

Anthropocene: the exhibition

Curators from the Deutsches Museum in Munich, Germany discuss an upcoming exhibition that will present geology and environmental issues to the public and encourage the scientific community to get involved in the project.

The Anthropocene has emerged as a popular term used by scientists and the media to partition the current phase of Earth's history. The concept suggests that the scale of human impact on the planet has become so great that the collective action of the species will be found in the geological record. Currently there is an [Anthropocene working group of the Subcommittee on Quaternary Stratigraphy](#) who are preparing a proposal to the International Commission on Stratigraphy to have the period formalised. The proposal is not due until 2016, but before then the [Deutsches Museum](#) will hold the [Anthropocene Exhibition](#).

Although it has antecedents reaching back to the early twentieth century, such as Vernadsky's 'Noosphere', the term Anthropocene has only been in use for over a decade. In 2000, Nobel Prize winning chemist Paul Crutzen described the term and later in the same year gave a further impulse to the concept with a short publication (co-authored with Eugene Stoermer) that appeared in the International Geosphere Biosphere Newsletter. Soon the term was being used in the global change community. In recent years it has spread throughout many disciplines and has struck a chord with many scholars in the humanities, where the concept appears original in its genuine challenge of nature-culture dichotomies. Recently, the [Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society](#), a joint endeavour of Munich's Ludwig Maximilians Universität and the Deutsches Museum, hosted the conference [Culture in the Anthropocene](#) in Munich. The concept has also gained the curiosity of artists and museums looking for creative ways to explain the increasing pervasiveness of humans.

Understanding that this is both a concept with utility for science and public engagement, the Deutsches Museum has embarked upon the Anthropocene Exhibition to be opened in October 2014. The



Rudolf Diesel and Oskar von Miller, founder of the Deutsches Museum, 1897 (Courtesy of the Deutsches Museum)

exhibition team is working on taking the concept from a complex assemblage of academic insights into a collection to showcase to the public. At this stage in the planning process we can offer a few insights into the exhibition.

The exhibition

The current scale of environmental issues demands that scientists and policy makers reach the public on as wide a platform as possible. Over its long history the Deutsches Museum has sought to be one of the sites to engage the public with science and technology. From the beginning of the museum, its founder Oskar von Miller and supporters like the engineer Rudolph Diesel wanted to communicate to society "the great masterworks of the natural sciences and technology". With global industrialisation and mechanisation influencing more areas of the planet, the associated changes have reached previously unimaginable dimensions and dynamics. With this, the role of the museum has also been challenged. In a survey



Ideal Moon Landscape, by Wilhelm Kranz, 1919 (Courtesy of the Deutsches Museum)



of patrons we found that eighty percent of those interviewed wanted the museum to engage with controversial topics.

The exhibition will visualise the history, present and future of the Anthropocene. It will also display the deep interventions of humans into the geo- and biosphere over the last two centuries. It will not, however, be conceptualised as a history of decline, but as a complex story of destruction and shaping. Science and technology based concepts of transformation are not only to blame for past mistakes, but offer some of the greatest potential in moving towards a sustainable economy and society. Accepting that we are now living in the Anthropocene is not a move towards anthropocentrism but an attempt to overcome the dualism between humans and nature; this

philosophical challenge is an equally important thread to weave into the exhibition. Topics of the exhibition will include: humankind as destroyer, but also creator and designer; the anthropogenic planet that is shaped and changed by human beings; historically grown consumption patterns and lifestyles; time and space as important factors in the Anthropocene; the future as challenge but also as chance for humankind and its political institutions, social networks and dreams.

The exhibition's main goal is to inform visitors about the Anthropocene as a scientific hypothesis and a currently debated vision of the role of humans on Earth. It shows the effects of human intervention as a biological and geological actor, increasing awareness for both temporal and spatial extent of human-invoked environmental changes. By translating the concept into a three-dimensional space, the exhibition offers the general audience a unique opportunity to experience the Anthropocene and learn about the current state of scientific knowledge and ongoing discussions.

Engaging the geologic

The exhibition is planned to run for eight months. Accompanying it, will also be a catalogue, an educational program, a lecture and film series and an online exhibition with the exhibition partner, the Rachel Carson Center.

The message of the Anthropocene makes significant contribution to the ongoing conversation about the human impact on the planet. At its heart the concept is layered with the sediments of geology and in this way we are planning to have a geological trace that runs throughout the exhibition. We would like to engage with as many scholars in the Earth sciences as possible and the curatorial team invites interested scientists who would like to contribute their knowledge to the formation of the exhibition to contact us with comments and suggestions. The Anthropocene Exhibition is set to be an original and important endeavour that brings transdisciplinary scientific knowledge about the 'age of humans' to the public.

For further information contact the project manager Nina Möllers and check the [exhibition website](#).

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