

The stability of preference over time and its relationship with emotion: a case study

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Introduction

Research on environmental preference has studied a wide range of predictors that increase or decrease the likelihood of an environment being favoured. This research has usually relied on the rating of photographic stimuli of existing environments. Environmental simulations have also been occasionally used, such as sketches, drawings, models, computer generated renders and photomontage.

The main objective of our research was to examine the role that *emotion* plays in environmental preference. That is, how environmental preference can be affected by the way people emotionally react to an environment and by the mood they are in at the time of an environmental evaluation.

There is a strong research base for the simulation of feasible new environments in a variety of built environment contexts. Within environmental preference research, the rationale for using environmental simulations could be broadly described as understanding people's preferences, or evaluating their responses to future environments. However, little is known of the stability or variability of people's responses over time in a real design process: from the prospective phase (final-design) of the new environment to the occupation of new premises (in-situ).

Method

We present results from a longitudinal case study of an office relocation, where staff moved from a variety of shared and open-plan offices to a new building consisting mainly of open-plan offices. First, staff (n=32) recorded their responses a month prior to being relocated based on a photorealistic Computer Generated Render (this visualisation was prepared and used by

the design team to communicate the new environment). Subsequently, staff responded to the same questions whilst working in their new open-plan offices, three and six months after having been relocated.

In order to explore the links between emotion and preference we considered the *mood* at the time of the evaluation (using the Positive Affect and Negative Affect Schedule) and the *emotional reactions* people have to the environment (using semantic differentials). The responses to the office environment were also gathered in the form of perceived attractiveness of different areas of the work environment (*interior aesthetics*) and a measure of *overall preference*. Finally, a model of *overall preference* was explored using *interior aesthetics* and *emotional reactions* as predictors.

Results

Results showed that the measures of the *interior aesthetics* of the building were significantly different at the pre-relocation stage when compared to the two in-situ ratings in all but one of the areas: the one where staff inputted into the design process. *Overall preference* was the same at pre-relocation and three month survey stages and had declined by the six month survey.

The *mood* that people were in at the time of the evaluation (mainly Positive Affect) had an effect on *overall preference* through the *emotional reactions* people had to the environment.

The model exploring the predictors of *overall preference* showed that, at the pre-relocation stage, both *emotional reactions* and *interior aesthetics* explained *overall preference*. During the three month survey however, *interior aesthetics* mediated the effects between *emotional reactions* and *overall preference*, indicating their primacy

during the initial person-environment interactions. Finally, at the six month survey only *emotional reactions* accounted for *overall preference*. Implications of these

results for environmental psychology and preference research are discussed in this paper.