Healthcare Associated Infections: Advancing CDC’s Health Care Quality Protection Efforts through Geospatial Maps/Apps

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Abstract text: pending

A Participatory GIS Approach in Environmental Advocacy: The Case of South Dallas

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Abstract text: The use of geospatial analysis techniques in the study of Environmental Justice (EJ) and health has increased tremendously in recent years. Accordingly, using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to map the distribution of environmental risk agents is now a part of the mainstream research agenda in this field. But aside from the limitations inherent in geospatial techniques in studying EJ and health, the traditional applications of GIS also fail to acknowledge the mere fact that these approaches and their results are social constructs. This leads to inevitable questioning of the epistemological issues in GIS research that, according to many scholars (e.g. Rambaldi, Chambers & McCall, 2006), are best embedded in questions such as whose data and whose analysis?. As Fisher (2009) argues, a discursive approach can be applied as a response to such epistemological gaps. In other words, as Corburn (2005) puts it, researchers should try to integrate local knowledge and professional analysis and recognize the other knowledge. Furthermore, participation is the underlying context of EJ movement and advocacy. Public Participatory GIS (PPGIS) is a relatively new approach that presents an important shift in GIS research from positivism to more collaborative approaches that include people and lay knowledge.

In this paper, I examine the application of participatory GIS in studying South Dallas, which is an infamous case of EJ. This paper presents the results of a set of interviews with the residents of the community. This includes open-ended questions on individual experiences with environmental health issues and coping styles along with residents perception of community activism. The participatory approach includes a focus group along with a publicly available set of interactive maps. This paper is focused on the nature of the ultimate participation achieved, the process and its successes and failures.