



SENCKENBERG
NATURE RESEARCH



THE ROLE
OF CULTURE
IN EARLY
EXPANSIONS
OF HUMANS

Symposium:
Diversifying Networks
How Culture Infuses the Environment

October 8 – 10, 2025

Senckenberg Research Institute, Frankfurt am Main

Organized by the ROCEEH Research Center

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**HEIDELBERGER AKADEMIE
DER WISSENSCHAFTEN**

Akademie der Wissenschaften des Landes Baden-Württemberg

Scope:

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. Drawing on archaeological, anthropological, paleoecological, and modeling expertise, we will discuss various aspects and questions related to the following themes:

1. Hominins shaped themselves and their environment
2. Cultural environments as niches for other species
3. Adaptations in sociality changed the rules for interaction
4. Opening new spaces: hominin mobility

Preliminary Program:

Wednesday, Oct. 8, 2025: 4-7 pm

Opening and Introduction
Keynote by Annette Kehnel

Evening Ice breaker

Thursday, Oct. 9, 2025: 9 am – 6 pm

SESSION 1 - How humans shape themselves and their environment
Lecturers: Karen Hardy, Ramiro March, Sabine Gaudzinski-Windheuser and Lutz Fiedler, Jessica Thompson, Jesus Rodríguez, Ana Mateos, Anaïs Vignoles

SESSION 2 - Cultural environments as niches for other species
Lecturers: Chris Baumann, Shumon Hussain, Charles Stepanoff

Discussion

Evening Conference dinner

Friday, Oct. 10, 2025: 9 am – 4 pm

SESSION 3 - Adaptations in sociality changed the rules for interaction
Lecturers: Fiona Coward, Miriam Haidle, Natasha Conrad, Amy Clark

SESSION 4 - Opening new spaces: hominin mobility
Lecturers: Christine Hertler, Matt Grove, Iwona Sobkowiak-Tabaka, Jesper Borre Pedersen, Fiona Laviano

Closing discussion

Venue:

Senckenberg Research Institute
Senckenberganlage 25, 60325 Frankfurt am Main

Speakers are invited by the ROCEEH Research Center.

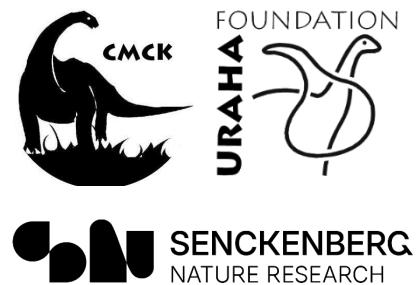
Non-Speakers: Poster presentations are welcome. Conference fees do apply and will cover the conference materials, as well as coffee and lunch breaks. Further information will be communicated in due course. Non-speakers should register by sending an email to Claudia Groth or Julia Hess at info@roceeh.net. If you plan to present a poster, please send your abstract when you register.

Institutional co-organizers

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