

REPORT ON THE 8TH BIENNIAL CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY IN ZURICH (SWITZERLAND) 6th to 9th Sept. 2009

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This year, the 8th Biennial Conference on Environmental Psychology took place in Zurich, Switzerland. The conference was hosted by Heinz Gutscher (University of Zurich) and Hans-Joachim Mosler (EAWAG, Zurich), and as usual, the conference language was English. Andrée Helminger and Bertolt Meyer (University of Zurich) splendidly organized and superbly managed the event including all the hard to anticipate details that eventually determine the verdict of the attendants. The conference was the biggest so far, with 226 researchers from 24 countries: Germany (27%), Switzerland (23%), the UK (10%), the Netherlands (9%), Japan, Thailand, Austria, Turkey, Canada, Sweden, Belgium, Italy, Australia, France, Hungary, Norway, Poland, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Finland, Romania, Slovenia, and the United States. Once again, the conference offered a great opportunity for young researchers to present their work – 48% of all participants were PhD students.

Both Heinz Gutscher and Hans-Joachim Mosler opened the conference with thought-provoking and welcoming speeches. Working in different institutes, they offered distinct research perspectives and thus provided a perfect opening for a diverse program that followed. The program of the conference consisted of 40 sessions with around 3-5 presentations each. The sessions covered a multitude of topics, ranging from virtual reality and simulations of restorative environments, environmental decision making, conservation and use of regenerative energy sources, human-based design and architecture, interdisciplinary approaches to sustainable consumption, connection to nature over to developing interventions to conserve energy and promoting certain types of transportation. The conference program and the abstracts can be downloaded from: www.sozpsy.uzh.ch/conference/Program_and_Abstracts.pdf

The official 2009 C.F.-Graumann lecture was delivered by Paul Slovic (University of Oregon at Eugene). His talk about “Risk as Analysis and Risk as Feeling: Seeking Environmental Sensitivity in a World of Data” was highly invigorating and passionate. Frances E. Kuo (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign) gave an inspiring presentation about “The Role of Green Places and Green Views in a Healthy Human Habitat”, and last but not least, Wander Jager (Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, The Netherlands) spiced up the last morning of the conference talking about “Can Marketing Save our Environment? A Prospect of Using Social Simulation to Understand Environmentally Relevant Consumer Behavior”. In order for all participants to follow the keynote lectures, another room with live video captivation had to be made available.

The conference dinner took place in the rooftop restaurant of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH), with its stunning view over the city of Zurich. The cherry on the pie of the evening was a spectacular sunset. During the evening, the C.F.-Graumann award was announced. This year, the prize went to Katrin Häfner (Friedrich-Schiller University Jena, Germany) for her diploma thesis on Existential Threats on Environmental Motivation and to Sonja Haustein (Ruhr-University Bochum, Germany) for her doctoral thesis on Personal Determinants on Mobility Behavior and Mobility-Related Environmental Impacts.

Over the years, the Biennial Conferences on Environmental Psychology have established themselves as the European venue for presenting and discussing leading environmental and conservational psychological research. In 2011, the next, the 9th conference will take place at the Eindhoven University of Technology, The Netherlands, with the prospect of yet another world-class program, helping to make this world a better place!