

# The Role of Local Population in Safeguarding Heritage Case of Chefchaouen

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**Abstract.** Local community engagement in heritage safeguarding has been a growing trend during the last two decades. With international models and charts that introduced the participatory paradigm into public restoration and interventions, community-based conservation approaches have started to emerge. The involvement of local inhabitants into restoration processes has proven effective contribution into sustaining public interventions and developing behaviors that mitigate the risks of deterioration of architectural heritage. The case of Chefchaouen has demonstrated multiples initiatives taken by inhabitants and local council towards chaoui medina aged from de 15th century. Made of stone, earth, wood and lime, the participatory dynamic around safeguarding the fabric has contributed to improve public efforts of restoration and rehabilitation. The contribution has gone beyond raising awareness to tangible actions and engagement. The article purpose is to analyse the modalities and role of inhabitants involvement into sustaining heritage. It presents the results of an empiric research based on qualitative data and analysis, and develops the dynamics around the medina of Chefchaouen, exploring the local initiatives and their effects on safeguarding heritage, with acknowledging the local configurations behind such dynamics.

## Introduction

Safeguarding urban heritage has known during the last decade an increasing interest especially after the launch of the royal rehabilitation program of traditional cities (medinas) in December 2011. By definition, medinas are traditional fabrics that composed of historical landmarks, traditional houses, streets and patterns, built with local knowhow and traditional materials, reflecting a valuable genius loci [1].

As a living heritage, it encounters daily uses and transformations, which make its preservation challenging at many levels. The public efforts deployed to preserve and value the medinas as an important economic and cultural asset for local development are multiple. From architectural charters, to safeguarding plans, including requalification and upgrading programs, the repertory is large [2, 3].

In parallel, modalities of state control and action have slightly shifted toward involving inhabitants and civil society in general. Seeking legitimacy and effectiveness at a first priority, this renewal with a participatory paradigm have acknowledged the later potential of optimizing the public interventions. The injunction of inhabitants as emerging actors has been confirmed by local experiences through the world in addition to global development models, proving that effective protection of heritage depends on the involvement and support of the community continuing use and maintenance [4.5].

As social practices and anthropic factors have as much impact as other types of risks on the degradation of heritage, it has from the opposite perspective, the involvement of inhabitants as permanent actors on heritage may influence safeguarding process [6].

The potential highlighted of inhabitants involvement beside institutional actors and elected representatives are mainly articulated about a mutual understanding of social practice and

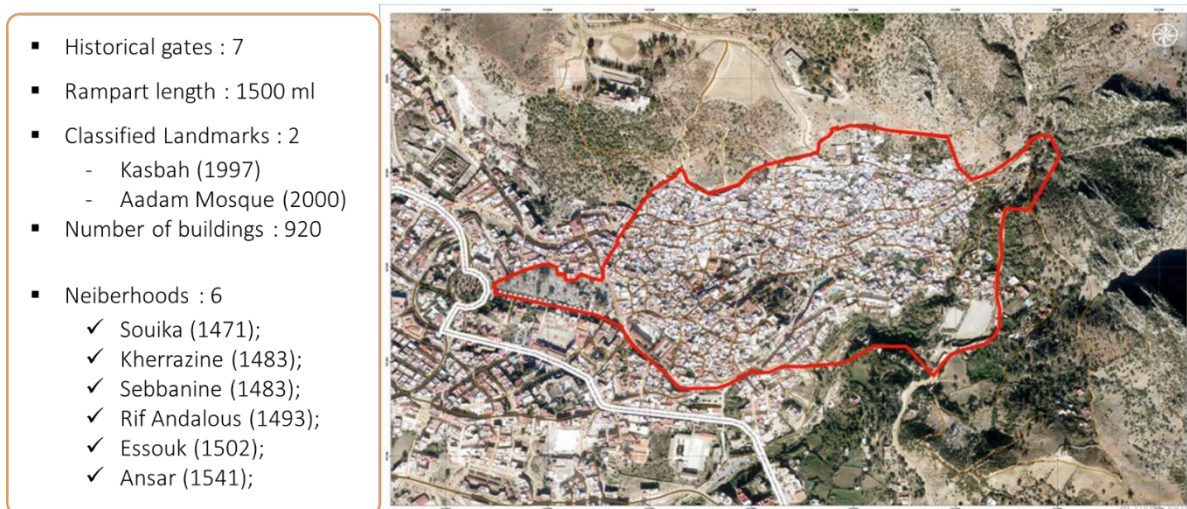
constructive knowledge in the medina taken into account by the stakeholders for efficient and harmonized interventions. The expected effects emphasize the valorization of physical and historical identity and image of the medina, through the promotion of cultural heritage [7, 8].

The case of Chefchaouen had demonstrated a local dynamic around medina heritage, combining inhabitants and associations initiatives to a political leadership. The medina of Chefchaouen, a living traditional fabric from the 15<sup>th</sup> century, has known for more than a decade, multiples initiatives. The article focuses on understanding the local dynamic of collective management of heritage on mitigating the different risks of its deterioration.

The methods of collecting and analyzing data are mainly qualitative, including official documents and reports, interviews of different stakeholders and participatory observations<sup>1</sup>.

### **Chefchouen Medina: a strong image of the traditional fabric**

Worldwide known as the blue pearl of north morocco, the medina is located in the mountainous city of Chefchaouen, in the region of Tanger Tetouan El Hoceima. Chefchaouen City is located at 112km from the city of Tangier.



*Figure 1: Delimitation and characteristics of Chefchaouen Medina's fabric (Author)*

The medina represents the core traditional fabric built since the 15<sup>th</sup> century. It is implemented in an area exceeding 20 ha, and counts more 18 000 inhabitants, which nearly represents 42% of the whole city population. The medina is the most populated fabric in the city, with a density of 900 inhabitants/ha (Figure 2).

Although the medina is still in process of classification, a delay due to extreme densification and hybridization of heritage character, it maintains authentic and strong physical and historical image with its narrow alleys, monuments, gates and ramparts, and especially the shades of local materials (Table1).

<sup>1</sup> The period of investigation is 2019-2022.

*Table 1 : Building materials of Chefchaouen medina’s heritage (Author)*

Building materials		Use
Stone	Calcareous and siliceous	Structural components
Terracota	Bricks and tiles	Roofs, part of walls, arches Masonry support elements Ceilings, awnings
Lime	Mortar / Plaster	Rendering exterior walls Plastering interiors Finishing roofpaving Protection of water infiltration
Timber Wood	Wooden beams (cedar, soha, red fir)	Roofs, ceilings, doors, lintels
Earth	Masonries, mortar	Rammed earth walls



*Figure 2 : Overview of the Medina of Chefchaouen from the Kasbah (Author)*

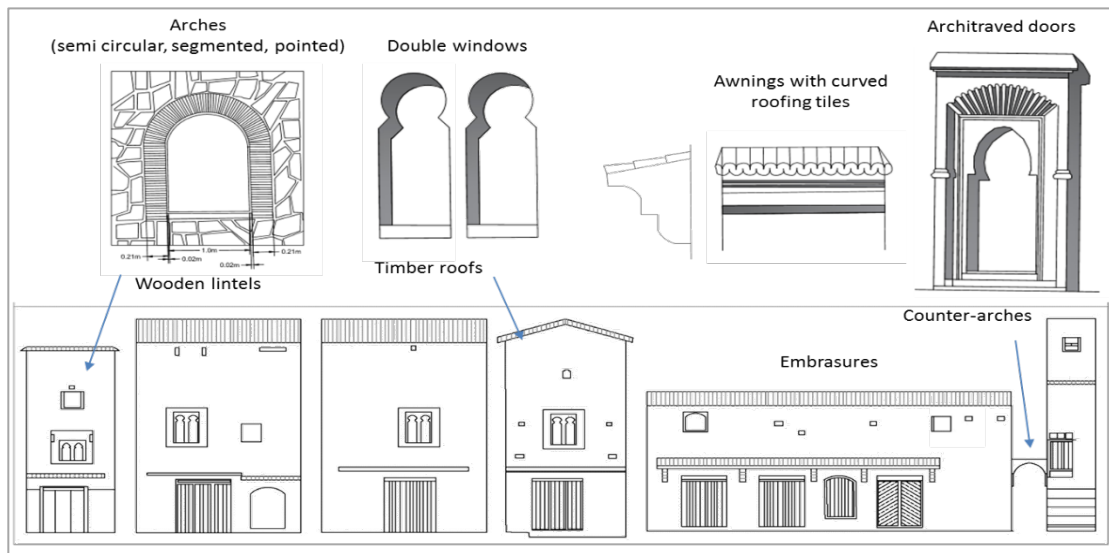
*Figure 2 : Compilation of materials and shades in Chefchoauen Medina (Author)*

Between the ochre shades of stones, terracotta and earth mortal, in addition to the white color of lime plaster, and the indigo tints obtained by mixing lime to a woad plant extract called nila, the medina’s fabric has an homogenous image (Figure 2, 3).

Its authenticity lays on the continuum of shads and subtle functional details such timber roofs, architrave doors and windows with different types of arches, awnings with curved tiles...etc<sup>2</sup>. Details that are extended to public realm with the counter-arches, fountains, traditional pavement, a whole hierarchized structure offering different experiences from private to public space [9].

For the safeguarding and valorization of such heritage, a large rehabilitation program has been implemented since 2011 mobilizing more than 115 Mdhs in rehabilitating the built environment, the landmarks, and enhance culture animation (Figures 4, 5). The interventions on built environment have cost more than half of the budget (66dhs) including facades, alleys, public spaces facilities maintenance and rehabilitation [10,11].

<sup>2</sup> Architectonic components are detailed in the architectural charter of the Medina of Chefchouen, published as a reference and guidelines to follow for the development of the city since 2006;



*Figure 4 : Constructive details taken into account in the restoration work in Chefchaouen Medina (Author)*



*Figure 3: Restoration work conducted in Chefchaouen medina by public actors (AUT report, 2022)*

### **Approaching heritage through practice: participatory initiatives**

Beside public actors and programs to rehabilitate the medina's heritage, local initiatives are conducted by inhabitants periodically, such as Al Awacher.

Awacher is annual event in chefchaouen that mobilises inhabitants in a collective maintenance operation, with the support of neighborhood associations and municipal services. Local population proceed to the liming of houses, streets, public paving...etc. and embellishment of their built environment with flower pots, street art and handicrafts.

As deep rooted tradition in chaoui's culture since the andalousian period, it has revived since 2010 from a social practice of families and women embellishing their home, to an extended public manifestation organized during "Chefchaouen spring" festival, covering a larger scale, and involving different age and gender groups of inhabitants, beside the municipality and neighborhoods associations' assistance (Figure6). This initiative has been promoting the local culture and reinforcing restoration efforts with the participatory and collaborative approach. The municipality provides the materials and the lime preparation to obtain a unified shade, while the associations assist inhabitants in the maintenance work [12, 13].



Figure 5 : Inhabitants 'maintenance work in Chefchaouen medina, poster of the initiative (Municipality archive, 2019)

Another initiative that involved inhabitants and neighborhood associations is the "participatory budget" for the rehabilitation of the medina that has been adopted as regular collective managing instrument<sup>3</sup>. As an instrument of co-decision, it consists on making available 2% of the investment budget of the municipality to inhabitants to decide interventions to implement in the medina, according to inhabitants needs, priorities and aspirations [14].

The process of the participatory budget progresses in several phases:

1. Diagnosis, propositions: the neighborhoods associations are involved to diagnose and make propositions of interventions.
2. Feasibility, prioritization: the driving group details their feasibility with the assistance of municipal services and representatives. The criteria of sorting is the respect of the budget,
3. Public vote: the sorted propositions are submitted to public vote (Figure 7);
4. Implementation: the terms of reference are prepared by the municipality to implement the project in the medina.

<sup>3</sup> Experimented first as part of an international cooperation project in 2015, the purpose of the project was to promote citizen participation in the local management. The second edition in 2017 was an independent initiative of the municipality to adopt the mechanism as a permanent instrument the involve inhabitants in the rehabilitation of the Medina. They municipal council dedicated a budget of 200.000.00dhs for the project. The associations that participated represented the six neighbourhoods of the medina. Some adaptations of the process were introduced, such as the gathering spot for the public vote in Outa Hmam square for more visibility. The period of voting was extended to one week instead of one day, during the first edition;

Inhabitants are involved to cogitate, diagnose and express their perspective of medina's heritage through the ideas proposed. The process allowed them to understand more closely the municipality work through the sorting and feasibility study. They participated also in the monitoring of the implementation.

*« We voted the proposition of protecting alleys and add railings in some dangerous sections in the medina. It was needed. Each year during raining season, we endure accessibility difficulties with rain flows, Sometimes accidents and injuries occur. The edition that followed, we voted the same project for many other sections, in addition to benches to install for more comfort in public space »<sup>4</sup>.*

The local configuration allowed the expression of such initiatives and dynamics involving the inhabitants directly in safeguarding processes<sup>5</sup>.

### **Inhabitants as ambassadors of local know-how and cultural heritage**

The effects of the local dynamics around safeguarding medina's heritage are considered from various levels.

#### a) The remedial of inadequate practices on built heritage

The direct involvement of inhabitants provided a shared space of knowledge and expertise that contributed in the remedial of many inadequate practices by inhabitants. With 55% of inhabitants as renters, the local traditions were in the beginning maintained only by the natives and active associations. Since the imitative got promoted into a large maintenance operation, the construction culture became more accessible.

“We've noticed that some inhabitants started to use synthetic paintings and cement for plastering their facades instead of the lime based mortar. Those are not local technics. In Chaouen we use lime as an essential material for our homes and streets. We've managed to raise awareness among inhabitants unfamiliar with our culture about the importance to use lime to prevent water infiltration, to regulate heat, and to refresh air in the alleys and interiors. We also use natural tints, extracted from “nila” a woad plant that gives as the indigo shades. The next year, we've prepared collectively the lime mortar, and it was very instructive for neighborhoods associations and inhabitants”<sup>6</sup>



Figure 6 : Participatory budget public vote  
(Municipality archive, 2019)

<sup>4</sup> Interview with inhabitant in Chefchaouen medina, Mars 2019;

<sup>5</sup> The local dynamic around safeguarding the medina heritage is related to many factors. The living traditions like Al Awacher provided a key configuration to promote the culture heritage in a large and more organized initiative. Local initiatives have been more structured since 1990 through an active associative network in the medina, with key figures advocating the collective management culture. One of them is the current mayor the city that has switched from associative activism into politics leading the municipality strategy to openness toward inhabitants and civil society in general. This political endorsement of local initiatives and dynamics has allowed the promotion of cultural heritage nationally and internationally;

<sup>6</sup> Interview with a municipal agent in charge of the coordination of Awacher initiative, Mars 2019;

b) Mutual understanding of needs and risks around heritage

The initiatives have brought inhabitants closer to public management and its functioning. The experience of participatory budgeting has offered a space to discuss both sides' constraints and needs, which led to mutual understandings of risks and challenges.

The environmental challenges prevailed during this experience. The proposed project of protecting some sections in the medina from rain flows was highlighted in the public vote twice. As the hydrological risks are recurring in Chefchaouen, especially in rainfall episode, inhabitants helped through this initiative to identify the damaged sections in the neighborhoods around Ras Al Ma spring. The identification of this intervention as priority is based on uses of space and a practical knowledge of inhabitants, which allows to take into account their perspective and priorities, and thus, provide more accuracy to public intervention.

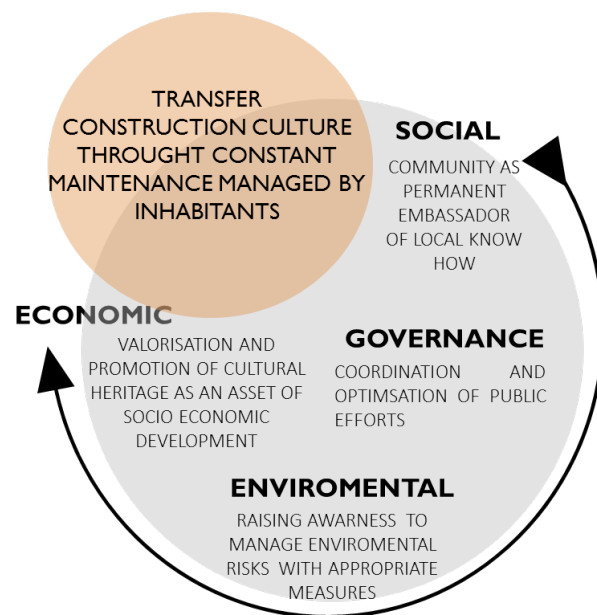
**Conclusion**

The case study of chefchaouen has demonstrated an endogenous dynamic around safeguarding heritage based on inhabitants initiatives endorsed by a political leadership.

The rehabilitation and maintenance work conducted by inhabitants in parallel with public interventions has allowed mutual understanding of heritage character and challenges, which contributed to value it and to mitigate the impact of different risks. Thus, the coherence in heritage interventions are more controllable.

This approach of heritage through practice has also permitted to access to knowledge systems on built heritage, which have a key role in promoting the culture heritage. Through the strengthening of the collective identity and intergenerational bridges, the community is empowered to fulfill the role of permanent ambassador of local heritage and know-how (Figure 8).

Having permanent figures and ambassadors of the cultural heritage is essential to sustain local dynamics by insuring long term community involvement in safeguarding their heritage.



*Figure 7: Effects of inhabitants' involvement in safeguarding heritage (Author)*

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