Current Research on Ecological and Social Psychology

Mission statement

The mission of CRESP is to bridge ecological and social approaches to human behavior. Ecological psychology has slightly different meanings, but CRESP adopts a broad approach. It focuses on the reciprocal relation between the organism and the natural or human-made environment. Key themes center on how climate, presence of forest, the natural stressors (e.g., viruses or disaster risk) or human-made stressors (e.g., noise or traffic), population density, may affect cognition, emotion, and behavior of humans (and other animals). Social psychology focuses on the reciprocal relationship between the organism and the social environment. Key themes center on how other people influence emotion, cognition, beliefs, coordination, communication, power, cooperation. And finally the interplay of ecological and social psychology focuses on the reciprocal relationship between culture, social interaction, and relations and key aspects of the ecological and societal environment, including broad societal variables such as those shaped by nature (e.g., climate), economics (e.g., wealth), political science (governance), or communication (media).

The inspiration for CRESP is multifold. First, psychological science has become broader and broader, as the world gets smaller and smaller. Psychology no longer focuses on WEIRD societies (Western, Educated, Industrialize, Rich, and Democratic) but examines and often compares societies that differ strongly in their ecologies and culture. Second, the focus on ecology is also inspired by the fact that scientific progress is served by the combination of experimental approaches in controlled environments, which have been characteristic of social psychology, as well as research in field settings where ecological differences have been around for a longer time and where cultural differences have been developed. Third, the world around us faces challenges that should be addressed by psychology, including climate change, migration (refugee crisis), corruption, polarization in society, and other issues that often transcend a particular culture, country, or ecology.