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LTER DataBits
Information Management Newsletter of
The Long Term Ecological Research Network
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Good Reads

Good Read: BioScience January 2003 Special Issue

- Karen Baker, Palmer Station

John E. Hobbie (ed), 2003. A Special Section on the US Long Term Ecological Research Network. BioScience 53(1).

A special section in Bioscience about LTER provides a comprehensive historical context for long-term research from pre International Biological Program (IBP) time through the work of LTER today. Two articles summarizing the LTER program and its accomplishments are followed by six articles on cross-site research topics: climate forcing, land-use, biodiversity, system disturbance, system variability, and mechanistic modeling. The collection of articles presents the LTER community, highlighting its mission and selected ecological the rich intellectual and data resources, the series gives insight both to the research community approach as well as to the long-term data legacy. The overview offers an opportunity to consider the LTER process as a whole.

Good Read: Steps Towards an Ecology of Infrastructure

- Karen Baker, Palmer Station & Helena Karasti, Univ of Oulu Dept of Information Processing Science

Susan Leigh Star and Karen Ruhleder, 1994. Steps Towards an Ecology of Infrastructure: Complex problems in design and access for large-scale collective systems. In Transcending Boundaries: Proceedings of the conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCWb 94), 22-26 October, Chapel Hill, NC. ACM Press, New York, p. 253-264.

The LTER represents one model of a networked community organization. The Worm Community System (WCS), a distributed software environment with successes and challenges similar to and different from LTER, represents another collaboratory model. Star and Ruhleder (1994), using ethnographic methods to conduct research on the WCS, present an analytic framework using multiple levels of understandings to capture this community's not-so-well-structured structures and not-so-well-expressed tensions.

The traditional "wires and pipes" infrastructure metaphor is broadened to encompass relationships with system users and change within organizations. Such multidimensional views of infrastructure are important to collaboratory participants facing choices about how technology standards will be used to support site science, how technology decisions will influence data practices, and how design approaches influence information system development. This work describes explicitly how local practices interface with large-scale structure, demonstrating how local customization is in tension with the development of common standards. The complexity and interdependence of everyday work practices are found to be critical elements when considering both technical and sociotechnical challenges.