ASPECTS REGARDING THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF THE INDIVIDUAL'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract. At the global level, more and more concerns refer to environmental degradation and climate change. Climate change and environmental concerns have consequences on the behaviors of citizens in all countries, regardless of continent. Knowledge of biological, physical and chemical processes, as well as the skills of environmental psychology are essential in the analysis and implementation of solutions regarding the conservation of natural resources and the control of environmental pollution. In solving environmental problems, both technical and human knowledge are important. Between them it is necessary to be a collaboration so that the solutions to these problems are effective. These climate changes concern both individual behaviors and human activities, trade, industrial activities, leisure, etc. Since the 80s, an increasing importance is given to the psychological and social aspects of human behavior, which are considered one of the causes of environmental problems. Environmental psychology is an interdisciplinary field. In order to understand the human factor and its role in and towards environmental changes, the role of environmental psychology is essential if we want to change the individual's attitudes and behaviors towards the environment. The social dimension will play a decisive role in the requirements of sustainable development and individual behaviors towards environmental issues.

Keywords: environment, climate change, individual, social dimension, environmental psychology

INTRODUCTION

The environment is not a simple setting. In most psychology research it should take into account the environment as a setting and consider it a variable that disturbs the phenomena being studied. (MOSER, 2009)

Goffman E. showed that individuals behave differently depending on the place and people they are confronted with. (GOFFMAN, 1973; GOFFMAN, 1974) The physical environment and the social environment become very important when it comes to understanding human perceptions, attitudes and behaviors as they manifest in everyday life. The environment becomes a meaningless setting when the environment is empty, without the people who live in that environment. (MOSER, 2009)

Barker R.G. considers the behaviors of individuals and the environment in terms of interdependencies, not as independent elements. (BARKER, 1968; BARKER *et al.*, 1964)

Gibson J.J. considers the environment to provide individuals with opportunities and constraints, which each individual is free to use. (GIBSON, 1950; GIBSON, 1979)

Environmental psychology is a branch of psychology that studies the interactions between individuals and their physical and social environment. This field investigates how the environment influences people's behavior, well-being, perceptions and mental health. Environmental psychology focuses on various aspects of the environment, including natural, urban and built environments, and how they can be designed or modified to improve the quality of life. (MOSER *et al.*, 2003)

Environmental psychology considers that the individual is conditioned, in his relationship with different spaces, by the cultural and social context in which he evolves, by his path and by the aspirations he has towards this space. (MOSER *et al.*, 2003; MOSER *et al.*, 2006)

The individual's relationship with the environment can only be understood if we take into account the cultural and social contexts in which this relationship is actualized, the collective and individual history that conditions perceptions and behaviors, as well as particular needs and aspirations. This interaction is also dependent on the individual's projection for the future, in relation to the environment with which the individual interacts. (figure 1) (MOSER, 2009)
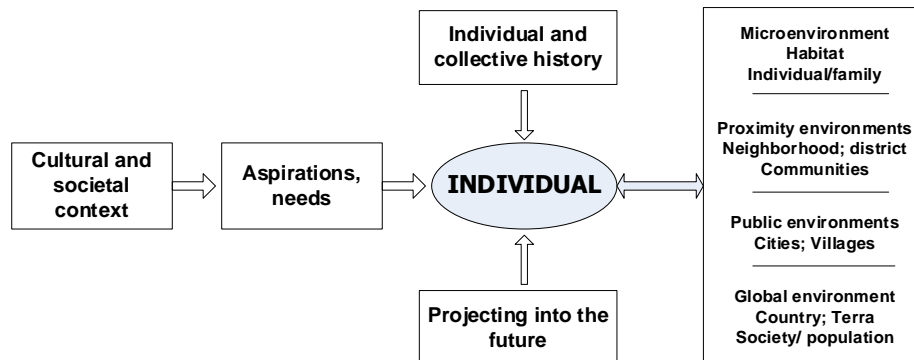

Figure 1. The context of individual-environment relations (MOSER, 2009)

The key aspects of the social dimension of the individual's relationship with the environment refer to: social norms and pro-environmental behavior, collectivity and community action, group and environment identity, education and collective awareness, as well as social structures and environmental impact.

Some people build their personal and group identity around green values and sustainable behaviors. These identities can be cultivated and strengthened through membership in groups or organizations that promote environmental protection. The sense of belonging to a community that values the environment can motivate individuals to engage more actively in pro-environmental practices. Ecological communities or eco-villages are examples where group identity plays a central role in promoting sustainability.

Environmental education in schools and public awareness programs can influence environmental attitudes and behaviors at the community level. Programs that engage entire communities in learning and action activities can have a significant impact. Media campaigns and other forms of public communication can change social perceptions and attitudes towards environmental issues. Concerted efforts to educate and inform can transform individual behaviors into social norms.

Environmental problems are often linked to social inequalities. Disadvantaged communities are more exposed to pollution and other environmental risks. Addressing these inequalities is essential to environmental justice. The active participation of communities in environmental decision is crucial. Citizen involvement in urban planning and natural resource management decisions can lead to more sustainable and equitable solutions.

Sustainable development focuses not only on economic and environmental aspects, but also on creating fair and inclusive societies. (SCHMUCK *et al.*, 2002)

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The social dimension of the individual's relationship with the environment refers to how social interactions, cultural norms and community structures influence perceptions, behaviors and attitudes towards the environment. This dimension emphasizes the fact that our relationship with the environment is not only an individual one, but is deeply interconnected

with the social and community context in which we live. Social norms, group identity, community efforts, education, and social structures play essential roles in how individuals perceive and interact with the environment. Promoting a collective culture of sustainability and the active involvement of communities in environmental initiatives are essential for building a sustainable and equitable future. The present work presents a content analysis of data, information from the field of environmental psychology to understand the social dimension of the individual's relationship with the environment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In 2019, the first International Summit on Psychology and Global Health took place in Lisbon. This summit highlighted the role of human behavior and human choices in accelerating climate change, as well as the consequences of climate change on physical and mental health and well-being. The General Council of Psychology in Spain proposed the creation of a working group on psychology and environment, for the professional development of psychology in the fields of: climate change and global warming, the psychological impact of the human habitat, the relationship of psychology with the objectives of sustainable development and human well-being and its relationship with the environment. (HERNANDEZ, 2023)

The practical applications of environmental psychology are in: urban and architectural design, ecological interventions in the environment, improvement of working environments and design of educational spaces.

Applying the principles of environmental psychology to urban planning and architectural design to create spaces that promote health, well-being and social cohesion. (CHURCHMAN, 2002; BECHTEL *et al.*, (EDS.) 2003)

Developing programs and policies that encourage pro-environmental behaviors and reduce negative environmental impact. For example, recycling awareness campaigns and initiatives to reduce energy consumption.

Environmental psychology has provided most of the scientific information that emphasizes the need to consider the environment as a set of variables closely related to human behavior. The way to characterize environmental psychology is to describe the themes it approaches by collecting the problems it studies. (HERNANDEZ, 2023) Table 1 presents the research topics addressed by environmental psychology.

Using knowledge from environmental psychology to create workplaces that reduce stress and improve employee productivity and satisfaction. For example, by optimizing natural lighting and reducing ambient noise.

Creating schools and universities that support the learning and development of pupils and students through stimulating and healthy environments. (BARKER, 1968; BARKER *et al*,. 1964)

The benefits of environmental psychology are revealed in the improvement of well-being, the promotion of sustainable behaviors, the optimization of built spaces. (UZZELL *et al.*, 2006; UZZELL *et al.* 2008) Research shows that access to green spaces and natural environments can reduce stress and improve mental health. Understanding the factors that motivate green behaviors can help develop effective interventions to protect the environment. Applying the principles of environmental psychology to architectural and urban design can create spaces that support the functioning and well-being of users.

The social dimension of sustainable development refers to the social aspects that influence and are influenced by the process of sustainable development. (SCHMUCK *et al.*, 2002)

This involves addressing equity, social justice, community participation, well-being and quality of life for all segments of society.

Table 1

Relevant contents addressed by environmental psychology

No. crt.	Research topics in environmental psychology
1.	Attitudes, values and beliefs related to the environment
2.	Place attachment and place identity
3.	Psychological well-being, quality of life and environment
4.	Climate change
5.	Knowledge of the environment
6.	Environmentally responsible behavior and sustainable behavior
7.	Design and evaluation of public spaces
8.	Natural environments and environmental management
9.	Stress and physical environments
10.	Evaluation of specific environments
11.	Overcrowding, privacy, territoriality, personal space
12.	Environmental intervention and education
13.	Participation and volunteering in the field of environment
14.	Perception of risk
15.	Landscape perception and recovery capacity

Source: HERNANDEZ, B., 2023 – Psihologia mediului. Înțelegerea relației dintre oameni și mediul înconjurător, Editura Litera, București, România.

Among the key aspects of the social dimension of sustainable development we mention: social equity and justice, community participation and involvement, education and awareness, health and well-being, culture and diversity, governance and policies, social security.

a) **Social equity and justice**

- *Reducing inequalities*: Sustainable development involves reducing social and economic disparities, ensuring that all members of society benefit from growth and development. This includes equitable access to resources, job opportunities, education and health services.

- *Social justice*: It involves promoting human rights and justice, combating discrimination and ensuring a fair distribution of the benefits and costs of development.

b) **Community participation and involvement**

- *Public participation*: It is essential for sustainable decision-making. Including local communities in planning and decision-making processes ensures that diverse perspectives and needs are considered and respected.

- *Community involvement*: Encouraging active citizen involvement in sustainable development initiatives such as environmental conservation projects, community gardens and environmental education programs.

c) **Education and awareness**

- *Education for sustainable development*: Promoting education that encourages sustainable behaviors, raising awareness of environmental and social issues and developing skills for active participation in society.

- *Public awareness*: Information and awareness campaigns to educate the population about the importance of sustainable development and how they can individually contribute to this process.

d) **Health and well-being**

- *Access to health services*: Ensuring universal access to quality health services, including mental health and disease prevention, is essential for social well-being.

- *Quality of life*: Sustainable development involves creating decent living conditions, access to clean water, healthy food, adequate housing and a safe and healthy environment.

e) **Culture and diversity**

- *Respect for diversity*: Promoting respect for cultural diversity and social inclusion. Sustainable development must respect and protect the identity and cultural heritage of communities.

- *Integrating cultural values*: Valorizing traditional knowledge and cultural practices that contribute to sustainability and integrating them into modern development solutions.

f) **Governance and policie**

- *Inclusive governance*: Promoting transparent, accountable and inclusive governance that ensures that all voices are heard and that decisions are made for the benefit of society as a whole.

- *Sustainable development policies*: Developing and implementing policies that integrate economic, social and environmental objectives to create balanced and sustainable development.

g) **Social security**

- *Social protection systems*: Creating and maintaining social protection systems that support vulnerable people, including providing a safety net for those affected by economic and environmental change.

- *Workplace security*: Promoting decent and safe workplaces, ensuring that workers are protected from exploitation and have access to fair working conditions.

Sustainable development requires changing the economic paradigm, as well as the social paradigm, the mentality. The change in mentality requires making visible the disproportion between the amount of goods produced and the social and economic costs associated with their production. Environmental sustainability is also social, it requires the application of the principle of equity, solidarity and austerity, so that human development reaches all the inhabitants of the planet. (HERNANDEZ, 2023)

The social dimension of sustainable development is essential to create a fair and inclusive society where all members have equal opportunities and benefit from economic growth and well-being.

CONCLUSIONS

In order to understand the human factor and its role in and towards environmental changes, the role of environmental psychology is essential, if the individual's attitudes and behaviors towards the environment are to be changed. The social dimension will have a decisive role in the demands of sustainable development, of individual behaviors towards environmental problems.

Environmental psychology is an interdisciplinary field essential to understanding and improving the relationship between people and their environment. By applying knowledge in this field, we can create environments that promote health, well-being and pro-environmental behaviors, thus contributing to a more sustainable and balanced future.

By approaching social equity, promoting community participation, ensuring access to education and health services, respecting cultural diversity and implementing responsible governance policies, the objectives of sustainable development can be achieved, which will benefit the whole society. This dimension emphasizes the importance of integrating social aspects into all development strategies and initiatives, to ensure a sustainable and equitable future for all.

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