

Our entire approach during the pattern language stage of work on a living process, is to get a glimpse of the centers that will make the building which is to be designed, come to life *as a whole*. We keep on making lists, doing experiments, trying to find out what the list will generate, trying to find out the key centers, until we have a system of centers in mind, which, when it is let loose in a real situation, will make something that comes to life.

The essence of the point, is to find — or create — a set of centers which, together, will generate a complete and coherent object of the type we are looking for. We keep trying out our rudimentary list to see what sort of whole this list of centers will generate. We then use intuition and feeling to judge the deficiencies in the whole which is created, to make us aware of *more* centers that still need to be created.



12 / THE EISHIN SCHOOL PATTERN LANGUAGE

In the next (and last) example, I give excerpts from a much longer language, the list of centers for the Eishin school in Japan, constructed between 1983 and 1985. The full list contained about 200 patterns, and defines a way of life for a high school and university.¹⁴ At our client's request it was different from any existing school in Japan at that time (1981). We can see and feel, merely by reading the names of the centers and their rough description, that what was going to happen in this new school would be very different from what we are familiar with.

Above all we can see this new way of life as a *complete* whole. The way it works is completely defined by the list of centers. Thus in all important aspects the *life* of the new school is *contained* in these centers, and the list of centers defines this way of life in its entirety. This gives us tremendous insight into the vast extent to which the life of any given building or building complex, is defined by the list of centers which it will contain.

I. GLOBAL CHARACTER

- *There is an outer boundary which surrounds the site.*
- *Inside the outer boundary, there is an inner boundary which surrounds a smaller area; about one-fifth of the whole site.*

- *The area inside the inner boundary is called the inner precinct. It is a dense area where the school and college have their major buildings.*
- *Between the inner and outer boundary is the outer precinct: an area filled with gardens, sports fields, and various freestanding outer buildings.*
- *The buildings and the site are given their character by stone foundation walls, wood columns, white walls, a few special places with red lacquered wood, wide overhanging roofs, dark roof surfaces, stones and grass on the ground.*

2. THE INNER PRECINCT

- *The entrance to the inner precinct begins at the outer boundary. At a key point in the outer boundary, there is a gate.*
- *This main gate is a building.*
- *From the main gate to the inner boundary, there is an entrance street. The entrance street is flanked with walls or trees, and is extremely quiet.*
- *Where the entrance street meets the inner boundary there is a second gate.*
- *Inside the second gate, there is a public yard. This public yard is formed by a great hall, which forms the main side of the yard.*
- *Beyond the public yard and through a third gate is the essential center of the school and uni-*

versity. This essential center is reached through several layers, which have been described. And it contains further layers and further levels of quietness, within itself.

- This essential center is fairly large — itself a world, bounded, within the inner precinct and formed by paths and gates. This essential center contains a large part of the high school and a large part of the university.
- Opening from this essential center are those parts of the university and high school which are specialized and separate.
- Since the essential center is at one and the same time, the heart and crossroads of the school and university, it has the rough form of a cross — formed by crossing paths. Because it resembles the character ta (a cross in a square) we have therefore named it the Tanoji Center.
- At the crossing of the streets and paths which form the Tanoji Center, there is a smaller center: This place is the kernel of the busy part of the Tanoji Center.
- And, opening from the far side of the Tanoji Center is a higher and most peaceful place that we call the college cloister. This is the inner sanctum of the university, and the most peaceful place of all. It is chosen to be in a place which invites contemplation.
- Also opening directly from the Tanoji Center is the homebase street. The homebase street is a wide, lively, sunny street formed by the individual home room buildings where the high-school students have their classes.
- Opening through gates on another side of the Tanoji Center is a lawn. This lawn, especially for the use of college students, is surrounded by the college buildings, and leads directly to the lake.
- The lake is a peaceful place, to rest. . . .

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A further excerpt from the pattern language gives some of the details:

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8. INTERIOR CHARACTER

- The interior character is warm and subdued: wooden columns, floors and walls in places; pale yellow wall color, comparable to golden chrysanthemums, paper or silk; near-white sliding screens and ceilings.
- Floors of many buildings are raised, slightly more than usual, off the ground.
- Classrooms have polished wooden floors, or carpets, and shoes are not worn inside the classrooms.
- All homebase classrooms have big windows facing south.
- Many rooms have gallery spaces to one side, where light comes in beyond, and shines through screens.
- Many walls and other surfaces are wooden, with natural unfinished wood.
- The classrooms and other rooms are furnished with very solid wooden desks, which several students share.
- In the larger buildings, there are mirrors where students see themselves.
- Outside the buildings, there are often flower beds.
- And inside, here and there, throughout the school, there are surprising soft highlights of color, shining out among the subdued colors of the rest, a figure painted in pale kingfisher blue in one place; a golden yellow iris in another.

The full original pattern language which we constructed in 1982 contained about 200 centers.¹⁵ These centers, completely governed and defined the life of the school. Even before we had any idea about the physical configuration of the buildings, their shape, or design, or the way these centers were to be made real in space, it was already obvious that the school was going to be given its life to an enormous degree, merely by this list of centers. Regardless of the particular architecture which followed from this list of generic centers, or the way these centers would later be embodied in a real place with real form,



In the rain on the Eishin campus, students hurrying from class to class. Christopher Alexander, 1985

the list of centers *alone* already defined the essentials of the place and its way of life, and its *degree* of life, to an enormous degree.

Once again I go to a single detail in this list of centers. One of the patterns in this pattern language for the Eishin school, describes the fact that classrooms are separate buildings, and implies, therefore, that it is will be necessary to walk in the rain to go from class to class.

One could have made a different choice, to keep the classrooms together, and to protect students and teachers from all rain. The key centers in the two cases are these (here again I use small capitals to emphasize the entity-like character of the centers):

A standard Japanese high school contains these patterns:

CASE 1

ONE BUILDING FOR ALL CLASSROOMS
CLASSROOMS ATTACHED
WALLS OR FLOORS BETWEEN
CLASSROOMS
COVERED PASSAGES PROTECTED
FROM RAIN

Instead, the new kind of high school formed by our pattern language contains these patterns:

CASE 2

SEPARATE CLASSROOM BUILDINGS
EACH BUILDING LIKE A HOUSE
GARDENS BETWEEN CLASSROOMS
PATHS CONNECTING CLASS-
ROOMS EXPOSED TO RAIN

In what sense is the second list more essential than the first? *It is more essential, because it deals with feeling, and at a much deeper level.* The second system of centers is more deeply connected to human feelings *as they really are.* This large topic is taken up fully in chapter 14.

It is also useful to understand that the second system is rooted more in the wholeness of the Japanese culture itself. Before we began our work in Japan, the old Eishin school (on its previous site) was arranged like case 1. There was one huge block with many classrooms. But if one examined that wholeness carefully, one could see that within it (the world defined by the case 1 patterns), the truth of the second set of centers (the world defined by the case 2 patterns) lay there, latent, waiting to be derived. The desire for autonomy of different teachers, and different classes was already a real thing in their lives. The enlivening character of the rain on people's faces was even then a real thing, observable in life. The deadening effect of being in passages all day long was also a real thing, also observable. The

centers of autonomous classrooms in the second list were latent in the actual existence of the people and the place *as it already was.* The centers of rain on your face and centers of unprotected paths were latent in the actual existence of the people and the place, *as it all was.* The centers of gardens between classrooms was latent in the actual existence of the people and the place *as it actually was then.*

What, then, defines essential centers and distinguishes them from trivial centers? The answer, briefly put, is this. The essential centers are those whose presence is already latent in the field — which go the heart of the living structure that is already there — which summarize, or encapsulate, the essence of the real life which is going on.

Of course, in a period of history where people like to stress the arbitrariness of all things, such an idea may seem doubtful or impossible to accept. But the crux of all life is, nevertheless, the difference between recognizing the essential thing and separating it from the trivial thing.



13 / THE DEEP NATURE OF PATTERNS AND PATTERN LANGUAGES

A pattern language is a created thing. It is a work of poetry, a work of art. It is potentially as profound in its way as a building can be.

The intensive character of questioning people, to find their deep wishes and deep needs, might, mistakenly, be thought to be some kind of market research, or opinion survey. But the power of the pattern languages, such as the one developed for the Eishin campus, hinges on something very different which they contain: A geometrically constructive aspect of their emotion and their content.

A well-constructed, deeply constructed pattern language has the power, within it, to help people visualize geometric configurations that are whole. This arises, because, deep inside the

elements of the pattern language there are references to, and hints of, the fifteen transformations. Thus, the agenda of the pattern language not only aims to record and objectify the positive things and relationships which are needed by a given culture, or a given population, or a given group of people. If it is any good, it also has, within it, a driving force which will make geometrical wholeness easily visible and more easily attainable. This arises because the fifteen properties are embedded, sometimes loosely, sometimes precisely, in the patterns.

So a pattern language, if it has been well-constructed, sublimates the inner desires and necessities which have connection to our feelings and dreams, transforms them into geome-