

Research

UNESCO Chair



Of Traditions and Perspectives – Insights into Sustainable Mountain Development

In brief

The UNESCO Chair on Natural and Cultural Heritage for Sustainable Mountain Development promotes research and exchange in the fields of nature conservation, renewable resources, protected area management, sustainable tourism, culture, traditions and regional development.

The Chair is run by the management centre of the UNESCO World Heritage Swiss Alps Jungfrau-Aletsch (SAJA) together with the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) and the Institute of Geography (GIUB) of the University of Bern as well as the Centre for Training and Integrated Research in ASAL Development (CETRAD) in Nanyuki, Kenya.

Learn more here.

Important publications with UNESCO Chair participation:
Tribaldos, T. and T., Kortetmäki (2022). Just Transition Principles and Criteria for Food Systems and Beyond. Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions 43, p. 244-256.

Ebner, L., Liechti, K., Tribaldos, T. und Rist, S. 2021. Forschungsschwerpunkt Traditionelle Bewässerung an der Universität Bern: Traditionelle Bewässerung in Europa – immaterielles Kulturerbe für die Zukunft. Working Paper. Bern, Schweiz: Centre for Development and Environment, Geografisches Institut, UNESCO Chair Natur- und Kulturerbe zur nachhaltigen Entwicklung von Berggebieten, Universität Bern, und Stiftung Landschaftsschutz Schweiz.
<https://www.bewaesserung.unibe.ch/>

Picture 1: Orlando Schmid explains exciting facts about biodiversity, agriculture and the irrigation system in Ausserberg to the participants of the network of UNESCO-associated schools in Switzerland (ASPnet).

Dear readers

With this new issue of our newsletter we would like to inform you about current activities and projects of the UNESCO Chair „Natural and Cultural Heritage for Sustainable Mountain Development“. 2022 was again an intensive year in which we dedicated ourselves to various activities in university teaching and research as well as cooperation with our practice partners.

In mid-May, the meeting of the network of UNESCO-associated schools in Switzerland (ASPnet) took place at the World Nature Forum in Naters. This meeting allows associated schools to get to know each other, present best practices, share experiences, discover new partnership opportunities, and explore topics in greater depth. In addition to expert presentations and practical experiences from schools, a hike along the Lötschberg south ramp took place on the second day, highlighting topics such as biodiversity, agriculture and irrigation systems in the driest region of Switzerland.

Also in May, the various UNESCO chairs in Switzerland met in Bern. The meeting, organised by the Swiss UNESCO Commission, allowed Theresa Tribaldos to interact with the other chairs in Switzerland and to learn about their respective topics and activities.

One of the main focuses of our chair in 2022 was the topic of intangible cultural heritage and living traditions. Karina Liechti

and Theresa Tribaldos were able to continue accompanying the process of the UNESCO candidacy of traditional irrigation as an intangible cultural heritage. This process was formally concluded with the submission to UNESCO at the end of March. Furthermore, as a partner of the International Centre for Traditional Irrigation, we participated in a successful project acquisition on the topic of „Securing the future of traditional irrigation as an intangible cultural heritage“ and look forward to working together on the new project.

In the field of living traditions, Alessandra Lochmatter, Theresa Tribaldos and Karina Liechti organised a symposium on 24 November with a wide range of contributions on traditional irrigation, local associations or intangible cultural heritage in Switzerland and Kenya. We also learned about the importance of living traditions for sustainable development, what they need to survive over time, and what the Swiss Alps Jungfrau-Aletsch UNESCO World Heritage Foundation is doing to support them. Boniface Kiteme's contribution provided an insight beyond Switzerland's borders into the development and current challenges of cultural heritage in Kenya. Dayana Pfammatter-Gurten, a natural yodeller, provided the musical accompaniment to the symposium. In this thematic context, Elena Paganoni also successfully completed her Master thesis entitled „An investigation of measures to promote living traditions and their significance for sustainable regional development“.

Picture 2: The participants of the symposium „Living Traditions“ were given the opportunity to learn the basic technique of yodelling.



In Kenya, Caroline Ouko and Boniface Kiteme were engaged in a meeting of all Kenyan UNESCO Chairs to advance the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals through regional partnerships and collaboration. They were also active in the sixth UNESCO Stakeholder Engagement Conference. In addition, they participated in a symposium on population growth for building cross-cutting collaborations for people and the environment in Kenya.

A highlight of last year was the International Summer School, co-organised by Boniface Kiteme, which took place in June in the Mount Kenya area. A total of 36 doctoral students from Kenya and Switzerland took part in the Summer School, which promoted intercultural exchange.

Also in the current year, we will maintain our focus on intangible cultural heritage and living traditions. We will intensify our cooperation with the International Centre for Traditional Irrigation and address various research questions in this context. In addition, both Co-Chairs will organise a session

on traditional irrigation at the International Conference of the International Association for the Study of the Commons in Nairobi in June. We would like to intensify our cooperation with actors in the Lötschental by working more closely with teachers. With the help of Christoph Morgenthaler's Master thesis, we were able to take a first step towards the conception of the cultural trail in Blatten and we will examine various possibilities for implementing the trail.

A second focus will be on food systems, where we plan to cooperate with Kenya and partners in Tanzania. In a joint project submission, we want to promote synergies between sustainable food systems and the restoration of intact ecosystems in the areas of the Mount Kenya region in Kenya and the Pangani River Basin in Tanzania. We are also planning further exchanges between Kenya and Switzerland to discuss the links between nature and cultural heritage in both countries and to deepen mutual understanding.

Theresa Tribaldos and Boniface Kiteme

Picture 3: A school class helps with the annual maintenance work of a Suone.

Picture 4: Karina Liechti gives an insight into traditional irrigation during the symposium „Living Traditions“.

