



Heritage tourism in rural areas as a tool for sustainable local development in Jijel: A Case Study of El Ancer municipality.

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Abstract

Rural tourism, through a sustainable approach, is recognized as a tool for valorization of natural, cultural and architectural resources and for rural revitalization. In terms of resources, jijelian rural area's contains enormous wealth and significant potential for development. Nevertheless, the socio-economic context remains deeply marked by low agricultural incomes, unemployment, poverty, marginalization and social degradation. At a time when rural areas are facing irreversible changes, this paper focuses on the strategic development of heritage tourism in the rural areas of Jijel

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city, more specifically El Ancer Municipality using SWOT analysis. From a policy perspective, this research aims to identify the main challenges and opportunities of rural heritage tourism as a driving force for sustainable rural development, economic growth and diversification. The effective valorization of architectural heritage through the rural heritage tourism could contribute to the sustainability of rural heritage resource. Also, it will help to solve the number of socioeconomic problems of municipality in Algeria.

Keyword. : Architectural heritage, challenges, opportunities, valorization, rural tourism, heritage tourism, local development, El Ancer Municipality-Jijel.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world, Tourism has become, recently, a global industry. It can contribute to improving societies in many countries (Beban & Ok, 2006). However, this economic activity, in an order side, generates a large range of negative effects on natural and social environments such as: pollution, deterioration of the environment, destruction of architectural heritage, unplanned and uncontrolled growth with socio-economic problems (Cánoves *et al.*, 2004; Widawski *et al.*, 2023).

At a recent time, an increasing number of international institutions and researchers have been interested in sustainable tourism, rural heritage and local communities as tool of local development (WTO, 2020; Widawski *et al.*, 2023). As a new tourism, sustainable tourism could contribute tangibly to optimal use of resources, to minimize of ecological, socio-cultural negative impacts and to the augmentation of the economic benefits for local communities (Creaco & Querini 2003).

The latest years, the promotion of rural tourism see a growing recognition and interest. Many developed and developing countries seek to utilize natural ,cultural and architectural heritage as resources for socio-economic development through rural heritage tourism. use locally available resources (Wahab & Pigram, 2004), rural tourism encompasses all form of tourism and leisure activities take place in non-

urban (rural areas) such as ecotourism, cultural tourism, adventure tourism, agri-tourism , guest tourism, ...(Viljoen and Tlabela ,2007 ; Cooper *et al.*, 2008)

Rural areas characterized by small settlements with low population densities, traditional societies and lifestyle , agrarian-based economies and land-use dominated by agriculture and forestry (Okech *et al.*, 2012; UNWTO , 2024). In economic terms, the competitive advantages and particularly attractiveness of rural areas is based in the high combinations of natural and cultural values (Trukhachev, 2015 ; Weidenfeld, 2018).

The study's emphasis is on rural heritage tourism, which is on both a sustainable tourism and cultural tourism type (Smith ,2003; Ivanovic, 2008; UNWTO , 2024). Rural heritage includes all physical assets (housing, landscape, etc.) and intangible elements (local dialects, traditions, etc.) of natural, cultural or architectural origin. Rural tourism, through a sustainable approach, is identified as a tool for protection of natural and cultural resources and rural revitalization (Okech *et al.*, 2012; Widawski *et al.*, 2023). In other side, it is necessary to emphasize the importance of the participation of local people (Widawski *et al.*, 2023). Heritage tourism take place in rural areas seeks to safeguard rural architecture along their associated landscapes, preserved natural environments, gastronomy, biological diversity, local activities including their knowledge systems also (UNWTO, 2024).

Today more than ever, the challenge of contemporary societies is to formulate development policies, better adapted to the realities of rural areas and , by offering solutions that meet the global challenges facing them and need to develop their capacity to adapt to different challenges and disruptions in order to be better adapted to local particularities. Presently, the Algerian rural areas are going through a crucial stage in their history which is beginning to recall a new space with complex characteristics. The Recent transformations are putting the rural heritage at risk.

In Algeria, the rural heritage is always seen as a particular burden and a root cause of conflicts and constraints. But, the potential of rural heritage can constitute a major asset, not only, for competitiveness, attractiveness, economic growth, protection of the cultural identity and the social cohesion in the Algerian countryside, but also, it can take active part in the partnership and balance city-countryside. In terms of resources, jijelian countryside's contains enormous wealth and significant potential for development, forestry, agriculture, water, tourism that promotes its economic development in general and the promotion of its industrial and craft activities in particular, particularly in the areas of agri-food, tourism, ..etc. These resources remain under-exploited or totally untapped. Nevertheless, the socio-economic context of rural Jijelian areas remains deeply marked by low agricultural incomes, the spread of unemployment and poverty.

In this context, the effective valorization of architectural heritage through the rural heritage tourism, as a driving force for sustainable local development, could contribute to the sustainability of rural heritage resource and sustainable local development in rural areas. Also, it may help to solve a large number of ecological and socioeconomic problems of municipality in Algeria. At a time when rural areas are facing irreversible changes, this paper focuses on the strategic development of heritage tourism in the rural areas of Jijel city, more specifically El Ancer Municipality using SWOT analysis. The objectives of the study were as follows:

- To identify natural and cultural resource potential that can be used for rural tourism development.
- To establish the challenges those impede sustainable heritage tourism development and the promotion of local resources in this area.
- To highlight the combination of natural, cultural and architectural values and to raise local awareness of these resources.

2. Methodology

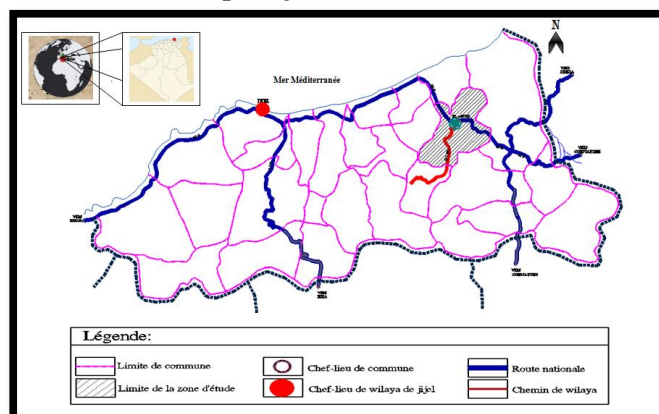
Based on previous research in this field, official documents and field observations and surveys, the focus of this qualitative empirical study is the assessment of potential resource for Rural Tourism within El Ancer (Jijel- Algeria) using SWOT Analysis. In this study, the first step was to determine rural heritage tourism potential of El Ancer and the second step was to apply SWOT analysis to evaluate the rural resources in the studied area.

2.1. Study area

In the Little Kabylie region (Petite Kabylie, or Kabylie des Babors), El Ancer municipality is located in the North-East of the capital of Jijel city, 48 Km from the capital of Jijel province. El Ancer is limited to the East by the municipality of d'El-Milia ; to the West by the municipality of *El-Djamaa*; to the North by the municipality of Khiri - Oued Adjoul; to the South by the municipalities of d'Ouled Yahia Khadrouche, Bouraoui Belhadeb and Bordj Athar. In the mountainous region of Jijel, it covers an area of 97.44 km², and it accounts for approximately 21,580 inhabitants (2012) distributed over 03 urban agglomeration and 05 douars devised to 28 mechtas. The commune of El-Ancer occupies a strategic geographical position to the north-east of its main town. It is accessible from the national road (R.N. 43) connecting the city of Jijel to the cities of Constantine , Skikda and Mila represents a major vector of socio-economic exchanges(Fig.1).

Deeply rural, El Ancer municipality has an invaluable rural heritage thanks to the history, reliefs and varied physical environments that give it colossal cultural, historical, forest resources and a significant agro-ecological potential. In addition, the traditional rural architecture bears in itself the characteristic features of the Jijelian identity that can contribute to the development of tourism and economic activities. However, this unique heritage could be lost or distorted in the absence of any safeguarding, valorization or conservation intervention.

Fig.1. Situation of El Ancer municipality in relation to the national roads and city roads.



Source: Authors, 2024 (Background PDAU, 2010)

2.2. SWOT analysis:

In order to evaluate the rural heritage tourism potential and to effectively put it into use in area under study, we use SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis. SWOT Analysis (or matrix, approach, framework, model or technique) is one of the oldest strategic planning technique (strategy tools) frequently used in the world (Puyt and al., 2023). It helps to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to planning studies, strategic development direction and analytical decisions (Dyson, 2004). Recently, it is considered a key tool for the assessment of any tourism destination and development opportunities for local development in Algeria (Kelfaoui and al., 2021).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Guided by the objectives of the research, the findings and the results cover the following areas of analysis: rural architectural heritage, natural and cultural resources which can be used for sustainable tourism development; and challenges that impede sustainable heritage tourism development in rural areas. The results are discussed below.

3.1. Socio-economic evaluation for El Ancer Municipality:

The rural area of El-Ancer has radically changes under specific political and socio-economic conditions. After the Algerian country's independence (1962), the process of socio-economic recomposition can be explained only through:

3.1.1. Rural depopulation and rapid growth of the urban area:

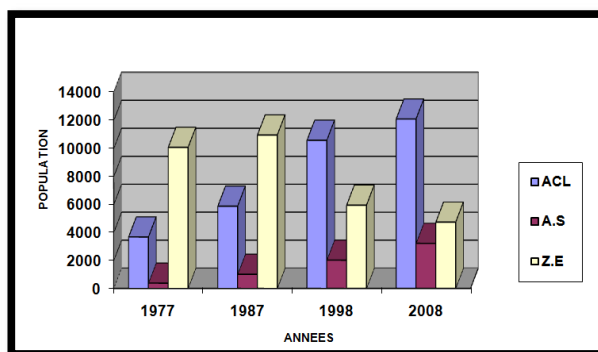
Since 1966, in all of the census years, the commune has recorded a massive rural exodus shown in Table 1. The migrations from rural to urban areas reduce rural population growth in the countryside significantly which fall from 71.38% to 23.59% between 1977 and 2008. The number of inhabitants reduces is constantly increasing from 10947 people in 1987 to 5934 people in 1998 and to 4723 people in 2008 (Fig.2). In other words, the rural area recorded a strong population loss with a negative annual growth rate of (-5.41%) and (-2.26%) respectively during the decades 1987-1998 and 1998-2008. Among the demographic processes taking place in rural areas, urban population recorded a population increase from 38.54% in 1987 to 67.97% in 1998 to reach 76.41% in 2008 (ONS, 2008). The phenomenon of rural exodus has constantly accentuated the process of depopulation of rural areas and the rapid growth of the urban centre of El Ancer which recorded high growth rate of urban population ; 60.38% in 2008.

Table. 1: Number of urban and rural population in the Municipality of El Ancer in all census

Areas	Number of population				Concentration ratio (%)			GRowth rate (%)		
	1977	1987	1998	2008	1987	1998	2008	77-87	87-98	98-2008
Urban centre	3666	5866	10575	12090	32,94	12090	60,38	4,81	5,50	1,35
Urban agglomeration of El-M'Harka	-	560	970	2020	3,15	2020	10,09	-	5,12	7,61
Urban agglomeration of Laaraba	369	437	1041	1188	2,45	1188	5,93	1,71	7,95	1,33
Total Urban agglomeration	369	997	2011	3208	5,60	3208	16,02	10,45	6,59	4,78
Total urban areas	4035	6863	12586	15298	/	15298	/	5,45	5,67	1,97
Rural areas	10064	10947	5934	4723	61.47	4723	23,59	0,84	-5,41	-2,26
El Ancer municipality	14099	17810	18520	20021	100 %	20021	100 %	2,36	0,36	0.71

Source: Authors, 2024 according to PDAU, 2010

Fig.2. Number of population in El Ancer Municipality



Source: PDAU, 2010

3.1.2. Multifunctionality of rural areas :

In the past, the countryside of El-Ancer was exclusively dominated by the agrarian economies and agricultural activities (agriculture and forestry). Currently, this area is multifunctional with the problems of low productivity in agrarian economies and low incomes of artisanal work. When agricultural activities is reduced, secondary and tertiary economic sector (service, industry,...) including the residential function have see increasing growth (Côte, 1986). In many rural localities have become dormitory town of a large number of inhabitants who work nearby in urban centers or cities. The labour market is significantly influenced by the new order. According to the latest census (ONS, 2008), it is currently dominated by the tertiary sector, which employs 4,067 people, or 53.10% of the employed population, while agriculture ranks second with 2,091 farmers: 27.30%, followed by the construction sector with 1414 employees: 18.46% of the employed population. At the same time, the industrial sector ranks last, with 87 jobs: 1.14% of the employed population.

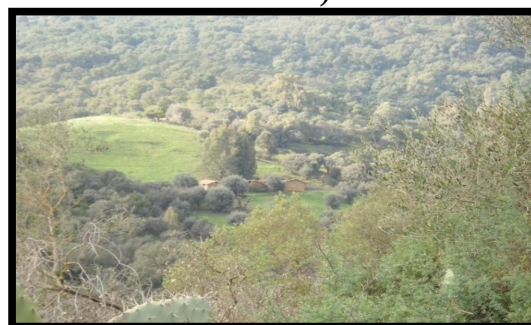
3.2. The relationship between rural architecture and tourism:

Rural settlements, douars and mechtas, combine the advantages of the natural setting with the constraints of the natural and socio-economic environment(Fig.3). The analysis reveals that the rural traditional architecture is built by the Berber tribes

and then Arab-Berber tribes who use and combine cleverly local cultures, raw materials, resources and know-how and inherited the traditional way of building from their ancestors throughout history. It is a dispersed construction whose simple dwellings, isolated or formed hamlets, made with local materials and harmonize with nature (Baba & Chabi, 2016). Refer to the knowledge and practices developed by local communities, the ancestral practices transferred and *developed* from one generation to another. With their particular character, rural architecture reflects the local cultural identity and influenced by their cultures, traditions, geography, available local materials, and local climate conditions (Baba, 2014; Baba & Chabi, 2016).

In this area, there are two main types of original rural dwellings which take the form of gourbis made of branches and houses built with stone and earth. The gourbi , hut with rectangular form, consists entirely of branches and dry clay. It is constructed of branches of trees or wattle bound together with mud. This rudimentary dwelling is covered with thatched roofs. This wooden shanties are easy to build *and* very economical to construct this kind of shelter with local available materials in forest area.

Fig.3: Traditional houses in a mountain environment rich in vegetation (Douar Beni Meslem).



Source: Authors, 2024

The rural houses have also a rectangular form and are built with natural stone and earth and covered with a roof tile. With a similar spatial configuration, they have only one room where rural people cohabited with their farm animals. His plan is adapted to the needs of social life and agricultural production of extended family life.

According to a socio-cultural and economic interpretation, the common room is divided into two large parts: the upper part, noble, is intended for humans, and the lower part serves as a stable. Functionally, this house is characterized by a tripartite division. In total, this multi-functional domestic space is divided into four compartments: the Aaynas (common room), El-makhzan (storage), Adday (stable) and finally the wooden loft "Asstah" used like bedroom (Fig.4). They are, entirely, built with local natural materials taken from the site such as: natural stone covered with a coating of earth for the walls, wood for the framework, and tile for the roofs.

Fig.4: Photos illustrating the exterior and interior of the traditional rural house of El Ancer.



Source : Baba & Chabi 2016.

But, in the contemporary world , the degradation of old rural buildings is due to the socio-economic evolution of contemporary societies, which has led to the disappearance of traditional economic activities, the abandonment of land work, the expansion of the rural-urban migrations , the rejection of ancestral practices , even retrograde, by young rural generations and especially many traditional rural buildings are largely redundant by rural people because is not fulfilling the requirements of modern life. With natural and cultural local values, the rural

settlements with their patrimony attract the attention of tourists with their maintained natural environments, preserved architectural heritages and original cultural and socio-economic structures.

For example, the reuse of traditional dwellings, gourbis and houses, for socio-economic and touristic purpose (residential function: lodging establishments, entertainment facilities,...) , after their restoration or rehabilitation , is an key approach to safeguarding these buildings. Rural architecture is an accelerating factor in rural tourism development because tourists usually prefer these local houses. On the other hand, this dwellings can be, also, used by local people in the period of olive cultivation or throughout the year as housing, stable, storage, .. In recent years, Olive cultivation and olive oil have thus acquired important role which is the livelihoods of large part of rural people in jijelian region. With the developing tourism phenomenon, all the rural resources are used for heritage tourism industry with balancing human needs, economic purpose and ecosystem function.

3.3. Evaluation tourism, cultural and natural, potential of El Ancer Municipality:

The results indicated that the El Ancer municipality, like many rural localities in jijelien region in Little Kabylie, has a wealth of cultural background, rural heritage, natural resources and agriculture production that can be developed into tourism products. However, these large potentialities have not been used to the benefit of the local people. The presence of a large natural (calmness, unique and wild natural sites, wadis and forests with typically Mediterranean fauna and flora) and cultural (history, architecture ...) resources indicate that there are opportunities for heritage tourism development in El Ancer municipality and further increase their touristic importance. Table 2 below represent provides a list, but not exclusively, of locally available resources in the area that can be used as a potential for rural tourism development and for sustainable incomes for rural inhabitants.

Table 2. Evaluation of El Ancer's tourism potential with SWOT Analysis

Factors	Description
Internal Factors	
Strengths (S)	S1- Presence of a Natural beauty with quiet environment without noise S2- Traditional rural settlements combine traditional architecture and natural landscape S3- Traditional art and Handicrafts: local pottery, traditional jewelry, and textiles S4- Fertile soils that offer a variety of agricultural products S5- Friendliness, tolerance and hospitality of the local people S6- Rich water resources (wells and rivers) S7- Young population living in the region S8- Original historical and cultural traditions S9- The fact that the socio-cultural identity of region has not yet deteriorated with rich historical background and original cultural mix between Berber and arabo-islamic culture. S10- Conservation of local cultural and social values S11- Presence of heritage attractions (ancestral houses, ancient ruins,...)
Weaknesses (W)	W1- Destruction of agricultural land, nature and environment in some areas W2- Unawareness for the development of cultural and rural tourism W3- Lack of knowledge and entrepreneurship of the local population on rural tourism development W4- Low-level of development of transport infrastructure, services and public utilities. W5- Lack of qualified and experienced workforce for tourism services e.g. guides W6- Insufficient inner-city roads and poor state of roads and absence of signs to access to the wetland view W7- Lack of coordination between different sectors (culture, tourism and agriculture) and lack communication among local stakeholders. (local people and local government).
External Factors	
Opportunities (O)	O1- Growing recognition of local and agricultural products such as handicrafts and olive oil O2- Growing interest in specialized tourism and many untapped tourism potential of ecotourism, safari tourism, health tourism, ecotourism, O3- Potential to host festivals and various events O4- Popular destination O5- The potential of being a tourism destination for the whole year with good climatologic condition (Mediterranean climate) for tourism and agriculture O6- Increasing of local travel (domestic travel) and recreation O7- preservation of the historical and cultural traditions O8- Increasing and diversification of the non agricultural activities.
Threats	T1- Degradation continues of natural and agricultural environment and

(T)	climate change e.g. fire, deforestation. T2- Insufficient use of the existent potential T3- Depopulation: excessive migration of young people to urban areas. T4- the seaside tourist phenomenon in Jijel T5- Under-estimation of the rural area in the region development T6- Lack of capital to support the rural investments and slow development of the rural economy T7- Increase of the disparities between the rural communities.
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Source: Authors, 2024

With unique mixtures of natural and cultural attractions(Fig.5), El Ancer municipality has the potential for developing and promoting tourism activities .the type of tourism that can be developed such as: nature based tourism, agri-tourism, rural tourism, and cultural heritage tourism.

Fig.5: Examples of rural landscapes in the region of El Ancer (Mechta Ibazichen).



Source : Auteure. 2024

3.3. Socio-economic challenges of rural heritage valorization:

In the contemporary era, rural areas of El Ancer face three main challenges:

- Deconstruction and profound transformation: which are generated by the change of spatial occupation and the disorderly insertion of urban constructions.
- Devitalization: degradation of natural resources, demographic decline (depopulation) and underdevelopment.
- The deterioration of the architectural heritage: high number of ruined houses and abandoned mechtas.

A major asset for the attractiveness of territories, heritage valorization is an essential phase of the process of local development, construction or reconstruction of territories. In rural areas, it can participate to protect their rural identity, boost local development and create a balanced and harmonious relationship between urban and rural areas.

In a new heritage and territorial evaluation, several writings (Chiva 1994; Sadoge, Chevallier & Morvan 1996) show the need to take into account the totality and diversity of the elements of rural terroirs and its dynamics for the revitalization of rural areas. The specific dynamics of each comparator and the relations between them must concern «all those in charge of the development and development of rural territories» to ensure «the subtle balance to maintain, but always questioned, between management and protection logics» (Chiva 1994). Therefore, under the influence of the city, conciliation has become urgent, imperative between logics, often contradictory, (productivist/conservative, economy/nature, maintaining the declining agricultural population/ the expansion of the city but which must be intelligently overcome. between elements of urban origin (desires of nature, the expansion of cities, modernization, new uses - tourist, residential, recreational, industrial, etc. , and urbanization) which were imposed on the countryside (Sadoge, Chevallier & Morvan 1996).

What challenges must any project to enhance the socio-economic value of rural heritage in El Ancer meet? Indeed, several issues can be identified:

3.3.1. Socio-cultural issues:

The rural heritage, as a treasure of identity and memory loaded with multiple meanings and meanings, can contribute to the affirmation of the common and strong cultural identity (Lacquement 2001; Di Méo 2007b, 76; Muchnik 2011; Poisson & Saleilles 2012; Dedeire & Mačiulytė 2018) of the rural area and the re-establishment of the link between society and its space that was lost, during long periods of political and socio-economic instability (colonization, security and economic crises and underdevelopment). As we have seen, the detachment between rural society, its space and its architectural heritage is operated according to socio-economic conditions. Because, it makes it possible to inscribe tangibly identity references in space (Veschambre 2007b). With its social and political character, heritage has a major role in territorial affirmation (Veschambre 2007a). Since, it is one of the constituent elements of local identity and sense of belonging, engine of solidarity.

3.3.2. Economic and tourism issues:

The rural heritage, as an economic asset and identity element, can also be a source of local economic development if properly developed. Currently, rural heritage is generating interest and can generate many economic and tourism activities (Lécuyer 2021). It can contribute to the improvement of the attractiveness of the rural territory, to the development and revitalization of the rural world and territorial development of the municipality of El Ancer. The promotion of a heritage vision of rural buildings aims to enhance the specificities of the places. It contributes to the brand image of space (Territorial Marketing) and therefore to its attractiveness, whether for residents or tourists. The promotion of cultural and historical heritage in rural areas is one of the means for these local actors of the municipality of El Ancer to exert a tourist attractiveness on their territory. If it is maintained and enhanced,

they will contribute, alongside the natural heritage, to the improvement of the tourist image of El Ancer and the creation of jobs.

Integrated into tourism and economic projects, rural heritage can promote local development (Rouvellac 2005). The implementation of rural rehabilitation operations and economic activities, adapted to potential, can lead to the revitalization of agriculture sector (local produce, agrotourism, farm tourism, ...). and crafts (pottery, wood carving, ...) while creating additional magazines for farmers in crisis. However, the arrival of new inhabitants and tourists, the development of sustainable tourism requires an increase in basic infrastructure, services, tourist facilities, leisure facilities.

3.3.3. Landscape and land use issues:

In any prospective development vision, contemporary planners – architects, urban planners, geographers – feel the need to renew their tools to grasp the complexity of rural spaces and find adapted solutions to local particularities. The exploitation of rural heritage for urban and architectural purposes can contribute to define the storytellers a new strategy of socio-spatial development. In this regard, rural buildings can provide answers through its elements of permanence to an urban approach respectful of the countryside. Drawing its essence from ancestral heritage and the values of rural society, sustainable rural urbanism must take into account, in parallel with urban and spatial planning constraints, environmental constraints, socio-cultural and economic of the rural society of El- Ancer. The latter will be based on rural heritage as a lesson in architecture and urbanism and a reference for the reinterpretation of the «old/ new» relationship in the production of a more appropriate built environment. Therefore, it is necessary to integrate the architectural and urbanistic specificities of buildings and natural environments in any future act of development of the local rural space. In other words, either through heritage conservation or through new architecture based on the traditional reference in architectural and urbanistic, we can guarantee permanence in architecture today.

Therefore, to ensure this continuity, a repertoire of pre-existing references must be reused in new architectures (Norberg Schulz, 1997). These criteria concern not only dwellings and extensions of housing, but also all new form of buildings for farms (stables, ...) and other functions (tourism, leisure, ...).

4. CONCLUSION

The rural areas are not a place of nostalgia or nature only. It is also a territory of the future capable of assuming the challenges of tomorrow. An equitable and self sustaining development of the rural tourism industry will help to solve the number of socioeconomic problems of municipality in Algeria. To ensure the development and sustainability of rural tourism, it is essential to adopted a comprehensive and multi-action planning strategy and involve multi-stakeholder through partnership among government, the private sector and local communities (participatory approach) (Wahab& Pigram, 2004; Cooperet al., 2008; Nzama, 2010; UNWTO, 2020). Custodians of the resources, local people could be participated in the identification of the assets that will be utilized and the form of tourism can be integrated in their rural area.

This research aims to improve knowledge on the landscape and heritage diversity of the Jijelian region while raising awareness among local stakeholders, especially the inhabitants, for collective safeguarding and valorization of their architectural heritage. To revitalize rural area , in Jijel or in Algeria, and making them attractive and competitive through the valorization of their architectural heritage and rural landscapes is a major cultural, socio-economic and political issue, not only for the quality of life of the rural people, but also for its eventual development. Abandoned wealth, the rural heritage of El Ancer is not appreciated of the majority of rural society due to the lack of knowledge and awareness. For its part, the local authorities consider this rural architecture as a burden that comes from the past rather than an asset for further development. This territorial resource has all opportunities to build responsible rural development.

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Glossary :

SWOT: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

WTO: World Tourism Organization

UNWTO: United Nations World Tourism Organization

PDAU: Plan directeur d'aménagement et d'urbanisme

ONS : Office National des Statistiques