
Modelling hunter-gatherer cultures after nature? – Reality or fake research? An old and unfortunately forgotten anthropological discussion

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Abstract

In a world of smart desktop approaches, it can be healthy to go back to the roots of the discussion of whether it is possible to model the behaviour of small-scale human cultures on the basis of their environment – or not. Our days modellers appear to have forgotten this at times quite heated debate, which played an important role in the late 19th and early 20th centuries' anthropology. Apparently, this disagreement was never settled. Around the 60s archaeological theoretical modellers decided that it was possible to model hunter-gatherer's culture and behaviour on the basis of their environment and thus to ignore social anthropological data, supporting the opposite point of view. This was the start of a tradition of archaeological modelling that ignored cultural differences and with time also, as the developing landscape ecology provided this information, environmental complexity and small-scale dynamics. It is difficult to see any scientific rationale behind such an archaeological isolation from other disciplines' relevant data. A more likely driver could be the demand for cheap and fast management methods that do not create a demand for too expensive management. The presentation outlines the history of the debate in focus here and suggests the development of alternative approaches.

Keywords: modelling, hunter, gatherer, environmental determinism, landscape ecology

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