Blog Archive

The Nature of Positive

by Shannon Murphy | May 21, 2014

I wanted to share the link to "The Nature of Positive," a new article by Pamela Mang and Bill Reed appearing in *Building Research & Information*. The article discusses the concept of net positive design through the lens of regenerative development and an ecological worldview:

"Green building was developed from the sciences of the physical world and a mechanistic worldview. This is the same foundation that most of the thinking and technologies of the building industry rely on. It has produced an industry structure and culture in which the value of a building is still generally defined in terms of human benefit, most often measured in relatively short-term financial returns and human health. From this anthropocentric perspective, 'ecological systems' are resources or amenities to be managed and utilized for human purposes, so adding value to an ecological system must perforce mean making it more valuable to sustain human activity. The movement to assign monetary value to ecosystem services, which was stimulated by the desire to prevent further destruction of natural resources, was an effort to broaden this definition. So long as it is rooted in the anthropocentric and building technology-oriented way of thinking, it may simply be seen as an infrastructure-oriented and quantitative accounting exercise. The implicit suggestion is that such anthropocentric and technological perspectives may be abandoned if the numbers do not add up.

In contrast, from an ecological worldview, the almost infinite interrelationships of 'ecological systems' are the way living entities, including humans, relate to, interact with and depend upon each other in a particular landscape in order to pursue and sustain healthy lives. Eugene Odum spoke of ecology as the study of living beings in their home (Odum & Barrett, 2004). Many indigenous people refer to the plants, animals, insects and even geological features they live with as relatives. Regenerative Development uses the term 'partners' (Reed, 2007) to describe the members of an ecological system in the sense of partners in the business of creating the conditions that support healthy life in the place they co-inhabit. In this biocentric perspective, value is defined in terms of benefits to life. Adding value to an ecological system means

increasing its systemic capability to generate, sustain and evolve increasingly higher orders of vitality and viability for the life of a particular place."

It's a great read, and the online access is free. Check it out!