

Designing from the Rural

Insights

- Rural areas' technological needs require solutions that are not readily apparent or possible from an urban perspective. Urban hand-me-down solutions are not enough.
- There is no single location for the rural in computing. Rurality is diverse: It is in almost every country on Earth and so resists easy definition.

Human-computer interaction is dominated by urban spaces, particularly superstar cities that have become hubs of education and technological innovation [1]. In many ways, this is natural for HCI: These cities, such as San Francisco and Boston, are home to most major tech companies and universities, as well as the majority of tech's financial and human capital. They stand in the popular imagination as bastions of the future, the places from which innovative design emerges. However, in allowing attention to drift almost exclusively to these cities, we bypass an important question: What are we missing when we focus only on the superstars?

HCI is not alone in overlooking the rural. Though 45 percent of the world's

population—over 3 billion people—lives in rural areas, contemporary economic development policies marginalize rural residents. Rural people are generally not perceived as rich sources of potential innovation, but instead as a problem to be solved or to be designed away. The rural landscape itself is often seen only as a source from which resources can be extracted, whether oil, food, timber, or cheap labor; rarely is it acknowledged for its social or cultural benefits. Inspired by postcolonial and feminist computing scholars, who ask what it means to exist on the periphery of tech movements, we wonder: What could it mean to shift rural areas from the periphery to the center of design? We