

# A Special Introduction

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## 1. Introduction

The launch of a new journal is always an exciting occasion. Of course, it is a very tangible sign that an area of scholarship is developing and that there is a body of work being undertaken that is of sufficiently high standard that warrants publication. It is also very auspicious, to use a word that I am very conscious has important meanings in Asian cultures. It is auspicious because it makes a statement not only about the present - and indeed past research - but it looks to the future as well. It is a statement of commitment and of confidence that this area of scholarly endeavour is important.

Some might ask whether we need another journal in environment-behaviour research. After all, we are already well-served by two *journals in particular* – *the Journal of Environmental Psychology* and *Environment and Behavior*. There are other journals as well, perhaps more closely tied to particular disciplines such as the *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research*. And then there are many interdisciplinary journals which publish environment-behaviour papers as those having other foci such as environmental risk or environmental policy. Despite the presence of these publications, there is still a need for more outlets for the interesting and important research that is currently being undertaken in environment-behaviour relationships in general and in particular, which involves Asians not only in Asia but also those living in non-Asian countries with focus on the non-spatial context.

## 2. Environment-Behaviour Research in and for the Global South

An archaeologist once suggested to me that if you look at a map of archaeological findings, this does not tell you where the significant historic or pre-historic sites,

communities and societies were. Rather, it tells you where archaeologists work. Of course, one hopes that there will be a close correspondence between the two, but this will not necessarily be the case. The same goes, I suggest, for environment-behaviour research. Both our cognitive map of the sub-discipline and the physical map of where we actually work by and large reflect our own personal interests and societal priorities through research funding agencies and government policy.

Thus most environment-behaviour research has been in the global North, where addressing these kinds of issues have received a comparatively large amount of attention. There are many reasons for this; available funding from government and industry; the protection and the development of the environment has been more affordable in the North; the availability of specialist researchers. There is an imbalance of reported research in the journals cited above either coming out of or discussing the Global South, for example, there is relatively little research published from Africa or India. However, the amount of environment-behaviour research being undertaken in Latin America is on the increase and there are notable research communities in Brazil, Mexico, and Chile to name but three. Likewise, there is a growing research community in Asia. This was reflected in the maiden ASEAN Conference on Environment-Behaviour Studies (AcE-Bs) in Kuching in July 2010. Eleven countries participated, the overwhelming majority from the region. Furthermore, over 113 abstracts were received. This is auspicious evidence of a growing research community and a ready justification for the launch of this new journal. If we are to take the view that environmental behaviour research should become more inclusive and integrative, then it cannot afford to exclude two-thirds of the world's population.

Economic development in the global North is inseparable from environmental degradation in the global South. Industrial development and carbon emissions impact predominantly in the Global South. Moreover, the natural resource hungry economies of the Global North not only impact upon the environments and communities of the South through resource extraction and the exporting of pollution and environmental degradation, but development in these countries is hampered by crippling debt charges and structural adjustment programmes insisted upon and enforced by the North which lead to social and environmental inequalities.

In response to these inequalities, there has been a tendency for research in the social sciences as well as NGOs to focus on identifying people's needs. Unfortunately, needs are often defined by those in power (i.e., the North), not the people whose needs and rights are supposedly being satisfied. Thus, the argument is made that we need to conserve the rainforests, wildlife, water supplies and prevent pollution, etc. While these arguments are laudable and justified, they often fail to take into account the needs of those people's in whose spaces wildlife and rainforests exist and whose environments are damaged. If these environments are being conserved at the expense of the livelihoods of local people, or if preventing environmental damage is at the expense of securing jobs for local people, this raises difficult issues. Of course, one wants to see the environment protected but

how one secures that raises all sorts of moral questions about which local people have a right to be heard. There is a need for North-South cooperation as opposed to the North deciding what has to be done in the South to prevent environmental degradation, while continuing to pollute and increase emissions whether through production in the North or through production relocated to the South. This dilemma is illustrated by a research project which I am currently undertaking investigating, amongst other things, the policies of trade unions towards climate change and environmental degradation in the global North and South. Our results point at one and the same time to the needs as well as the difficulties concerning collaboration and solidarity across the North-South (Räthzel and Uzzell, 2010). This research has highlighted the tensions which exist for trade unions in the North who are concerned to take on social justice issues, and act with solidarity to defend the interests of those with less power and influence in the South. But if standing up for improving the conditions of someone's job means that a job is no longer available then whose justice is being served? As one trade unionist said to us "I'm going to die quicker from having no job than from climate change." Another said "For us exploitation is better than starvation". This is not an easy conflict to resolve, but if it is to be solved much more cooperation, understanding and solidarity between North and South is necessary.

Rather than framing the discussion on the basis of satisfying needs, especially when the issues of who determines needs is contested, an alternative approach focuses on *environmental rights* in which those without power define their needs themselves and try to secure the rightful access to resources to satisfy those needs. Within a context of self-determination, transparency in decision-making and accountability it is especially important to ensure that all involved are informed. Research is the key to this, and environment-behaviour research is crucial in the decision-making process. This new journal has the potential to inform decision-makers in both the North and the South so that political movements as well as governments are informed is informed by local cultural as well as global perspectives.

### 3. The Scope of the Journal of ASIAN Behavioural Studies

Moscovici reminds us that the development of social psychology was inspired "by the hope that it would contribute to our understanding of the conditions which underlie the functioning of society and the constitution of a culture" (Moscovici, 1972, p49). The domain of social psychology was seen to include the study of everyday life and "relationships between individuals and between groups, as well as ideologies and intellectual creativity in both its individual and collective forms" (*ibid*). Such a definition must include the relationship between people and their environment because within a holistic critique of the person we cannot separate people from their environment - people are part of the environment and the

environment is an essential part of the person. Although Moscovici was writing about social psychology, the hope to which Moscovici refers has to be set within an environmental context and research on the non-spatial environment-behaviour relationships are fundamental to our understanding of ‘the functioning of society and the constitution of a culture’. The papers to be published in this journal have an important role to play in that process. I would like to highlight six qualities characterising environment-behaviour research. They are not the only ones but they strike me as significant as they capture the uniqueness of environment-behaviour research.

First, environment-behaviour research is necessarily interdisciplinary. The problems we face in both the built and natural environment require the co-operation and collaboration of many disciplines - psychology, sociology, architecture, planning, geography, economics, the environmental sciences, education, archaeology, landscape architecture, interior design and engineering. Environmental psychologists typically work with colleagues in each of these disciplines over the years and without doubt to the enrichment of the research in all of these disciplines. It is difficult to conceive of environment-behaviour research that could not be undertaken without interdisciplinary collaboration. Bringing together such diverse disciplines in such a commonwealth of scholarship is probably unparalleled in the academic world.

Second, environment-behaviour research is multi-method. There is not one single method that is appropriate to use all the time for the range of work research that we undertake. People-environment research uses both qualitative and quantitative methodologies; for example, questionnaire surveys, in-depth interviews, focus groups, simulation studies, behavioural mapping, laboratory and field-based experiments.

Third, environment-behaviour research is policy-oriented. In other words, much of the work we do aims to inform government policy on the most pressing social, environmental and economic issues of the day. At the same time environment-behaviour research aims to support social movements in their aim to develop grassroots oriented forms of participation. This has never been more necessary with the current contribution of researchers to issues of sustainable development.

Fourth, environment-behaviour research is necessarily applied. While much research seeks to increase our fundamental knowledge about environment-behaviour relationships, much of this is done in the context of addressing real-world problems. People-environment research is contracted by governments, industry and NGOs to generate solutions which address the problems of everyday life in our cities and rural areas and enhance the quality of life of its citizens.

Fifth, one of the defining characteristics of people-environment research is that it is context-aware. One of the shortcomings of so much environmental psychological research is that it treats the environment simply as a value-free backdrop to human activity and an empty stage upon which we act out our lives. In essence the environment is regarded as noise. It is seen as expedient

in much traditional psychological research (especially experimental research) to remove or reduce as much extraneous 'noise' as possible in order to reduce contamination of the findings. But as environment-behaviour researchers we know that the environment -- the noise -- is a crucial part of the equation. We cannot understand human perceptions, attitudes and actions without reference to the social and environmental context in which they are formed. And of course, the environmental context in which perceptions, attitudes and action occur also has a temporal dimension; we cannot understand people, spaces and places without taking into account time.

And finally, the most effective environment-behaviour research is international. As it is difficult to conceive of environment-behaviour research undertaken in disciplinary isolation, so is it only slightly less difficult to think of environment-behaviour research undertaken in national isolation. IAPS (International Association of People-Environment Studies) has been in existence for 25 years which is testimony to the enduring value of international collaboration. For example, I have ongoing projects with colleagues in France, the Netherlands, Spain and Sweden. There is not a single week, sometimes a single day, when I am not in communication with colleagues from these countries. We work in a comparatively small field, certainly within our own individual countries. I am sure that this has only served to encourage international collaboration and international projects.

The papers that are published in this first issue of the **Journal of ASIAN Behavioural Studies** reflect many of these characteristics. It is hoped that future issues of the Journal will continue to take, for example, context-aware, interdisciplinary, applied, policy-oriented and multi-method approaches. Doing so will lead not only to a transformation of our understanding of the problems our cities, nations and the planet faces, but is also more likely to generate solutions which are useable and useful (Solesbury, 2001, p5).

I began this introduction with a discussion of the role and importance of research in the global South. It is intended that this Journal will have a regional focus. It is vitally important that researchers in the region feel that they have an outlet for the dissemination of their research that reflects the particular characterises and features of everyday life and the environments of not only Asians in Asia, but also those living in non-Asian countries . It is critical that researchers in the South have means and opportunities to reflect their position in these global debates. I benefitted hugely from attending the maiden ASEAN Conference on Environment-Behaviour Studies (AcE-Bs) in Kuching. It is essential that more researchers in the North are exposed to the kinds of perspectives and knowledge that are represented in this journal. It is also important that researchers from the North publish in the journal so that there can be a dialogue between north and south. It is noteworthy that this first issue has already started that dialogue.

## References

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