
Neanderthal intra-site spatial patterns and social dynamics: What are we talking about?

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Abstract

The intra-site spatial patterns of lithic artefacts and their density are traditionally used in Prehistory as proxies for activity areas and social organisation of past human groups. This approach allows identifying domestic units, inferring number of co-resident, understanding site function and duration of occupation. These topics are especially interesting when looking at communities of archaic humans and investigating their behavioural variability, traditions, and complexity. The problem is that too often in Prehistory we are comparing data that are not at the same scale or are not the result of similar behaviour. In this presentation, we will focus on two main features that strongly affect the social interpretation of spatial data: the 3D spatial scale of analysis, and the temporal scale of analysis. These features upset the visibility of events and the identification of changes at short-scale of analysis, with important implications in the understanding of adaptive behaviour and long-term cultural dynamics. Looking at the spatial data with a high-resolution approach at Abric Romaní Middle Palaeolithic site, we could investigate how the spatial and temporal scale of analysis affect the archaeological interpretation. At the same time, a long-lasting interdisciplinary research allowed us to enlarge knowledge of behavioural diversity in Neanderthals in terms of use of living space, technological costs, economic strategies, and shared knowledge. We will present results of our researches through case studies along the stratigraphic sequence showing how our approach has changed our vision of Neanderthal variability.

Keywords: Intra, site spatial analysis, gesostatistics, archaeostratigraphy, Middle Palaeolithic, lithic technology, refits

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