

People-Environment Interaction and Environmental Action An Introduction

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The social and behavioral sciences have taken up the interaction between individuals and the environment as their contribution to the analysis of environmental problems. That is to say, not only the influence of the environment on individuals, but, reciprocally, the effects of individual action on the environment. In this regard, an increasing effort has been - made to develop deeper explanatory models of this complex interaction - models that try to analyze the human dimensions of environmental action.

Solving environmental problems requires changing peoples everyday attitudes, and behavior, and influencing them socially, as well as constructing new identities around responsible projects. This requires a research approach in which the environment has to be considered from a different perspective: behavior change implies taking into account important aspects related to a person's attitudes, beliefs, social representations, and values. Also, theoretical models that have an application to the development of environmentally responsible actions such as those from social dilemmas, altruistic behavior theory, or social identity theory.

The social and behavioral sciences have also been interested in the models that analyze the importance of people beliefs and attitudes towards the environment in order to motivate and engage them in the development of effective behaviors concerning environmental protection. These include the influence of the structure of values, the formation of personal obligation norms to act in a given way, and the effect of structural constraints or restrictions.

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This Special Issue of the International Journal of Environmental Psychology *Medio Ambiente y Comportamiento Humano* brings together five selected papers from the 17th Conference of the International Association for People-Environmental Studies, which was held in Corunna in 2002.

The papers address a number of applications. In the first, Guido Francescato examines the relevant elements of the discourse relating to person-environment knowledge. He describes three critical points: First, *instrumentality*, or the specificity of the tasks to which such knowledge is supposed to apply. Second, *interpretation*, as a mediating process between the creation of knowledge and its application to practice. Third, *promotion*, referring to the persuasive and promotional role that research plays in the construction of the society.

The second paper also has to do with the role of promotion and the need to use a constructive, pervasive and responsive approach that, recognises and improves levels of community satisfaction. In this paper Ombretta Romice examines how Architectural students can engage in the design process within the environment, developing special skills to reinforce the abilities of people to build quality communities where social, economic, environmental, technological and public policy aspects are all taken into consideration. The collaboration with students from other disciplines, included Environmental Psychology is also addressed.

In the third paper, Julia Regueiro and Ricardo García-Mira explore the cognitive maps of the *moirantes* population, and representations of spatial information. This ethnic group lives in Carballo (Spain) and its members deal with a discriminating society, forcing a spatial differentiation which leads to a social segregation concerning different levels of safety and criminal activities. The culture and identity aspects related to this segregation are also discussed.

In the fourth paper, Maria Johansson examines how environmental design relates to social and traffic dangers. These are considered simultaneously in order to explain parental perception of social dangers in the urban environment as a constraint on children walking and bicycling.

Finally, the paper by José Vicente Pestana, Merce Rosich and Nuria Codina, deals with the study of environment satisfaction. It examines how this construct, together with the study of the self and leisure behavior, may help in the understanding of human processes coping with life

satisfaction and the environmental aspects conditioning people's quality of life.

Together, these works illustrate some of the approaches to understanding people-environment interaction, and they demonstrate the complexity of the aspects involved in this special issue. However, there is still a long way to go in our understanding of the relation between the individual and the environment. We would particularly like to underline the need for a higher level of collaboration between disciplines, such as Architecture and Psychology, in order to cast light on all aspects which may be relevant to the theoretical development of this developing scientific field.

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