

# Water, Cultural Diversity and Solidarity

Corinne Wacker

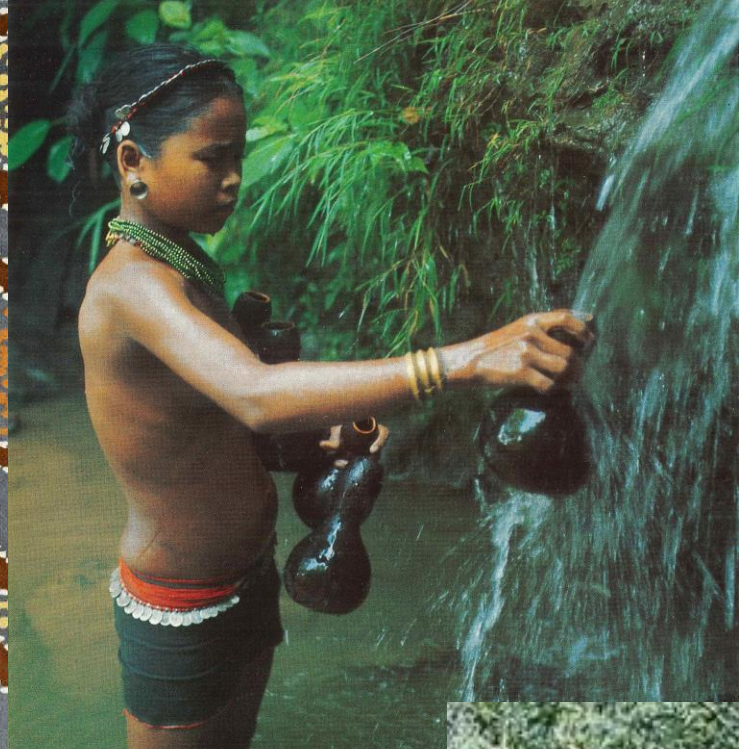
The European Landscape Convention (2000 article 2.a.) defines a landscape as “an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the actions and interactions of natural and /or human factors”.

Depending on their cultural heritage and practice, people perceive different elements in the same ecological environment, handle them differently and vary on the cultural values they attribute to them.

How to reconcile cultural diversity with sustainable water landscape management?

## Part 1: Water and Cultural Diversity

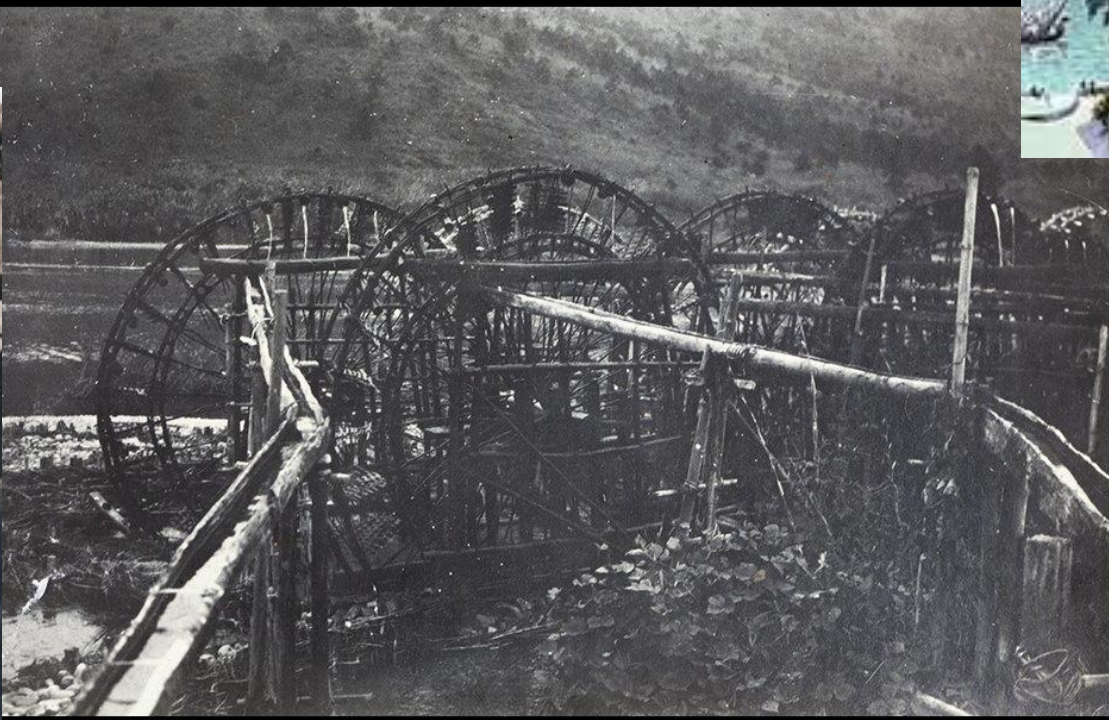
Taking a broad view on the typology of known water civilisations



# Water and Fertility Preservers



# Hydraulic Horticulturalists



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# Part II: Cultural Diversity and Solidarity: The Example of Ladakh

Ladakh is a highly complex water landscape relying on the integration of cultural diversity in sustainable landscape management.



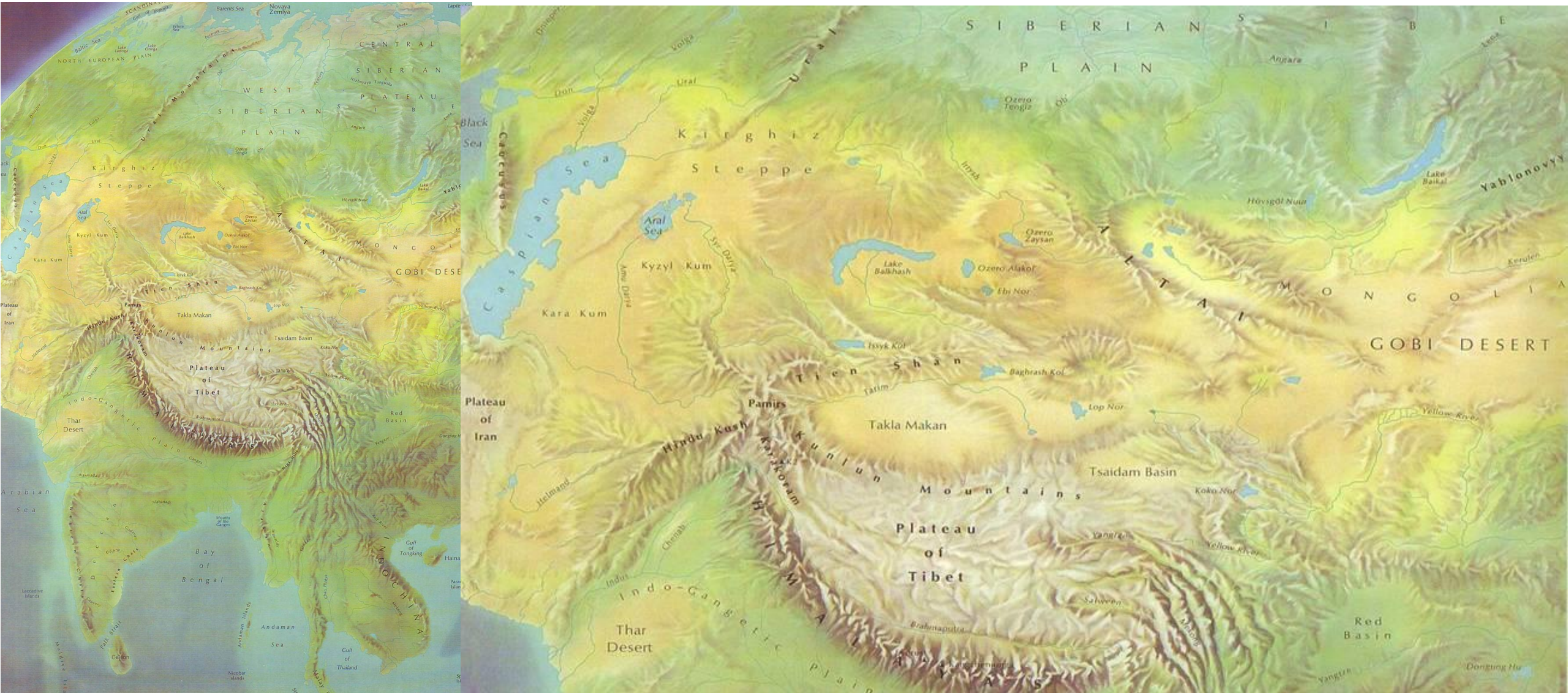


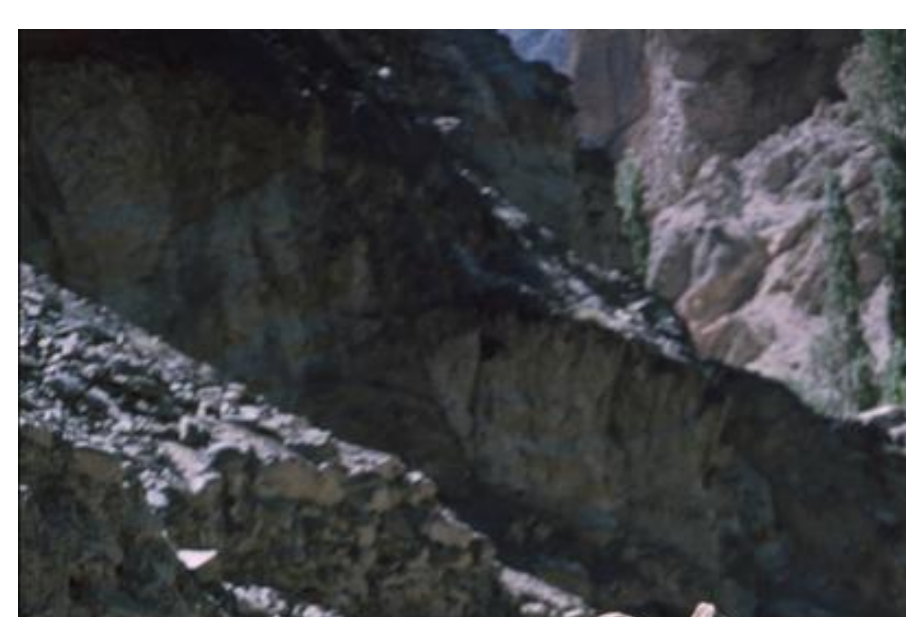
# Water Landscapes as perceived by the people in Ladakhi Folksongs



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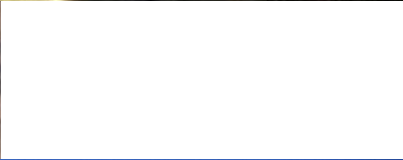
# Ladakh in its geographic context

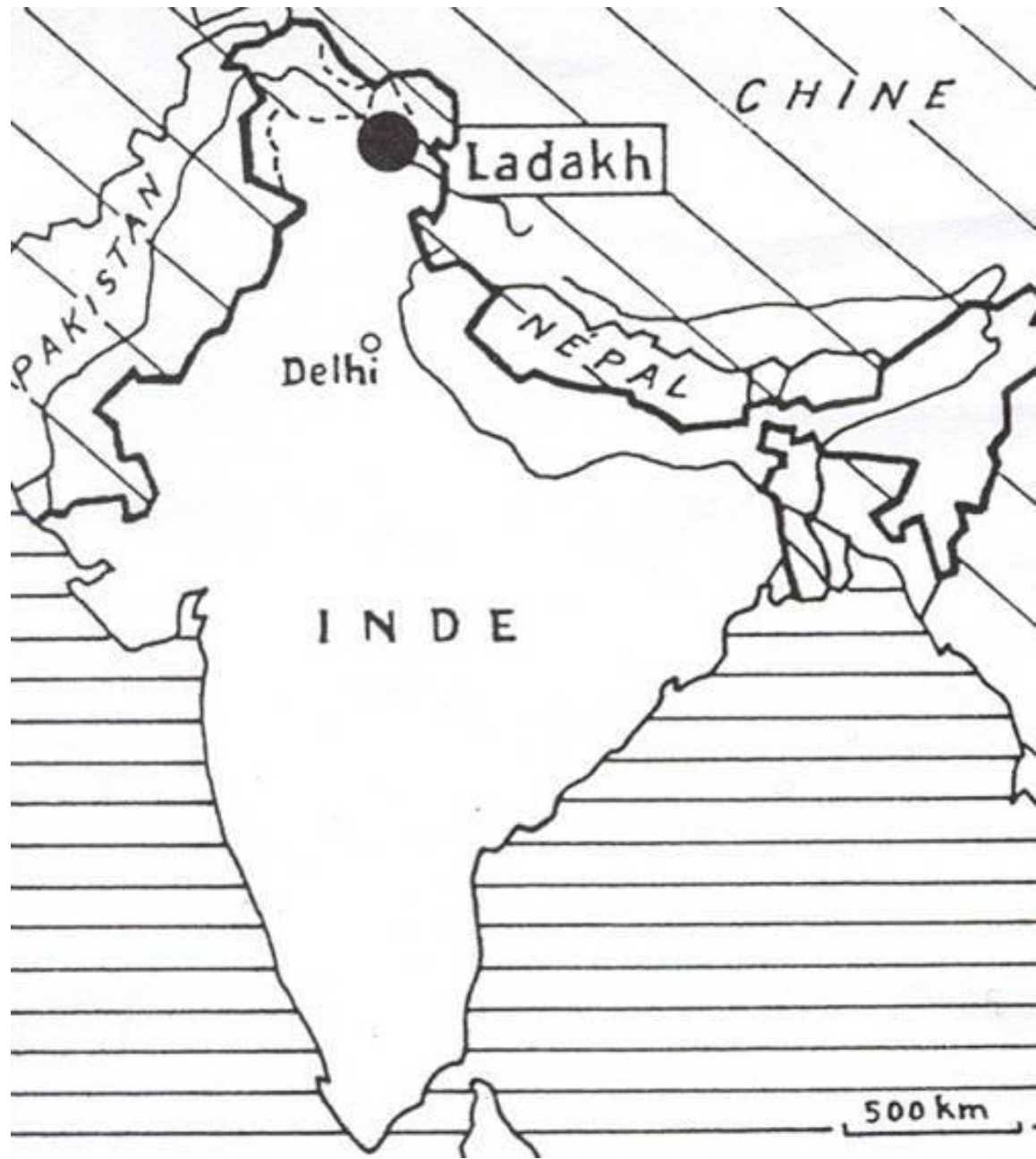




















## Water, Cultural Diversity and Solidarity

The Ladakhi developed a village-based decentralised complex, with an irrigated agricultural system using vertical integration of herding which allows for optimal use of scarce water, the sun and the vegetation and whose soil fertility they enrich with human and animal manure.

When water is scarce, the farmers call Buddhist monks to hold rituals with chants and incense near the springs, to call the water and attract it with gifts representing fertility and wealth.

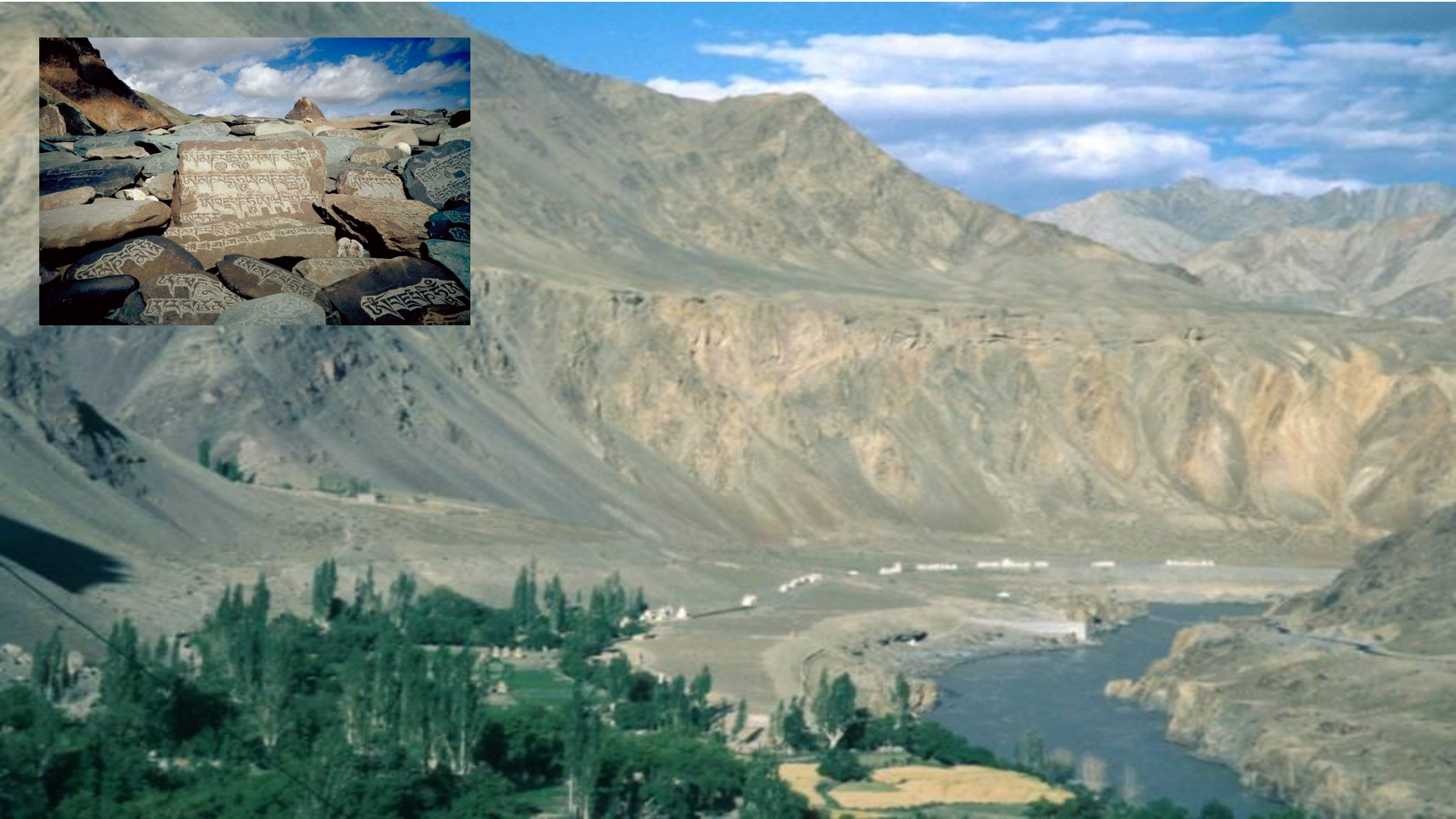
Their expertise resides in collective practical experience which is transmitted orally from one generation of farmers to the next.

The fruit of the previous generations' investment to make the land fertile allows the current generation to make a living and develop the landscape further as a constant process of adaptation and experimentation.









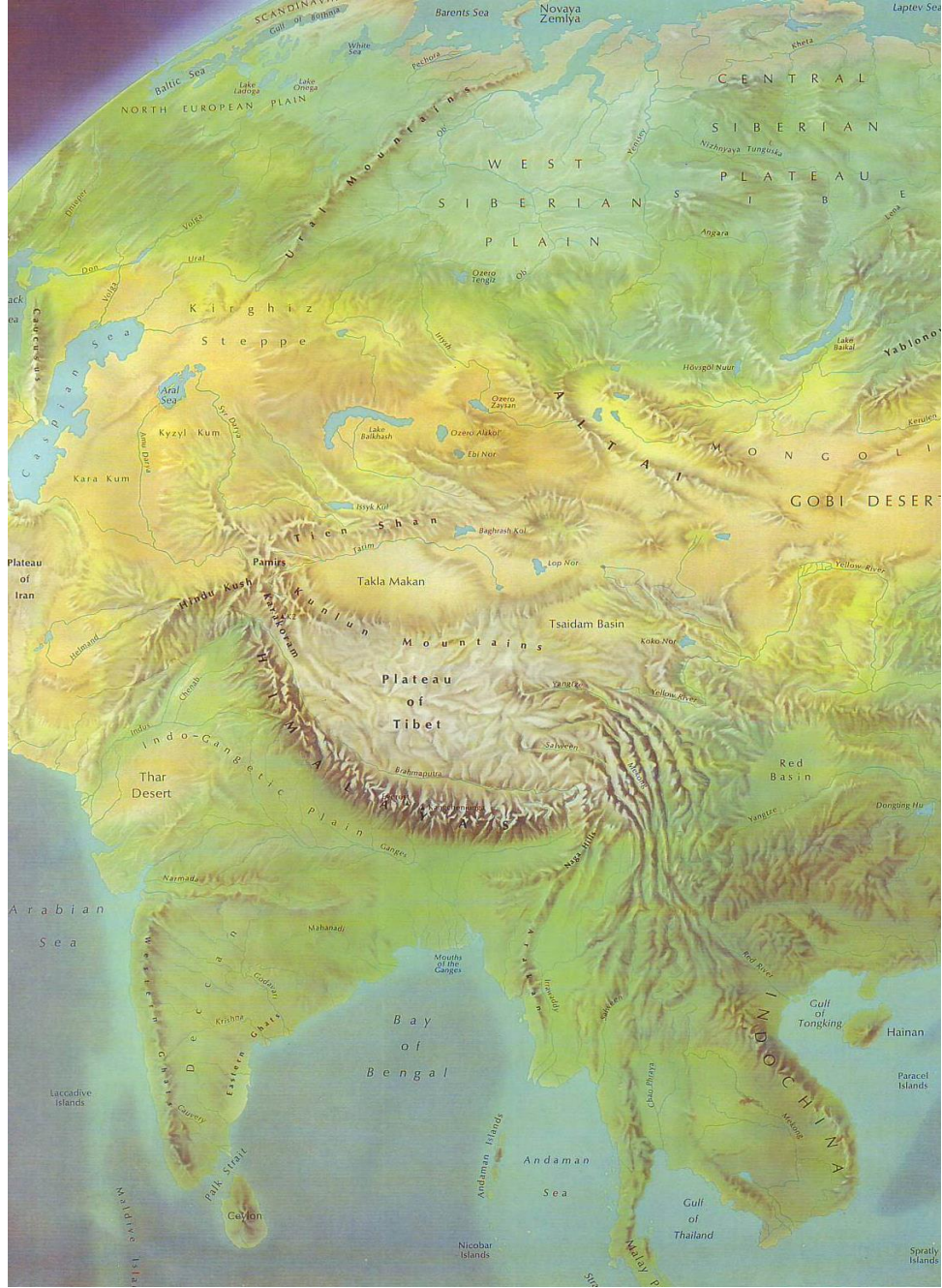
The Ladakhi are known for their pleasure in cheering and dancing together, inventing and sharing folksongs and participating in numerous religious festivities and performances, occasions at which they also barter their goods.





# Part 3: Public Policies concerning the management of water resources and the presence of water in the landscape





The local government of Ladakh, the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council, does much to maintain and support the local farmer-engineers who know how to build waterproof irrigation works with age-old techniques that can withstand the cold when the temperatures are below 30 degrees Celsius in winter.

The global challenge of climate change affects the Ladakhi oases in multiple ways, such as with more frequent landslides and glacier melting. The Ladakhi of some oases have observed that the glacier waters recently have come too late for the sowing period and the crops do not mature.

Seeking a solution, a Ladakhi engineer, Norphel Chewang, studied the problem thoroughly and came up with an innovation based on the traditional irrigation technology. He collects the glacier water flowing down unused in summer and pumps it to the adequate altitude on the barren mountain slope where it is stored as layers of ice or an 'artificial glacier' as he calls it and melts next spring, precisely at the required planting time. His invention allows more crops to be planted and harvested today.

With this invention, the local government was in the position to optimise the traditional system with modern calculations and create new arable land, as water became more abundant at the right time for sowing and watering crops.



**WATER RESERVIOUR STAKMO**





## Concluding thoughts about public water and landscape policies

In the European Landscape Convention (2000) Landscape planning means “a strong forward-looking action to enhance, restore or create landscapes” (article 2.f.).

Traditional water landscapes are successful adaptations to local environments, proven to be viable, manageable and sustainable as ecological knowledge is a product of a learning process by the practitioners in their environment.

Cultural diversity resides in different practices and experiences.

The cultural heritage enables land and water managers to invent improvements, and to adapt to new challenges, such as climate change.

A mosaic of distinct human cultures in a watershed whose water management activities differ and partly overlap can express complex layers of cultural values in a landscape.

From my research experience in culturally diverse and complex settings of traditional water and land management, I recommend studying each of the water uses in a landscape first and separately, not only its quantitative and qualitative aspects, but also the seasonality, the techniques and management skills involved, the dependencies and the risks.

Then to study the overlap of the different uses and their synergies, to study the water and land rights on which they reside and to develop only thereafter with the participating user-managers and beneficiaries, solutions which can solve perceived problems, complement existing skills and optimise a complex system.



In my understanding, the subjective dimension of landscape perception is a result of how people relate to their heritage and how they perceive themselves to be able and authorised to realize “the future they want”.

Such a self-identity of practical water landscape managers necessitates the political space in the broader national setting, decentralised decision-making and bottom-up development.

Learning from the living heritage of cultural diversity allows us to reflect on the temporal and spatial centrality of principles of modern water law, which date back only some two hundred years, and reflect priorities of urban and industrial water use.

## Recommendations:

- Landscape planning should be decentralised, allowing flexibility and local adaptation and learning processes by practitioners of land and water resource management, gatherers, farmers and herders.
- Landscape policies should include the right of the local practitioners to invent adaptations and transmit their knowledge and techniques to the next generation in one of the 6,500 human languages existing on the planet.
- Local governments can generate rules to share the benefits from modern income sources, such as tourism, to foster the expertise of the local water managers who live and maintain the common landscape in which the cultural wealth of the area resides.