

Traditional irrigation in Europe and its role as an intangible cultural heritage

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Traditional irrigation

Definition

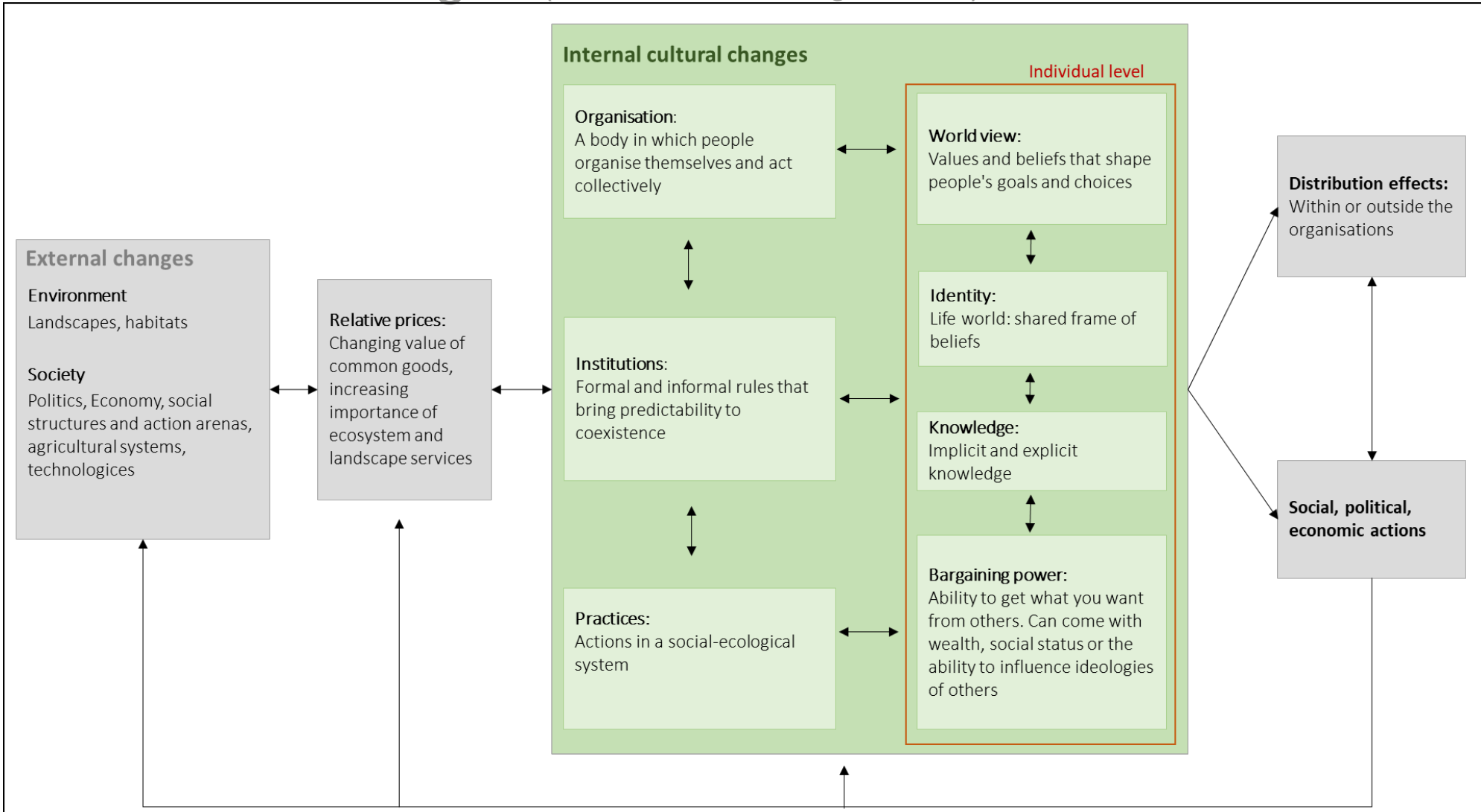
Agricultural practice

- Gravitation and artificial infrastructure
- Irrigation, fertilization, soil building
- Collaborative governance
- Specific knowledge holders over many generations
- Community-based, sustainable, adaptable, energy-independent and biodiversity-minded water supply



Traditional irrigation

Institutional changes (based on Ensminger 1992)



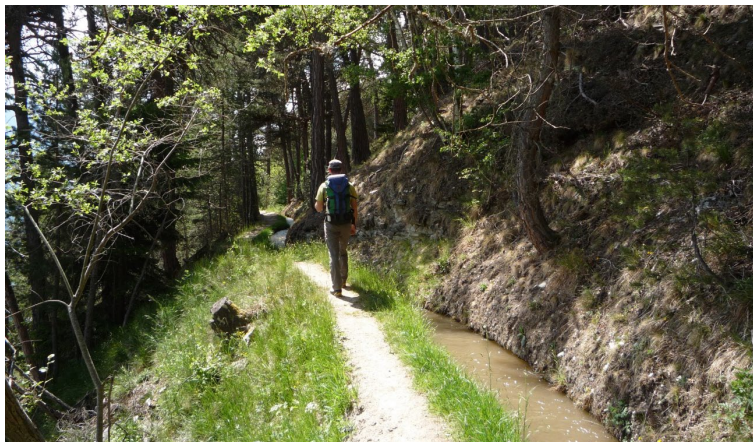
Traditional irrigation

Occurrence

Occurrence of traditional irrigation in Europe
(historical and current, as of 2015) >>>

Irrigation has a long history in Europe, e.g.

- 1381: first water regulations of the Niwärch water canal in Ausserberg municipality (Switzerland)



UNESCO candidature 2023

Traditional Irrigation as Intangible Cultural Heritage

Countries involved

- Austria: Tyrolean Oberland
- Belgium: Lommel (Flanders) and Cierreux (Ardennen, Wallonien)
- Germany: Franconia (Bavaria) and along the Queich (Rhineland-Palatinate)
- Italy: Malser Haide (South Tyrol)
- Luxembourg: Ösling
- Netherlands: Lankheet (Buurserbeek, Twente) und Pelterheggen (Brabant-Plateau)
- Switzerland: Oberaargau, Valais

Intangible cultural heritage

Characteristics

The “intangible cultural heritage” means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage.

The “intangible cultural heritage”, [...], is manifested inter alia in the following domains:

- **oral traditions and expressions**, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage;
- performing arts;
- **social practices, rituals** and festive events;
- **knowledge and practices concerning nature** and the universe;
- **traditional craftsmanship**.

(Source: Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2003)

Oral traditions (e.g. legends)

Irrigation landscapes in the Valais (Switzerland)

Three sips of water

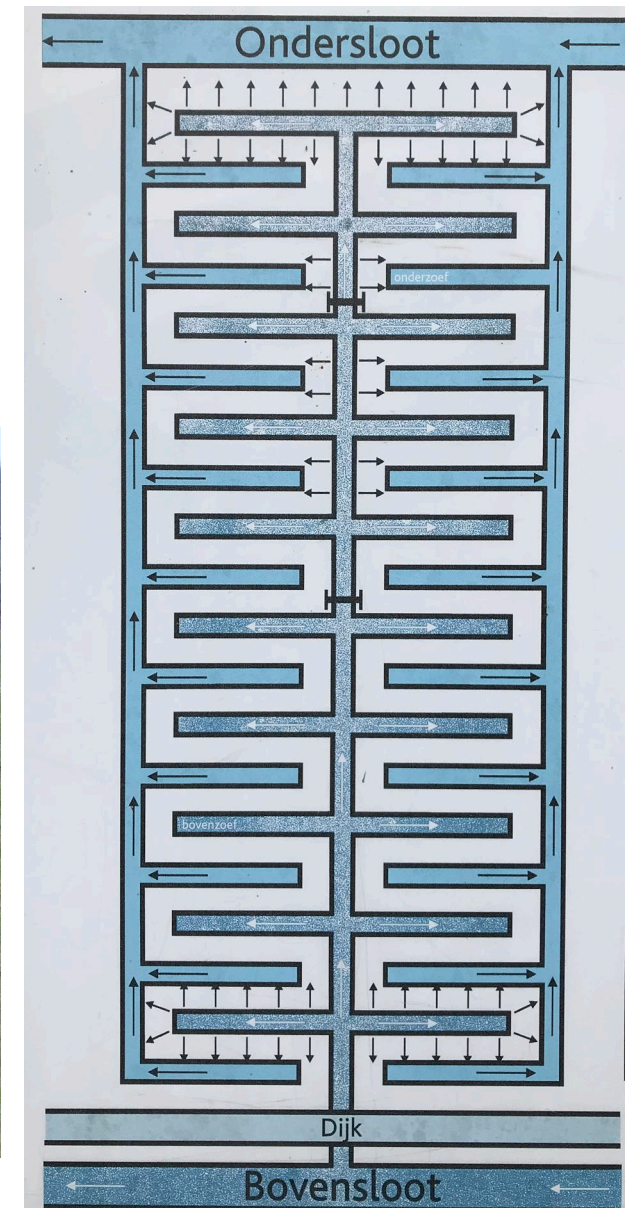
The hermit in Rüodufo was a pious man. Once in summer, however, he was so terribly thirsty that he drank three good gulps from the Wiissu water canal. At that hour, the water belonged to a poor widow. Because of these three gulps of water, she had three handfuls less hay, three pints less milk and therefore less cheese, and that is why the Kienzler (=family name) family is said to have died out in Mund (=name of a village).



Knowledge and practices (e.g. artificial ridge irrigation)

de Grote Watering, Lommel (Belgium)

Irrigation as a consequence of the “Landbau-Kolonie” (=type of collective agricultural organization) established by the Belgian state in 1849 to promote the cultivation of the heathland for forage production.



Forms of social organisation

Tyrolean Oberland (Austria)

From a historical irrigation cycle (= rod; from Latin rota - circle, wheel):

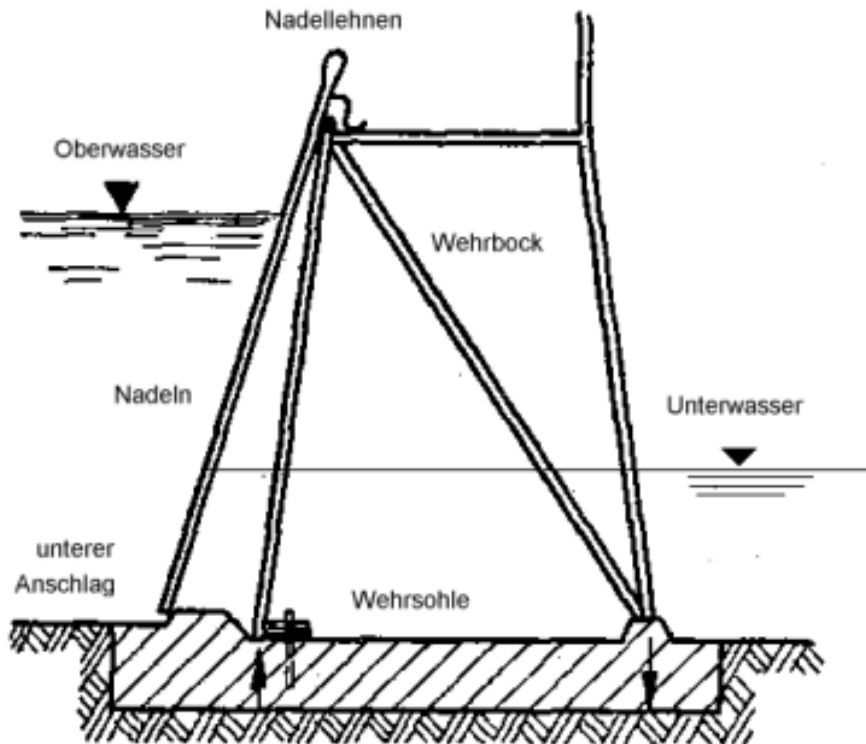
- the farmer to whom the first hour of the night fell had to walk up the Waal (=water canal) to the catchment and clean the water canal.
- Control of the fulfilment of duty: An iron marker had to be collected from the water steward and placed under a stone at the water catchment. The marker of the predecessor had to be brought back.



Expertise and traditional craftsmanship techniques

Franconia (Germany)

Nadelwehr (“needle weir”)



Basic principles of preserving traditional irrigation as...

...a living tradition (and as an intangible cultural heritage)

A living tradition is not alive through its structure alone (e.g. the canals).

A living tradition lives from the knowledge and practices of the people involved.

A living tradition can be maintained through...

- the local, regional and national will to preserve a living cultural heritage (e.g. financial contributions)
- the focus on the strengthening of communities
- its perception as part of identity
- preservation and promotion of knowledge and knowledge sharing
- education and awareness raising
- actively shaping processes of change
- innovation (e.g. new regulations and cooperations)

Basic principles of preserving traditional irrigation

e.g. education and awareness raising



Basic principles of preserving traditional irrigation

e.g. innovations, such as new forms of communal works (Gemeinwerk)

Communal works for the maintenance of a water canal

- Past: Communal work of land owners, number of hours/year depending on the number of water rights
- Present: Annual communal work by the Swiss Alpine Club members



(Photo sources: Karina Liechti 2012; Médiathèque Valais, Charles Paris 1930)

Basic principles of preserving traditional irrigation

e.g. acknowledging the diversity of landscape services created by traditional irrigation; in favour of...

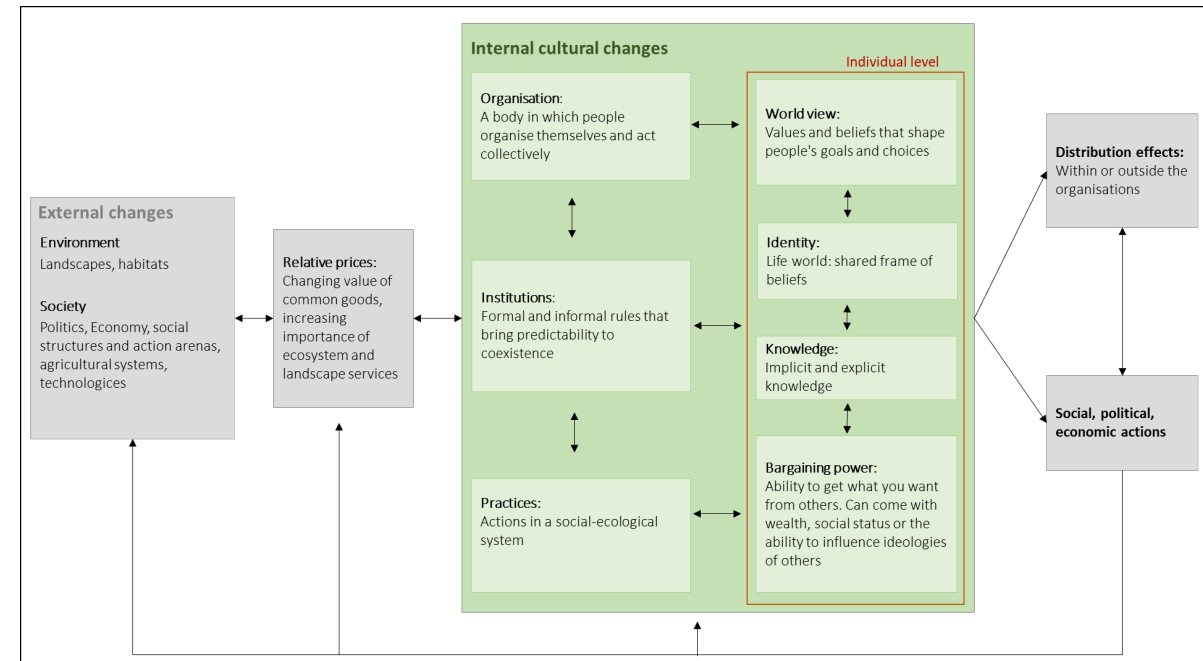
- Agriculture (meadow, field, vine, garden irrigation, drinking water for animals)
- Forestry (passive irrigation)
- Security (removal of water in the case of flood events, slope stability, fire prevention...)
- Social cohesion (cultural-historical heritage, identity, communal work, rituals)
- Tourism (hiking trails, aesthetics)
- Education and research
- Ecosystems (biodiversity...)



Research agenda

for living traditions and intangible heritage

- What services do living traditions provide and what factors contribute to their maintenance?
- What role does culture (organisations, institutions, world views, knowledge, bargaining power, identity, social practices) play in the system? >>>
- What forms of governance of the commons have contributed to the success or the failure of a system and how have they changed over time?
- What shall be maintained in the future and what are the pathways to achieve this?



Thank you for your attention!

Contact and more information

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