Since architecture centrally involves constructing environments for people, why has the architectural community largely ignored environmental psychology, the field that analyzes how well we do in meeting people's needs? Is it that we don't want to know or, even more troubling, that we don't care how we're doing? Or have our various modern and postmodern ideologies gotten in the way, allowing us to convince ourselves that the enormous literature in environmental behavior has little relevance to either the discipline or practice of architecture? And is it time, as architecture has become much less ideological and much more tolerant of difference, to look again at what environmental psychology has to offer us?

A tolerance for difference comes in handy when diving into this literature. For architects accustomed to the visual representation of ideas and information and allergic to data tables and descriptive statistics, environmental psychology, with its dry prose and deadpan graphics, seems to speak another tongue. Likewise, the tendency of environmental psychology to focus on what it can measure as much as what really matters can lead even the most broadminded among us occasionally to ask: Who cares? Yet, once we get past the differences in appearance and approach between architecture and environmental psychology, we will find, like travelers to a foreign country, a great deal to learn about ourselves and our practices.

Understanding "the other," though, rarely happens without resistance. Architects, for example, sometimes complain that environmental behavior research uncovers the obvious, and when you scan the abstracts in the major journals in the field—*Environment and Behavior, Journal of Architectural and Planning Research, Journal of Environmental Psychology*—you will find a lot that does seem self-evident: Inner city children benefit from green space, windows in the workplace improve job satisfaction, aesthetically pleasing stairwells increase their use, and ventilation affects worker performance.

And yet how much does this claim of obviousness stem from our own desire to avoid facing up to what we, as architects, have done over the last fifty years? What this research really makes obvious is that we have been designing cities without green space, workplaces without windows, offices without adequate ventilation, and stairwells from hell, and this points toward a much broader critique of the architectural community. The work of environmental psychologists reveals an architectural profession that has been too compliant in
ON PRACTICE

ARCHITECTS BEHAVING BADLY

accommodating the private sector's rush to maximize profits and the public sector's desire to minimize spending. At the same time, environmental behavior research shows an architectural discipline that has been overeager to impose its aesthetic ideologies and utopian visions on others, particularly the most vulnerable among us. No wonder many architects don't want to read this literature.

And those who do may still not be able to, because of its inaccessibility. Much of the findings of this research exist in specialized journals and conference proceedings usually available only in university libraries. In a recent discussion, a number of architectural deans and practitioners from some of the largest firms in the country identified the lack of easy access to research information as a problem that both groups need to address immediately, charging a subcommittee to develop a way of indexing and searching what research exists on the websites of architectural schools and firms. The will to use research exists, but the way seldom does.

The environmental psychology community has addressed the need to make aspects of its work more inviting and accessible. Some researchers, such as UCLA architecture professor Ben Refuerzo and Tulane architecture professor Stephen Verderber, have gone a long way toward showing how environmental behavior findings can be made visually accessible. Computer graphics, digital photography, and desktop publishing have enabled researchers to make their work more appealing to aesthetically oriented readers. At the same time, this research community has developed web-based databases of its findings, bringing what used to sit on university library shelves onto the desktops of designers in their offices.

One of the best of these is “InformaDesign” (www.informedesign.umn.edu). Started with a sizable grant from the American Society of Interior Designers, this database contains concise summaries of the findings of hundreds of research papers, sorted according to space or building types (corporate, health care, residential, retail, etc.), issues (materials, codes, aesthetics, human factors, social factors, etc.), and occupant categories (age, gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic standing, etc.) As such databases become more common, their content will undoubtedly be used more, which may lead to a greater efficiency and better morale, the research shows that clutter in offices leads to greater efficiency and better morale, the research shows that clutter and the ability to personalize office space improves worker well being and job satisfaction.

Consider just a few conclusions drawn from the myriad of research out there. Contrary to the assumption that more unencumbered space increases people's use of parks, research shows that increasing the number of trees does so, especially in and around public housing. Contrary to the assumption that increasing class sizes reduces costs, research shows that crowding too many children together in schools and daycare centers increases instructional and behavioral costs. Contrary to the idea that reduced clutter in offices leads to greater efficiency and better morale, the research shows that clutter and the ability to personalize office space improves worker well being and job satisfaction. Such results show that research can provide architects with valuable tools. When clients want to cut the number of trees, crowd more children into schools, or overly control workspaces, the research shows how these very things negatively affect the most important and most costly aspect of any building: the interaction of neighbors, the productivity of employees, the happiness of children, and the operations of facilities. In not using such information to convince owners to do the right thing, we architects have been just as penny-wise and pound-foolish as the cost-cutting clients we complain about.

This research can also convince architects to do the right thing. For example, some environmental psychologists have begun to emphasize the natural environmental aspect of the field. These “ecological” psychologists have revealed the sometimes superficial or ineffective ways in which architects have ad-
ON PRACTICE

addressed environmental problems, tackling sustainability as if just one more feature of a building. At the same time, this research suggests that we must see human behavior in its largest possible context—the natural as well as the built environment—if we are to understand not only how we behave, but the effects our behavior has on others, human and non-humans alike. Environmental psychologists have also focused on social justice issues, which get equally short shrift from many architects. By looking at the difference that culture, race, gender, and poverty make in the built environment, this research also provides data to back up the critique of power that underlies so much contemporary architectural theory. Indeed, the degree to which psychologists and theorists address many of the same issues, albeit in different ways, makes one wonder if the widespread neglect of environmental behavior research in architectural theory is, itself, a form of power politics, a type of turf protection that some theorists seem to see everywhere but among themselves.

Not everyone can know everything, and the enormity of the environmental psychology literature can be a deterrent to architects’ understanding of it. Still, that is no excuse for the outright neglect of this research by architects over the last several decades. If nothing else, environmental behavior studies can help us see how much the architecture culture is, itself, an environment in which we behave in often unexamined ways, based on unspoken assumptions, and resulting in unanticipated consequences. Were we to become more self-conscious and self-critical of our own professional and disciplinary culture, we would find that environmental psychology has much to offer, not least of which, like all good psychology, is an understanding of ourselves.

NOTES

1. AIA Large Firm Roundtable Deans’ Forum, April 21, 2004, San Diego, California. I am chairing a task force looking into how research conducted in schools and firms can be made more readily accessible to students, faculty, and practitioners.


3. Other databases include that of the Environmental Design Research Association (www.edra.org) and Research Design Connections (www.researchdesignconnections.com).

4. Studio culture in most schools tends to be ideological, focusing on ideals, and deontological, focusing on students’ intentions. In most studio reviews, the attention frequently gets placed on what a student intended to do and how the results did or did not achieve those intentions. At the same time, the research most students engage in involves site-, program-, or precedent-specific inquiries. This often seems inevitable or natural when in fact it represents just one way of looking at things. Environmental behavior, with its empirical tradition of testing and measuring, and its mode of evaluating actions based on their consequences, offers another, complementary way of understanding.


10. Roger Barker coined the term ecological psychology to differentiate his emphasis on the setting in which behavior occurs, as opposed to the typical focus of psychologists on the behavior itself. However, people such as William Ickes, Harold Proshansky, Leanne Richard, and Gary Winkel among many others, have expanded it to include nature as a behavior setting and an environment dramatically affected by human behavior.


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