
An integrated approach to the construction of cultural landscapes in Southwest Angola: the case of Huíla

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Résumé

Human behavior is influenced by multiple variables that tend to structure around basic notions of a perception of "landscape" mediated in a broad relationship by "culture". Over time and space human groups have shaped the environment according to their adaptive strategies, not only as mere reaction to the territorial conditions (environmental, climatic and others) but as a concomitant process of culturally informed perceptions of its surroundings regulating collective structures that define cultural identity, ethnicity, social spaces and/or ritual-mythical references. The archaeological record is full of examples that show how humans are remarkable for their capacity to create complex social and technological structures over time and in different environments. Thus, cumulative culture seems to be the ultimate adaptive strategy of humankind.

Southwest Angola is a mosaic of biotopes of transition between desert, savanna and tropical rainforest and has undergone cyclic environmental changes shaping the landscape perceived today. The province of Huíla is an area of peculiar geomorphological characteristics that have allowed preservation of remains of past human societies under transitional conditions

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of *refugia*, spanning from the Plio-Pleistocene to the past millennium. This is a privileged region to analyze the processes that underlie the construction of cultural landscapes over a continuum of time in the evolution of human species, the establishment of hunter-gatherer societies and the persistence of forager communities among pastoralists and colonizers.

The African Archaeology research line at the Earth and Memory Institute/Polytechnic of Tomar/Centre of Geosciences of Coimbra University and its partners propose an approach to these territories and cultural landscapes integrating the Geosciences in the anthropological research driving this archaeological inquiry. We aim to approach the aspects of hunter-gatherer activities and technological innovations that indicate dynamic developmental processes towards social stabilization in this specific ecological niche of Huíla. While in the Kwanza Sul and Namíbe provinces we have conducted research on cultural landscapes dominated by rock art and burial features, the richness of the Karst system of Huíla reveals great potential but remained only superficially studied.

Mots-Clés: Cultural landscapes, Adaptation, Paleoenvironment, Geoarchaeology, Southwest Angola