Regional and chronological development of fishing: its significance in past economies and their socioeconomic dynamics

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Fishing was one of the simplest sources of livelihood in prehistory. Where available, fish constitutes an important food resource. Apart from the nutritional value, all parts of the fish have been utilised for various purposes. Humans’ adaptive and innovative ability to conquer new ecological niches and to respond to environmental stress led to the invention of new fishing technologies and e.g., mass-harvesting facilities and highly organised procurement strategies. Sometimes fisheries are labour-intensive and collective effort may have been required. Hence, fishing techniques may be closely related to the socioeconomic, cultural, and sociopolitical systems in fishing communities, as well as to population dynamics. Cultural constraints, behavioural interactions, and social norms might have regulated fishing and the consumption of aquatic resources. Exploitation technologies might express group identity, and provide insights into contacts and communication between different fishing societies. Still, aquatic resources and procurement technologies are often poorly visible in the archaeological record. Therefore, knowledge about the importance of fish in prehistoric subsistence is often quite uncertain. This session aims to deepen current knowledge within the framework of local, supra-regional, and diachronic development and application of active and passive fishing techniques in the harvesting of aquatic resources as well as other linked activities. Where direct evidence of fish utilisation is insufficient, various forms of indirect evidence are employed. Settlement patterns, site location, fishing technology, and resource specialisation reflect the utilisation of fish as a food source, or as a source of raw materials. Therefore, apart from studies utilising archaeological fishing-related materials, we would also like to encourage researchers contributing studies applying analogous data, from the viewpoint of, e.g., ethnography, anthropology, and ethnohistory to help build the frames of reference and further our understanding about fishing as a phenomenon and its long-term dynamics.
Presentation Preference - Regular session (half day)