



Conférence de l'OSUR

An Archaeological Perspective on Humans and Climate Change in the Neotropics: an example from the Archaic Period of Puerto Rico

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Résumé/Abstract :

Given the urgent challenges that people are facing globally in regards to climate change, understanding how it affects people has never been more relevant and urgent. Research has demonstrated that the archaeological record has stories to tell where climate has changed and people have lived through it, but these stories are not easy to understand. While some studies point towards the collapse of societies upon change in climatic conditions, others demonstrate their resilience. It is not yet clear under what conditions a society is vulnerable, and what aspects of climate change enhance those vulnerabilities. This presentation focuses on the research process of articulating climate change and human societies from the stand point of environmental archaeology. Human decision-making occurs on landscapes, within environmental and geographical characteristics that dynamically respond to human activity and to climate. Weather patterns and atmospheric phenomena articulate to shape climate, which is a longer-term observation. The Archaic Period in Puerto Rico (ca. 5-2kya) presents an excellent example where the neotropical island adjusted to sea level rise and changes in weather and atmospheric patterns, and people acted in response to their experienced and perceived risks and priorities. The identified climatic and geomorphological processes are imperceptible from the point of view of large-scale climate modelling, but are very significant to the daily life of local communities. Understanding human vulnerabilities to change requires scale-awareness to better understand the articulation of social and natural phenomena contextualizing human adaptation strategies.

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