

FORUM: REVIEWS AND COMMENTS

LEIBUNDGUT, Christian und VONDERSTRASS, Ingeborg: *Traditionelle Bewässerung – ein Kulturerbe Europas*. Bd. 1 – Grundlagen – 267 S., zahlr. Abb. und Karten. Bd. 2 – Regionale Dokumentation 436 S., zahlr. Abb. und Karten. Merkur Druck AG, Langenthal 2016, € 59,-

The scientific debate about an appropriate use of natural resources that are limited on a global scale and that are unevenly distributed on earth has gained momentum in recent years. Water management and irrigation play a dominant role in this context as hydrological resources are identified as the basis for life. The focus is often directed to arid and semi-arid zones; the aspect of enhanced agricultural productivity by applying irrigation techniques aims at remedies for food shortages in heavily populated areas. In the search for adaptive strategies and appropriate technologies some researchers go back to what is defined in an all-encompassing manner as 'traditional irrigation'. Hydrological resource utilisation is one of the oldest cultural traits in agricultural practices and has created impressive evidence of irrigation infrastructure and construction that have become part of global cultural heritage. Several publications have addressed these issues in non-European contexts. To mention only one: The Centre for Science and Environment in New Delhi, India published in 1997 a report titled 'Dying wisdom: rise, fall and potential of India's traditional water harvesting systems' which aimed at initiating a wake-up call for a sensitive and thrifty use of available water resources. Europe has been left out of these discussions for quite some time. Therefore, it is a laudable effort of Christian Leibundgut and Ingeborg Vonderstrass to compile a collection of valuable chapters that are directed towards the basics of 'traditional' irrigation and their regional distribution. Volume one is devoted to the foundations of 'traditional irrigation' which is understood as systems of gravity-fed irrigation as it was applied in Europe until the mid-20th century. The inventory provides valuable insights into the wide spectrum of irrigation techniques, their cultural and practical value as measure for the documentation of agricultural practices; the compilation is understood as a timely

preservation of cultural knowledge. The second aim is to support regional initiatives in their attempts to lobby for the preservation of irrigation systems as cultural heritage. The first volume is dedicated to a systematic approach in recording, systemising, and regionalising of 130 irrigation systems spanning a quadrangle between Madeira, Greenland, Russia and Greece with a core area stretching from Germany to Northern Italy, from Eastern France to Slovakia. The systematic approach is structured by historical processes in irrigation expansion, the contribution of gravity-fed irrigation and drainage to adequate agricultural practices in a functional perspective, the categorisation of applications and techniques. The final chapter discusses its contribution towards cultural heritage. The second volume presents the mentioned localised and specific case studies in greater detail. Both volumes are lavishly illustrated with informative and appropriately selected photographs, as well as numerous detailed sketch maps and thematic diagrams. The illustrations prove the extensive fieldwork by the authors and their supporters; the case studies confirm the importance of empirical enquiry in order to perceive the high degree of variability between systems.

This compendium can be recommended to all readers who are interested in the cultural diversity and technological ingenuity of 'traditional' irrigation systems, who want to acknowledge its cultural value in a time when so-called straight-forward and sometimes simplified versions of water management suggest modernity. Both volumes succeed in drawing our attention to century-old experiences in irrigation systems, their proven efficiency and adaptive value. Old systems show us how thriftily a valuable commodity such as water was treated when it was less scarce than today. It would be helpful if these volumes could be made available in English as well as they could help to stimulate the international debate about 'traditions' and their meaning for our present time from a hydrological and water management perspective.

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