

ENVIRONMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM: TOWARDS AN INTEGRATION OF CULTURAL AND TEMPORAL DYNAMICS

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Summary

Defining sustainable development as a development capable of satisfying the needs of the present generation, without compromising the possibility of future generations to satisfy their own needs, opens the way to concerns related to quality of life. The reference to needs allows for the inclusion of not only the necessity that development be harmonious towards and respectful to the environment, but equally for recognition of individuals' own well-being. Furthermore, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, globalization and its corollary—global trade and communications—creates pressure towards cultural lifestyle uniformity and brings with it fear of a standardization of values and increased anonymity. In this context, globalization is considered by many of our citizens to be a threaten to their identity.

Environmental psychology is able to analyze, explain, and furnish information capable of identifying the conditions involved in well-being and thereby help formulate decisions on environmental matters. In order to meet these requirements, environmental psychology needs to take account of two variables that have, until now, been inadequately considered in identifying the conditions of well-being: intercultural difference and the temporal dimension of our relation to the environment. The cultural

factor cannot be ignored in Western societies that are increasingly intercultural, and our relation to the built as well as the natural environment needs to be analyzed in terms of temporality. The introduction of temporal variables could contribute to the better understanding of some fundamental processes.

This article analyzes the impact of intercultural factors and the time perspective on four levels of analysis: the micro-environment, the proximate environment, the urban environment, and the global environment). The article further considers how environment psychology needs to come to terms with the fourth level of analysis—the global environment and sustainable development.

1. Introduction

Environment psychology studies individuals in their physical and social context. It aims to bring to light the logic of interrelations between individual and environment by giving a prominent place to environmental perceptions, attitudes, evaluations, and representations while at the same time taking account of accompanying behavior. Environmental psychology is interested in both the effects of environmental conditions on individual behavior, and how individuals perceive and act on the environment. Even if the point of departure of analysis is often the physical characteristics of the environment (noise, pollution, planning, and layout of physical space) or social variables in the environment (crowding, population heterogeneity, etc.), these variables frequently bring to light, over and above their specific effects, interrelational and systemic explanations. Physical and social factors are inextricably linked in their effects on individuals' perceptions and behavior. In this sense, environmental psychology studies individual-environment interactions with the aim of identifying processes that regulate and mediate this relationship.

Environmental psychology's unit of analysis is the individual-environment relation. Yet, by its very nature, one can study this relation only by examining cognitions and behavior that occur in real-world situations. For this reason, environmental psychology operates according to an *inductive logic*: theories are generated from what can be observed and from data unearthed in research in the real world. Also references to Lewin's call for combining theory and practice are often mentioned as models for environmental psychology. The orientation is both theoretical and directed towards solving practical problems. Every day, environmental psychology is confronted with the need to account for the context with which individuals are in constant contact.

The assumption that our perceptions, representations, behavior, and conduct are interdependent with the physical and social environment has frequently been mentioned in psychology and more particularly within social psychology. Brunswick as well as Gibson in their work on perception referred to the role of the environment; Tolman used the concept of the "mental map" to describe the cognitive mechanisms that accompany maze-learning; and Lewin in the domain of psychology of form elaborated the theory of the environmental field, conceived as a series of forces that operate on individuals. The first milestones of strictly environmental psychology were erected by Barker at the end of the 1960s. But it was not until the 1970s that the psychology of the interrelationship

between individual and environment made its appearance as a scientific approach. The first works of environmental psychology date from this period.

Environmental psychology, because of its very focus, has been and remains above all a psychology of space to the extent that it analyzes individuals' and communities' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors in explicit relation to the physical and social contexts within which people live and their communities exist. Notions of space and place occupy a central position. The discipline operates, then, at several levels of spatial reference, making it possible to characterize people-environment interactions at each of these different environmental levels.



Figure 1. Environmental extension, type of control, and forms of appropriation

Among other priorities, environmental psychologists distinguish systematically between the natural and the built environment, with respect to the human hold on the environment. This distinction differentiates clearly between an environment that calls for preservation, ever more important for humanity's future, and an environment shaped by human beings, for human beings—the places within which we pass our lives. Reference to the spatial dimension and the distinction between built and natural environments makes it possible to take into account different levels of analysis: (1) the micro-environment (private space: dwelling-place, work space, offices, private gardens, etc.); (2) the level of proximate environments (semi-public space, blocks of flats and their immediate surroundings, parks, green spaces, etc.); (3) the public environment level, involving both built spaces (villages, towns, cities) and the natural environment (the countryside, landscape, etc.); and (4) the level of the global environment (the environment in its totality, both built and natural) that also includes natural resources (see Figure 1).

By referring to the scale of analysis, we can account among other elements for a significant dimension in the individual-environment relation: *possibilities of control and mastery* over the environment in question. Such potential allows individuals' aspirations to dominate more or less different aspects of their environment. These are important, individual, and direct with respect to the micro-environment (when appropriation is not shared with others and control is absolute). In proximate and semi-public environments, the possibility of control and mastery are no longer individual but shared (participation at the local level becomes possible, and a sense of belonging can be created under some circumstances, but control is necessarily mediated by others). At the macro-environmental and the global environmental levels, control is beyond the range of the individual, so it can be only collective or societal. Consequently the ways the environment affects us are frequently analyzed in terms of coping strategies, taking different forms as a function of situational characteristics.

The start of the twenty-first century is characterized by two major points of reference that are likely to mark profoundly how our societies will develop: these two issues are sustainable development and globalization, both key concepts in the economics of the new century, inevitably affecting our ways of living in general.

The emergence of a preoccupation with *sustainable development* is likely to provide environmental psychology with a new impetus. The concerns that had focused essentially on the habitat, and more particularly on behavior occurring within particular physical and social conditions, have progressively broadened out towards lifestyles on the one hand, and integrating into behavioral repertoires pro-environmental behavior on the other, within the context of a more global perspective. More specifically, the 1987 Brundtland Report (*Our Common Future*) opened the way to concerns related to *quality of life* by defining sustainable development as a development capable of satisfying the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to satisfy their own needs. The reference to *needs* allows for the inclusion of not only the requirement that development be harmonious towards and respectful to the environment, but equally for the recognition of individuals' own *well-being*. This preoccupation is a clarion call for our discipline particularly to the extent that ways of relating to the environment make up an important element contributing to individual

well-being. Environmental psychology is in a position to analyze, explain, and provide information capable of identifying those conditions that are involved in well-being and thereby help formulate decisions in environmental matters.

Globalization and its corollary—global trade and communications—create pressure towards cultural uniformity in lifestyles. The progressive deployment of globalization has brought on, with good reason, fear of the standardization of values and increased anonymity. In this context, globalization is considered by many of our citizens as threatening their identity, often evoking protests focusing on questions of identity. Globalization and the anxieties that accompany it also give rise to movements demanding recognition of local or regional priorities and particularities, cultural differences, and therefore also specific needs. These assertions of differences and of uniqueness are often territorially anchored: in France, people increasingly feel different as Basques or Bretons, etc., or as French in Europe. This, without doubt, reflects a *search for identity* that finds its expression in the spatial dimension. On the other hand, the increase in both local and, for certain categories of population, worldwide mobility (economic migration of job-seeking populations or executives dislocated by their companies) exacerbates confrontations between cultures that have different needs, values, and customs that are reflected in daily life. These trends constitute the second major challenge to environment psychology in the twenty-first century. Investment in the local community, environmental appropriation, and identity are in fact the traditional concepts used by our discipline, but their inclusion within sustainable development and globalization gives them a new dimension. Globalization provides the impetus to situate the different issues of environmental psychology in a more global and at the same time culturally more relative framework.

Sustainable development and the global trade both involve the whole spectrum of themes developed by environmental psychology. The cultural and temporal dimensions intervene to different extents at each of these levels. Certainly, since the 1970s, environmental psychologists have been preoccupied by topics such as the habitat, urban ways of living, environmental needs, local involvement, and the search for identity, as well as pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors. But today we have to reposition the whole gamut of these issues both in an intercultural and a transcultural perspective and in their temporal dynamics. This seems to be the major challenge facing us.

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Biographical Sketch

Born in Switzerland on March 24, 1944, **Gabriel Moser** moved to Paris in 1966 and studied psychology at the Sorbonne. He is director of the Laboratory of Environmental Psychology, associated with the

Center National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), and runs the advanced Diploma in Environmental Psychology (DESS) at the Institut de Psychologie of the Université René Descartes-Paris V.

His first works, published in 1976, deal with the determinants of noise annoyance. Progressively his interests shifted to specific urban behavior involving stress (aggression, vandalism and helping behavior, politeness). More recently he has been doing research on interpersonal relationships in urban settings and on appropriation of different urban spaces.

Gabriel Moser has published five books *Les stress urbains* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1992; Italian translation 1996); *Les relations interpersonnelles* (Paris: P.U.F., 1994), and *L'agression* (Paris: P.U.F., 1987; Brazilian translation 1991, Mexican translation 1992), *People, Places and Sustainability* (Göttingen: Hogrefe & Huber, 2002), and about 30 scientific publications, most of them in international (*Environment and Behavior, Journal of Environmental Psychology, Acoustic Letters, Cahiers Internationaux de Psychologie Sociale*) and French (*L'Année Psychologique, Revue de Psychologie Appliquée, Psychologie Française*) journals.

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