
European Land-use at 6000BP: from on-site data to the large-scale view

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Workshop background and planned activities

The workshop aims at synthesising our understanding of land usage, particularly of the different types and modes of farming and landscape management strategies (plant and animal) across the region, for the time-slice 6000BP.

Although the main focus here will be on farming and landscape management strategies (e.g. animal herding) we are also interested in other land usage activities and the use of other raw materials where such information is available (e.g. location of settlements, field systems, industrial activities). Land cover reconstructions are being pursued independently via pollen analysis in connection with the LandCover6k PAGES workgroup and we are not intending to discuss these data here.

A preliminary land use classification has been developed, it is intended to be used world-wide, hierarchical and scalable, but its use at a European level has not been discussed:

The main goals of the workshop will be to:

- (i) Discuss the land use classifications that have been developed for other regions of the world and ensure these are fit for purpose for Europe at 6000 BP; these will be available as a draft document and circulated to participants in advance of the meeting;
- (ii) Establish in broad terms the areas and regions for which we have good data and knowledge on land usage at 6000BP and identify those regions for which data are currently lacking;
- (iii) Where there are good datasets, discuss what we can say about land usage for these regions, being mindful of sources of uncertainties; attempt some preliminary mapping of these datasets; an example may be found attached;
- (iv) Identify potential high-resolution case study areas that might merit further analyses and collaborative effort on.

We recognise that the scale of the problem of defining and understanding land usage at 6000BP for Europe is ambitious, likely to be iterative, and subject to considerable discussion. However, we feel that the workshop would be a useful first step in the right direction. Much of the work would happen within the workshop but will require additional work in advance and afterwards. Several large collaborative projects have already developed datasets and techniques to address large scale issues and we believe now is a good time to commence this exercise. Moreover, it is important the archaeological community undertakes this exercise so that the end products are archaeologically relevant and useful to our communities, as well as others who are keen to see this exercise happen (see below).

The planned 'products' from the workshop would be a multi-authored research paper that discusses the (i) land use categories within a European context and (ii) preliminary comments on locations for which we have good datasets to address land usage at 6000 BP and (iii) some selected mapped case study regions where datasets allow us to comment on and ideally map land usage – to be determined by the group. The group can, however, discuss further any other outputs they would like to see developed, depending upon the focus of the discussion.

Funding

The workshop is funded from PAGES

LandCover6K project

It is concerned with synthesising understanding of land cover and land use, across the globe, for selected time-slices of the Holocene, ultimately to create improved global land use and land cover models for the climate modelling communities. There are well developed approaches to reconstructing land cover that have been developed over many years by palaeoenvironmental communities but this is not the case for archaeological datasets for reconstructing land use at a regional and continental scale. The overall project is co-ordinated by Marie-Jose Gaillard, Kathy Morrison, Marco Madella and Nicki Whitehouse and divided into activities concerned with Land Cover and Land Use.

You can read about progress with Land Use here: <http://landuse.uchicago.edu>

Wider relevance

Until now, much knowledge of land use has been based on modelled on problematic foundations (e.g. assumed demography) rather than empirical archaeological data, with considerable criticism from the archaeological communities and known inaccuracies. Within the Land Use section of the LandCover6 project, we are moving towards addressing the issues associated with collating and understanding the archaeological record.

We also recognise that land use is important for asking archaeological questions and the intention is to ensure they are archaeologically relevant and of interest to the archaeological communities and beyond. We believe that Land Use Maps, for instance, could find a role with stakeholders in relation to traditional ecological knowledge and land-use in the current debate on resilient and sustainable management of natural resources and small-scale farming. Discussions around different types and modes of cultivation, plant and animal foods, and the use of other raw materials across different continents are also likely to aid archaeological discussions around the role of farming in wealth degeneration, the rise of social inequality and considerations of long term food security. It is intended that these avenues could be explored when land use maps and datasets are available.