



January 2011 Newsletter

Dear SCORAI,

Happy New Year and welcome to the January 2011 SCORAI eNewsletter!

On the top right, you will find a menu "In This Issue" that serves as a Table of Contents to help you navigate through the eNewsletter. If you have newsworthy items that you would like to appear in the next issue, please send them to me no later than January 25. Note that the deadline to submit items is the 25th of each month.

Regards,
Maurie Cohen

Book Review of *The Spirit Level*

Ecologists and, increasingly, a small minority of progressive economists tell us that with more equitable distribution of work and income the society can thrive without economic growth and with less material consumption. What makes them focus on this question is the desire to protect the integrity of the physical Earth. It is therefore remarkable to discover a book by two British epidemiologists, Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, that arrives at the same conclusion, but through an entirely different logic. What drives their research is the desire to *protect the integrity of human society*.

We are all familiar with the international comparisons showing that once countries reach a certain level of wealth, further economic growth and average material wealth yield few improvements in population health, happiness, or measures of well-being. But within the flat part of the curve, there are still significant differences among rich countries. Wilkinson and Pickett explain this variation by showing that among rich countries income equality--but not the average income--is the most reliable predictor of a country's performance on nine different indicators of societal well-being: from life expectancy and infant mortality to crime, obesity, social mobility, mental health, children's well-being, educational performance, and others. When inequality between the top and bottom 20% grows,

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so does material consumption and various social pathologies. When inequality decreases, health, social trust and cohesion, and educational performance increase.

This is true at all income levels within a society--so much so that in one study men belonging to the highest social class in relatively unequal England and Wales were found to have a higher mortality rate than those belonging to the lowest class in much more equal Sweden.

If you want to know the explanations, I recommend reading this eminently readable book, based on decades of research. In a nutshell, the logic of its argument goes something like that: as social beings we are hardwired to be exquisitely sensitive to our social position and very much vulnerable to experiencing anxiety about our place in the social pecking order. The more unequal the society, the greater the collective anxiety, which manifests itself in various ways: social trust, population health, positional consumption, crime, punitive treatment of prisoners, educational achievements, and others. It thus follows that while consuming more does not make rich societies happier or healthier, consuming *more equally* does. So the shortest way to making people in these societies better off--in all income brackets, but more so in the lower strata--is to reduce income inequality, regardless of whether the economy is growing or not. Today's Japan, with the most equal wealth distribution among the rich countries, is the case in point: despite its 20 year slump in economic growth, the country scores highest in almost all indicators of social well-being examined by Wilkinson and Pickett.

Submitted by Halina Brown

State of New York Releases Draft Climate Action Plan

The State of New York released the draft version of its Climate Action Plan last month and is inviting feedback through the beginning of February. The plan can be downloaded at

<http://www.nyserda.org/programs/Environment/EMEP>.

Questions or comments can be directed to SCORAI-er Marsha Walton, Senior Project Manager for Energy Efficiency and Exploratory Research at the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority. She can be reached at mlw@nyserda.org.

Upcoming Conferences

17th Annual International Sustainable Development Research Conference, May 8-10, 2011, The Earth Institute, Columbia University, New York City.

<http://www.isdrc17.ei.columbia.edu>

Third Biennial Transformative Consumer Research Conference, June 24-26, 2011, Baylor University, Waco, TX.

<http://www.baylor.edu/tcr>

United States Society for Ecological Economics Conference
(Building the Green Economy), June 26-29, 2011, Michigan
State University, East Lansing, MI, USA.

<https://www.msu.edu/~ussee>

Fifth International Consumer Sciences Research Conference
(Consumer Behaviour for a Sustainable Future), July 18-20,
2011, Bonn, Germany.

<http://www.consumer11.org>

New SCORAI Affiliates

SCORAI welcomes the following new participants to the
network during the month of December. Total membership is
currently 199 people.

Goran Finnveden (KTH-Royal Institute of Technology)

Rafael Laurenti

Klaus Hubacek (University of Maryland, USA)

Rebecca Jacobs

Rosie Cooper

Hanin Nashif (New Jersey Institute of Technology, USA)

John Thøgersen (Aarhus University, Denmark)

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Sustainable Consumption Research and Action Initiative (SCORAI) | c/o Tellus Institute | 11 Arlington Street | Boston | NJ |
02116