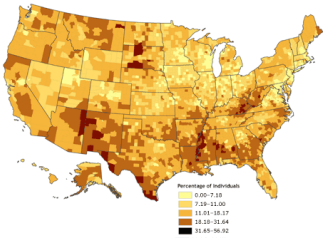
Sustainable Design (22)

Human welfare depends on using the Earth's physical resources, material cycles, and biological processes, but current human techniques, understanding, decision-making, and perceptions of need are blind to their destructive effects on these essential functions of the Earth. The reverse is also a problem: current attempts to protect the Earth are often blind to how they impact human welfare.

Consider each building or product as a double intervention—in the Earth's cycles and processes, and simultaneously in the human culture of needs and techniques. Make use of available understanding, innovative and traditional, natural and social, to gauge the proper balance of human and non-human effects for each intervention. Remember that present culture builds from work of the past, and future culture will have to build from what the present provides. The ethic of sustainable design is not only that future existence should be possible, but that it should exhibit justice and beauty for humans and for the rest of nature.

Written by Rob Knapp

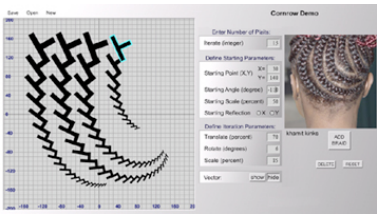
Big-Picture Health Information (27)



Health information cannot focus solely on the individual. Many detriments to health cannot be eradicated without changes to the physical and social world that people inhabit. If environmental and social changes are necessary to get well, individual patients cannot do so solely by seeking health care and avoiding health risks. Expert medical information and advice is inadequate to create a healthy environment that creates healthy people. Real change to improve health comes from a shift away from acknowledging only expert clinical opinion and toward an awareness of the effect of environment on health: a shift from passive diagnosis and treatment to active engagement with the causes of and solutions to health problems. Demand and produce health information that identifies environmental and social causes of ill-health. Analyze the interconnection between these causes and their solutions, and bring individuals, communities and governments together in putting the solutions into effect. *If the struggle with disease becomes a struggle with established power, you may be on the right track.*

Written by Jenny Epstein
Graphic: Topography of poverty; cdc.gov

Culturally Situated Design Tools (49)



The "digital divide" is often addressed with a one-way bridge: a technology-rich side brings gadgets to the technology-poor side. This can have the unfortunate side-effect of making local knowledge and expertise invisible or de-valued.

Culturally Situated Design Tools use computer simulations of cultural practices to "translate" from local knowledge to their high-tech counterparts in math, computing, and other domains. Current tools focus on cornrows, urban graffiti, Native American beadwork, breakdance, and Latino drumming. Students can both simulate originals and create their own designs. Grade 3-12 minority students show statistically significant increases in math performance and information technology career interest. The concept of making hidden cultural capital more available through technological "translation" could be broadened to many other domains (nanotechnology, physics, etc.) and applied to endeavors beyond education (for example in architecture). Culturally Situated Design Tools offer an important new position in the struggle to revalue local or traditional knowledge in the face of oppressive histories.

Written by Ron Eglash

Powerful Remittances (73)

The poor countries generally have few job opportunities and their "best and brightest" often leave the country. Village cultures, family and ritual life has adapted to these new circumstances and to the significant sums of money sent home. There is room for innovation and experimentation for migrant organizations and their supporting transnational communities. This pattern of massive remittance transfers can be more transparent and cost efficient while leveraging resources for migrant families and organizations committed to growth back home. Information technology can substantially reduce remittance transfer costs and improve transparency if both financial and telecommunications regulatory reforms were in place. Voice over Internet Protocol free or low cost phone calls will contribute to lower communications costs. International financial institutions could offer matching funds for specific investments back home. Non-profit foundations working with migrant organizations could set up alternative networks of cost plus transfer mechanisms and otherwise protect remittance transactions while lowering costs still more.

Written by Scott Robinson