

## THE IMPACT OF THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET ON THE REGION AROUND CHEFCHAUEN



**HERITAGE** DEVELOPMENT ECONOMIC  
ATTRACTIVENESS LANDSCAPE **CULTURAL**  
JOBS **TRADITION** IDENTITY COMMUNITY

### 1. Background

The city of Chefchaouen is a town of about 50,000 inhabitants, founded in 1471 by Mulay Ali Ben Rachid al-Alami. It was built at an altitude of 600 metres, at the foot of the Tisouka and Meggou mountains, which rise above the city like two horns, which are the origin of the city's name. It is a combination of "Chouf", which means "look", and "Echaouen" which means "horn" in Amazigh, and often refers to the



top of the mountains. Therefore, "Chefchaouen" means "look at the horns", or "look at the peaks of the mountains". The city of Chefchaouen is the county seat and the only urban area in the province of the same name. The territory covers 1,040.5 hectares, and is subsequently characterised by its strong rural life, with 90% of the population living in rural areas. In addition to its rural surroundings, the region is made up of the old city, the new city, and the districts of Ain Haouzi, Al Ayoun, and Adrar. This blue pearl attracts many tourists eager to explore nature and discover the local culture of the city.

## 2. Chefchaouen and Culture

With a rural exodus and mass migrations to large cities, Chefchaouen is facing a human resource deficit due to the depopulation of the rural countryside. This endangers the preservation of the local culture and even the territory itself.

Since 2010, Chefchaouen has been recognised as an exemplary community, representing the Mediterranean diet as part of UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage, alongside the cities of Soria in Spain, Koroni in Greece, Cilento in Italy, and other cities in Portugal, Croatia, and Cyprus.

The concept of the Mediterranean diet brings together all the knowledge, skills, traditions, and agricultural, socio-cultural, and culinary practices of the Mediterranean countries. It also integrates landscapes, natural resources, biodiversity, sustainable and responsible environmental management, as well as health, well-being, hospitality, and creativity.

Traditions and symbols are still very much alive and passed down from generation to generation, such as practices around food, social events, and celebrations. Indeed, people are drivers of local development who keep heritage alive and live in harmony with their cultural identity. Chefchaouen's development activities are in line with the New Community Charter, approved in 2009, which focuses on municipalities' strengths, strategic planning, dialogue with civil society, and local government intervention in local economic development.



As such, Chefchaouen set a goal of educating generations of youth on the importance of nutrition and the richness of their gastronomic heritage, while also reinforcing the importance of cooperatives for regional products and local food.

THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET IS PROMOTED BY CHEFCHAOUEN AS A COMPLETE LIFESTYLE, "FROM FARM TO TABLE, AND FROM TABLE TO LANDSCAPE"

### 3. Objectives and Project Implementation

#### 3.1 Primary and Specific Objectives

The main objective of the project is to contribute to the city's development by emphasizing the value of local culinary arts and handicrafts, in order to help residents embrace their identity.

Its more specific objective is to promote "Chaouen" as a tourist destination based on its rich land and the conservation of its heritage. It is also a question of modernizing and structuring resource management to establish sustainable sources of income, territorial balance, and attractiveness.

#### 3.2 Project Development

##### Main Actions Carried Out

The municipality of Chefchaouen has implemented numerous actions aimed at preserving and promoting the Mediterranean diet. In order to promote the vibrant, comprehensive regional development, this action plan is built on four main pillars:

##### 1. Preserving and Valuing Heritage

- Creation of the Mediterranean Diet Museum
- Creation of the Biodiversity Bank
- Rehabilitation and valuing of traditional bakeries and grain mills
- Supporting the mainstreaming of local products and handicrafts which are still undervalued
- Development of tourist routes in the Medina
- Establishing a Creative Tourism Network





## 2. Capacity-Building

- Establishing a Territorial Quality Mark
- Capacity building for regional product cooperatives and local artisans
- Creation of a network of cooperatives to improve marketing conditions
- Assessment of the Souk Beldi project, with the aim of reviving it
- Creation of a Mediterranean diet centre

## 3. Awareness-Raising and Communication

- Implementing awareness-raising workshops on nutrition and the Mediterranean diet in schools
- Organization of an annual "Mediterranean Diet Day" Festival
- Creation of a page on the municipality's website dedicated to nutrition
- Publication of a book on the heritage of the Mediterranean diet

## 4. Governance

- Partnerships with the academic and research community
- Creation of a Monitoring Committee
- Inclusion of the Municipality of Chefchaouen in the European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation

This project is part of a multilateral cooperation with many partners, including researchers, cities, and local actors that include: a research and collaboration agreement with the University of Granada; the 6 communities; the Ministry of Culture; the Offices of Artisans, Tourism, Agriculture, and Water and Forests; cooperatives; cultural associations; hotel associations; committed restaurateurs.

# 4. Impact

## 4.1 Direct Impacts



### Impact on Local Government

The local government has played a unifying role in "Cultivating Culture", to turn it into a source of income, a sense of belonging, and dialogue.

This project, in which the inhabitants recognize and identify with each other, has helped to improve social cohesion, bring citizens and the administration closer together, and create proximity between the mayor's office and its counsellors. The Mayor of the City was elected President of the Moroccan Association of Eco-Cities (AMEV).

**THROUGH A CULTURE OF RESPECT, CREATIVITY, AND DIVERSITY, THIS PROJECT HAS STRENGTHENED SOCIAL COHESION ACROSS THE REGION, AS WELL AS WITH OTHER CITIES CONNECTED TO MEDITERRANEAN CULTURE ROOTED IN AL-ANDALUS HERITAGE.**

The project has been developed based on cooperation and dialogue:

- Horizontal cooperation - Dialogue with surrounding rural communities, civil society, and institutional bodies engaged in the region
- Vertical cooperation - Cooperation between the Chefchaouen Province, the Ministry of Culture, other ministries (Delegations), and the Ministry of the Interior of Morocco.
- At the international level: This UNESCO initiative is supported by an international network of cities.

### Impact on Culture and Cultural Stakeholders in the City

This project has revived local crafts and living arts, and help foster recognition of creativity in a civil society that is organized around attracting both artists and investors.

Women's groups making products have multiplied, structured, professionalized, and networked to reach a critical mass and establish competitiveness. Young cultural stakeholders have developed new

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talents for events related to the project: including photography, painting, or transmission and information technologies.

Under this project, culture has been reframed as a way of generating life and ensuring the sustainability of rural or urban ancestral rites, rituals, and traditions in connection with the culinary arts. Wisdom and ancestral knowledge have been modernized and disseminated through technological tools.

### **Greater Impact on the City or Territory and its Population**

The beneficiaries of this project are mainly rural populations that interact with urban populations involved in the project such as craftsmen, tradesmen, restaurant owners, and building conservationists. Indeed, urban and rural links were strengthened through the recognition of each other's cultures, but also through economic complementarity.

Women in particular have benefited from training courses, networks, and the Territorial Quality Mark. Furthermore, youth, those who have seen the rebirth of their culture and identity, as well as both Moroccan and foreign visitors are all considered indirect beneficiaries, too. By revitalizing the region's attractiveness the project has minimized the impact of the rural exodus. It has also bolstered the development of a new form of responsible tourism, sparked a change in mentality within an environment characterized by cannabis culture, and adapted rural tourism infrastructures to international standards.

Chefchaouen has also gained greater visibility in international networks, basing its communication and its regional marketing on responsible tourism, organic produce, and fair trade.

### **4.2 Assessment**

Three elements make it possible to measure the impact of this project on Chefchaouen:

- The wealth of civil society, through the expansion of the number of cultural associations and quality of developed issues
- The opening of the Mediterranean Diet Museum with the support of local and financial actors
- The involvement and attractiveness generated by this project within local networks and cities partnered with Chefchaouen





**WOMEN, YOUTH, AND PEOPLE LIVING IN RURAL AREAS ARE THE MAIN BENEFICIARIES OF THIS PROJECT, WHICH HAS SERVED TO STRENGTHEN SOCIAL COHESION AND REAFFIRM PEOPLE'S IDENTITIES ACROSS THE REGION.**

#### **4.3 Assessment**

- Recognition by UNESCO, and Chefchaouen's invitation to the world to present and exchange experiences in the field of culture
- Tourism attractiveness of the city, and particularly, the strong influx of tourists to restaurants that use local products
- Chefchaouen's positive image and strong demand for local agricultural products

#### **4.4 Ongoing Work**

The sheer magnitude of this project warranted the creation of an International Forum on the Mediterranean Diet. Organized in the latter half of 2016, it was a citizen exchange platform between the involved cities, experts, actors, and civil society stakeholders.

### **5. Further Information**

The City of Chefchaouen was a candidate for the third "UCLG Mexico City – Culture 21 International Award" (November 2017 - May 2018). The jury for the award drew up its final report in June of 2016, and requested that the UCLG Committee on Culture highlight this project as a good practice in the implementation of Agenda 21 for culture, as a special mention for the third awarding of the prize.

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