



THE CONTEXT OF SPATIAL BEHAVIOUR AND EXPERIENCE

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The idea of environmental man as integral to an understanding to the process of change, man not as a passive receiver of stimuli, nor as psychologically autonomous, but man is dialectical tension with his milieu, interacting with it, shaping it and being shaped by it. The boundaries of such a concept are broad with implication for environmental planning, the design of office and living space, the conservation of natural resources and the building of institution such as schools and hospitals where environmental form is intimately related to the educational and therapeutic process which it serves. Thus the environment was conceptualized as a complex stimulus field whose properties emerge from and are determined by the organization and interrelationships of its component parts.

With some basic idea about the person in the environment in mind, the way in which the environment impacts upon the person could be considered in a number of ways. One way is to considered the two categories of impact: the environment as a setting for behavior, the ecological perspective; and the environment as a source of demand on the person. One focus has been recognize that in any interaction the environment providing a behavior setting. The term behavior setting is associated with the work of Roger Barker and Herbert Wright whose fieldwork in the 1950's was a radical departure from accepted mainstream practice in psychological research.

In the work of Barker and Wright, the behavior setting provided information which allowed explanation for the behavior observed. Individual move through a wide range of behavior setting each day and it is these, not personality traits, which control their behavior. In essence, the setting provides clues as to the roles to be played by the person in the setting and determines the range of behaviors that are possible in that setting. A micro-analysis might lead us to the behavioral concepts of discriminative stimuli (Skinner, 1953).

People in setting

In assessing the behavioral fit of the setting, Baker introduced the concept of undermining and over manning. Each behavior setting has an optimum number of people in a behavior setting has an optimum number of people. When the setting

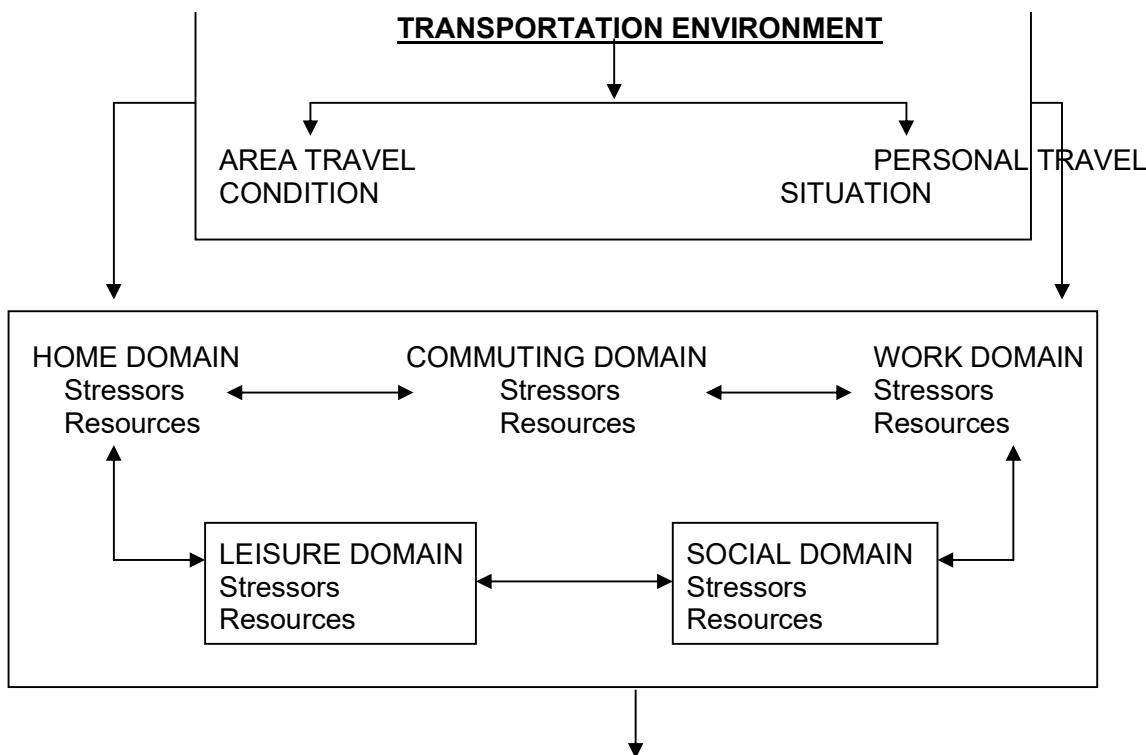


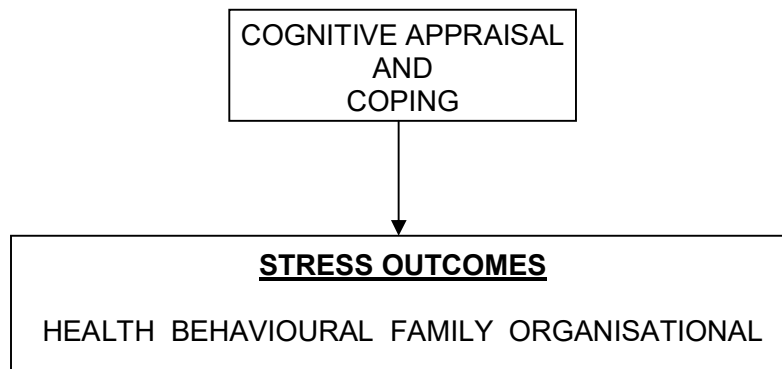
becomes crowded on congestion then solution would include :increasing the physical size of the setting, controlling admission into setting or controlling the amount of time each person can spend in the setting. This overstaffing issues will be considered in more detail when we considered the research on crowding. The work on behavior setting thus provided us with a great deal of insight into the impact of the environment and indicated the need to incorporate this approach in environmental planning and design.

Settings, systems and place

This was the concept of place which also extends the behavior setting of Barker to include the phonemic world of the individual .The central postulate is that people always situate their actions in a specifiable place and that the nature of the place, so specified, is an important ingredient in understanding human action and experience (**Cantor, 1886, p.8**).

The argument is that behavior is place specific in the sense that while one behavior is appropriate in one place, the same behavior would be inappropriate in another place. One can see the importance of understanding the place specific behavior in planning and designing of environments.





While ecological psychology as exemplified by Barker has had a major impact on environmental psychology, many researchers including those whose background was within ecological psychology, such as **Wicker (1987)**, have become critical of the concept of behavior setting. As with the radical behaviorist perspective psychology generally, the rigid focus on external factors generated some useful data but is ultimately limited and incomplete without some consideration of the cognitions, emotions and motivations of persons. The objections of modern environmental psychologists to behavior settings as defined by Barker tend to reflect the criticisms offered by Bronfenbrenner. In other words they argue that behavior settings provide incomplete explanations because they do not include the person's experience and appraisals of the context, and because they appear as isolated settings which do not consider the interdependence of parts within an individual's world. The concept of place includes these aspects and is offered as a way of building upon the ideas generated by the behavior-setting perspective.

The relationship between behavior setting and place is captured very nicely by and **Stokols Shumaker (1981)**. Places are viewed not only as composite of behavior-shaping forces, but also as the material and symbolic product of human action. In this quote behavior shaping forces reflect the behavior setting which is combined with the material and symbolic product of human action to produce the concept of place. Stokols' addition to the concept is to consider the element of commonality, by proposing that place involves shared meanings. In other words the social representation of place involves important aspects which are shared by those who inhabit the place. In addition he emphasizes the architectural elements which transcend the more immediate functional and social aspects of Barker's behavior setting. Between Cantor and Stokols a holistic model of the context of behavior is presented in terms of place incorporating the ways in which the environment serves a function, motivates the person and is evaluated by the person all at the same time. It is this total experience of the



environment which is important in determining the behavior that occurs within it, not just the cues and constraints provided by Barker's behavior setting. The shared meanings or social representation of place unite groups in their preference or attraction to a specific place. Different terms are used to describe this link between people and environments. Stokols talks of place dependence, while others talk of place attachment (**Shumaker & Taylor, 1983**) and place-identity (**Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983**). The social representation of place or the sharing of dependence, attachment or identity to place is analogous to the development of social identity (**Tajfel & Turner, 1979**). The relationship between social identity and physical environments has not been investigated, although it is clear that social groups are located within physical and geographically defined contexts. The concept of behavior setting has evolved into a more holistic concept of place, reflecting the interactional model of person-environment relations. In doing so it has raised the issue of motivational and evaluative aspects, which leads to the issue of how the environment impacts upon the emotional life of the individual, something that is contained within the area of stress.

BEHAVIOUR SETTINGS:

Behaviour- settings are characterized by specific- place and time boundaries, and human and non human components organized in such a way that regularly occurring activities can be carried out relatively smooth. The Ecological Research of Roger Barker and his associates (**Barker, 1968 and 1978**) is an empirical work based on the transactional approach in environmental psychology. The field emphasizes on motor environment in relation to human behaviour.

Barker, a colleague of **Kurt Lewin** although was trained in the Gestalt tradition, but formulated the problem of human behaviour in different terms. For several decades, Barker has examined the psychological processes in a variety of environmental settings-small towns, schools, churches etc in accordance with the thesis that behaviour is inextricable linked with the physical and social environment in a continuous flow. For Barker, the tasks of ecological psychologists are to understand the stream of behaviour and to describe the natural units of psychological functioning in physical settings as they unfold and change direction.

A central concept for understanding the dynamic quality of person-environment relationships is the Behaviour Setting. A behaviour setting is founded in space and time and has a structure which interrelate physical, social and cultural properties so that it elicits common or regularized forms of behaviour.

Behaviour setting according to **Wicker, (1972)** is a "bounded, self-regulated and ordered system composed of replaceable human and nonhuman components that interact in a synchronized fashion to carry out an ordered sequence of events called the setting programme". Thus a behaviour setting is a confluence of



actions in relations to places and things, these actions are organized in systematic temporal sequences and patterns. Behaviour places and temporal dynamics are mutually interlocked such that behaviour gains meaning by virtue of its location in a particular spatial and temporal context; and the context gains meaning by virtue of the actors and actions that exist within it.

Barker has described several attributes of behaviour setting. These attributes will help us to understand some particular characteristics of behaviour setting:

- (1) Behaviour settings have one or more standing pattern of behaviour. These patterns of behaviour are not behaviour of individuals separately, but of a group of people. They are the overall behaviour pattern that one observed if he went to a temple, a football game etc.
- (2) It involves not just behaviour but a milieu and may include manmade objects such as building, streets, chairs, tables etc. It may also entail natural features of environment such as hills, streams etc. The milieu exists independently on the standing pattern of behaviour in the setting and it exists independently of anybody's perception of the setting.
- (3) The standing pattern of behaviour in the setting are similar in structure to the milieu that is the physical and temporal aspects of the setting and standing pattern of behaviour in the setting are interdependent. Given these characteristics of behaviour setting Barker said that the milieu is synomorphic to the behaviour.
- (4) Definite time and place boundaries are located that the behaviour outside the boundaries is readily discriminate from those within boundaries.
- (5) A hierarchy of positions that influence the behaviour setting or have responsibility for its function.
- (6) The capacity to generate the forces necessary for its own maintenance that is, pressures develop to assure that the program me of the behaviour setting is adhered to the necessary components are brought into the setting, shaped and if necessary expelled when they become disruptive.

Barker's objective was to determine the relationships between what he calls extra individual patterns of behaviour that is the behaviour that all people exists in a behaviour setting and the structural pattern of that setting. At the core of Barker's definition of behaviour setting is a social purpose or a meaning involving a set of social rules, which unifies or integrates into an already system, what people do, how they do it, and when and for what intervals of time. Thus behaviour setting is a naturally occurring unit, having physical, behavioural and temporal properties and it reveals a complex interrelationship among its parts. Although behaviour setting may appear as static



(within a stipulated period of time) but in fact it is conceived of as dynamic. Behaviour setting exerts a substantial degree of influence over the behaviour of their occupants. Wicker has referred to this phenomenon as behaviour environmental congruence. It is not just that settings act on people to affect their behaviour. Nor it is only that people act on settings instead a continual interaction between the people in a setting and other aspects of the setting itself, patterned state of affairs.

In order to understand Barker's view of stability of settings and how behaviour-environment congruence occur two questions must be considered. "How are behaviour settings and people related to one another"? In other words "what are the channels or circuits that connect the people in a behaviour setting to the setting itself"? The second question is "how do they work"? To answer the first question Barker suggested the following circuits exist between settings and their occupants **(1) Goal Circuits (2) Programme Circuits (3) Deviation Countering Circuits (4) Vetoing Circuits.**

Thus one of the important relationships between behaviour setting inhabitants and the settings itself is the goal circuit which involves peoples' perception of goals within the setting, ways to obtain and achieve these goals and the satisfaction derived from their achievement. Thinking in these terms it is seen that people and settings are by paths and routes to goal satisfaction. For example, if a professor's lecture notes in the undergraduate college are boring or have little to do with the students' final examination it would not be surprising to see him lecturing in an empty hall.

Barker used the programme circuits to designate a second way in which people and settings are linked. The essential features of the programme circuits are knowledge of the people in a behaviour setting, about the programme of that setting and knowledge of how to control and organize that programme. Programmes are much like agendas in a meeting. They specify the behaviours to be enacted in a setting and they are usually carried by people who act as performers in the setting. Programme circuits thus specify in a fairly precise way the behaviours to be enacted by the members and performers in the setting and the nature of the transactions between performers, members and other components of the setting.

The 3rd one is called the deviation countering circuit. Although transactional in most respect, Barker does assume to the operation of generic homeostatic mechanism that regulate behaviour settings, maintain the programme of that setting and smooth their functioning. The deviation countering mechanisms links people and the setting to maintain the stability of the settings and of the people's behaviour. For a setting to be maintained in fact, the deviations in the setting must be dealt with. Deviations are inadequacies or modifications that prevent the inhabitants from achieving the satisfaction they seek. If for example a proprietor corrects a



salesman's errors in pricing articles, he is using a deviation countering circuit to maintain the setting for example confectionary store intact.

Deviation countering circuits need not only deal with the behaviour of the setting inhabitants physical aspects of the setting may require to be maintained as well. In the same setting, the confectionary store, if the fridge does not function properly for the desired amount of cooling goods, a deviation countering circuit is used when the fridge is repaired. A setting will thus be maintained. Barker noted that deviation countering circuits are characterized by peoples' ability to sense the presence in the setting of conditions that prevent the programme of the setting from being carried out. They are also characterized by the action designated to counteract that interfering conditions and maintain stability in the setting.

The final type of circuit or channel that specifies a mode of relationship between a setting itself and its inhabitants, is what Barker called the Vetoing circuits. Vetoing circuits are much like deviation countering circuits, except that vetoing circuits of the setting is eliminated rather than repaired.

The functioning of the four circuits can be elaborated with an example of University library. University Library is a behaviour setting where students come with the goal of getting greater knowledge about a definite subject. The students either make notes from books, read different books. It is expected that silence should be maintained in the library so if necessary, the student talk in a low voice which does not disturb the others in the library. But if the humming should become so loud that it creates problem for others the librarian may warn the students not to talk and maintain silence (deviation countering). If the students do not listen the warning and go on talking, the librarian may send them out to maintain the atmosphere of the library (Vetoing mechanism).

So, the programme behaviour setting through its goal circuits programme circuits, deviation countering circuits and vetoing circuits modify the human behaviour to promote their effectiveness. Barker and Wright focused on behaviour. Cognitive and emotional processes were considered only when manifested in overt behaviours; subjective reports were largely excluded. The key environmental concept was behaviour setting.

The focus on behaviour was not exclusive, however. Perhaps the most important departure was Barker's theory of under manning, later known as staffing theory. It considered both behavioural and psychological consequences of insufficient staffing of behaviour settings. The psychological consequences were described as tertiary, following primary effects on the behaviour itself and secondary effects on the behaviours of setting occupants (**Barker, 1968**).

Despite these developments, ecological psychology did not become a major force in the diversification of psychology in North America. It did achieve recognition and varying degrees of influence in several psychological specialties,



notably environmental, community and developmental psychology. The impact of other relevant specialties, however, is including social and organizational psychology was very limited.

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