The Promise of Pattern Languages for Interaction Design

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The concept of pattern languages was first presented in a book called *A Pattern Language*, published in 1977 by Christopher Alexander. In this book he argued that good architectural design was based on patterns. Patterns are conceptual tools to create high quality designs. In the article by Pemberton, she states that “A pattern is the solution to a problem in a context. In a particular context or a set of situations, a problem or clash of constraints will occur, which is amenable to resolution by a canonical design form or solution. The pattern encompasses all three elements: the situation, the problem of clashing constraints or forces, and the canonical solution.” The pattern language method has been utilized by programmers, interface designers, usability engineers, and game developers to create libraries of solutions for design and reuse.

In Pemberton’s article, she describes the need for an HCI knowledge transfer tool and how the current vehicles, such as textbooks, online information, principles, guidelines, and style guides, are inadequate. Typically these interaction design knowledge vehicles, though useful, are either very specific but cumbersome to learn and use, or they are very general and lack specificity. Pemberton proceeds to show what a interaction design pattern language looks like, including some examples, and discusses how patterns compare with other design knowledge tools. Pemberton finishes the article discussing issues regarding interaction patterns and provides a good list of references, bibliographies, and pattern collections. Two of which are below:

http://www.welie.com/index.html
http://www.mit.edu/~jtidwell/common_ground_onefile.html