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Attractiveness of the landscape: Reconstruction of Early to Middle Holocene landscape and occupation history of Flevoland (central Netherlands)

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The onset of the Holocene (11 500 BP) is marked by climate warming. Climate warming induced the growth of vegetation, which in combination with precipitation and a long period of non-deposition resulted in the formation of soils at the top of the Pleistocene deposits. As these soils have been present at the surface in Flevoland (central Netherlands) during most of the Mesolithic and Neolithic period, the top Pleistocene is an important archaeological level.
Prior to the 1990s, prehistoric occupation in wetland areas, such as the Flevoland region, was seen as a challenging living environment due to its marginal nature. However, since the early 1990s a different approach was raised concerning the suitability of wetland occupation by Mesolithic and Neolithic people. Instead of adapting to the natural conditions, prehistoric people selected an area suitable to their way of life. The question remains why it took so long (Mesolithic-Neolithic transition period: 5300-4600 cal BC) for the inhabitants of the Lower Rhine Basin to adapt to the Neolithic lifestyle, in contrast to the adaptation in the loess zone and later in Britain. This difference in adaptation of the Neolithic lifestyle during this transition period cannot be solely explained by a difference in attitude or other cultural arguments. As postglacial sea-level rise caused large parts of Flevoland (central Netherlands) to inundate during the Late Mesolithic and Early Neolithic, the availability of natural resources also changed. It is hypothesized that the availability of a wide range of natural resources, and not exclusively the soil type, predominantly determined the suitability and attractiveness of a region for hunter/gatherers and therefore delayed the transition to a Neolithic lifestyle. To test this hypothesis we have compared two selected areas on the basis of the following parameters: elevation, slope gradient relative to sea-level rise, soil type, past vegetation and the number of archaeological remains. A striking feature in the comparison between the two selected areas is the major role of inundation for the local subsistence strategy of hunter-gatherers during the transition period.