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COLONIAL HERITAGE: A RESOURCE FOR LOCAL DEVELOPMENT IN EL HARROUCH, ALGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The small village, which started as a settlement, still maintains a close relationship with its surrounding environment. Its rural origins are still evident, as it aligns with the rhythm of the countryside and offers its services as a relay and mediator in both directions. The town of El Harrouch, located in eastern Algeria, was chosen for its distinct behavior compared to other similar towns. Although it has not undergone any significant changes or transformations, it is situated in an agricultural basin surrounded by high-yield farmland, which limits its spatial growth. Despite its strategic location and historical roots as the oldest settlement in Algeria, urban development has been slow. As a result, the built environment remains in disrepair, especially in the colonial grid that makes up the town center. This legacy, whose advanced deterioration is due to various factors, is the subject of this paper. We aim to explore questions related to the future development of El Harrouch. Can the revitalization of its colonial heritage lead to a local economic dynamic based on the potential and assets of the town? How can all stakeholders, both public and private, participate in new prospects for the town's development? Assuming that the town's agricultural potential is a driving force for development through agrotourism, is this dimension compatible with short- and medium-term planning policies, and do we have the means to balance present needs with future uncertainties?

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1. INTRODUCTION

Heritage is a driving force behind local development (Bank, 2001), helping create economic value. In Algeria, new regional planning policies have a primary objective in terms of local development approaches for marginal areas, that is, how to act on the attractiveness of remote and marginalized areas. Rural areas have become an important factor for guaranteeing local development. Attachment to land is the first step towards development. Colonial legacy is a type of heritage that has left its mark on the Algerian territory, in a non-random way, from one region to another. Colonial facts remain problematic, as the weak anchoring of the colonial past in national memory seems clear. To this end, this study seeks to identify the mechanisms and keys to economic development in fragile and marginal rural areas, taking these local resources as the focus for intervention to envisage the revitalization that these areas require today.

The town of El Harrouch, our case study, has breathed rural life to the present day. Its colonial origins, dating back to 1838, gave us hope for a successful and sustainable future. Nevertheless, the paradoxical situation that emerges between potential and available local resources and urban, social, economic, and spatial realities calls for us to qualify, evaluate, and innovate new keys to sustainable economic development. Located in an agricultural basin that is considered one of the richest and most promising in Algeria, its territory was created on the basis of a colonial perimeter, whose agricultural vocation persisted to this day. In fact, this village is located halfway along the main axis linking Constantine with its port Skikda. Its location was chosen for economic reasons, as the agricultural land on which the village of El Harrouch was created, which served the colonial economy, was and will always be high-yield land, whether for orchards, cereals, or even market gardening. Thus, today's rich colonial heritage is at odds with the rest of the city to which it gave birth. This rupture is always linked to a rupture in civilization (Gharbi, 2011), a problem of attachment to this type of heritage, which remains discriminated against and rejected by all that is colonial (Gharbi, 2011), (Said, Zeghlache, & Guinadez, 2015).

El Harrouch's colonial heritage remains, therefore, imprisoned in its political context and not reconciled, "a policy of "purifying" urban space of the signs of an abolished history, pejoratively qualifying the architecture of that era as "colonial architecture (Igheroussene, 2011). After a process of intensive reappropriation, El Harrouch's colonial heritage became vulnerable (Benaissa, 2023) (SAID AISSA, 2012), threatening, and falling into ruin. This study attempts to elucidate the issues surrounding future development. Does the revitalization of colonial heritage allow us to envisage a trend towards local dynamism through the potential and assets of the town of El Harrouch?

Agriculture is a characteristic of the rural world and one of the activities that are considered incompatible with the city because it is irreplaceable, non-delocalizable, and, above all, respectful of man and his environment. However, agriculture has a promising future for small towns, which are lagging behind economically, and the economic revival approach is attempting to formulate a response to new development challenges. The dynamic role of the town's hinterland (agricultural farms) would then trigger a local economic dynamic. This leads us to formulate the hypothesis that agri-tourism as a tool for revitalization and relaunching would be capable of shaking up the local economy in favor of a sustainable process by seeking stability for the town through its autonomy between the town and hinterland.

With this in mind, the heritage approach to the colonial legacy will be a new territorial dynamic for the town of El Harrouch to identify opportunities for development, where agriculture is part of this heritage that shapes the rural area (Vernières, 2015). The colonial farms of El Harrouch are prime examples of the discrimination of Algeria's colonial heritage, representing abandonment and loss of use. After independence, the state reclaimed them and transformed them into self-managed estates as part of the agrarian revolution (1970). However, the latter has led to mismanagement and under-utilization of agricultural land. The built-up colonial heritage lost its original vocation, leaving colonial castles that dominated the vast estates surrounding it in ruins.

This type of heritage should constitute a territorial resource for development (Vernières, 2015); (Campagne & Pecqueur, 2014) (Davezeis & Talandier, 2009) and should be mobilized in economic development initiatives. Neyet (1992) stresses that knowledge of the value of the past, following its protection and enhancement, will be a factor in développement. Therefore, enhancing the value of colonial farms has become essential for the evolution and development of El Harrouch (Idir, 2013). To this end, we deduce that the multiplication of forms of agricultural activity enables the desired economic dynamics to ensure the linking of the economic specificity of the surrounding rural area of El Harrouch (Greffé, 2003), since agriculture remains one of the components of colonial heritage (Vernières, 2015).

Rural tourism is seen as a territorial resource, along with agriculture and handicrafts, which can contribute to sustainable economic development. Agrotourism is a successful form of rural green tourism and a form of local sustainable tourism. In this sense, it has been identified as a specific feature of the rural world (Perrier-Cornet, 2002) and a means of ensuring the sustainability of rural areas (Dalmas 2014). Generally speaking, tourism, especially agritourism, is based on the development of specific local resources, whether natural, man-made, or culturelles (Bastin, 2007). It is presented as a niche for rural tourism that takes place on farms at activités (Rober, 2012). Agrotourism is often confused with rural tourism (Bourdeau, 2001) as it represents a source of income diversification in agricoles. Today, agrotourism is the focus of new développements (Flanigan, 2014). Tourists represent the opportunity to visit and meet producers directly on a farm (Marcotte, 2006).

2. Methodology.

On the basis of our literature review, and starting from the inverted logic of the valorization of El Harrouch's colonial heritage in order to integrate a participatory approach by the inhabitants, we assume that our evaluation approach is based on the sustainability of the contribution of heritage in territorial development projects. The development of the analysis grid must be in line with the logic of sustainability on the one hand, and with the vision of the orientations of recovery and development projects on the other. Our approach consisted of two main stages :

- A diagnosis to identify the key resources likely to be mobilized in the construction of El Harrouch's specific territorial resources.
- An evaluation grid to examine El Harrouch's agricultural potential to contribute its colonial heritage to the development process.

Once a diagnosis and evaluation grid has been drawn up, we will be able to identify the real keys to the development of El Harrouch, where the enhancement of its colonial heritage could maintain its agriculture and enable the conservation of its fragile landscape, which could constitute a factor of attraction and carrier of an image valorisable (Vernières, 2015).

Gathering information is the evaluation tool via the literature review, which is used to identify the structuring elements of the grid to be used (Necessa, 2020). Multidimensional criteria are derived from the notion of heritage, which in turn derives from another multidimensional criterion resulting from a process of patrimonialization (Dalmas, 2014).

The research objective is to assess the contribution of colonial heritage, of which agriculture is a part of the local economic development process, with a view to creating new values and jobs, thus contributing to sustainable local development. This analysis will help ensure that this legacy is better taken into account by local and even national authorities, whose concern for the local population is the cornerstone of this action.

The first step is to identify El Harrouch's specific local resources and colonial heritage. Second, to ensure that this legacy has a positive impact on El Harrouch's development, we present this approach from an institutional perspective through national policies for rural revitalization, including the various intervention programs proposed, such as the search for new activities to create goods and services linked to this heritage.

3. Results and discussion.

The small town of El Harrouch is characterized by a paradoxical situation between the current reality and the future to be propelled. Located in eastern Algeria, the town of El Harrouch was not only a garrison town and administrative center during the colonial era but also a military base representing the colonists in the hinterland.

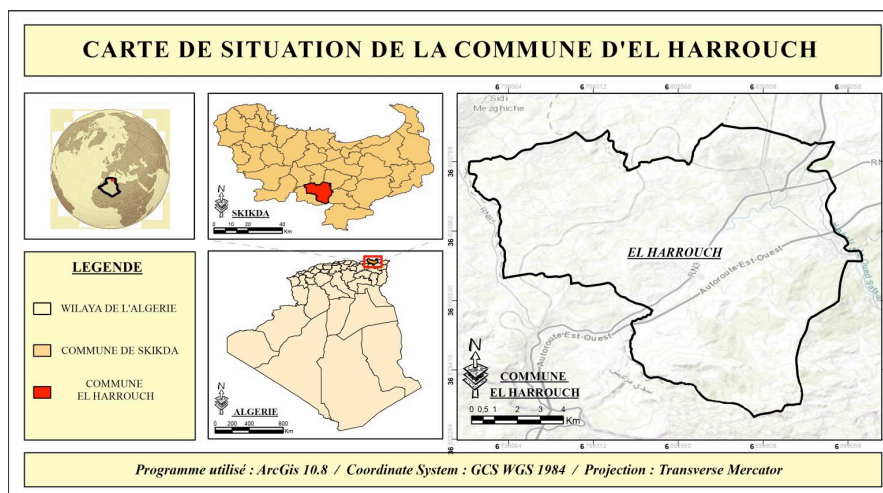
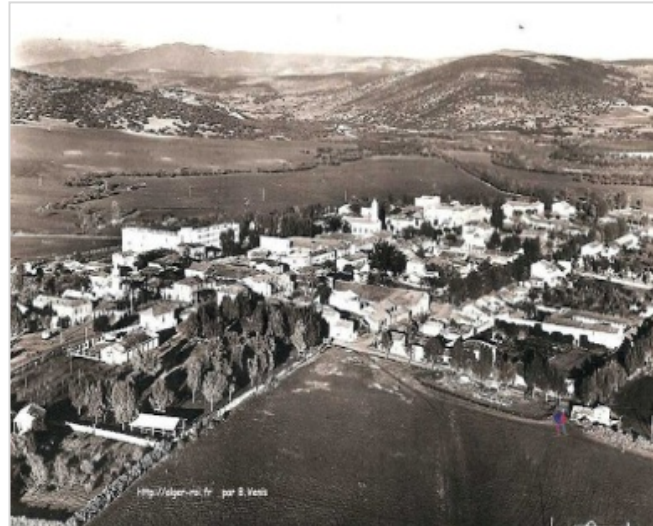


Figure 1. Geographical location of the El Harrouch commune.

3.1. El Harrouch settlement centre/perimeter binomial.

El Harrouch's settlement was created following the conquest of the town of Skikda (1838) as a result of a political decision. The town took the form of a military camp linking the port of Philippeville (Skikda) to the city of Constantine. The site was chosen for economic reasons, as the agricultural land surrounding the village, which served the colonial economy, was and will always be land of high agricultural yield: orchards, cereals, and market gardening. El Harrouch was first a bivouac, then an entrenched camp for General Valre's column of infantrymen, who settled there in 1838. Thus, the engineering barracks formed the first French village between Cirta and Rusicade.



*Figure 2. View of the village in its environment.
Source: East Constantine Regional Archive.*

The military occupation lasted from 1838 to 1846. The full-fledged commune of El Harrouch was created by decree on August 22, 1861. An impeded valley, where the cultivated fields draw the geometric regularity of their green, yellow, or black quadrilaterals. Then, in the middle of the valley, a white spot appeared at the bottom of the basin, in the village of El Harrouch. This administrative center of the canton covered an area of 11719 hectares and included four communes: El Harrouch, Robertville (Emjez-Edchich), Col-des-oliviers (Aïn Bouziane) and Gastonville (Salah Bouchaour). The perimeter of colonization was a form of allotment made up of geometric plots that systematically offer lots to settlers (Cote, 1992).

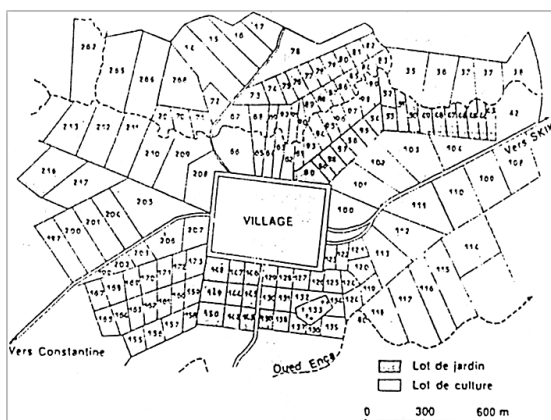


Figure N°3: The settlement village of El Harrouch perimeter.

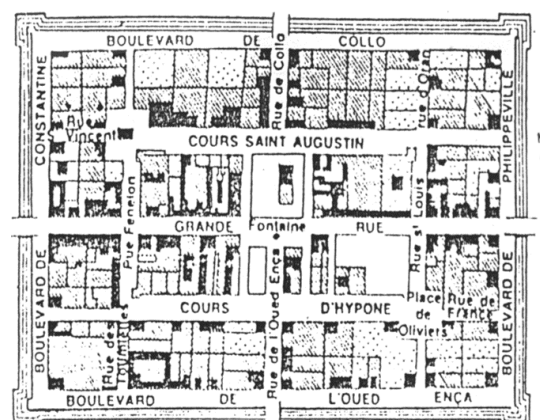


Figure N°4: Built fabric of the colonial in its village of El Harrouch

Source: East Constantine Regional Archive.

They received an urban, garden, and cultivation lot. Each perimeter was equipped with a village in the central position. Three grids were superimposed: agrarian grid, road grid, and bâti grid (Bitam, 2011). The villages were designed on an orthogonal grid, which has been the geometric pattern for organizing colonized territories since antiquity. Checkerboard villages, with orthogonal streets, low-slung houses, red tiles for roofing, a square at the crossroads of the right-angled lanes on which the village's structuring buildings, monuments, the town hall, the church, public gardens, and sometimes theaters, are located. Villages are often fortified by surrounding walls with gates on the two main axes.



*Figure 5. The green belt of the El Harrouch settlement in 1873
Source: Authors from Archive régionale de l'Est Constantine.*

3.2. Colonial farms as heritage resources.

Farmhouses bear witness to the discrimination of Algeria's colonial heritage, representing the state of abandonment and degradation of the built environment and the loss of use and initial practice of their construction. After independence, the state reclaimed colonial farms and transformed them into self-managed farms. The agrarian revolution (1970–1975), by nationalizing agricultural land, breathed new life into these structuring establishments, grouping farms, and agricultural land into "state farms." The workers were neither landowners nor farmers. This policy was poorly managed, with underexploited estates and the consequent loss of the original vocation of colonial lands and farms. The failure of the nationalization policy paved the way for the development of new state lands and, as a result, colonial farms were abandoned. This colonial heritage, which resides in colonial farms, has become a nuisance, but it constitutes an asset for local development by mobilizing agriculture and reintegrating it through its historical and functional enhancement into the local economic development process. **How can colonial heritage be integrated into the local economic development process through enhancement operations?**



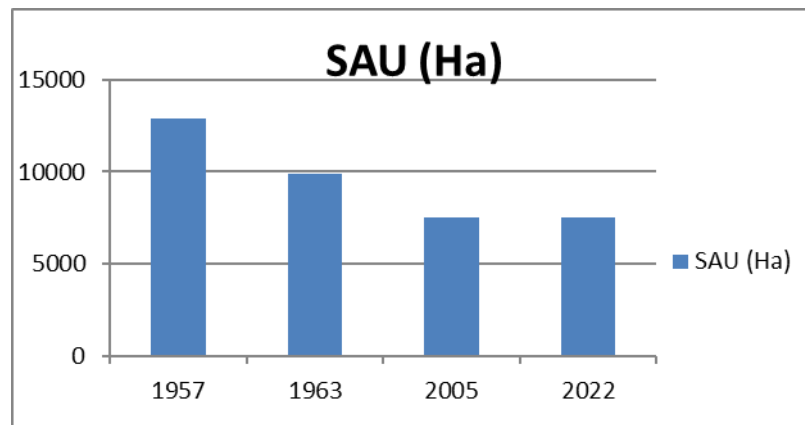
*Figure 6. Plurality of farms around the village farm of El Harrouch.
Source: Archive régionale de l'Est Constantine.*



*Figure 7. Abandoned colonial.
Source : Author, 2022.*

3.3. El Harrouch's Natural Resources: A Small Town with an Agricultural Vocation.

Agriculture is a resource and economic activity that helps maintain the landscape and reinforces local identity. The specific nature of each area is reflected in its geographical, landscape, economic and social characteristics. These characteristics are shaped by the dominant role of agriculture in rural areas. Agriculture is one of the pillars of the local economy and has lost its economic and social characteristics. As a result, with the advent of globalization and the ease and speed of transport and communication, rural areas are open to the outside world, which means they can no longer capitalize on their specific assets, both agricultural and artisanal. The more pronounced and recognized this specificity, the easier it is to develop. The construction of a territorial brand calls for a heritage approach to rural heritage to identify the role of agricultural activity. In this way, agriculture becomes a source of local development through specific tourism offers.



*Figure 8. Evolution of agricultural land in the commune of El Harrouch.
Source: El Harrouch agricultural subdivision, 2022.*

Presidential instruction no. 005 of August 14, 1995, on the protection of high-yield agricultural land, declared an entire zone off limits to all construction, as it is of high agricultural potential. Although the urban area is blocked by a very large area of high-potential agricultural land, the number of farmers is declining, with a considerable drop in the number of people employed, and a spectacular fall from 47.50% of those employed in 1966 to 9.80% in 1998.

Table 1. Distribution of farms in 2023.

	Collective farms	Individual farms	Pilot farms	TOTAL
farms	35	114	1	150
%	23,33%	76,00%	0,67%	100,00%

Source: APC of El Harrouch.

4. Revitalization to promote local economic development.

Local economic development is an approach to revitalize territories. The aim is to enhance the local resources of an area. Economic and social revitalization affect employment, housing, training, health, and social services. Local development is a process of empowering mechanisms for transforming socioeconomic systems through the use of local resources. The specificity of territories is reflected in their geographical, landscape, economic and social characteristics. These characteristics are shaped by the dominant role of agriculture in rural areas. Following the failure of the nationalization policy of colonial farms in Algeria, the State embarked on a new path of agricultural development: privatization of these farms in the 1980s. This privatization system was granted to people with little interest in the local history and culture. Two factors transformed the Algerian rural landscape in general, and the El Harrouch landscape in particular:

- Integration of a new type of housing with no connection to local identity or architecture.
- Removal of certain plants (for religious reasons), as in the case of orchards for vines (as in El Harrouch).



Figure 9. Farm in a state of disrepair
Source: Authors, 2022.



Figure N°10. New integration
Source: Authors, 2022.

The loss of its social, cultural, environmental, and economic characteristics has certainly led to the disappearance of rural agricultural areas' economic specificity (Greffé, 2003). This specificity ensures reliable competition through agricultural and craft goods and even the services it produces. Rural areas are increasingly setting themselves apart from the rest to create distinctive signs and specific images. To this end, rural areas will be developed through these territorial characteristics, which materialize quite simply through specific agricultural activities. The construction of a territorial brand calls for a heritage approach to rural heritage, in order to identify the role that agricultural activity can play. To this end, the Algerian state embarked on the process of taking charge of corrective measures (Campagne & Pecqueur, 2014):

- **1st corrector:** rural industrialization to improve some **rural performances**.
- **2nd corrector:** The implementation of major development programs to create new favorable areas suitable for modernization (rural development program).

The objective of this new development plan is to rejuvenate and boost the growth of rural regions by implementing a local development model that focuses on income-

generating and productive activities. This approach, known as PPDR (Projet de Proximité et de Développement Rural Intégré - Proximity and Integrated Rural Development Project), is an essential tool for rural development and is part of the national rural renewal policy. The goal is to help rural communities harness the potential of their territory, thereby promoting economic activities and enhancing the incomes and living conditions of the people. (Algerian Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, press review, (2003).)

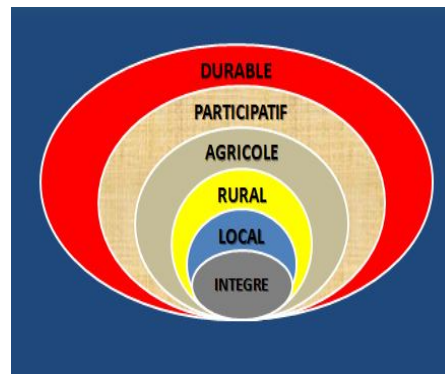


Figure 11. Sustainability concept.
 Source: <http://www.agriculturemono.net.website> 2020.

The sustainable rural development strategy is an operational tool that embodies the fundamental principles of sustainable development, including proximity, participation, decentralization, and multi-sectoral integration (Laib, 2008). This type of project is designed to revitalize marginal rural areas by consolidating economic activities and promoting new activities centered around the sustainable management of natural resources. By pooling the skills of local players and federating the objectives emphasized by the State, the PPDR brings together the various national sectoral policies, including Agriculturemono (2020).

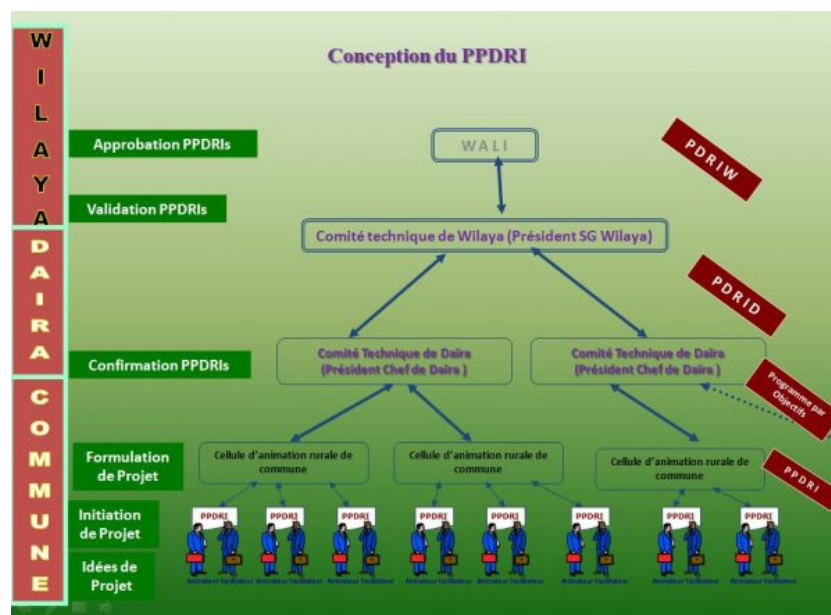


Figure 12. The PPDR process.
 Source: <http://www.agriculturemono.net.website> 2020.

The project is organized around four unifying themes soient (Algerian Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, press review (2009).) :

- Improving living conditions by **rehabilitating** villages and ksour
- Increase and diversify incomes by promoting small and medium-sized businesses producing goods and services
- Encourage the rational use of natural resources and tangible and intangible assets
- Strengthen the capacity of institutions and populations

Algeria's new rural policy has been restructured by revising the reallocation of available territorial resources. This policy is gradually reducing the degradation of the rural world and restoring hope to local populations. Several objectives have been targeted to meet the requirements of the national economy, such as the revitalization of rural areas through job creation, the modernization of rural societies, the creation of a favorable environment for sustainable economic development and the adoption of participatory governance. In view of this policy, an agreement was signed by the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Tourism in June 2018. The aim is to revive and revitalize rural areas by mobilizing the various factors in a new strategy to modernize and revitalize agriculture and diversify local agricultural, forestry, craft and tourism resources. This strategy will enable us to embark on a new type of development. Agriculture is still present in the El Harrouch area, despite the difficulties it faces, and is seen as a genuine economic activity that maintains the landscape and reinforces local identity.

4.1. El Harrouch integrated rural development project (PPDRI) 2007.

The area chosen for diagnosis is the isolated Lagbar Lahmar area of El Harrouch, a local integrated rural development project with the following characteristics:

- Relief: Farmland.
- Very favorable climate.
- Average annual rainfall: 600ml.
- Distance between project and main road: 5km.
- Distance between project and access to services (doctor, market, bank): 5km.
- Population of 400 hbts, including 70 households.
- Lack of necessary living conditions in rural areas.
- Project area 4 ha.
- Unemployed population of which 150 hbt unemployed, 60 hbt engaged in agriculture of which 98% of the active population are engaged in agriculture.
- Agricultural activity is based on cereal growing, market gardening and livestock breeding.

Table 2. Constraints and opportunities of the territory.

Constraints faced	Opportunities available
1. Obstacles linked to the physical environment:	1. Opportunities available in the physical environment :
– Climate : favorable	– Climate : favorable
– Soil : favorable	– Soil : favorable
– Water Ressources : lacking	– Water Ressources : lacking
– Other resources :	– Other: forest and pasture
2. Socio-economic constraints: same infrastructure	2. Stabilize the population and encourage them to stay
3. Impact of constraints: unemployment, poverty.	3. futuristic visions of the area after difficulties have been overcome: PPDRI

Source: El Harrouch agricultural subdivision, authors' processing, 2023.

The application of this project over a five years timeframe would certainly have positive **impacts** such as:

- Opening up the area: development of communal roads and easier travel.
- Improving the living conditions of the target population: Providing the necessary conditions for an easy and healthy life, such as public lighting, schooling, water, sports and leisure activities...
- Increase the income of the local population through income diversification, as well as through increased agricultural production.
- Employment: Create new job opportunities by diversifying into agricultural activities.
- Support for rural women as the driving force behind rural development.
- Stability of the local population by improving the living environment.

4.2. Agrotourism complements rural activity by supporting the local economy.

The literature review we conducted focused on various forms of tourism, with a particular interest in rural tourism and agrotourism. Agrotourism, which is tourism linked to agriculture, has gained significant attention in recent scientific publications. The practice of rural tourism is not considered to be agrotourism, as it does not involve direct contact with farmers or a focus on agricultural activities (Bourdeau, 2001). Agrotourism provides an opportunity for tourists to visit farms and meet producers directly (Marcotte, 2006). The concept of agrotourism has been widely used in the United States since 1990, and the Small Farm Center defines it as "an act of visiting a working farm or any agricultural, horticultural or agribusiness enterprise for educational or entertainment purposes, or to participate actively in the enterprise's activities" (Small Farm Center, 2014). Gautrat (2004) argues that agrotourism can contribute to intercultural exchange in disadvantaged rural areas. According to Durrande-Moreau, Courvoisier and Boquet (Marcotte, 2006), agrotourism has a double economic impact and is a strong potential for the future, as it helps to maintain landscapes, promote local identity, and support the local economy. Overall, the combination of tourism and agriculture creates a highly dynamic local economic activity. The Canadian Farming Alternatives Program concurs with the contribution of agrotourism to the economic dynamic created by such a tourism offer: "a tourism practice associated with the pleasure of the terroir; a type of ecotourism... An economic activity between the tourist and the agricultural producers". Indeed, the positive effects of agrotourism on territories are vast. In this regard, Gautrat affirms that mass tourism contributes to the development of territorial settlements where the attractiveness of certain tourist sites sees their population multiply. At the same time, it contributes to the depopulation of the countryside. Agri-tourism slows down depopulation by enabling farmers to stay on their land without abandoning their smallholdings. Integrating agri-tourism into the development strategies of fragile agricultural terroirs is becoming necessary to promote the local economy.

Successful agri-tourism necessarily involves seeking authenticity in the tourism product, where local culture must be the central differentiating element of tourist destination (Dubois, 2014). According to this definition, local products are what we call "authenticity." In their book **"Local Products Understand and Act"** (Bérard, 2004), L. Bernard and P. Marchenay explain the process of promoting territories and the place of local products in this promotion. They define **"terroir"** as a small area where soil and climate distinguish the foods produced by their unique gustatory quality. The innovation in agri-food services and craft activities has generated a remarkable flow of tourists, which explains the attraction of fragile rural areas.

5. Conclusion.

Acting on the attractiveness of marginal areas has become a key objective in Algeria's new regional planning policies. This territorial attractiveness is expressed by a region's economic, social, and cultural attractiveness. As the commune of El Harrouch is an agricultural region par excellence, town of El Harrouch is encroaching on very good agricultural land, known for its high productivity in garlic, onions, and legumes (30% of national production is supplied here). Based on this observation, market garden production in El Harrouch has been taken as an indicator of development. Festivals also a means of safeguarding and enhancing rural heritage and promoting and disseminating traditional culture. In this respect, the annual garlic, onion, and potato festival held in the commune of El Harrouch is a real investment that generates significant economic (employment, income), tourist, and spatial impacts. El Harrouch's regional environment appears to be ideal for agrotourism, which would bring a new dynamic to the commune, whose tourism offering remains to be developed. This applies to both agriculture, as a

truly diversified economic activity in El Harrouch, and the colonial farms, now abandoned. In fact, the revitalization of this small locality would inevitably begin with the promotion of local products.

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