Never-ending (always transforming) irrigation spaces
(Mariasole Pepa, postdoc researcher, University of Padua)

“Everything in Sudan is about the issue of land”
Water and land are intriguing geographical lenses to explore the societal transformation in Sudan. This exhibition aims to illuminate the multiplicity of agricultural irrigation systems and their recent changes. The photos were taken during fieldwork jointly conducted by the Faculty of Geography and Environment at the University of Khartoum and the University of Padua in February 2023. The research took us to the White Nile Sugar Company, Kenana Sugar Company, Gezira, Al-Fao, Guineed (Sudanese Sugar Company), Al-Waha (DAL Group), and up to River Nile State in Ed Damer, Abtara, Berber and Shendi.

Different and sometimes opposite ways of irrigation agriculture co-exist and evolve in Sudan. The diversification of production, the use of new technologies, and the call for climate-smart agriculture which construct a new layer of “digital territories” bring new questions for the future of agriculture. These changes are developing within the old issues of land and water ownership, pollution, and the challenges of weed and siltation control. This is happening in the frame of severe climate change and a wave of national and international agricultural investments that could increase the pressure on water and land resources. For instance, a new (or not so new) wave of agricultural investment in pivot irrigation system (“the green circle in the desert”) is taking place in the River Nile State, both from national investors and international companies including from the Gulf and China. The long-term impact of the pivot irrigation system, due to the large amounts of water needed and land access, should be taken into consideration, together with the implications for the local communities involved. Overall, agriculture remains a controversial sector in and beyond Sudan. This exhibition aims to provide ‘geographical lenses’ to read some of the changes happening in the agricultural irrigation sector in Sudan.

This exhibition represents a starting point to open other collective reflections such as, what is the future of agriculture? Which kind of agriculture and for whom? How are different irrigation spaces related to human and more-than-human interactions? How are different irrigation systems shaping mobility?

If you would like to be updated about the project, follow our progress at: AtlaSahel.it.
For suggestions and comments, please email mariasole.pepa@unipd.it.
This project was made possible by the time and help of all the people we had the pleasure to meet during field research, the commitment of the Faculty of Geography and Environment at Khartoum University, the support of CEDEJ, and the expertise of Downtown Gallery Khartoum.
This exhibition was partly funded by the Green Citizenships Project led by CEDEJ Khartoum.