

Article

A World of a Thousand Independent Regions: Confronting the Ever-Increasing Refugee Problem

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Abstract

Based on Pattern 1 “Independent Regions” in the book *A Pattern Language* by Alexander et al. (1977), we investigate a fundamental socio-spatial alternative for reorganizing our world, countries, and metropolitan regions. When put into the context of large worldwide problems, such as climate change, nuclear danger, pandemics, overpopulation, and refugee crises, the innovative idea of “independent regions” presents itself as a promising alternative to the current imbalance of few large and dominant countries in contrast to a wide majority of smaller and medium-sized countries. Working on the development of a refugee pattern language (RPL), this alternative can help to solve larger worldwide problems including the human-made refugee problem. In RPL pattern “3.2 A World of Independent Regions,” we explore this bottom-up alternative based on fundamental principles with an ideal population size for governing itself democratically and equity among regions in a world community. Other considerations include the potential to reduce the root problem of refugee creation of big countries vs. small countries, in cooperation with independent regions, and world regions. Updating this concept involves considering suggestions and new ideas that might make the outcome richer in overlaps, assembly, and scope. The relevance and vision of this concept and pattern are probably most visible and needed in the current turmoil of a transforming world.

Keywords

independent regions; pattern language; refugee crisis; refugee pattern language; structure of world; world problems

Issue

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1. Introduction

The origin of the idea of “independent regions” (IRs) can be found in the politico-geographical studies of concerned citizens and scholars, particularly in Austria, England, and France right after WWII. These concerned citizens searched for solutions for a well-functioning structural organization of the world containing the study of IRs. As Borrás-Alomar et al. (1994, p. 29) point out, “Authors like Leopold Kohr, Dennis de Rougemont or Guy Heraud constitute the key players in what can be considered here as the ‘prehistory’ of contemporary political opinions...of ‘Europe of the Regions.’” When Alexander took up the topic of IRs 15–20 years later the world was

still recovering from WWII, but it was also the beginning of a new epoch of hope, economic progress, democracy, and working together.

INDEPENDENT REGIONS is the very first pattern in the book *A Pattern Language* (Alexander et al., 1977) with 253 “patterns of events, patterns of space, and patterns that are alive” (“attempting to create life”; see Figure 1). It seems to stand at the top, as a building block of a new socio-spatial order. It is the only pattern that explicitly addresses a worldwide geo-social problem. For our times, we might formulate the question of “how to structure the human world in a way that it can work best and survive?” This needs a critical perspective and updating of context, new concepts, and criteria. While

we contemplate additional concepts, such as “bioregionalism,” “ecoregions,” or *If Mayors Ruled the World*, we will consider IRs as the main concept and building block to pursue, albeit enriched by additional concepts. This study, although large in scope and complexity, is relevant for providing new insights and suggestions to meet the often dangerous contemporary challenges of our era, especially in the search for solutions to the global refugee problem.

Humankind has maneuvered itself into a number of large problems that threaten our survival on Earth. Climate change, including rising sea levels and increasing heat and wildfires; the dangers of war and terrorism; pandemics; overpopulation; refugees; over-urbanization; and threatening dominance of a few powerful countries over the rest are global conundrums. These problems all need answers and solutions. The impact of Alexander on confronting problems of this kind is first visible in the application of the PL approach that he invented. Particularly, it is noticeable in the updating, adapting, and exploring of the idea of IRs. While his input as a scientist, mostly an empiricist, as well as a structuralist, mathematician, planner, architect, and contemporary humanist, is unquestionable. His political-philosophical view is less clear yet might be relevant in a topic as critically important as the survival of organic life on earth based on the idea of IRs. In the liberating years of the late sixties to the mid-eighties centered around capitalist and Marxist ideas, Alexander was more interested in a third option of a new society and civilization built around concepts of wholeness and value, and a humanistic bottom-up and piecemeal growth perspective. In his article “Value: A Reply to Protzen,” he emphasizes one value as his philosophical base and asks: “What kind of political process, in a neighborhood, will allow the people to shape the neighborhood according to their own culture?” (Alexander, 1977/2022). More pronounced, we can find a view that is closely related to an actual project: “Understand that the battle between system-A and system-B is not merely a clash between two theories of architecture. More profoundly, it is a clash between two

systems of thought, human organization and social activity” (Alexander et al., 2012, p. 60). Finally, the importance of practical reality and empirical depth is emphasized as a necessary ingredient: “The social and economic revolutions—revolutions that have been debated for the last 250 years or more—suddenly come into clear focus when we find ourselves dealing with the actual making of the world, in concrete terms” (Alexander et al., 2012, p. 482).

In confronting the refugee problem, the study and application of the PL method led to the pattern of IRs, which proved to be helpful in addressing the refugee problem from a new and innovative angle appropriate to the scale. These new and progressive ideas seem to come up especially during and after large global disasters, such as WWII. They are now reappearing in a world where the younger generation refers to itself as the “last generation,” and refugees have reached 100 million worldwide and continue to grow (The Last Generation, n.d.).

2. Methodology and Format

Pattern Languages were first published as a theory and method in *The Timeless Way of Building* (Alexander, 1979) and *A Pattern Language* (Alexander et al., 1977). They have been adopted in many more disciplines than architecture, from social sciences to computer software, and now for confronting the refugee crisis. The reoccurrences and continuity of human migration and displacement, with all its problems and complexities, suggest the employment of the PL method.

In the work of RPL, we collect data and analyze case studies on contemporary refugee groups: Conducting field studies to meet refugees in different circumstances and support with conversations and interviews. Scrutinizing patterns of sequences from escaping, resettling, and returning in conjunction with scales of country, city, neighborhood, and building, help categorize these patterns into clusters. In the domain of refugees, a complex dynamic between hosts and refugees requires tools that ensure mutual benefits, such as social interaction,



Figure 1. A Pattern Language APL1 Independent Region(s) plus Refugee Pattern Language RPL3.2 A World of a Thousand Independent Regions.

conferences, and qualitative conversations. We also conduct seminars and produce and test housing designs and neighborhood projects with our students. While assisting vulnerable persons it is important not to be damaging to a host society but rather promote equity and endorse the coinciding interests of both sides. The pattern and PL approach is in itself a method of research and design and therefore needs some minimal introduction as such. It can be reasonably well explained in three illustrations. In Table 1, we can see two different columns of table of contents juxtaposed with RPL and APL. These show the sequences, clusters (or chapters), and patterns ordered according to their context in *A Pattern Language* (Alexander et al., 1977). They are also the two main pattern languages, P+PLs, referred to and applied in this article. Figure 2 shows the build-up of a new PL, where one or two patterns are at the center connected to

other patterns in a system or language or relations diagram, in one particular context area or domain: IRs and Refugees. Table 2 shows the build-up of an individual pattern format in detail, with all its components at the example “Welcome Countries.”

Both domains support the life of people. With the selection of patterns from both domains, that is APL and RPL, we have created an initial system of connections between these various concepts, creating a PL. We have prominently placed the “independent region” at the center, followed by connections that make the IR stronger. Also closely placed is the pattern “extended refugee family” that starts to create relations to IRs, but also relations to patterns, such as “Welcome Countries.” We have placed two potential concepts to the right, that may become relevant in “A World of Independent Regions”: ecoregions and bioregions.

Table 1. Juxtaposition of the two shortened and condensed PLs applied in our investigation: (a) RPL and (b) APL.

“The Sugar in the Milk: Refugee Pattern Language” RPL	<i>Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction</i> APL
Cluster 1: The Refugee Family	Cluster: World
Cluster 2: Leaving Place—Escape Journey	1. Independent Regions
Cluster 3: Welcome Country—Arrival Place	Cluster: Region
1. Welcome Countries—Refugee Declaration 1951 (1967)	2. The Distribution of Towns
2. A World of Independent Regions—Refugees	3. City Country Fingers
3. From Countries to Independent Regions	4. Agricultural Valleys
4. Walk-To Countries	5. Lace of Country Street
5. Taking in a Million People	6. Country Towns
6. Sanctuary Cities and Counties	7. The Countryside
Cluster 4: Arrival City—Urban Life and Infrastructure	Cluster: City
Cluster 5: Refugees in Neighborhoods and Communities	8. Mosaic of Subcultures
Cluster 6: Buildings, Facilities, Neighborhood Support	9. Scattered Work
Cluster 7: Housing, Living, and Live Work	10. Magic of the city
Cluster 8: Work and Work Learning	11. Local Transport Areas...
Cluster 9: Design and Construction	253. Things from your Life
Cluster 10: Anti-Patterns	

Note: “Refugee Pattern Language” is an ongoing manuscript that is partially published in papers and conference presentations. *A Pattern Language* is a fully published book, that serves as the model for RPL, albeit in a modified form (see also PUARL, n.d.). Patterns from RPL and APL are applied in a PL together (see Figure 2). Box 1 exemplifies the format of a pattern and pattern language.

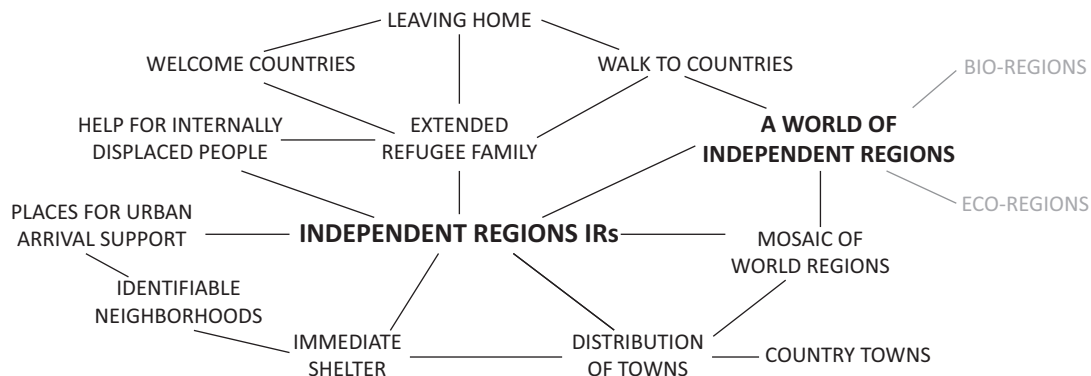


Figure 2. New PL relations diagram composed of patterns from APL and RPL.

Box 1. Pattern format using the shortened example of “RPL3.1 Welcome Countries.”

- **Figure 3.** Illustration that captures the essence of the pattern: Crowds of people at Berlin Railway Station offering shelter to Ukrainian refugees. Source: Marsh (2022; see also Neis et al., 2018).



- **Title:** Welcome country** with or without asterisks about the quality of the pattern.
- **Links:** To other patterns (APL, RPL): IR may offer a solid and serious but also visionary alternative to the current highly unbalanced world system. “APL8 Mosaic of Subcultures” alludes to the possibility of bringing cultures, regions, and countries into balance with each other.
- **Definition of the problem:** “A welcome country is positive and open to help and welcomes refugees....Unfortunately, not all countries are welcoming to refugees or provide asylum services.”
- **Investigation and discussion of pattern:** Here, empirical or analytical facts are discussed to demonstrate the validity of the pattern; a number of possible solutions are discussed:

Only 149 of 193 countries have signed into the 1951 UN Refugee Conventions and its 1967 Protocol. Moreover, not all of the 149 countries felt obliged to actually follow the convention.
- **Solution proposals:** Text that shows the solution/proposal of the problem. This also includes the physical and social connections that are needed to solve the problem. The solution/proposal is given in the form of an instruction so that the reader knows what to do or how to proceed:

Strategize your country (or “Independent Region” if applicable) in a way that it always has the capacity to welcome refugees. First, refugees will get formal protection under the asylum status, according to the non-refoulment clause in the Refugee Convention... Employ the existing social system to support refugees, or even improve the system. Keep in mind that welcome takes place at the policy level, and public opinion but also media as well as personal level.
- **Illustration of the proposal**
- **Links to other patterns (APL, RPL):** “RPL3.2 A World of Independent Regions” can be strengthened by patterns such as “APL2 The Distribution of Towns” and “APL6 Country Towns.”
- **References:** In text and at the end of each pattern (new feature).
- **Web platform** (new feature)

Pattern “3.2 A World of Independent Regions” addresses multi-level problems and opportunities that the world community, regional associations, countries, and regions need to address at the social modus and spatial level of IRs, and at the level of cooperation between different IRs, different levels of scale and area responsibilities. Individual patterns create the depth of each concept, and they also create the overall depth of a PL. Presentation of this pattern is conducted in the original format: “*Problem—Investigation/Text—Solution/Suggestion,*” and links are essential to forming a PL.

**3. Results and Discussion of One Pattern: RPL 3.2
A World of Independent Regions—And Refugees**

Links: “RPL1.1 The Extended Refugee Family” provides an overview of their problems and needs; “RPL2.1 Help for Internally Displaced People,” asks for disaster assistance within a country; “RPL3.1 Welcome Countries” encourages nations to take in refugees; It is also relevant for “APL1 Independent Regions” as a major encouragement of providing help and showing sympathy and empathy; “RPL3.2 A World of Independent Regions—And Refugees” is relevant for supporting regions and countries cooperating with each other in an organized fashion in order to reduce the number of refugees.

Problem: What are Independent Regions? How could a world of IRs help to restructure and improve our social and spatial life so that large-scale world problems, such as the ever-increasing refugee crisis, could be drastically lessened or avoided altogether? How can IRs participate and be instrumental in solving refugee problems?

Based on the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, the remaining 46 countries should finally sign the Convention. Each country should be obligated to provide full support for refugees worldwide and offer better coordination among them. However, that may not work in the current state of the world organization, where a few very large and powerful countries can dominate the world with their military might and their veto right in the UN.

As the engineer-architect Buckminster-Fuller would argue, do not stay with criticizing the past, but propose a new and better system. Here, we explore the question on a structural level as originally proposed in the pattern “Independent Regions” (Alexander et al., 1977, pp. 10–15). The argument implies that the world should be regrouped into a “thousand independent regions,” and it is anticipated that the restructuring will include significant improvements in world balance and cooperation for solving large-scale problems. This could considerably reduce the numbers of refugees because: (1) IRs are easier to self-govern democratically than the larger country system; and (2) the system would protect smaller countries and IRs as equals, rather than what is seen in the current system of being vulnerable to domination, attack or even military invasion by larger or more powerful countries (see Figure 4).

Before we go any further, we need to take a critical look at the pattern of IRs, update the argument for today’s world, and also refer to recent developments and ideas that can inform the concept of IRs. Since 1977 the world has changed dramatically—social technology has influenced communication and politics tremendously—and ecology and sustainability are dominating the discussion of how to live and survive on Earth together. Here we refer to three concepts that are related to IRs: ecology and ecoregions, bioregionalism, and *If Mayors Ruled the World*.

Ecoregions are defined by nature and scientifically based on wildlife and vegetation. They are relevant as additional elements to IRs and may form buffer zones or commons between IRs. In other words, these areas have their independent rights of existence and they may add up to the mosaic of world regions. Bioregions: Apparently, the term was coined by Allen Van Newkirk, founder of the Institute for Bioregional Research in 1975 and Michael V. McGinnis wrote the first book that explains the theoretical and practical dimensions of Bioregionalism (McGinnis, 1999.) Like IRs, these regions are not always dependent on political boundaries. A bioregion tends to be larger than an IR;

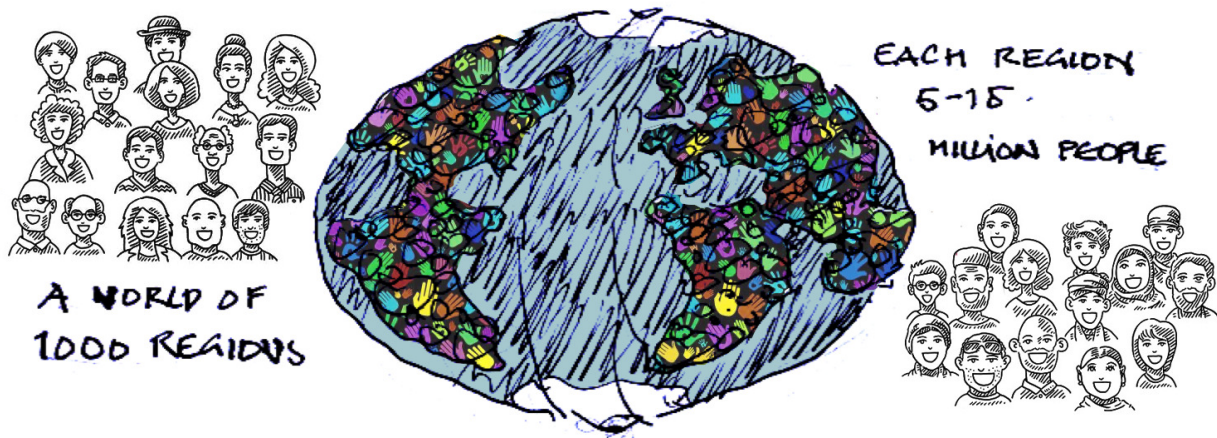


Figure 4. A world of a thousand independent regions with each region 5–15 million people.

for example, when we consider the bioregion of the North American Cascadia Region, this consists of most of Oregon and Washington, the Alaska Panhandle, the far north of California and the west coast of Canada. It also easily includes the smaller Ecotopia Region that Callenbach (1975) wrote about in his famous novel with the same name. Third is the challenging book by B. Barber, entitled *If Mayors Ruled the World* (2013). Barber (2013, p. 3) argues that nations were “the perfect political recipe for the liberty and independence of autonomous people and nations. It is utterly unsuited for interdependence.” These three arguments might enrich and update the understanding of an IR and more specifically world regions where IRs cooperate.

With reference to *the raison d’etre* of new IRs, Alexander writes “Metropolitan Regions will not come to balance until each one is small enough and autonomous enough to be an independent Sphere of Culture” (Alexander et al., 1977, p. 11). Four conditions and criteria of IRs have been proposed (Alexander et al., 1977, pp. 10–14). These four are updated and two new conditions are added regarding inner strength or resiliency and ability to cooperate, and recent developments and ideas have been considered.

(1) The nature and limits of human government largely determine the population size of IRs, so that a region can govern itself effectively and all people can participate in direct democracy. The biologist Haldane (1926) asserts:

Just as there is a best size for every animal, so there is a best size for every human institution. In the Greek type of democracy all the citizens could listen to a series of orators and vote directly on questions of legislation. Hence their philosophers held that a small city was the largest possible democratic state. (J. S. B. Haldane, 1926, in Alexander et al., 1977, p. 11).

As population size increases, direct communication decreases. Governments of a region become less effective, unmanageable, and are prone to break down. While the original APL estimates 2–10 million per IR (Alexander et al., 1977, p. 11), other proposals suggest 3–12 million. To give it more flexibility, some also added 5–15 million as a reasonable alternative (Letter by Lord Weymouth, 1973, in Alexander et al., 1977, p. 12). We partially work with the increased number of 3–12 million, but

also use higher numbers when appropriate. The numbers could increase for two reasons. First, there are far more people in the world today than in 1975 (3 billion in 1975 to 7.8 billion in 2023) and various world demographic development calculations have estimated a 10 billion world population by mid-century before it will level out. Countries and IRs will have to absorb more population than the ideal numbers suggested. Second, we consider how modern tech media have improved communication for direct plebiscites or other large-scale democratic involvements that affect citizen participation and refugees’ integration decisions. Better communication thus allows IRs’ population to increase considerably. Still, we need to be careful and ensure that democracy can function when there are major problems because of refugee arrivals. Here we follow the number 5–15 up to 20 million (see Figure 5b with Switzerland as a potential example of a future IR).

(2) Equity among Independent Regions in the world community is easier to establish than with unequal countries, especially when IRs are all relatively similar in their limited population size. When IRs are too limited in population, they may not have an equal say in a world government. Therefore, a minimum of 2–3 million population is needed. Lord Weymouth of Warminster, England, makes the following point in *World Federation: A Thousand States* in his Letter to the *New York Times* dated March 15, 1973:

Working backward from an estimate of the global population in the year 2000, which is anticipated to rise to 10,000 million mark [10 billion H.N.], I suggest, that we should be thinking in terms of an ideal regional state of something around ten million, or between five and fifteen million, to give greater flexibility. This would furnish the U.N. with an assembly of equals of 1000 regional representatives: a body that would be justified in claiming to be truly representative of the world’s population. (Lord Weymouth in Alexander et al., 1977, p. 12)

With the right population size, IRs can self-govern more efficiently and democratically in a world of IRs and metropolitan areas. Because the demands of direct democracy need a rather developed social system built on freedom of the press, citizen responsibility, the rule of law, and free and open elections with different independent

Table 2. Conditions and criteria for Independent Regions.

Conditions and Criteria	Results and Outcome for Refugees
1. The nature and limits of human government	Range of 5–20 million people for each IR
2. Equity among regions in a world community	Each IR will have one seat in a World Organization
3. Regional planning considerations	Will include plans for refugees’ accommodations
4. Support for intensity and diversity of human cultures	Refugees are part of the Mosaic of Life
5. Resilience of each Independent Region	Infrastructure and Defense will be strengthened
6. Cooperation between Independent Regions	Includes cooperation for taking care of Refugees

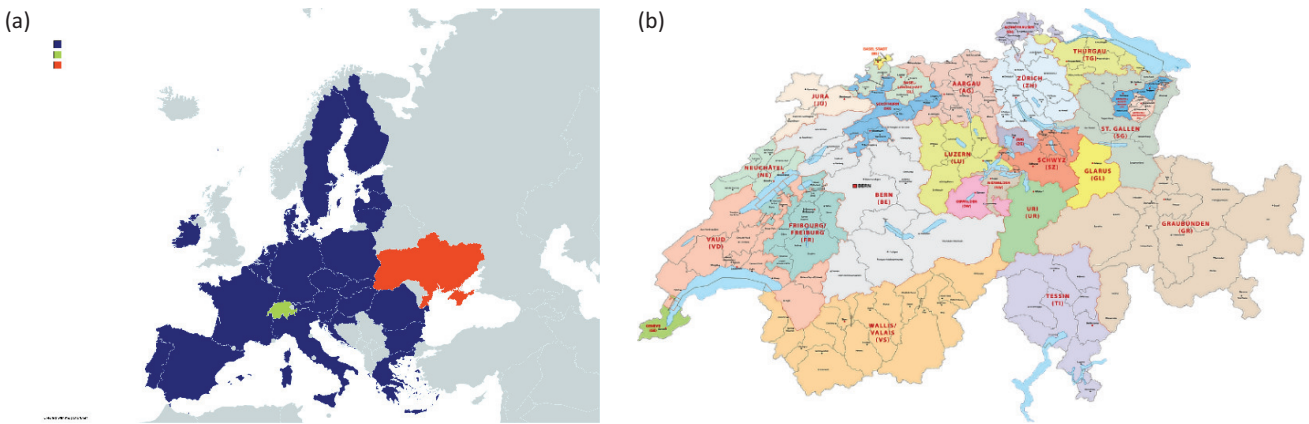


Figure 5. Map of EU Countries with Switzerland as a neutral embedded country: (a) EU countries in dark blue provide Temporary Protection Directive for Ukrainian refugees to move freely within the EU, are free to work, and receive housing and social benefits. (b) Map of Switzerland as a theoretical example of a potential new IR with cantons as the basic local historic and geographic unit of governance. Source: WorldAtlas (n.d.).

political parties. We can see examples from the future “IR of Switzerland” with a long democratic tradition since 1848 as well as the “IR of Singapore” with a recent democratic tradition. It is certainly easier to self-govern on the regional level than on the scale of huge countries like the US, Russia, China, or even the UK, or Germany. In short, equity among IRs would be most just when all IRs have the same one vote each in a World Federation of Thousand Regions, and when IRs are roughly about the same size in population.

(3) Regional planning considerations can strengthen a territory to support its own governance and encourage cohesion. Arbitrary boundaries that randomly cut across natural boundaries make it difficult for people to connect within an IR and develop deep knowledge to solve problems in their land, cities, and countryside. This means that the definition of regions should be strengthened by both natural boundaries, like rivers, oceans, forests, mountains, and man-made connections (including bridges and railways), as well as ecological, economic, and social-cultural qualities. In the event of human displacement, IRs need to employ action plans to handle either natural or man-made emergencies. New concepts such as ecoregions and bioregions need to be integrated into large-scale regional planning and cooperation between IRs.

The French economist Jean-François Gravier (1965) has proposed the idea of a Europe of the regions which cross present national and subnational boundaries, for example, the Basel-Strasbourg region which includes parts of France, Germany, and Switzerland. Furthermore, APL provides concrete patterns for regional planning within a framework of Independent Regions. “Within each region work toward those regional policies which will protect the land and mark the limits of the city” (Alexander et al., 1977, p. 15). Original regional patterns that support regional planning as part of an APL network are suggested for pages 16–40: (a) The distribution of towns, (b) City country fingers, (c) Agricultural val-

leys, (d) Lace of country streets, (e) Country towns, and (f) The countryside.

Any of these patterns are appropriate for the distribution and inclusion of refugees into a new land. “The distribution of towns” is relevant regarding the widespread distribution of new populations which include the growing population of immigrants and refugees. The pattern “Country towns” could play a relevant role in the welcoming of new inhabitants, such as absorbing forced migrants in agriculture, and possible including initial experiments with circular economy. The pattern “Countryside” reveals a fresh view, reminding us of a countryside that belongs to everybody and therefore needs to be carefully organized such that it promotes agricultural production and use for all kinds of people, beyond a purely utilitarian use of the land as huge fields, lacking animals, bees, and people.

(4) Support for intensity and diversity of human culture, with regard to refugees, has become a relevant topic. The widespread distribution of IRs, or small countries, can provide a new space system in which all cultures can find a home within. Many of the new IRs could be delineated in a way that any culture can find a place within an already existing IR, or they can find a place within a newly emerging IR. Others may want to develop a new culture in the overall process of human evolution and new needs from environments. What is described here is a life of freedom and possibility in a world of IRs that allows for a chance of rich cultural life within a variety of diverse cultures.

A word of caution: Forced migration can still occur, especially due to natural disaster-induced displacements such as floods, storms, earthquakes, famine, or droughts, even in a world of IRs. Thus, there need to be policies and strategies in place in such cases to absorb large numbers of refugees. Alternatively, new IRs may be formed to accommodate populations that had to evacuate from their own land, like the Rohingya people from Myanmar or the internally displaced people of Palestine.

The question is how refugees can continue to develop their own culture in a new land while concurrently trying to adapt to a dominant culture and a new system of life.

Resiliency and Cooperation are relevant for fighting the contemporary large-scale problems of the world, which have become primary concerns for survival and living together. Hence, IRs (and countries alike) are dependent on two major features. First, they need to be more resilient and resistant to large challenges and disasters, and second, they need to cooperate with each other to tackle large issues and challenges.

(5) Resiliency refers to a “capacity to recover quickly from difficulties” (Resilient, n.d.). To establish resilient IRs, the region has to develop its own economy, social cohesive structure, and safety plans for any potential disasters, especially as related to climate change, war, or conflict. The region might also need a military protection force to keep the country or IR safe and resilient, maybe in the form of the Swiss protection system where everybody has to take on defense obligations, learn some specialized military activities and become part of a territorial organization. At the point of a thousand IRs, IRs are equally large and well-equipped economically, socially, and culturally. They should be each resilient enough to govern themselves and take care of possible future problems, whether expected or unforeseen (Figure 6).

(6) Cooperation is fundamental to the function of a world government of a thousand regions, especially

when it comes to dealing with worldwide problems such as climate change, refugee crises, or pandemics. While the world government has important centralized functions in various departments such as UNHCR and WHO, etc., IRs must also be able to cooperate naturally with each other. The large-scale issues between IRs and the world government may be scaled into world regions like regional federations, associations, or unions similar to what the EU offers. There needs to be a cooperative system that “independent world regions” can provide at their administrative level as well as human structures through modern democracy and competent communicative technology.

Because of their relative population size within a range of 5–15 million or up to 20 million, IRs can potentially rely on more internal cohesiveness. At the same time, they can be equal partners in a world federation or union without fear or domination from huge countries of more than 100 million or more. IRs thus can become bulwarks in strengthening their territories and also assist areas that have problems and need help in recovery.

No matter what, the most important task is to always strengthen IRs and help to support each other to solve problems that challenge IRs in significant ways. In the case of a refugee crisis, it is important to make sure that IRs are consistently resilient and well maintained so that no citizens will be displaced or lose their human rights protection, and basic human rights as refugees with the

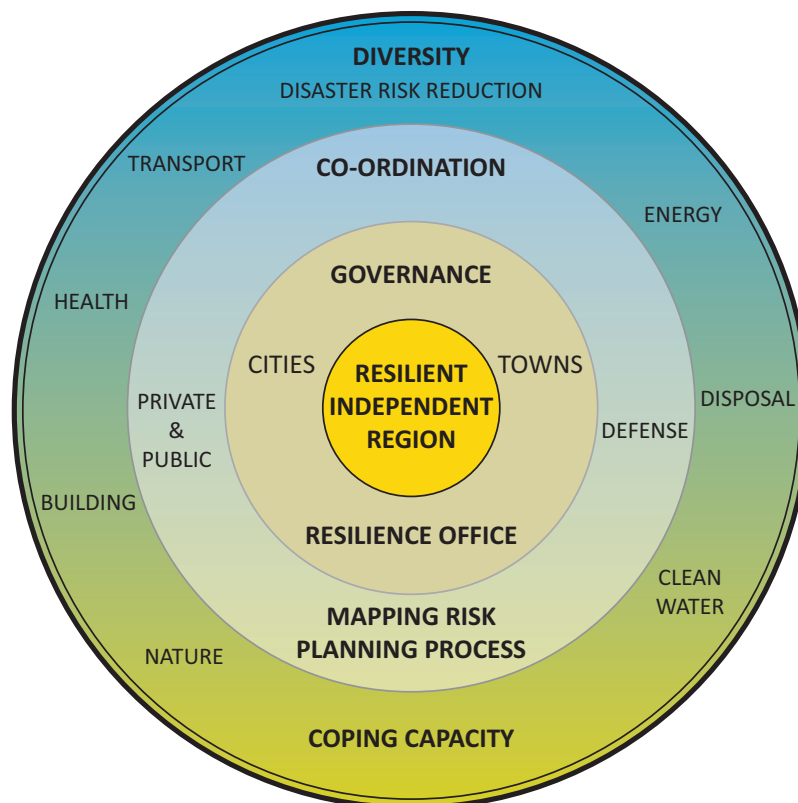


Figure 6. Diagram of characteristics of structure and organization of resilience in IRs with emphasis of governance, coordination, and diversity, as well as protection from and coordination with the outside. Source: Adapted from Barrott (2021).

support and cooperation of other IRs, and with the help of the world regional federative administration.

Therefore, in the current dominant large-country system, all the remaining 46 non-signing countries must sign the UN Refugee Convention and actively develop a refugee support system within their country. At the same time, we look for opportunities to establish IRs in an organic bottom-up process with countries that form already more than two-thirds of the world's smaller countries. Working towards the evolution of IRs, each region will have a population of 5–15 up to 20 million, within its own geographical and natural boundaries, a circular economy, and will be autonomous and self-governing. Each IR has an equal seat in a world government without the intervening powers of larger countries. Furthermore, emerging "independent regions," will become resilient, and work together to assist with each other's problems, such as refugee crises, in a new world of self-governed, equitable, and free IRs.

Links: "RPL3.3 A World of Thousand Regions" explores transitions from countries to IRs. "RPL3.4 Walk-To Countries" (or IR's) can be very useful in creating first safe-havens. "RPL4.2 Places of Urban Arrival Support" suggests safe places for refugees arriving in new cities. "RPL5.4 Identifiable Neighborhood for Refugees" provides safe havens for refugees. "RPL6.1 Immediate Shelter" guarantees a roof over one's head.

4. Outlook and Conclusion

With the pattern 1 "Independent Regions" in the book *A Pattern Language* (Alexander et al., 1977), Alexander has given us an idea and a concept to approach our current large-scale world problems in new and promising ways. While this idea framed as the first pattern of the book seemed to be a talisman rarely ever used practically, it gave the sense that taking care of the entire world is its primary task. In our case, and for current times, it has helped the authors start to explore a potentially totally different order of the world. In the end, it might be a more useful and practical approach to solve current large-scale problems, including the refugee crisis that has affected more than 100 million people as of the Spring of 2023.

Furthermore, Alexander has given us a method of working with patterns, not only as individual pieces but forming them together, in what is considered a system or language, to better understand large and complex problem areas. It is because of this build-up or format that one can take a complex problem, and work on individual patterns, but with the intention to bring all pieces or patterns together in one area of activity. Patterns end with instructions and are therefore also a set of instructions that work together. What we may call here the PL method (some call it methodology), has become very attractive in numerous disciplines and professions outside architecture, for which it was invented and developed originally. It is also a solid method for

interdisciplinary research and cooperation. This fact can also be found in the combination of patterns of the two domains APL and RPL. The primary objective of APL is to improve the lives of people with very specific patterns or several of them together. The aim of RPL is to support and help refugees in their arduous and demanding lives in the same way.

A critical IR perspective has resulted in the updating of the criteria as well as an expansion of the conditions for an IR. Four existing criteria were updated, such as the increase of the population number for an IR, and additional arguments for the remaining three have been provided. Resiliency and cooperation were introduced as two new criteria because of the need for protection in a more dangerous world and because of the need to work more closely together. Most importantly, three additional complementary as well as competing concepts were introduced. These are appropriate for our times with regard to sustainability, biodiversity, and governance, and result in a more complex picture of a new world with IRs, ecological regions, and bioregions. Because of the need for cooperation between all these entities, we looked at a scaled structure in particular for IRs to work together with IR neighbors, in clusters as well as associations or unions of mosaic of world regions.

Instead of pursuing the way of ever larger countries with hegemonial or world domination ambitions, this proposal tries to proceed in the opposite way by emphasizing the scale of human living within an entity that people can understand and govern well by themselves. The strong criticism of Leopold Kohr has encouraged our support and development of IRs because of his warning, "the bigger the power and size of a State, the bigger the potential risk of driving towards conflict with serious destructive effects" (Borras-Alomar et al., 1994, p. 30). However, without a clear democratic and cooperative structure it needs to be seen if smaller countries and IRs will not turn on each other, fighting for limited resources such as water, food, and energy. But at a minimum, we assume that smaller countries and IRs are less likely to start wars with each other.

The observations and arguments in this article reinforce the proposition of a new socio-spatial entity called an "independent region" for the benefit of mankind including a drastic reduction of refugees. One might wonder if the idea of IRs with 5–20 million inhabitants each and self-governing based on strong democratic principles shall be a better way for organizing, structuring, and administering our world altogether (see Figure 7). It is not only because of contributions to solving refugee problems but also because the arrangement of IRs has the potential to solve more large-scale problems beyond the refugee crisis.

As the Club of Rome argues, we need a new enlightenment that is based on tradition and culture, but that also works with a new understanding to tackle the large-scale problems in the world at the right levels of scale and with the power and understanding of science, new



Figure 7. Invitation to create an open world of IRs, bioregions, and ecological regions as a mosaic of world regions from the bottom up.

philosophy, and passion (von Weizsäcker & Wijkman, 2018). The idea of IRs, and their formation, thus, should become part and parcel of this new enlightenment.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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