

WATER AS CATALYST

Int

Interventions

AR

Adaptive Reuse

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Interventions | Adaptive Reuse

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THE BLUE LINE

REUSING TRADITIONAL RURAL WATER MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

by FRANCESCO GAROFALO

Abstract

In the last century agriculture experienced a leap in scales, shifting from small scale production to large and mechanized industrial production. Such dramatic change has impacted local communities and associated traditional, agricultural techniques and infrastructures which have become, in many cases, derelict and abandoned. Traditional water infrastructures have been left behind, substituted by centralized large scale solutions. This paper investigates the importance of reusing traditional water management systems in order to create a resilient water supply chain, pinpointing the multi-fold benefits of preserving rural cultural heritage for agriculture and tourism. Traditional water management systems can become the link between rural communities, agriculture, and tourism — a concrete example of embracing heritage as a means for improvement and development.

Change of rural landscape: A leap in scales

In post-World War II Europe and, more generally, developed countries, agricultural production has changed dramatically in scale, specialization, and mechanization. From small scale farming, agriculture has moved towards large scale specialized production typical of 'agro-industry.' In developing countries the so called Green Revolution that occurred between the '30s and the '60s, resulted in 'new, high-yielding varieties (HYVs) of cereals, especially dwarf wheats and rices. These new varieties were developed in tandem with chemical

fertilizers and agro-chemicals, and also with controlled water-supply (usually involving irrigation) and new methods of cultivation (including mechanization). All of these together were seen as a 'package of practices' to supersede 'traditional' technology and to be adopted as a whole.¹ Such revolution resulted in an increase in water demand (for most of the high-yielding varieties), and the abandonment of small scale traditional water supply methods, shifting instead to large infrastructures for the support of the new scale-intensive farming. Large scale agricultural production has made derelict a great variety of irrigation channels, aqueducts, tanks, and wells that were the foundation of traditional agriculture. This has contributed to the further decay of areas abandoned due to the loss of jobs. The resultant movement to the city from industrialized agriculture has decreased the rural population from 66% in 1960 to 46% in 2015.²

Centralized vs. Decentralized

Of the global water supply, over 96% is saline; of the total freshwater supply, over 68% is locked up in ice and glaciers while another 30% of freshwater is in the ground. Thus, rivers and lakes that supply surface water for human use only constitute about 0.007% percent of total water, yet rivers are the primary source of human use.³ Availability of freshwater is a current urgency for humankind, with the availability predicted to worsen in the near future. "By 2025, 31.8 billion people will experience absolute water scarcity and 2/3 of the world



could be living under a water stressed condition." Water availability is further threatened by overexploitation: "water use has been growing at more than twice the rate of population increase in the last century."⁴ Climate change is increasing this stress, with the most serious impacts, which paradoxically can be expected at the same time, being an increase in the frequency and severity of flooding events⁵ and a decrease in the availability of freshwater.⁶

Such huge demand of water for both domestic and agricultural uses has been supported by the development of centralized water management solutions which are now proving to have limits, especially in terms of expensive and inflexible long-term building and maintenance strategies. 'Centralized systems are not resilient in cases of damage because their structure is a chain of linked and interdependent parts'; while 'decentralized rainwater management, including retention, storage, and reuse strategies that are integrated into spatial planning and urban design, can reduce flood risks while simultaneously enhancing freshwater availability.'⁷ Measures for decentralized water management are not meant to take the place of centralized systems, but they can complement them, improving the resilience of the water management system as a whole.

Reuse of traditional water supply system: New opportunities

Generations of villagers and farmers located in areas affected by water scarcity have been developing techniques and solutions for rainwater collection and reuse throughout history, making certain rural (as well as partially urban) civilizations independent and self-sufficient in terms of water supply. There is a great heritage of rural artefacts and infrastructures that were developed in water-scarce areas. They have now been overtaken in the past decades by centralized systems that render them redundant and, therefore, derelict.

These old, vernacular systems are of critical importance in many ways. First of all, they can complement (and integrate into) centralized systems, making the water supply chain more resilient. Secondly, such infrastructures are, in many cases, part of the cultural heritage of rural civilizations and, therefore, create a link to the identity of rural communities. Returning such infrastructure to use would preserve and maintain the relevance of such cultural heritage and knowledge. This is the case of Battir, a Palestinian village in the West Bank, located to the SouthWest of Jerusalem. Its landscape is characterized by stonewall terraces that are either dry — planted with grapevines and olive trees — or irrigated, enabling intensive market gardening. The irrigation is served by a 4,000-year-old elaborate channel system that collects and distributes water coming from natural stream sources. Battir was designated UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2014 for outstanding

universal values: "The complex irrigation system of this water supply has led to the creation of dry walls terraces which may have been exploited since antiquity. The agricultural terraces, exploiting this irrigation system, were the basis for a strong presence of agriculture through the cultivation of olives and vegetables. The area still today has the same use."⁸

The striking cultural landscape is, in fact, still in use; the ancient water supplies have molded a landscape which is still cultivated with different crops, establishing a virtuous cycle that has made Battir an outstanding agricultural and cultural site, as well as touristic attraction: an example of balanced—sustainable—interaction between community, landscape and natural resources.

Another best-case can be found in the Indian *Kattas*, dams built by farmers across creeks to store water, once popular in the Kerala and Karnataka states. Made of stones and mud, these low-cost dams are temporary so that they can be dismantled before the monsoon arrives. With the arrival of running water, this practice has largely been abandoned. *Kattas* were part of the local rural culture and implied a *savoir-faire*, which has become lost in time. The cultural importance of such engineering works and the need for complementing the current water supply infrastructure are, now pushed by campaigners for cultural preservation, bringing the traditional system back to life. Workshops have been organized where farmers could meet and share their experiences, reinforcing the rural communities whose identities are threatened by industrialized agriculture. Besides being the platform to recall and share the *Kattas'* construction techniques, the workshop becomes an opportunity to improve the structures by the consideration of different material options. New *Kattas* have been appearing in the last years, with bottom up processes, led by local communities. Despite these developments *Kattas* have not been integrated into the government's water conservation awareness programs.

The conditions for reusing traditional water infrastructures require both a platform where the community can meet and interact, and seed capital (in the form of subsidies) in order to bring such systems back to life. What is crucial in each different situation is to act before the local knowledge and *savoir-faire* become lost. The advantages are clear and multi-fold: traditional rural water management systems are usually small in scale and low cost, which makes the construction feasible and quick.

Furthermore, traditional water artefacts can be linked with tourism alongside the territories for which they are best suited, including associated landscapes and local products.

An example is a rural development strategy developed for the Albanian village of Qeparo by a multidisciplinary team (formed by: Openfabric, MVO Nederland, Cityförster, Alterra, Sawadee, Boer Bos, GutundGut,

Arber Togani). Qeparo, located in the southern coast of the country, has always been linked to the nearby village of Borsh by economic and cultural ties. These ties became 'physical' when, in the '40s, an irrigation channel was built, bringing water from Borsh downhill to Qeparo, irrigating a lush terraced landscape defined by the cultivation of citrus and olive trees. If reactivated, as proposed, the old irrigation channel bears the potential of restoring the now abandoned terraces by creating continuous irrigation.

By providing an amount of water ranging from 9.660-20.125 cubic meters, the channel can irrigate a surface of 161.000 sqm of terraces. With the channel restored, the summer irrigation demand can be solved, fostering a more intensive cultivation (mixed-farming) of the terraces and consequentially, better maintenance. This would result in a drastic improvement of both the local landscape aesthetic and its productive qualities. In addition, a simple path can run along the infrastructure rendering it accessible and creating a new alternative pedestrian connection between Qeparo and Borsh. By restoring the water inlet, the channel can feed the terraces and also serve as a touristic attraction.

In this case, the link between rural heritage in terms of water infrastructure and agro-tourism exploitation is evident. A clear connection can be drawn between water supply as traditional artefacts (both architecture and agriculture) and larger touristic and regional development strategies.

The blue line: sustainable landscapes, sustainable communities

This paper is not advocating for a return to past technologies. The need for large scale water infrastructure is clear, especially when it comes to supplying cities, villages and agricultural areas. At the same time, the limit of centralised water management systems is also clear, as is the relevance of decentralized small-scale solutions. This holds particularly true when the small-scale solutions complement the large-scale water supply network and favor an integrated yet independent resilient system. Applying systems of adaptive re-use to traditional water management solutions, besides serving to augment large infrastructure through the creation of diversity and redundancy, opens up a new range of opportunities.

Artefacts, as well as agricultural techniques and crop species' selection, have been developed through generations in balance with the environment. Exploiting the cultural value of water infrastructures can enhance tourism in rural areas, activate bottom-up processes for sharing knowledge, and strengthen rural communities that are suffering the 'invasion' of the agro industry. Through reuse, indigenous communities can preserve their heritage, built over time. Preserving and enhancing the role of rural communities can re-establish the

often-lost direct relation between sustainable landscapes and sustainable communities.

Capillary water distribution supported by traditional small-scale solutions can be the backbone to support agro-biodiversity on small, even family-scaled farms, improving the water supply and giving farmers a potentially broader range of crops. Enabling the farmers to act directly in the direction of reused rainwater facilities gives them the responsibility of their water use, re-establishing a balance between supply and demand (critical for sustainability), that has been, in many cases, lost with progress. Empowerment is the first step towards reinforcing the awareness of being a responsible actor within a system of supply/demand.

Adaptive-reuse can be the tool for water to be a medium of a holistic approach on regional development: the (blue) line serves as a link between the cultural yet, pragmatic, and past and present infrastructures.

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PROJECT CREDITS, INFORMATION AND BIBLIOGRAPHIES

EDITORIAL

Project Name_ Projecting Change

Image Credits: Neethi Abraham, Angelica Carvahales, Udeeta Jain, Mengran Jiang, Vinoti Kabara, Krishna Lingutla, Sneha Mathreja, Hana Mehta, Gloria Ramirez, Eshank Rishi, Eder Romero, Yinghua Tan, Rohit Vantaram, Ananya Vij, Plub Warnitchai, Mengyue Zhou

BREATHE, LOOK, STAND UP

Project Name 01_ DC ExchangeProject_Site_ McMillan Slow Sand Filtration site_ Location_ Washington DC_ New use 01_ Community center, marketplace, performance_ Project Name 02_ People's Liberation Army No. 1102_ Location_ Shenyang China_ Original architect_ Communist Party China_ Rehabilitation architect_ META-Project_ New use 02_ Exhibition space, mini theatre

Image Credits_ Figure 01,02, 08_ McMillan slow sand filtration site, Washington, DC, Lewis Francis; Figure 03 –07_ Public Folly, Shenyang, China, META-Project; Figure 09_ Courtesy of Lindsay Winstead

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THE TEARS OF THE U.S.S. ARIZONA

Project Name_ A tomb that lives; Location_ Pearl Harbor, Hawaii

Image Credits_ Figure 01_ View of USS ARIZONA taken from Manhattan Bridge on the East River in New York City on its way back from sea trials. December 25, 1916, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/pp.print;photographer_EnriqueMuller,Jr./E.Muller;1916;Wikimedia; Figure 02_ A TOMB THAT LIVES Monument proposal, illustration by author; Figure 03_ An aerial view of the USS Arizona Memorial, U.S. Navy photo by Photographer's Mate 3rd Class Jayme Pastoric, Wikimedia

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THE EDGE OF CONDITION

Project Name 01_ Three Mills_ Bromley-by-Bow_ River Lee_ London, England_ Project Name 02_ The White Building_ Lee Navigation Canal_ Hackney Wick_ Stratford, England_ Project Name 03_ The Marine Engine House_ Walthamstow Reservoirs

Image Credits_ All images courtesy of the authors; Figure 01, 02_ Three Mills Island, London_ Figure 03_ White Building_ Hackney Centre Wick_ Stratford_ Figure 04_ The Sinking Future Post Apocalyptic Flood Survival Centre.

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BACK TO THE FUTURE

Image Credits_ Figure 01_ The Big U, Courtesy of Bjarke Ingels Group; Figure 02, 03, 05) by Julia Casol; Figure 04_ Courtesy of H+N+S Landscape Architects; Figure 06_ Dijkdoorbraak bij Bemmel, 1799, Christiaan Josi, naar Jacob Cats (1741 – 1799), 1802, source: Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

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THE OYSTER BLOCKS PROJECT

Project Name_ The Oyster Blocks Project

Image Credits_ Figure 01 – 07_ courtesy of the author

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THE HAMMAM OF ERBIL CITADEL

Project Name_ Hammam of Erbil; Location_ Erbil, Iraq

Image Credits_ Figure 01 – 04_ courtesy of the authors

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(re)MADE BY WATER

Project Name_ New World Mall, Bangkok, Thailand

Image Credits_ All images courtesy of the author; Figure 01_ Mall; central court, Photograph by Perfect Lazybones; Figure 02_ Floating market in Bangkok, Photograph by Georgie Pauwels; Figure 03_ Mall, escalators, Photograph by Olga Saliy; Figure 04_ Mall, koi, Photograph by Olga Saliy; Figure 05_ Mall, escalators, Photograph by Olga Saliy.

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T-HOUSE

Project Name_ T-HOUSE, theoretical project; Location_ Hains Point, Washington, D.C.

Image Credits_ Figure 01 – 08_ courtesy of the authors

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THE BLUE LINE

Project Name_ blue developments; Location_ Battir, Palestine; Qeparo, Albania

Image Credits_ Figure 01- illustration by author

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ENVIRONMENTAL IDENTITY

Project Name 01_ Caiaques kayaks; Location_ Pinheiros River, São Paulo, Brazil; Artist_ Eduardo Srur; Project Name 02_ Pets; Location_ Tietê River in São Paulo, Brazil; Artist_ Eduardo Srur

Image Credits_ All photos courtesy of Eduardo Srur; Figure 01_ Caiaques, kayaks, Pinheiros River, photo_ Eduardo Nicolau; Figure 02_ Caiaques, kayaks, Pinheiros River, photo_ Alexandre Schneider; Figure 03_ Pets, Tietê River, photo_ Eduardo Srur; Figure 04_ Pets, Tietê River, photo_ Almeida Rocha

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A METROPOLITAN PARK OF WATER

Project Name_ Metropolitan Water Park project, Location_ Saragossa, Spain

Image Credits_ Figure 01_ Bridge Pavilion & Third Millennium Bridge, Río Ebro, Zaragoza, España, Source_Pabellón Puente y Puente del Tercer Milenio, Author_ Juan E De Cristofaro from Zaragoza, España, CC-BY-SA-2.0; Figure 02_Google Earth aerial view of Zaragoza, Spain; Figure 03_ Plano topográfico de la ciudad de Zaragoza del siglo XVIII, Wikimedia;

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BETWEEN RESILIENCY AND ADAPTATION

Image Credits_ All images courtesy of the author; Figure 01_ by author, background_ by Aleks Dahlberg at www.unsplash.com; Figure 02_ by author; Figure 03, 04_ graphic by author, background_ by Frantzou Fleurine; www.unsplash.com

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WATER AS MEDIUM

Project Name 01_ Water tower in Delft, Architect_ Rocha Tombal; Location_ Delft, NL; Project name 02_ Water tower in Brasschaat, Architect_ Crepain-Binst Architects; Location_ Brasschaat, Belgium; Project name 3_ Water tower Sint-Jans convent, Overijssel; Architect_ Zecc Architects; Location_ Overijssel, NL

Image Credits_ All images courtesy of the authors_ Figure 01_ typological evolution of the water tower, Source: Ingeonné; Figure 02_ Water tower in Delft (NL), photo by Christiaan Richters; Figure 03, 04, 05_ Water tower in Brasschaat (BE), Crepain-Binst Architects, photo_ Crepain Binst; Figure 06, 07_ Water tower Sint-Jans convent, Overijssel (NL), Zecc Architects, photo_ Stijn Poelstra, <http://www.stijnstijl.nl/>;

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