

**KNOWING AND ACTING IN THE ENVIRONMENT:
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN KNOWLEDGE,
BELIEFS AND ACTIONS
IN ENVIRONMENTAL STUDENTS AND ALUMNI**



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ABSTRACT

Interest in the relationship between individual and group beliefs and actions in the environment has grown in recent years. Although there is a great deal of research concerning wider social interaction between people and the environment, little research has been forthcoming to explore the actions of informed actors. Research on informed actors can be a useful litmus test for wider community interaction with the environment and speaks to the necessary change that is to come.

The environmental conundrum in contemporary society can be expressed in terms of a paradox that while most people have positive environmental attitudes and are concerned about environmental issues, a much smaller proportion of people actually translate their concern to action. It is therefore important to explore why in today's climate of environmental concern and uncertainty about the future, there is a great deal of incongruence between the way people interact with the environment, and the way they would prefer to interact with it. The role played by informed actors needs to be explored because their location to the center might point to the view that any inconsistency noted between theory and practice, can be accounted for in terms of differing degrees of focus and intimacy on specific issues in terms of time and space.

This research found that there are significant differences between what environmental students and alumni do in practice in environmental terms. The variation between the two groups sheds light on strategic alignments (theory and practice) that social actors make as they negotiate the complexities of every day lived experience. To bring the two groups to alignment is possible through change strategies. Such change is conditional on degrees of focus and intimacy on specific issues in terms of time and space and the way in which they might appropriately be explained.

The findings of this study are beneficial for all who are interested in how ideas are acquired (education) and how they are realized (practice). The research techniques and methodology from this study can be applied to a multitude of social situations where knowledge, attitude and practice converge and are in need of explaining. Human action models are complex as is life itself. In light of such complexities it is recommended that future research focus upon the social intercultural subtleties and differences that object orientation plays towards effective interaction with the environment in terms of time and space.

KEY WORDS: ENVIRONMENT/ EDUCATION/ INFORMED ACTORS/ THEORY AND PRACTICE/ CONFLICTING VALUES/ CONSENSUS/ TIME/SPACE

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