



Symposium: Diversifying Networks How Culture Infuses the Environment

October 8 - 10, 2025
Senckenberg Research Institute, Frankfurt am Main

Second Circular

Diversifying Networks. How Culture Infuses the Environment

**International Symposium at the Senckenberg Research Institute, Frankfurt/Main,
October 8 – 10, 2025**

Organizer: “The Role of Culture in Early Expansions of Humans” ([ROCEEH](#))

Research center of the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities
at the Senckenberg Research Institute and the University of Tübingen

Venue: Senckenberg Research Institute, Senckenberganlage 25, 60325 Frankfurt/M.
Entrance: Robert-Mayer-Str. 2, 60325 Frankfurt/M.

We do not charge a conference fee.

If you would like to participate, please contact claudia.groth@senckenberg.de.

Hominins are exceptional constructors of their ecosystems. Over the course of human evolution, their achievements increasingly impacted the environment on a global scale, transforming the conditions for development and evolution in unprecedented ways. Like some animal species, hominins used tools to access resources—but they did so on a much broader scale. They shifted their role in the carnivore guild from small game catchers and active scavengers to big game hunters, thus providing food for other consumers. They expanded the diversity of available food resources through the use of new technologies. They utilized raw materials that their ancestors had previously ignored. They enriched their resource space with a wide array of artifacts, which became part of the learning environments for future generations. They diversified their social relationships and developed new forms of complex interaction. Cultural achievements enabled them to penetrate areas that were previously unappealing or inaccessible. The ecological consequences of this expansion were unpredictable.

In doing so, hominins created new conditions for individual performance and development, for social learning, and for evolutionary processes—not only within their own species but also for synanthropic niches of other species.

With the ROCEEH Symposium “*Diversifying Networks – How Culture Infuses the Environment*”, we aim to explore and discuss the interplay between cultural achievements and environmental aspects. How has the interconnection between hominins and their environment evolved? What impact did hominins, through their cultural innovations, have on their surroundings and their resource spaces? How did these resource spaces change—and how, in turn, did these changes affect the evolutionary path of hominins and their cultural accomplishments?

At this international conference, we aim to bring together researchers who examine, from various perspectives, the material, social, and ecological aspects of hominin achievements, their macro- and micro-environments, and the mutual dependencies that have shaped human evolution. By jointly assessing the current state of knowledge, we hope to gain a more comprehensive and diachronic understanding of the diversifying ecological networks within which human evolution has taken place.

Diversifying Networks. How Culture Infuses the Environment

International Symposium 8-10 October 2025, Frankfurt/Main

Programm

Wednesday, 8 October 2025

16:00-17:00 Arrival and Registration

INTRODUCTION – Diversifying Networks. How Culture Infuses the Environment

17:00-17:15 Friedemann Schrenk, Nicholas J. Conard: Opening of the symposium and welcome address

17:15-17:45 Miriam N. Haidle: Introduction

KEYNOTE

18:00-19:00 Annette Kehnel: Diversifying Resources, Sustainable Economy and Human Resilience

19:00 Ice breaker

Thursday, 9 October 2025

SESSION 1 - How Humans Shape Themselves and Their Environment

9:00-9:30 Karen Hardy: Stringing It All Together. The Social, Technological and Functional Roles of Plants as Key Drivers in Human Evolution.

9:30-10:00 Ramiro March: Reconstructing the History of Fire, Control and Application of Thermal Energy and Its Technical, Social, Symbolic and Environmental Consequences

10:00-10:30 Sabine Gaudzinski-Windheuser and Lutz Kindler: Neanderthal Ecology at Neumark-Nord (Germany)

BREAK 10:30-11:00

11:00-11:30 Jessica Thompson: The Coevolution of Foragers and Landscapes in the Woodland Belt of Southern-Central Africa.

11:30-11:45 Discussion (Chair: Angela Bruch)

SESSION 2 - Cultural Environments as Niches for Other Species

11:45-12:15 Shumon T. Hussain: Coupled Human-Nonhuman Feedback Systems of the Deep Past

12:00-12:45 Charles Stépanoff: Hybrid Communities. Biosocial Approaches to Domestication and Other Trans-Species Relationships

LUNCH 12:45-14:00

14:00-14:30 Anaïs Vignoles: The Influence of Climate Variability on the Gravettian Cultural Diversity and Evolution

14:30-14:45 Discussion (Chair: Jesper Borre Pedersen)

SESSION 3 - Adaptations in Sociality Changed the Rules for Interaction

14:45-15:15 Nataša Djurdjevac Conrad: Agent-Based Modeling of Hunter-Gatherer Societies and Their Cultural Evolution

BREAK 15:15-15:45

15:45-16:15 Fiona Coward: New Materialism Meets Niche Construction: Exploring Complementarities Between Evolutionary Theory and Traditional Ontologies.

16:15-16:45 Miriam N. Haidle: Communities of Practice as Resource Space

16:45-17:00 Discussion (Chair: Andrew Kandel)

18:00 – 19:00 City Tour

19:30 Conference Dinner

Friday, 10 October 2025

SESSION 4 - Opening New Spaces: Hominin Mobility

9:00-9:30 Matt Grove: The Generation and Maintenance of Cultural Diversity in Structured Populations

9:30-10:00 Miriam Garcia Capin: Taming the Darkness. The Earliest Visual Culture in Cantabrian Caves

10:00-10:30 Iwona Sobkowiak-Tabaka: Scaling Late Palaeolithic Mobility in the North European Plain

BREAK 10:30-11:00

11:00-11:30 Jesper Borre Pedersen, Peter Yaworsky, and Felix Riede: Cultural Packages and Landscape Memory – Discussing the Divergent Fates of LRJ and Aurignacian Expansions

11:30-11:45 Discussion (Chair: Christine Hertler)

SESSION 5 – Modeling Diversifying Networks

11:45-12:15 Christine Hertler, Miriam N. Haidle, Ana Mateos, and Jesús Rodríguez: Cut&Run – Measuring the Advantages of Tool-Supported Scavenging

12:15-12:45 Jesus Rodriguez: Hominins as facultative scavengers - Biotic Interactions and Ecological Constraints

LUNCH 12:45-14:00

14:00-14:30 Ana Mateos: Are Hominins Equipped to Be Efficient Scavengers?

14:30-15:00 Jan-Olaf Reschke, Carolina Cucart-Mora, Kamilla Lomborg, Matt Grove, Christine Hertler, and Marie-Hélène Moncel: Surviving in the Pleistocene Guadix-Baza Basin – From Small-Scale Models to Large-Scale Insights

15:00-15:15 Discussion (Chair: Christian Sommer)

BREAK 15:15-15:45

PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

15:45-16:30 Final Discussion (Chair: Andrew Kandel)