

Future Plan for Creating a Pattern Language to Improving Refugee Acceptance and Support Systems in Japan

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Abstract

This paper outlines a prospective plan and conceptual framework for developing a Pattern Language aimed at enhancing the systems for accepting and supporting refugees in Japan. Prompted by the acute necessity to address the influx of Ukrainian refugees following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, this study seeks to methodically organize and integrate the fragmented and tacit knowledge within refugee support into a coherent and practical knowledge base. The research focuses on converting the implicit knowledge held by seasoned practitioners and experts in refugee assistance into a structured, Pattern Language, thereby facilitating a comprehensive and shared understanding that can be readily applied to improve the efficacy of refugee support. By creating a Pattern Language, this study aims to establish an inclusive environment where supporters can autonomously and suitably engage in refugee aid, thereby enhancing the overall quality of support provided. This paper not only proposes a novel academic and practical approach to refugee support but also contributes to the empowerment of refugee supporters by providing them with a framework to reflect on their practices and engage in meaningful dialogue with peers. Furthermore, this research highlights the importance of a multifaceted understanding of refugee experiences and the need for tailored support mechanisms that respect their unique circumstances, thus advancing the discourse in refugee studies and support methodologies.

1. Introduction

This paper concerns a future plan and concept of creating a Pattern Language to Improving Refugee Acceptance and Support Systems in Japan. As a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, there was an urgent and substantial need to respond to Ukrainian refugees/evacuees. This situation underscored the importance of systematically organizing and consolidating the dispersed and biased tacit knowledge in refugee support into shared and referable knowledge, suitable for practical use.

Hence, this research aims to articulate and systematize tacit knowledge in refugee support, making it accessible and shareable to improve the overall quality of refugee support. It involves transforming the tacit knowledge possessed by experts and exemplary practitioners in refugee

support into a structured form through the creation of a Pattern Language. Furthermore, the study includes the implementation and efficacy verification of workshops using the developed Pattern Language. This research strives to create an environment where all supporters can engage in refugee support in a way that is autonomous, appropriate, and true to themselves.

2. Background

According to the 1951 Refugee Convention, a refugee is defined as a person who "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.". Refugee support often intersects with general foreign support. However, as indicated by the definition, the refugees, their experiences of persecution and fear, and the complexity of legal procedures for recognition, necessitate specialized support.

While emphasizing the unique characteristics (nature) of refugees is important, overemphasis should be avoided. Japan has a history of over 40 years in accepting a diverse range of refugees. The rapid political shifts in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia in 1975 led to a large outflow of refugees (Indochina refugees). Following this, in 1978, a cabinet decision was made to accept Vietnamese refugees for settlement, and the policy for acceptance began in 1979. The criteria and scope of settlement permission were later relaxed to include Laotian and Cambodian refugees. Although the acceptance of Indochina refugees ended in 2005, support for their descendants is still needed by NGOs and other organizations. After Japan's accession to the Refugee Convention and its Protocol in 1981 and their effectuation in 1982, Japan, compared to other developed countries, has recognized a smaller number of refugees, and maintains a low recognition rate. Nevertheless, Japan has been accepting refugees under the Convention. Furthermore, cases exist where individuals, though not recognized as Convention refugees, have been allowed to stay in Japan due to humanitarian considerations.

Since 2010, Japan has been accepting refugees for third-country resettlement, which is meant for refugees unable to receive protection in their asylum countries. Japan initially accepted Myanmar refugees from Thai refugee camps and later from Malaysia. The government has now resolved to extend this acceptance to refugees temporarily residing in the Asian region, not limited to Malaysia. Programs are also in place to accept refugees as students, like the "Syrian Scholars Initiative" which can be either policy-driven or privately led through collaborations between

educational institutions and NGOs. Additionally, cases exist where refugees, while awaiting recognition, acquire different residency statuses based on technical, humanities, or international services, or come to Japan through family reunification.

3. Purpose

The aim of this research is to elevate the overall quality of refugee support. However, this does not imply making everyone involved in refugee support capable of providing the same kind of assistance. Given the need to cater to a diverse refugee population and the heavy reliance on volunteers in current refugee support, it is imperative to create an environment where supporters can engage in an authentic, autonomous manner, while appropriately considering the unique nature of refugees without overemphasizing it.

Therefore, this study involves articulating and systematizing tacit knowledge in refugee support using Pattern Language. Pattern Languages have already been developed and widely used in social welfare and interpersonal support fields, such as "旅のことば(*Tabi no kotoba*)," "対話のことば(*Taiwa no kotoba*)," and "ともに生きることば(*Tomoni ikiru kotoba*)." A Pattern Language is neither a specific action directive nor an abstract theory. Its nature, termed as "中空の言葉(*Chuukuu no kotoba*)" allows Pattern Language to be a tool that facilitates the reference of others' experiences and insights while enabling authentic practice. This research is unique and creative academically and practically, as it aims to create an environment where refugee supporters can engage appropriately and authentically in support, reflecting on their practice and dialoguing with other supporters, referencing Pattern Language. In this sense, the study is not only research on refugee support but also research supporting refugee supporters, adding to its uniqueness.

4. Significance of the Author's Involvement

The author has been consistently involved in refugee support since 2009 as a volunteer, a paid staff member, and at times, a friend to them. Collaborating with multiple NGOs, the author has engaged in various support activities as both a supporter and a researcher. Additionally, the author has taught classes and courses related to refugee support in universities, municipalities, and NGOs, sharing knowledge and experiences while learning.

Particularly in 2019, 2020, and 2023, the author, as the core coordinator and instructor of a Cultural Agency commission project, had the opportunity to design the entire training program and develop Japanese language teachers capable of supporting refugees and others. Through these experiences, the author strongly felt that relying too much on the enthusiasm of those intending to provide support, approaches by researchers and trainers that dictate ideals in a

prescriptive manner, and either overemphasizing or underestimating the unique nature of refugees are detrimental to enhancing the quality of support.

On the other hand, the author, in their primary role, has been involved in the creation of two Pattern Languages, implemented numerous trainings, classes, and workshops using Pattern Language, and has realized their effectiveness and appeal. Integrating these experiences, the author has concluded that it is necessary to prepare an environment where refugee supporters can engage in support appropriately and authentically, and Pattern Language for refugee supporters can be an effective tool for this purpose.

Refugee studies are a transdisciplinary field. There have been numerous legal discussions, particularly from an international law perspective, providing criteria and norms for refugee recognition. Additionally, studies on the emergence of refugees and their causes, as well as how refugee support is conducted by nations, regional communities, and international organizations, are plentiful both domestically and internationally.

Regarding refugee acceptance and support, discussions from various perspectives, including language learning and educational support, living conditions and life support, and the majority's view of refugees, have been held from the standpoints of sociology, social welfare, and language education, among others, with considerable research accumulation. Furthermore, given that many refugees have traumatic experiences, discussions on addressing these issues from the perspectives of psychology, psychiatry, and social welfare are conducted worldwide.

Traditional refugee studies and support research, to the extent of my knowledge, have either emphasized one aspect of the diverse refugee population or focused on certain parts of various supports like legal, employment, life, educational, and psychological support. Additionally, many refugee researchers, including myself, tend to sympathize with refugees, often leading to prescriptive approaches. The creation of a Pattern Language seems ideal for avoiding the traps of conventional practices and research.

5. Methodology

This research endeavors to articulate and systematize the tacit knowledge encompassing the diverse array of refugee support activities within Japan, utilizing the methodology of Pattern Language. Pattern Language is characterized as a compilation of individual patterns. Specifically, a pattern encapsulates various elements such as the nature of problems, contexts that predispose to these issues, their root causes, potential solutions, and the anticipated outcomes of these

solutions. When these elements are methodically arranged into a structured format, they become accessible and referable for others.

The development of Pattern Language commences with conducting interviews with experts and seasoned practitioners who exemplify effective practices. These interviews aim to gather descriptive data that forms the foundation of the patterns. In conventional Pattern Language development, interviewing at least six individuals is advised. However, given this study's objective to encompass the full breadth of diverse support methodologies, a greater number of interviews is requisite. The diverse scenarios encountered in metropolitan areas like Tokyo and other regions, coupled with the variability and specialization in the types of support offered by different individuals, necessitates a significantly larger sample for interviews. The precise number required will be determined as the research unfolds, but initially, the goal is to conduct interviews with approximately 100 practitioners across Japan. This estimate is grounded on the number of staff members, particularly coordinators and social workers, and volunteers from NGOs with which the author is directly involved, as well as refugee support researchers identified as key interview candidates. The interviewing process will persist until reaching theoretical saturation – the point at which no new information or themes are observed. However, it is projected that the number of individuals interviewed will not fall below 100.

The data gathered from these interviews, referred to as pattern seeds, will be synthesized using the KJ methodⁱ and subsequently structured into a Pattern Language. Nevertheless, applying the standard methodology of Pattern Language development to a dataset encompassing 100 individuals presents a challenge. To circumvent this, the study will employ the Modified Grounded Theory Approach (M-GTA) for descriptive and reflective purposes and utilize text mining for analysis. These supplementary methods aim to thoroughly capture the entirety of the tacit knowledge and provide a comprehensive overview of the Pattern Language.

The description of patterns possesses a grammar-like structure at its core, consisting of the Context, Problem, and Solution. These elements are collectively referred to as CPS (井庭, 2013). An example of a pattern for “難民日本語教育 Japanese language education for refugees(伴野, 2023)” is illustrated at the end of this paper. The following exampleⁱⁱ is also written in the CPS format, indicating that "in a given Context, a Problem may arise, for which a strategy or tactic for the Solution is adopted."

The "Also Next Time" Relationship: Fostering Continuous Learning
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Individuals with refugee backgrounds may sometimes find themselves in situations where envisioning a future is too challenging. For instance, those undergoing refugee status application or on provisional release often face difficulties in planning their lives ahead due to residency status issues, making it hard to accept their presence in Japan.

In such circumstances,

even if one intellectually understands the need for learning Japanese, continuing education or finding motivation can be challenging.

Therefore,

it is essential not only to communicate the significance of continuous learning but also to cultivate relationships where learners feel a desire to return, to converse, and to study with the same people again. By building relationships where both parties look forward to meeting and talking again, the motivation for learning Japanese transcends the mere fact of being in Japan; it becomes a means of communication for "here and now, among us."

6. Closing Thoughts/Conclusion

This paper discussed the effectiveness of Pattern Language as a concrete method for visualizing and sharing practical knowledge in refugee support. The future task involves creating a pattern language for refugee support as a specific practice of knowledge production and exploring concrete ways to support refugee supporters using this pattern language. As of the writing of this paper, the author is in the stage of collecting "seeds" that will form the basis for creating the pattern language. Over the next two to three years, the author plan to develop a pattern language for refugee support. Once the pattern language is completed, the author intends to report on it again.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my gratitude for the valuable and concrete advice received during the Writer's Workshop at Asian PLoP 2024, which has greatly contributed to the progression of this research. While this revised version may not yet fully reflect all of the guidance offered, I am committed to incorporating it into my future work.

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附記 本研究の一部は JSPS 科研費 JP23K01947 の助成を受けたものである。

Note: A portion of this research was supported by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) KAKENHI Grant Number JP23K01947.

ⁱ The KJ method was developed by the cultural anthropologist Jiro Kawakita as a technique for synthesizing qualitative data to generate new insights(川喜田二郎 1986).

ⁱⁱ This example is based on and modified from a part of the presentation materials for the oral presentation titled "難民を対象とした学習支援の実践知の体系化―質的心理学の手法としてのパターン・ランゲージによる〈わざ〉の記述(*Systematization of Practical Knowledge on Learning Support for Refugees - Description of Techniques Using Pattern Language as a Method of Qualitative Psychology*)" conducted by the author at the 19th Conference of 日本質

的心理学会(Japanese Association of Qualitative Psychology) held at 愛知大学(Aichi University).