsystems from there, so will the next set of patterns need to begin with

systems that define the ecovillage as-a-whole, before subsequently differentiating into ever more detailed subsystems.

For example, I can imagine patterns like “Village Scale,” “Village Clusters,” “Integration into Watershed,” “Micro Energy Systems,” “Fifty Percent Net Primary Production,”¹ etc., etc. What is important and what is implied is that any antecedent pattern in the language is always more inclusive than the patterns that follow it; or, stated another way, antecedent patterns in the language are more generalized, pertaining to all ecovillages, while subsequent patterns in the language will increasingly pertain to vernacular details that may not apply in all cases.

For the purposes of this Project, as accredited Master’s level education, I will be satisfied to formulate 12-20 new patterns at the generalized, meta-systemic scale.

There are some issues to consider about the design process before engaging in this work. Most importantly, I formulated the first twelve patterns independently, on my own, ruminating in a context-dependent, altered state of mind induced by a summer-long immersion in the readings. Since they are personalized in this way, they may not be universal; that is, not everyone may agree that these are the first twelve patterns to begin a language specifically for ecovillages. Nevertheless, in the absence of any alternatives, this framework will significantly influence the present Project – it may serve as a starting point.

The next set of patterns will be formulated in a collaborative *group design process*. This raises some associated questions:

- 1) Each participant will be most likely entering the process with preconceived notions about what the ‘ecovillage’ is, as well as what exactly entails designing sustainable communities for the 21st century. It has been my experience that the word ‘ecovillage’ gets used rather loosely – indiscriminately applied to a wide variety of settlement types. For this Project, it will be necessary for me to introduce a specific definition of ‘ecovillage’ (undoubtedly based on *my* preconceived notions! But hey, I’m the one doing the studying), so that all participants are ‘playing on the same field.’ As the initiator and facilitator of this Project, and, importantly, as a pioneering student of ecovillage design for some eight years now, I reserve the right to impose my own definition to guide this Project. Otherwise, there is the real possibility of getting bogged down in consensusing a definition.
- 2) In a similar vein, each participant will be entering the exercise with varying degrees of familiarity with the reference works. It would be ideal to have seasoned practitioners, but this may not be the case. For that reason it will be necessary to articulate beforehand an epistemology of pattern languages, including a review of the reference works and a review of the principles set forward in *The Timeless Way of Building*. This articulation

¹ This conclusion was reached in a recent paper I wrote entitled “Sustainable Settlement Energetics: EMERGY and Ecovillage,” in which it was discovered that maximum power is achieved at fifty percent efficiency.

may be facilitated by introducing the first two papers I wrote in this class (how convenient) that cover the use of languages in general and the relevant applications of a pattern language in particular.

- 3) Time will surely be an issue: formulating a complete pattern language for ecovillages could conceivably take years, even with an experienced crew. Operating within the time constraints of the last half of a college quarter will require streamlining the design process so that information can be presented quickly and efficiently, initial patterns can be proposed and then edited, and finally a workable set of patterns can be decided upon *by the group as a whole*. This will be a big challenge for me (and us), so as a solution I propose the following timeline:

SESSION 1: defining terms and reviewing previous, referential pattern languages.

INTERSESSION: participants begin conceptualizing their own patterns.

SESSION 2: all proposed patterns are displayed at once, holistically, in a kind of brainstorming that may stir up new ideas for patterns. Redundant patterns are discarded.

INTERSESSION: participants practice arranging patterns into the rudimentary structure of a language.

SESSION 3: Everybody comes together and systematically arranges the patterns according to the procedure of a 'silent affinity matrix.' New patterns are introduced as needed for completeness.

INTERSESSION: Participants continue to work with the structure of the language.

SESSION 4: Consensus is reached among participants.

INTERSESSION: I compile the pattern language into a booklet form and distribute it to the participants. This booklet also will make an interesting publication.