A Model of Environmental Psychology in interaction with Islamic thought

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Abstract

Mankind is always interacting with an environment that contains various meanings and layers with each of which the environment behaves differently, and on the other hand, this behavior is effectively reflected back to the environment. In recent decades, experimental environmental psychology has sought to help solve the issues posed to human societies by pursuing two objectives of theoretical understanding of human interactions with the environment and applying this understanding in practice. In pursuit of these objectives, the area of knowledge has succeeded to build theories and achieve practical findings. Nevertheless, applying these achievements in an Islamic society faces theoretical and practical challenges in both «description» and «prescription», which in turn necessitates further investigations about «Islamic Environmental Psychology». The present study aims to present an applied paradigm of environmental psychology in interaction with Islamic thoughts, which can be used to organize «location-behaviors» of contemporary living in order to facilitate the realization of an Islamic lifestyle. In regards, the present study began with the three constituents of «location-behavior»; that is, humans, the environment and the mechanisms needed for the human-environmental interaction, and posed three questions: what social, psychological and cultural characteristics of humans, from the Islamic perspective, affect the environment? What are layers of the environment that affect humans under certain circumstances? And finally, what mechanisms are required for a human-environment interaction in Islamic viewpoint?

To answer these questions, two frameworks were proposed: The first relies on environmental psychology by accepting the assumption about different layers of the environment (from the objective to the subjective environment) and assesses the effect of sociocultural environment in a comparative study. The second framework relies on the Islamic doctrines and develops a reference framework consisting of both Islamic views and environmental psychology views. Following a survey of the two proposed frameworks, the second one was taken as the reference comprehensive framework in this article.

To develop this comprehensive framework, the relation between religious epistemology and experimental science was first discussed. Unlike the modern perspective that sets the religion-science-art trinity against the emotion-intellect-sense one, in respective order, or at most assumes a unity between religion and art by mixing emotion with sense, the Islamic perspective holds that religion rules these three areas, and only one aspect of religion is strongly associated with emotions, which is «faith».

In the second step, the Islamic version of environmental psychology debate was analyzed in three areas of the individual-entity system within the framework of the anthropology of religion, the collective-

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social system within the framework of religion’s attitude toward society, and the body-space system within the framework of religion’s attitude toward the body, not as separate distinctive areas, but as three spatial human-environment experiences. That is to say, the fundamental difference of environmental psychology from an Islamic viewpoint is so vast that it expands from the «bodily area» to the «spiritual aspect» in the individual-entity line, from the «corporeal world» to «incorporeal world (the invisible)» in the body-space line, and from «routine patterns of life» to the debate on the «united ummah as a timeless entity» in the collective-social line. In the final step, a three-layer system was devised to discuss the intended paradigm, which includes collective references to the current state of the society and Islamic texts. The first layer includes identifying «local phenomena» as clear points in Islamic jurisprudence and ethics, whose «position» in religious sources is identifiable in behaviors, rituals, sensory perceptions and spiritual perceptions. In fact, the identified «local phenomena» have not yet really emerged in environmental psychology within an Islamic framework, and if this layer is the only one concerned, this phenomena can be more or less studied in experimental environmental psychology. For practical purposes, the phenomena can be classified in two areas – «general local behavioral-psychological phenomena», indicating phenomena with no direct relationships with the environment, and may only be affected by it, and «specific local behavioral-psychological phenomena», indicating phenomena with an established bodily-environmental aspect. The second layer, which is the first real step toward an «environmental psychology» within the framework of Islam, seeks to identify the (correlative or causal) «relationship mechanisms» between «general” and “specific” local phenomena in religion that have been identified in the previous layer. Finally, the third layer emerges from linking and creating connected loops of general and specific mechanisms of the second layer and through creating a sub-system, and may have certain concepts and components in common with experimental psychology.

According to the results, two approaches are applicable in the development of an Islamic environmental psychology paradigm: a conscious approach and a meta-conscious one. The first approach is informed and based on the rules and regulations of jurisprudence and Islamic orders. In this approach, attempt is made to extract the basic concepts by reference to the original Islamic sources and to understand the Islamic position on man-made environment irrespective of the external determination of the past centuries. The second approach is meta-conscious and normative (relying on values and knowledge), is based on the recommended or prohibited behavioral patterns, provides a system for the regulation of behavior-body relationships, and takes priority over mentalities and even time and place values. Although an axiom of all religious doctrines, this approach has been less emphasized in theorizing, compared to symbolic concepts. Compared to the mainstream «behavioral sciences» as «subjective» perspective on the role of social behavior, this approach proposes a middle perspective in forming architecture and an «objective» perspective, based on the role of the subject and object and the third factor, culture, in relation to the role of architecture in society.

The final outcome of the present study, that is the Islamic environmental psychology paradigm, aims at producing theoretical and practical knowledge and addresses four conditions: past conditions, i.e., the quality of life before modernism (the popular culture), present conditions, i.e., the current quality of life, desirable conditions, i.e., the quality of life deserved by humans from the viewpoint of Islam, and possible conditions, i.e., the quality of life that can be handled by humans, in order to create behavioral benchmarks in accordance with Islamic view point. The authors recommend that both conscious and meta-conscious approaches can be used, since the conscious approach is based on jurisprudence and orders and thus acts as a framing shell, prevents distortions to some extent, and is also the doorway to theoretical knowledge and implications. also, the second approach as the meta-conscious one, should ideally create environments that are affected by the recommended behavioral patterns of Islam.

Keywords: Place, Behavior, Human, Environmental Psychology, Islamic though