

The heritage of “traditional” or gravity-fed irrigation at UNESCO: World Heritage in the face of climate change

Seminar

Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne - IREST/EIREST

Monday, 3 November 2025 9:15am – 12:30pm

Room 6, Panthéon Centre and online, 12 place du Panthéon, 75005 Paris



In 2023, “Traditional irrigation: knowledge, techniques and organization” was inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage, following the nomination of 7 European countries (Austria, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Switzerland). The essential role played by this practice in shaping landscapes - some of which are listed by UNESCO under the 1972 Convention - is also recognized (cultural landscape of the Causses and Cévennes, France, inscribed on the WH list; cultural landscape of the Ribeira Sacra, Galicia, Spain, candidate for inscription). Traditional irrigation techniques are based on a network of channels or ditches dug into the earth, allowing water to circulate by gravity to irrigate fields and gardens. Despite their many positive externalities (groundwater recharge, biodiversity conservation, slope drainage), these practices are threatened by lack of resources, regulatory constraints and climate change. Long perceived as “archaic”, they are now valued as heritage and as a response to climate change and to the objective of biodiversity conservation. In France, national and local initiatives for heritage

recognition have emerged, and an inscription in the national inventory has been made with the support of teacher-researchers and students from the University of Paris 1, EIREST. This process is currently being pursued by a project to apply for an extension, supported by 4 countries wishing to join the representative list of ICH (France, Greece, Portugal and Spain).

This scientific event, organized in parallel with the heritage initiative, aims to make the work in progress accessible and visible to the community of students, researchers and staff at Université Paris 1, as well as to the general public. The event will provide an opportunity to apprehend the challenges and threats facing traditional irrigation techniques, and to consider the role of tourism in revitalizing the practice. The session will include contributions from the countries who first obtained the inscription on the UNESCO list, and specialists in the field. The aim is to raise awareness of the practice and its positive externalities, and more broadly of the way in which UNESCO World Heritage initiatives - whether tangible or intangible - help to meet the challenges of adapting to climate change.

Participation is free, but registration is compulsory by completing the form at the following link:

<https://forms.office.com/e/wNRntzPxqw> deadline 20 october

The link to attend online (via Zoom) will be sent to registered participants two days before the event.

For any additional information, please send an email at: patrimoine-irrigation@univ-paris1.fr