

SPATIAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN

RACHAYA REGION

A- INTRODUCTION

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STUDY AREA

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A- INTRODUCTION

I. Objectives and scope of the study

VNG International, with its headquarters based in The Hague, in assignment of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, aims at strengthening resilience of local governments Lebanon in order to be able to improve living conditions of local populations and Syrian refugees in their host communities.

For the Local Government Resilience Programme (LOGOReP) VNG International will collaborate with Dutch, as well as Jordanian and Lebanese (unions of) municipalities, with the UNDP & UNHCR, and NGOs operating in the targeted areas.

Within the Local Government Resilience Programme (LOGOReP) Lebanon project, VNGI and its municipal partners work on the development of local economies and municipal service provision within the context of the refugee crisis, more specifically in the West-Bekaa region.

The aim of the Urban Planning and Local Economic Development (LED) in the LOGOReP is to offer tools for integrated economic and spatial development on the long term at the scale of a regional urbanized area : Rachaya, located in the Bekaa Valley.

Ownership of the SEDP will be transferred to Rachaya Union and Rachaya Municipality after its final delivery and these parties will have to use the SEDP twofold:

- As their local spatial strategy;
- As a blueprint for discussions with potential investing or financing parties.



Rachaya village, source: unknown author

B- GENERAL PRESENTATION OF THE STUDY AREA

I. Localization

II. Governance

III. Brief History

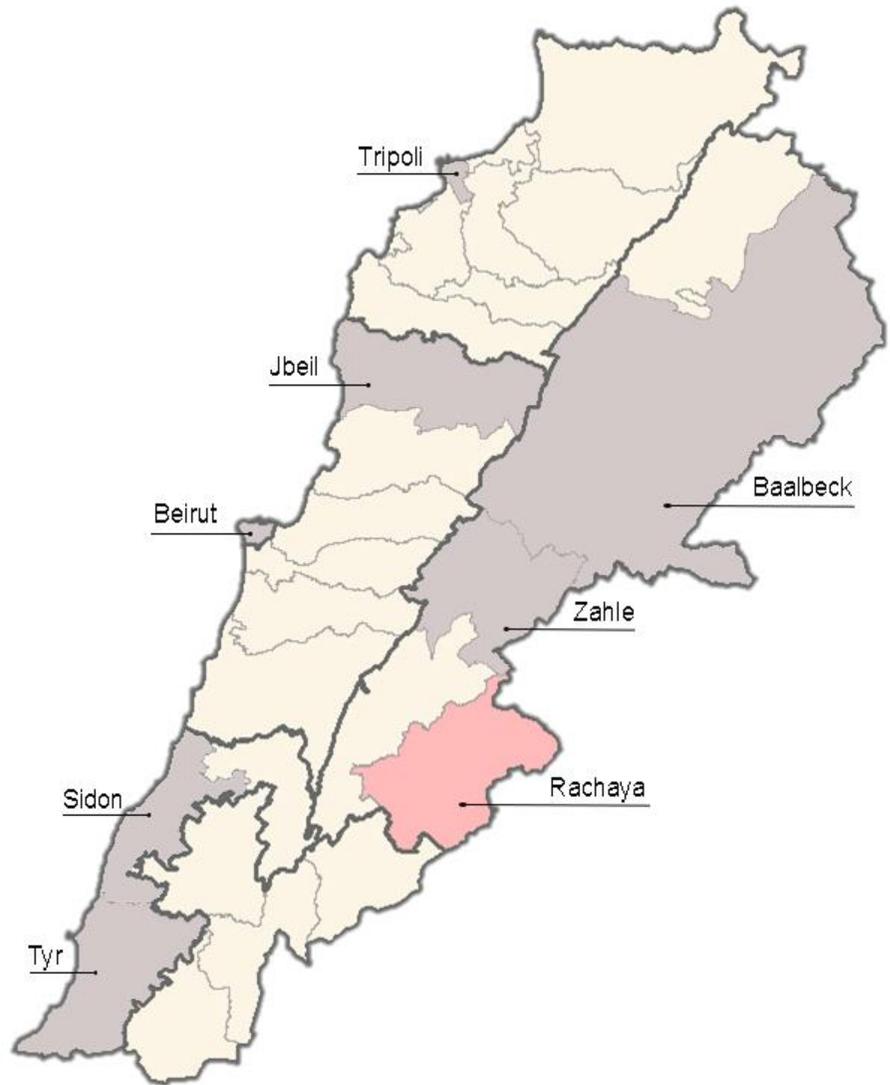
IV. Climate

V. Archeology

1. Localization

Rachaya El- Wadi is the capital of the Caza of Rachaya. It is a small town seated on the western slopes of Mount Hermon. It is located in the South Beqaa at 85 kilometers from Beirut, in the northern side of the Wadi el Taym valley.

The township stands at an altitude of 1,360 meters above sea level on the western slopes of the famous mountain: **Mount Hermon**, whose summit rises to 2,814 meters above sea level and to be exact to 3,300 meters above the Beqaa-Ghor depression, which makes it **the second highest mountain in Lebanon, somewhat lower than Qornet El-Sawda but higher than Sannine.** It is from Rachaya that anyone sets out who wants to climb Mount Hermon from the Lebanese side, winding up the mountain past picturesque vineyards and fig-tree groves below, then wild ravines and jagged escarpments till one reaches the very top, which marks the frontier between Lebanon and Syria. It might even be that this was the high mountain mentioned in the Gospels, Mark 8:1 and elsewhere, scene of the Transfiguration, “after Jesus had passed through the upper valley of Jordan north of Cæsarea Philippi” (the present town of Banias.)



Map of Lebanon: Localization of the caza of Rachaya

II. Governance

Jabal El Sheikh municipal union

Rachaya is part of Jabal El Sheikh municipal union in Lebanon. There are 51 municipal unions in Lebanon that include overall more than 700 municipalities.

Municipal unions have many prerogatives, which include executing public projects with common benefits for all or some member municipalities.

More than half of municipal union's funds are spent on the construction of public roads, Provision of public lighting networks, Construction of public water networks.

The most important source of municipal union's revenues is the Independent Municipal Fund

Rachaya Caza

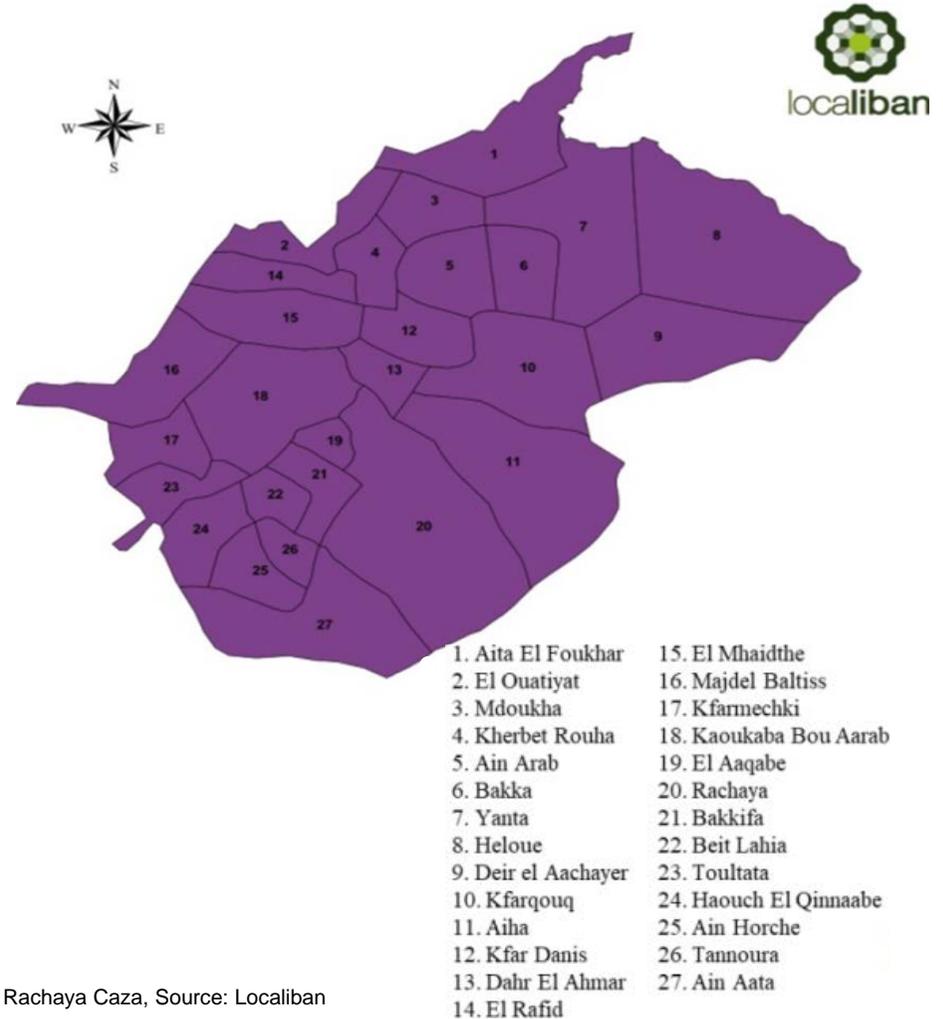
Rachaya is the capital of the Union of municipality of "Jabal El Sheikh" which includes 14 municipalities' members. It is considered as the main administrative center of the Casa constituted by 28 villages in Rachaya district.

The Caza occupies an area equivalent to 5.2% of the total area of Lebanon, It is bounded on the north by Zahleh District, on the west by the West Beqaa District, on the south by Hasbaya District in the Mohafazah of Nabatiyeh, and on the east by the Syrian border.

Rachaya Municipality

The municipality is the unique form through which territorial decentralization is practiced. Its role is diversified according to the needs and its main functions concern the areas of hygiene and public health, urban planning, construction, public service, safety, construction of tracks, garbage disposal, cleaning streets. Its concerns are social and economic.

The municipalities in Lebanon enjoy significant power to govern their administrative territories, but lack substantially of related funds. This is the case of Rachaya that faces economic difficulties to plan and develop the area, making its role limited to management of daily basic services.



Rachaya Caza, Source: Localiban

III. Brief History

Due to the geographical location of Mount Hermon, located between the Syrian Desert and the Mediterranean Sea (50 km distance between the sea and Mount), **Rachaya was colonized by the Romans followed by crusaders and their successors, including the Chehab emirs.**

The Chehab settled in Rachaya around 1183, making it their stronghold under the Crusaders and Mamluks. "Wadi el-Taym" also acquired great importance during the reign of Emir Fakhreddine II, who made it one of his strongholds. Under Bashir II, the inhabitants of this valley refused the access of the Egyptian troops to their locality and made them incur heavy losses. During the two Caimacamats and the Moutasarrifia, the region was, in its majority, annexed to Damascus to rejoin the Mountain only after 1920 under the French mandate and following the great Syrian revolution of 1925.

The township of Rachaya has always occupied a **strategic position overlooking the El-Taym valley** and since time immemorial has been the emplacement of an impressive and famous fortress which was in turn Canaanite, Greco-Roman, Arab, Crusader and Ottoman. The massive Feather Tower, built by the Crusaders in 1172 on the still visible remains of more ancient fortifications, was refurbished in the 17th century by the Chehab family, who made it the seat of their power. This fortress has more than once played a role in the history of Lebanon.

ROMANS

Traces of Roman sarcophagi in the "El Faqueaa"

CRUSADERS

Tower of the Crusaders of the citadel of Rachaya

CHEHAB Emirs

The Chehab emirs reigned over "Wadi el Taym" previously known as "the Jordan river valley".



Citadel of Independence, source: unknown author

III. Climate

The precipitations in Rachaya fluctuate between 650 millimeters and 750 millimeters each year with around two fifths of this amount falling between November and March. The temperature varies between 35 °C in the summer season down to -5 °C in winter, and the average annual temperature is of 15 °C. The dominant wind orientation is east to west from which the town is somewhat protected by the mountains.



Unknown author, Red roof tiles in Rachaya

The climate has influenced the architecture of the village which is reflected by the **frequent use of red tile** to cover the roofs and **the coating of natural stone facades** for thermal insulation. **The pavement of the souk reduces the formation of ice in winter.**

Temperatures (°C)



Rainfall (millimeters)



Daylight



Weather averages in Rachaya , source: NOAA

V. Archaeology

Paleolithic and Neolithic Stone Age tools were found near the town of Qaraoun along with **Trihedral Neolithic material** recovered in the nearby town of Joub Jannine, both in the Western Beqaa province. One of the several Temples of Mount Hermon is a **Roman temple** which the remains can be spotted on the left side of the road starting from Rachaya to the village of Aaiha. **Neolithic stones** were also located in the hills 3 kilometers north of the town. There is also **fragments of agricultural tools** such as basalt hoes with very faded dating that have been found in a significant Neolithic site nearby at Kawkaba suggesting the 6th millennium or earlier.



Neolithic stones in Rachaya, source: Unknown author

C- CONTEXT OF REGIONAL SCALE

I. Rachaya in the National Physical Master Plan (NPLMT)

- Mount Hermon Peak
- Cedar corridor between Rachaya and Hasbaya
- Rachaya regional natural park
- Rachaya potential relay city

II. Existing Tourism Activities in Rachaya

- Natural heritage
- Agricultural Tourism
- Cultural Heritage
- Nature, Sports and Leisure

III. Tourism Potentials in Rachaya to be developed

IV. SWOT Analysis:

Weaknesses, Opportunities, Strengths, threats

I. Rachaya in the National Physical Master Plan (NPMLT)

The NPMLT is the first national land use plan to be prepared at national scale in Lebanon. Approved by a decree from the council of Ministries, it has not yet been taken to implementation level.

i. Mount Hermon peak

According to the NPMLT, Mount Hermon is considered as one of the most important cultural landscapes of Lebanon, its grandeur can be visible from a distance. It is considered as being one of the still most preserved areas in Lebanon. The NPMLT recommends the restoration of the natural continuities between its ecosystems and other natural areas in Lebanon.

ii. Cedar corridor between Rachaya and Hasbaya

The region benefits also from the presence of a cedar corridor located between Rashaya and Hasbaya this corridor should be preserved and linked to the other existing surrounding corridors.

iii. Regional natural park in Rachaya

Rachaya is also considered the only one of the sixth areas in Lebanon that would be suitable for the creation of regional natural park project

This classification is a very important tourist argument which provides to tourists and visitors a series of guarantees on the quality of life and the absence of disturbances.

The zone of peak in Lebanon : beyond elevation of 1 900 m

- To be preserved because of their importance in water resources and its fragility. These zone is unsuitable for dwellings and due to rough climatic conditions; existing vegetation is relatively poor and excessively fragile

The zone of Cedar corridor in Lebanon between elevations of 1 500 and 1 900 m

- To be protected also because of the quality of these species, coupled with a determination to develop them.

Regional Parks in Lebanon

- Regional parks to be preserved because of its natural beauty, historic interest, or recreational us....

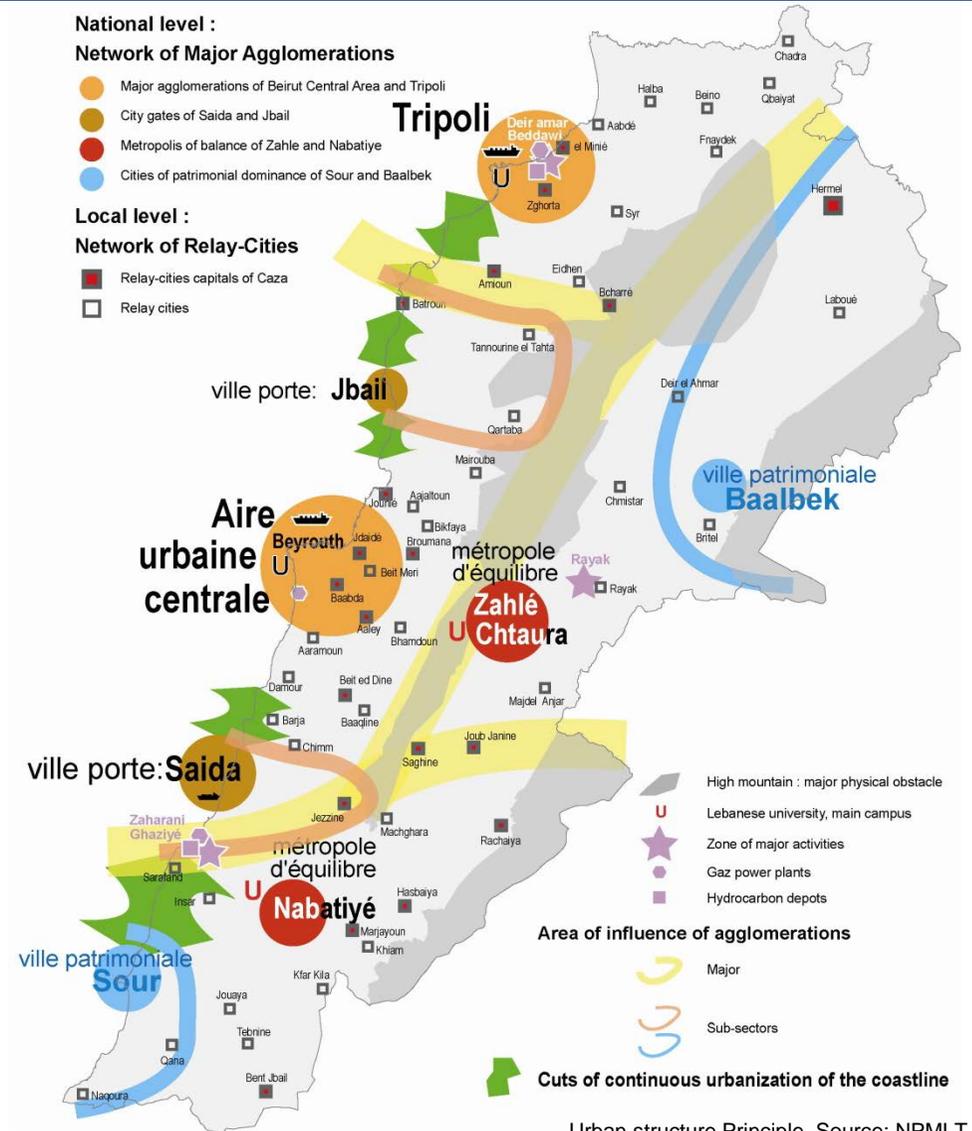
Landscape to be protected In Lebanon

iv. Rachaya could become a relay city

According to the NPMLT, some cities own several potentials contributing to the diversification of income sources that are mainly possible due to their proximity to major cities and to the quality of its living standard; such as attracting new residents, retired persons, summer vacationers, tourists... as well as the special identity of them. These villages are named “Relay cities”.

The relay cities should have the priority of any economical, administrative and public services development in rural environment.

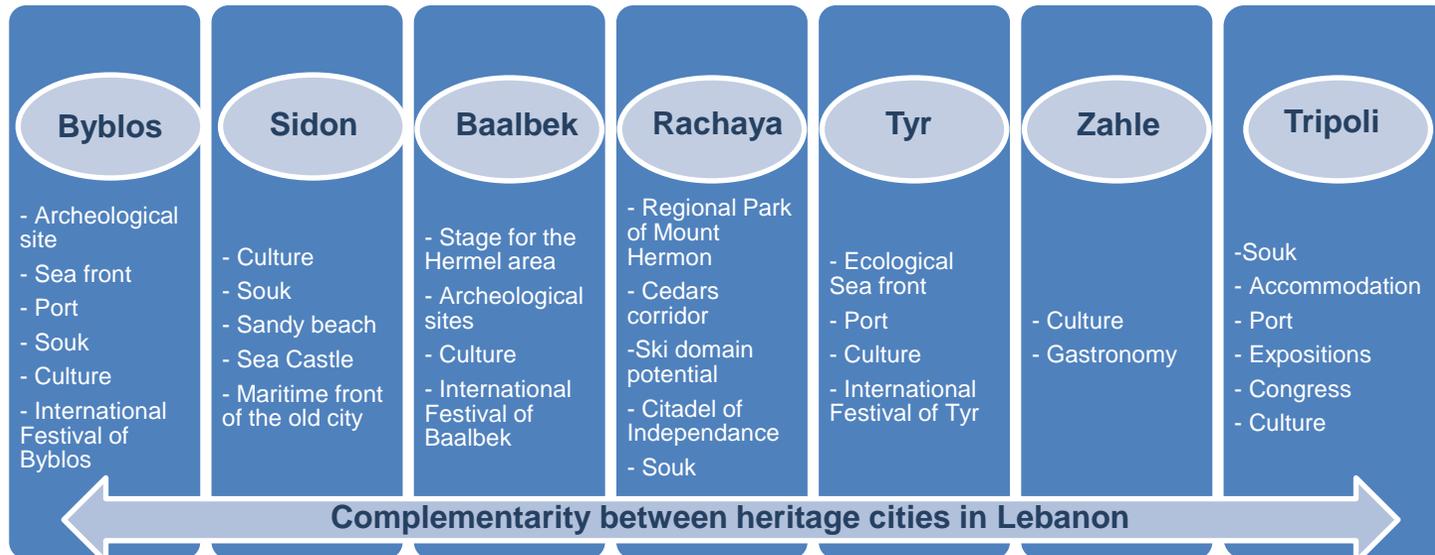
Since Rachaya owns these divers characteristics, the NPMLT considers it as a candidate to become one of the 11 relay cities in 2030, as its geographical location allows it, and its identity is based on traditional architectural and artisanal assets that should be used at the service of the economic and touristic development of the region.



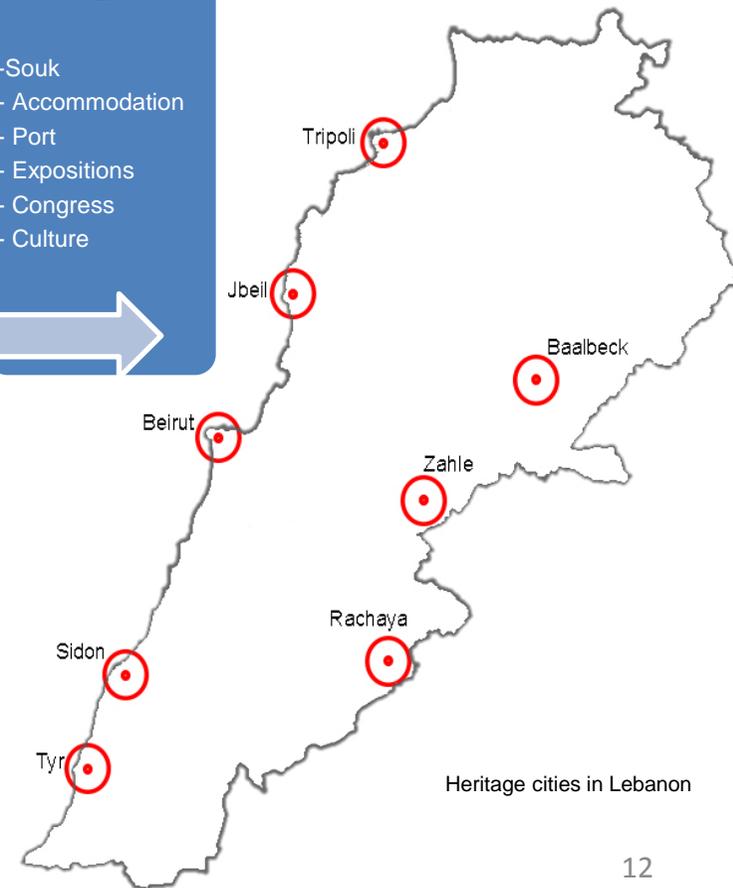
Urban structure Principle, Source: NPMLT

I. Rachaya in the National Physical Master Plan (NPMLT)

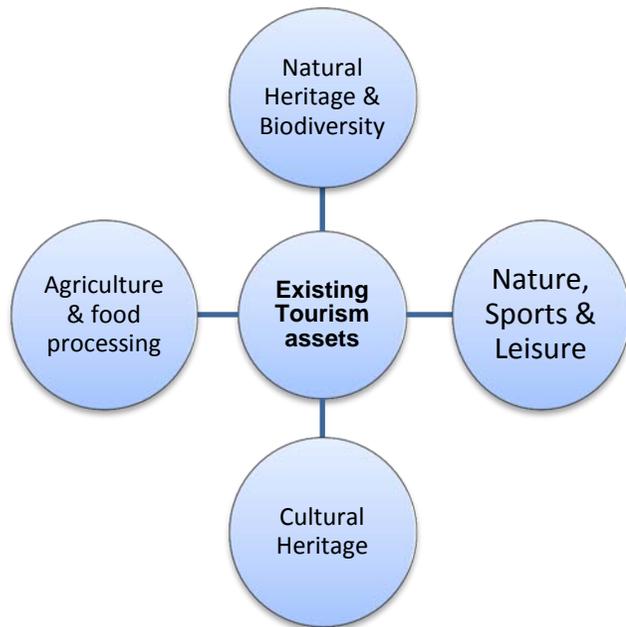
✓ Rachaya positioning on the national level in tourism related sector.



Rachaya locality compared to other main cities in Lebanon, has assets that are related to ecotourism. It could built on this to position itself and attract a niche market specialized in ecotourism activities on the local and regional level



II. Existing Tourism assets in Rachaya



a. Natural Heritage tourism and biodiversity

❖ Landscape

The landscape usually contributes to the visitor's impressions of and **feelings about a region**. In many other regions, landscape is usually not seen as a specific subject of interest, since normally single feature such as rock formations, vegetation, or forests are what attract the visitor. It is, however, **The context of the whole landscape** of these features of the area of Rachaya that makes visiting them special.

✓ Mount Hermon

Mount Hermon, or Jabal al-sheikh, is a snowcapped ridge on the Lebanon-Syria border west of Damascus. It rises to 9,232 feet (2,814 meters) and **is the highest point on the east coast of the Mediterranean Sea**. It is considered the southernmost extension of the Anti-Lebanon range.

At its foot rise the two major sources of the Jordan River. Hermon has also been known historically as Sirion and Sion. A sacred landmark since the Bronze Age, it represented the northwestern limit of Israelite conquest under Moses and Joshua.

On its slopes are temples with Greek inscriptions dating from about 200 BC.

Several activities are planned valorizing Rachaya nature and its biodiversity such as the event named **"Discover Mount Hermon Wild Plants"** where Botanists & plant experts unveil the variety and benefits of Mount Hermon plants.



Mount Hermon, source: Unknown author

b. Agricultural tourism (Agritourism)

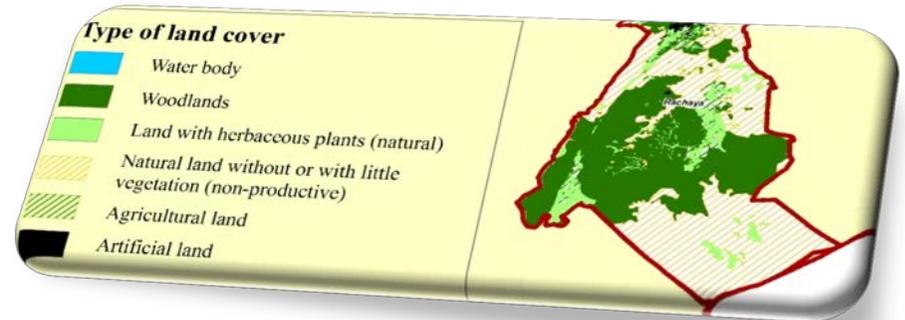
Following the map elaborated by the national center of scientific research in 2005, ordinarily grown products incorporate fruits, olives, apricots and grapes. Some wild cucumbers are additionally developed, however vegetables are less grown because of low precipitation. Tree species, for example, oak, wild pistachio and sumac are also grown in the area.

The locals of Rachaya produce their own **agro food, grape molasses, goat milk derivative products**, they are also popular in the **beekeeping practice for honey extraction** in Jabal El Sheikh, especially that the mountainous land around Mount Hermon with its diverse wild plants and flowers contribute to the production of a **variety of honey** as well as the knowledge of local bee-keepers makes it one of Lebanon's most well-regarded.

Rachaya has 5 factories: two olive oil presses and three grape molasses factories, Rachaya owns an important agricultural potential.

Animal breeding is also applied, mostly with goats, of which the Labneh assortment is a well-known staple food for local people.

On another hand, there are some pastoralism activities in the region which aren't well organized and currently affect negatively the agricultural lands.



Land Cover map, source: National Center for Scientific Research, 2005



Agro food, grape molasses, goat milk derivative products, honey extraction, source: unknown author

❖ Activities and Projects

In addition to the seasonal activities organized by the union of municipalities and other associations, many projects supporting the agricultural and agro-food processing heritage, are planned and ongoing such as:

- **Establishment of an agricultural educational center** has been a potentiality in Rachaya ,the center provides educational services to the farmers on the kinds and quantities of the fertilizers and pesticides to be used and reduction in using the persistent organic pollutants.

- **Making fridges for conservation of crops** and enhancing the rural production.

Most of the farmers held several meetings with local community representatives and cooperated with agricultural cooperatives, in order to:

- Provide a fridge that keeps their seasonal crops fresh
- Improves their productivity
- Reduces their marketing costs
- Increases their individual income rate.

- **Waste water treatment plant** was financed by the World Bank and U.S. Aid development with the assistance of the YMCA and many NGOs.

The project aims at environmentally safe disposal of its wastewater, for upgrading the sanitary and health standards of the inhabitants, as well as providing a clean water for agricultural lands irrigations.

Activities	Description
<input type="checkbox"/> Cherry Festival, Ain Arab	<input type="checkbox"/> The festival includes a rural dinner, visits of old mills, hiking, tasting of local produce and a mule back riding competition.
<input type="checkbox"/> Be a Bee Keeper for One Day	<input type="checkbox"/> Visits to the famous Rachaya apiaries with Jabal el Sheikh Beekeepers and discover honey making and benefits of honey.
<input type="checkbox"/> Evening around the Alambic, Kfarmeshki	<input type="checkbox"/> Arak tasting, a music eve, a rural dinner, an overnight in a guesthouse and a cultural tour on the 5th.
<input type="checkbox"/> Discover Atayeb el Mohaydsseh	<input type="checkbox"/> Visit Najmat el Sobh to taste agro-food and the exclusive toasted wheat of the area.

c. Cultural Heritage tourism

❖ Cultural monuments

Rachaya owns an important cultural heritage characterized by its historical famous monuments the Citadel of Independence and the Roman temples.

✓ Roman temples and ruins

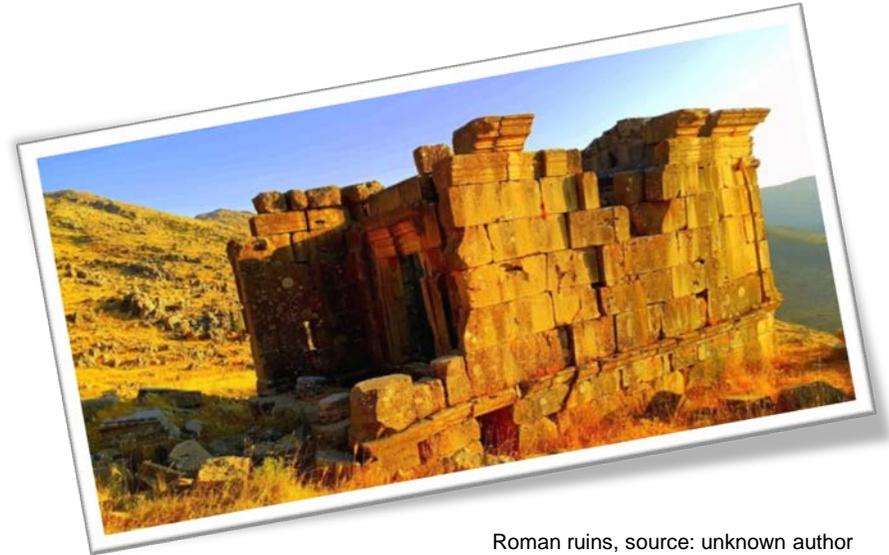
Many of Rachaya's villages have Roman temples, ruins, caves and sarcophagi that are a main stop for tourists of Mount Hermon.

✓ The Citadel

In 1925, on November 22nd, this place was the scene where the French authorities suffered a military defeat.

In 1943 the members of the new Lebanese Government, were imprisoned in the citadel. Later on, they were to be freed, and they signed the new Pact of the Lebanese Republic on November 22nd, making this day a double anniversary.

Perched on the top of three slopes, the citadel of Rachaya is at 1400 m altitude and covers an area of 8,000 m². Its entrance overlooks Mount Hermon. With its thick walls and numerous cellars and galleries, it resembles the citadel of Chkif. As for its vaults and arcades, they resemble those of the palace of Beiteddine. The citadel includes a Roman building and ruins including an underground tunnel 1,500 m long, connecting the citadel to the locality of Ain Mry near the triangle Aqba- Bkifa. The gallery was used by fighters of the time to provide food during blockade periods.



Roman ruins, source: unknown author



Citadel of Independence, source: unknown author

❖ Religious tourism

The presence of many churches along with the oldest one in the region, called "Mar Mousa el Habashi" in Rachaya as well as the Maqam El Sheikh Fadel in Ain Ata, valorize the richness of the religious built heritage in Rachaya.

✓ Churches

Most of the habitants of Rachaya are Druze with a Christian minority.

\Rachaya has four churches and a Druze Khalwat. There is a Greek Catholic Church and a Syriac Catholic Church along with two Greek Orthodox Churches.

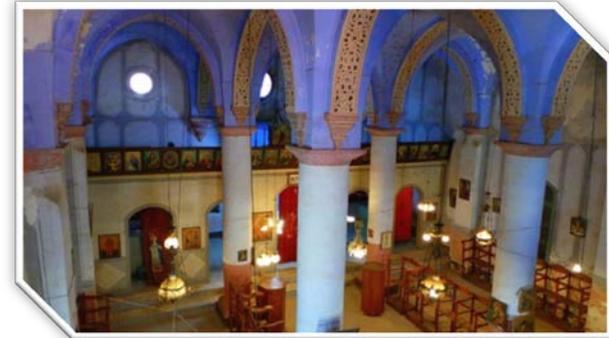
✓ The transfiguration of Jesus – Mount Hermon

The Transfiguration of Jesus is an episode in the New Testament narrative in which Jesus is transfigured and becomes radiant in glory upon Mount Hermon.

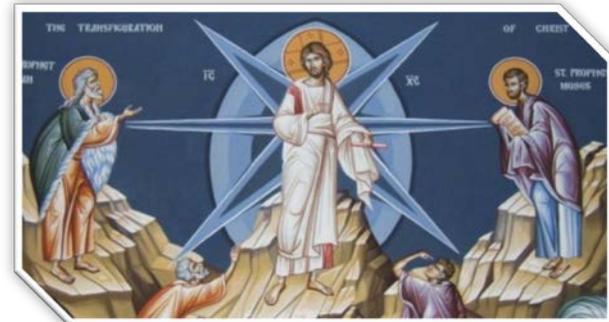
In Christian teachings, the Transfiguration is a pivotal moment, and the setting on the mountain is presented as the point where human nature meets God: the meeting place for the temporal and the eternal, with Jesus himself as the connecting point, acting as the bridge between heaven and earth.

✓ Maqam el Sheikh Fadel - Ain Aata

It is a holy place in an archaeological center. It's famous for its Roman inscriptions at the entrance and a carved stone that represents an eagle.



Church in Rachaya Al Wadi, source: unknown author



The transfiguration of Jesus, source: unknown author



Maqam el Sheikh Fadel - Ain Aata, source: unknown author

❖ Religious and cultural activities

In order to preserve the value of the cultural heritage and transfer it to the new generation, many associations get together to organize some events for families, youth and sometimes for kids. Rachaya municipality is involved, at various levels, in most of these activities

Their capacity to attract local and international tourists is nevertheless very limited still.

Most of these activities need to be rethought in terms of organization, programming and marketing in order to increase their outreach

Activities	Description
<input type="checkbox"/> Zajal and music in Haoush el Qennaabeh,	<input type="checkbox"/> A musical event
<input type="checkbox"/> Cultural & Archaeological Discovery	<input type="checkbox"/> A Rural lunch
<input type="checkbox"/> St Elias Feast, Beit Lahya	<input type="checkbox"/> Annual Dinner
<input type="checkbox"/> Cultural Discovery around Ain Harsha & Ain Aata	<input type="checkbox"/> Visits to God of the Sun Temple, Maqam el Sheikh Fadel and the cave and the sarcophagus.
<input type="checkbox"/> Koullouna Lel Watan (honoring event for the Lebanese Army)	<input type="checkbox"/> Rural lunch, competitions, outdoor games, campfire, traditional dinner & music, a night hike & accommodation in a local guesthouse.
<input type="checkbox"/> Mar Touma Festival, Ain Aara	<input type="checkbox"/> a rural dinner, mass dance & music festivities
<input type="checkbox"/> An Evening of Poetry and Zajal, Rachaya el Wadi	<input type="checkbox"/> The evening features local artists & local food
<input type="checkbox"/> Flower Festival, Bakkifa	<input type="checkbox"/> The festival includes a painting symposium, sculptures, photography, handicrafts & rural lunch at Bakkifa Cultural Center.
<input type="checkbox"/> Festival of the Social Haoush Charity Association, Haoush el Qennaabeh	<input type="checkbox"/> A musical event & a rural dinner that takes place on St Elias celebrations.
<input type="checkbox"/> Annual Dinner, photo and sculpture symposium, Bakkifa	<input type="checkbox"/> Annual dinner

d. Nature, sports and leisure

Due to the abundance of its natural components, panoramic landscape views, and historical monuments, the Lebanese mountain trail association has developed till today three different paths and several guest houses where opened by local habitants to welcome the hikers and tourists:

✓ Lebanese Mountain Trails are:

Trail 1: Rachaya to Hasbaya trail (Moderate trail – 9h 41 mins - 12.42 miles). The hiker starts from the citadel of independence until the Mathaneh passing by the goat farm, it continues until the fountain of Ain Aata and arriving at Ain Tenta.

Trail 2: Aitanit to Rachaya trail (Moderate trail - 10 h 7 mins - 15.19 miles). The Hiker starts from Aitanit, Chicken farm passing by the water Station arriving au Maqam El Sheikh Fadel, then passing through the bridge “abou djej” and arriving at the Ain Allabwi fountain

Trail 3: Rachaya el Wadi - Aïn Horche trail (Moderate trail - 4 h28 mins – 6.27 miles). The hiker starts from Rachaya El Wadi passing by the panoramic view of the Mount Hermon then by the Beqaa field view arriving at Ain Horche.



Trail 1: Rachaya to Hasbaya trail, source: www.wikiloc.com



Trail 2: Aitanit to Rachaya trail, , source: www.wikiloc.com



Trail 3: Rachaya el Wadi - Aïn Horche trail, , source: www.wikiloc.com

✓ Outdoor activities

Several activities are organized every year by the Union of Municipality of Jabal el Sheikh, municipalities of Rachaya caza and related organizations, mainly NGO's and community based organisations.



Hiking in Rachaya, source: unknown author

Activities

- Walk Where Jesus Walked at Mt Hermon, Rachaya el Wadi
- International Environment Day, Ain Aata
- Sound of the Wind, Rachaya
- Bike Rachaya to promote the use of bicycles
- Hiking in Haoush el Qennaabeh, Beit Lahya and Ain Harsha
- Scout Camping in Rachaya
- Rural Dinner in Ghaza
- Be a Shepherd for One Day, Jabal el Sheikh
- Children Camp, Haoush el Qennaabeh
- Hike the Lebanon Mountain Trail from Rachaya to Hasbaya
- Independence Marathon, Rachaya el Wadi
- Bosta Trip

Description

- The walk includes a hiking on the Holy Mountain & a rural breakfast
- Outdoor activities
- A Night hike & overnight at Bella Vista
- Environmental and sporting event for families, kids & professionals.
- Hiking event
- Camping event
- Rural dinner
- Camping & hiking with local shepherds
- Cultural and sports activities
- The hike also includes an accommodation at a local guesthouse.
- Open to families, youth, children and students
- Discovery of the region of Rachaya. The trip is customizable with a hakawati (storyteller) and it includes fun activities.

III. Tourism Potentials to be developed in Rachaya

a. Natural Heritage Tourism and Biodiversity

Goal: Developing the new Regional Natural Park of Rachaya

✓ Regional natural park potential

The regional natural park project in Rachaya has not yet been implemented. Following the formal approval of the NPMLT in 2009, no measures have been taken to create the regional park. As stated by the NPMLT, a regional natural park is designed as a joint project with several neighboring municipalities, agreeing on a moderate and high quality urban development plan and on the conservation of the natural environment.

It is based on this chart and on human and financial means that the municipalities would be able to proceed with this classification, in concentration with the Ministry of the Environment. .

The only practical measure that has been implemented in Rachaya in view of the potential creation of a regional park, is the extension of the existing Cedar Forest

This label provides to tourists and visitors a series of guarantees on the quality of life and the absence of disturbances. It is therefore a very important tourist argument. In other countries that have implemented such policies, many regions have been trying for years to acquire this label that constitutes a powerful factor for their development.



Rachaya green areas, source: unknown author

✓ Biodiversity

Goal: Preserving the existing biodiversity especially in the area located between Rachaya and Mount Hermon

Rachaya like many other regions preserves some mountainous areas which are less suitable to the use of intensive farming methods and less attractive for the development of urban settlements. These areas are considered as the ideal ones for the biodiversity development. Biodiversity can be reinforced and safeguarded through the establishment of natural corridors that connect Rachaya and Mount Hermon with their natural surroundings

✓ Reforestation Initiative

Goal: creation of a safe bio-corridors for wildlife and expansion of green areas

The LRI (Lebanon Reforestation Initiative, a program funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by the United States Forest Service (USFS)) reforestation strategy for the Rachaya's biocorridor (extending the forests of Rachaya towards Aanjar) which links the previously reforested sites in the region to additional sites that need to be reforested, is very essential and should be strengthened. As well as the involvement of the private sector along with its engagement and contribution to reforestation activities, can lead to the creation of a safe bio-corridors for wildlife and expansion of green area in order to protect the environment and provide a sustainable natural resources in Rachaya,

✓ Water ponds establishment

Goal: implementation of water pond to benefit from the melted snow

According to the altitude of Rachaya, and to the volume of snow falling each year, it would be very essential and beneficial to suggest an implementation of a water pond in order to collect water especially from the melted snow, and then connect the pond with the agricultural lands of the village and surrounding areas in Rachaya.



Reforestation activity in Rachaya, source: unknown author

B- Agricultural tourism

Goal: Protection of agricultural lands and valorization of local culinary traditions

✓ **Sylvi-agro-pastoralism and conservation agriculture**

Different factors can contribute in the classification between pastures or arable lands in Rachaya such as climate, geomorphological and biophysical characteristics of the region, this classification is very essential, it can limit the harmful pasture activity and can also influence positively Rachaya's farmers.

The approach can be also developed by the elaboration of a map specifying the potential of the concerned areas, a site study in terms of soil depth, slope, water irrigation need... the main objective of this study is the protection of the agricultural lands and valorization of their landscaping and cultural values, as well as the preservation of the existing genetic diversity of local domestic animal breeds and cultivated plants, taking into consideration that the maintenance of a vegetal cover also reduces soil erosion and improves soil infiltration and organic matter content.

On another hand, the agro - production of grape molasses, goat milk derivative products and practice beekeeping for honey extraction should be reintroduced and reinforced as well as traditional processes shared with the new generation in order to preserve and strengthen this characteristic culture of Rachaya.

This sector can be enhanced by the development of a competitiveness strategy based on several steps starting by hosting agricultural experts to teach local farmers the correct methods of cultivation, checking the quality of all products, working on a creative and attractive labeling and running a successful marketing strategy



c. Cultural Heritage tourism

Goal: Valorization of the cultural heritage

✓ Religious monuments

the existing churches and monuments have an important architectural and cultural values, hence the need to preserve this heritage and restore the buildings,. A special effort should be made in order to ease their accesses towards the public. .

✓ The Citadel

the Citadel of independence constitutes a major landmark at the national level, and once it is valorized properly, it could play a substantial role as a major lever in the revitalization of not only the adjacent souk, but also the whole village. Therefore this major national heritage can be strongly considered the point of entry to increase the number of tourists at Rachaya's city scale as well as regional one. Based on this fact, several actions can be taken in order to enhance the capacity of this Citadel such as redefining the internal and external spaces, as well as adding a cultural program and proper management in order to be ready to welcome the visitors.



Citadel of independence, source: unknown author

d. Ecotourism, sports and leisure

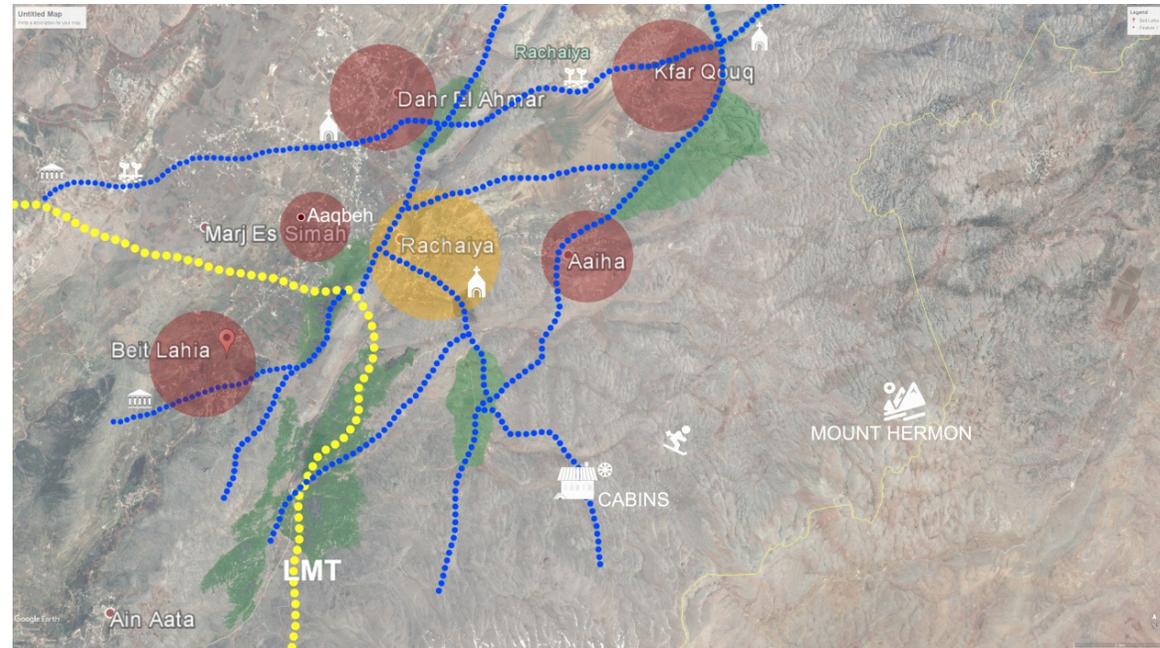
Goal: Creation and development of activities enhancing tourism attraction

✓ Hiking trails

In addition to the 3 different major paths that have been identified till now, new trails should be developed based on specific characteristic, such as: duration, technical difficulty, and total distance, and each one passing through different landmarks and overseeing different view sheds. The network of trails should focus on linking Rachaya center with surrounding villages including Mount Hermon. Specifically activities in relation with culture, leisure, eco-tourism, sports, ect... should be linked together through this trail network that should also link the cedar forest in Rachaya to the other ones in Lebanon.

✓ Biking trails

Since the bicycle trails can follow some of the paths of the roads and of the hiking trails, it is essential to integrate and develop the biking component in Rachaya region and identify the land that is more or less adequate, therefore the length, the slope, the width, and many other factors should be studied before elaborating related maps as bicycle users would preferably need a clear and delimited path to bike on, be it easy or difficult.



✓ Camping areas

The identification of camping areas would be also very interested especially that there is a potential in Rachaya's sites. Multiple factors should be identified prior to the project implementation: the wind speed should be the lowest; a water source should be close to the site. This will allow the installation of eco-friendly restrooms and water access to the camping site. Several types of outdoor recreational activities for both family and youth can be implemented near the camping area.

Two main camping areas can be suggested:

The first convenient location can be the Mount Hermon, which can be considered suitable for general camping activities. The second one could be located near to the bio-corridor of Rachaya where wooden cabins would be installed, Thus, this would allow the campers to be surrounded by an area rich in biodiversity and where their main motivation would be the observation and appreciation of nature, wildlife and protected natural areas. Camping sites need to be very well managed and controlled to avoid any threat or pollution on the natural environment.

✓ Recreational: Ski domain potential

Since the Arab-Israeli war of June 1967, about 40 square miles (100 square km) of Mount Hermon's southern and western slopes have been part of the Israeli-administered Golan Heights; they have been developed for recreational use, especially skiing. The Lebanese part of Mount Hermon is a restricted area that only army soldiers have access to. The idea of a snow domain is interesting but it is difficult to attract investments in the current regional instability.

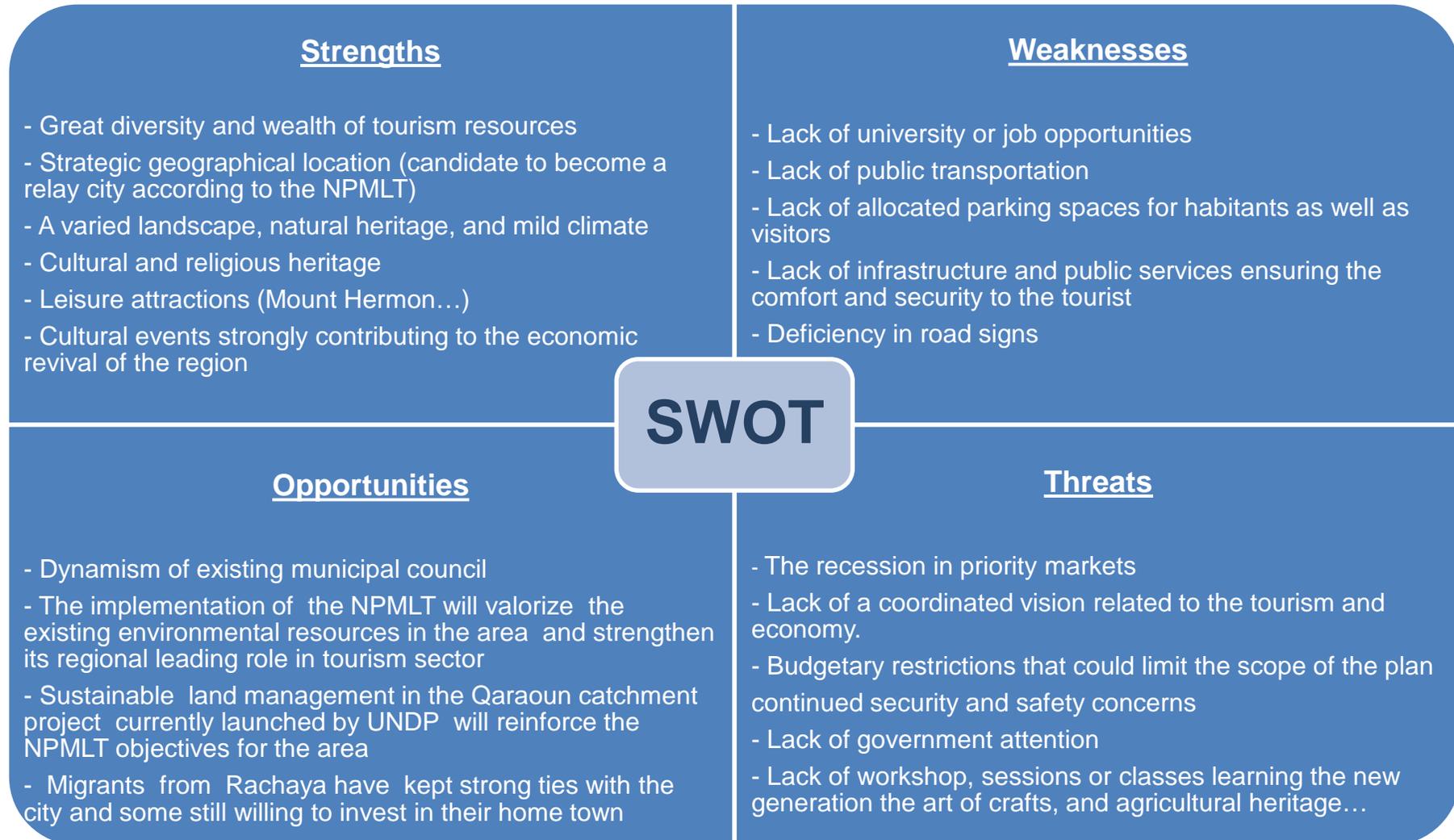


Cedar forest in Rachaya, source: unknown author



Mount Hermon – Ski resort, source: unknown author

IV. SWOT ANALYSIS



D- CONTEXT OF CITY SCALE

I. Introduction

- Brief History
- Typology
- Rachaya Souk history

II. Existing commercial activities

III. Program of religious and cultural activities

IV. Existing local urban services

V. SWOT Analysis: Weaknesses, Opportunities, Strengths, threats

I. Introduction

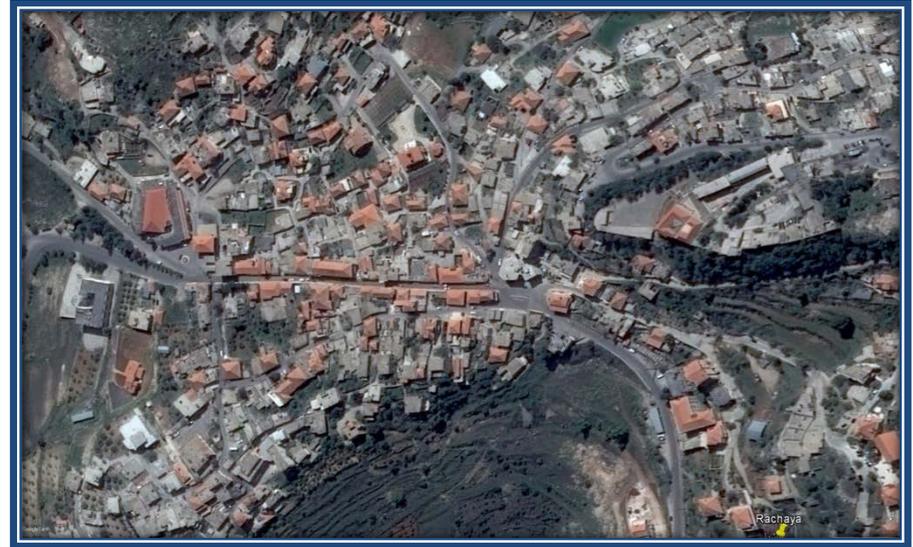
Rachaya Village

a. Brief History

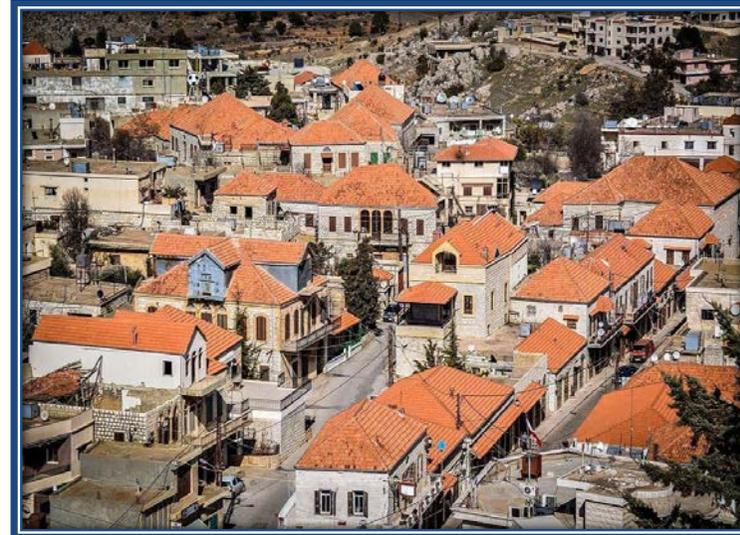
Rachaya is a distinguished Lebanese village with a special character and a noticeable expansion of buildings, the historic center has managed to preserve its traditional aspect by keeping its ancient traditional stone houses with red tiled roofs, small shops and old cobbled streets.

b. Typology

It now includes more than 300 typical houses with red brick roofs, most of them with attics known as "Tayyara". Stone arches decorate their facades. The entrances of these dwellings are characterized by their semicircular arch form; the arcade is generally surrounded by two circles to the right and left of the main door, which itself is surrounded by two windows. The balconies are supported by iron or stone pillars. They are decorated with iron railings. These balustrades often have the shape of arrows each crowned by a lotus flower. The interior of these homes includes four to eight bedrooms, all overlooking a large living room called "El Iwan". These houses, which are often surrounded by gardens, are distinguished by their floor height which sometimes exceeds 4 meters.



Rachaya village, source: Google map



Arial view of the village, source: unknown author

I. Introduction

Rachaya Souk history

The traditional souk in the center of the town provides many shops that sell local crafts and low-priced goods. It used to cater for the whole region, as was located on a merchant route between greater Syria and Palestine. The souk was destroyed during the French mandate in retaliation of the druze rebellion. It was rebuilt later on with the help of craftsmen that were brought mainly from Dhour el Choueir village. It is currently one of the best preserved traditional souks in Lebanon and is one of the longest still operational.



Rachaya souk, source: Liban Villages.com – Joy Homsy

Souk Elevations



Souk elevations, source: Alba, Atelier urbain - 2017

II. Commercial activities in the souk

Rachaya souk is considered as the main place for the marketing of local productions of the region represented by the honey, molasses of grapes, spices, matte, jam, pickles, milk derivative products, mankouche....

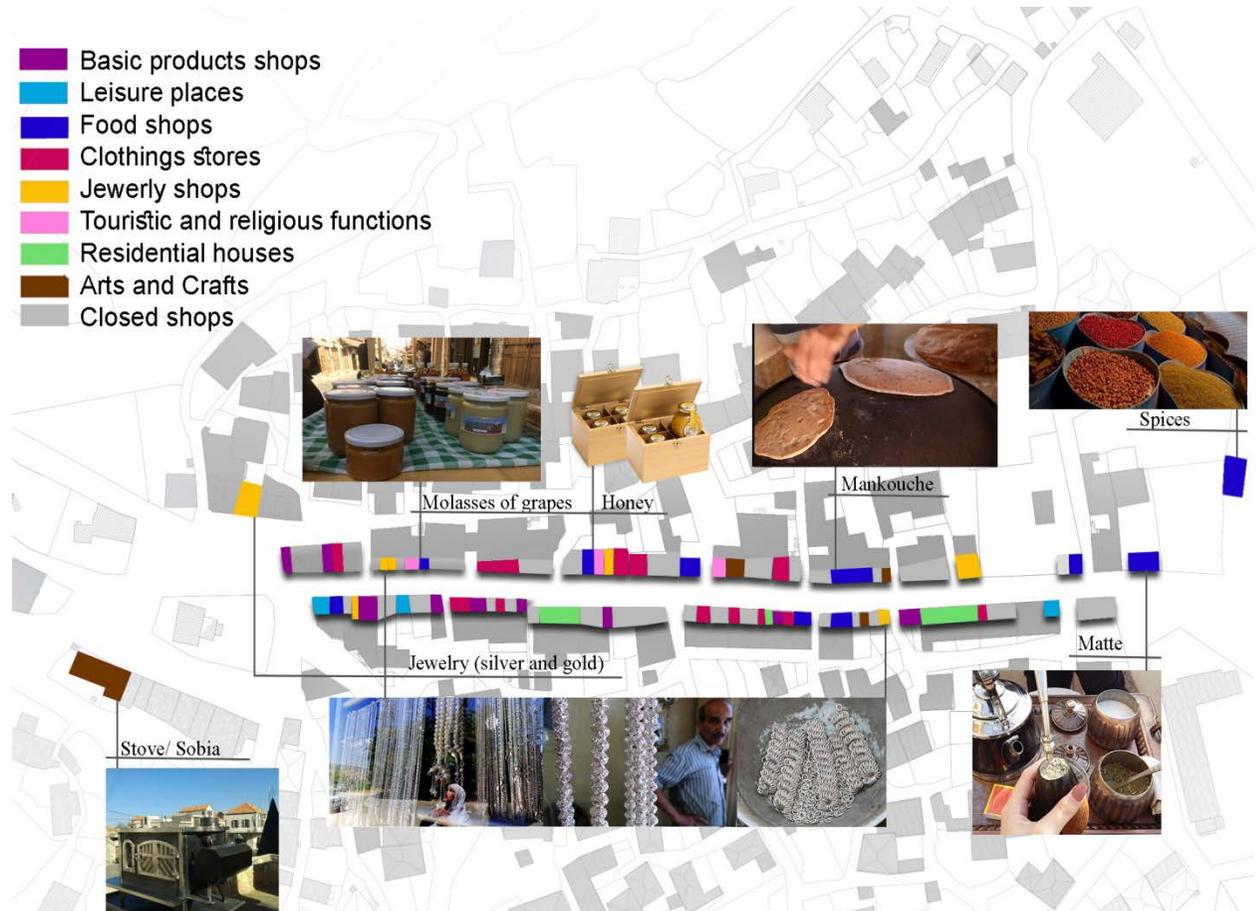
In addition to these products, the souk still includes some workshops showing the art of silver and goldsmith working which have a very good reputation in the surrounding and therefore Rachaya is considered as the best destination to buy jewelry especially for wedding celebrations

On another hand, Rachaya souk allows also the selling of the traditional handmade wood, olive oil soap and oil stoves (called "Sobia" in Lebanese).

Rachaya's souk is one of the main touristic attraction pole in the city.

There are currently 105 shops in the souk of Rachaya, 44 are currently closed, 18 stores of grocers, 21 stores of clothes and jewels, 2 bookstores, 17 stores used by shoemakers, hairdressers, dressmakers.

There is an absence of dynamism in the souk artery and this is mainly reflected by the closure of around 50 % of the shops.



Existing commercial activities in the souk, source: based on data from Alba, Atelier urbain - 2017

III. Program of religious and cultural activities

The union of municipality of Jabal el Sheikh, along with the Rachaya municipality and Rachaya festival organize several local religious and cultural activities to maintain the cultural heritage of the city:



Source: www.nogarlicnoonions.com

“Independence Celebrations, Rachaya el Wadi”. The celebrations include special events for schools at the Citadel of Independence.

“Discover Rachaya's crafts and food, sculpture, clay statues, locally hand-made Sobias (stoves), local silver-making, local products including goat-milk derivatives”.

“ Rachaya in the fall”. The program includes a rural dinner, a cultural tour to heritage churches & temples.

“Rawwiq bi Rachaya, Food and Feast with Souk el Tayeb”. This event includes a farmers market, arts and crafts exhibits and activities for families.

“Discover Rachaya's Grape Molasses and its benefits”. The discovery trip includes a cultural tour, debs and local food tasting.

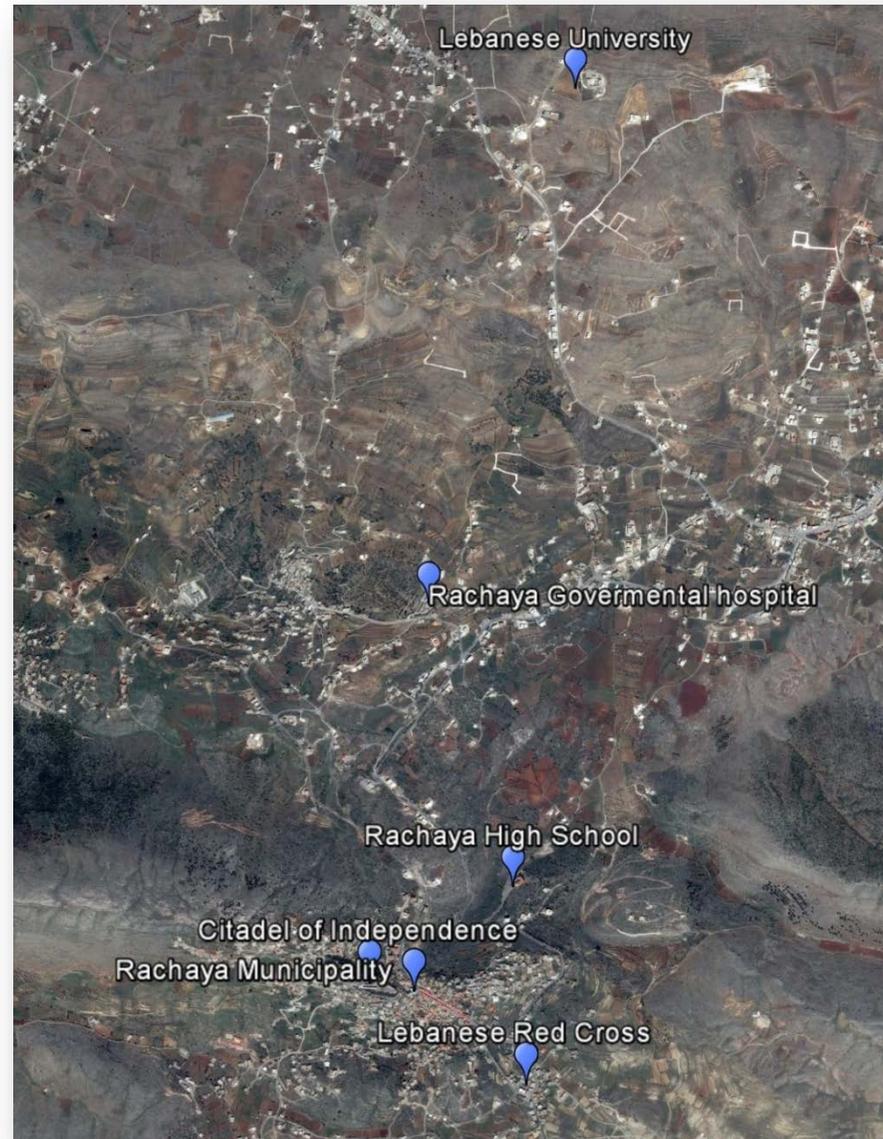
“ Zawarib Rachaya”. This event is for photography lovers to discover the hidden corners of Rachaya, heritage houses and alternative touristic attractions.

IV. Local urban services

In addition to the commercial and retail activities, Rachaya is considered as the main administrative pole in the region, where all the public services are located serving all the caza.

These services are mainly:

- The municipal building of Rachaya
- Rachaya High School
- The Lebanese University
- Rachaya Governmental Hospital
- Lebanese Red Cross



Public services locations, source: Google Earth

V. SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths

- The souk is the longest rectilinear traditional souk in Lebanon
- Rachaya's architecture is relatively well preserved
- The existence of the private squares / Haras
- The existence of interesting pedestrian network linking the souk artery with surrounding Haras.

Weaknesses

- Tourists visit only the main souk
- Around 50% of the shops are closed
- Lack of allocated parking spaces for habitants as well as visitors
- The Citadel lacked of a cultural program and need to valorized
- The main street of the souk is currently the main link for car traffic circulation.
- Entrances need to be restructured and reorganized

SWOT

Opportunities

- Rachaya village is among the few on the national level that are located within the regional park
- UNDP initiative "Development of local level Master Plans and Detailed Urban Plans in the Qaraoun Catchment" represents an opportunity to develop Rachaya city
- Provision of near parking spaces for habitants and tourists
- the municipality started working on the place that serve as main entrance to the city

Threats

- New generations have been migrating from the area.
- Existing road networks around the Souk artery are badly dimensioned, mostly with dead ends and non-connected sections
- increasing interventions on the built heritage that could damage it in an irreversible way

E- DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

I. Introduction

II. Development strategy at Regional Scale – Ecotourism

- Current Spatial Planning Status
- Elaboration of a spatial plan for Rachaya
- Eco-tourism Strategy for Rachaya

III. Development strategy at City Scale

- Rachaya as a tourist hub at the regional scale
- Rachaya city as a Backbone for tourist activities
- Synergies between regional and city scale
- Spatial quality
- Souk proposal

E- DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The economic development of an area is linked to the economic structure and resources of a territory. Moreover, also infrastructure and investments may affect the local economic development. Tourism in Rachaya, as indicated in the NPMLT is considered as being the main economic activity to be developed for the area. Tourism has different purposes and may also be complementary to other local economic activities.

Public institutions have to be aware of the capacities of an area and try to help its development. However, if not well managed the local resources may be destroyed by tourist. A local tourism policy towards sustainability is indispensable for the future development of an area.

Sustainable tourism development means the optimal use of social, natural, cultural and financial resources for national development on an equitable and self-sustaining basis to provide a unique visitor experience and an improved quality of life through partnerships among local government, private sector and communities.

A comprehensive tourism development plan can become a key driver for socio- economic development for its effects of job creation, investment in local enterprises, infrastructure development and export revenues earned

The strategy also is needed as a guide to steer the current limited budgets and possible future investments in a way that synergy and maximalization of outcome is achieved.



Source: Unknown author

E- DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

REGIONAL SCALE – ECO-TOURISM

Current Spatial Planning Status

Sustainable Land Management in the Qaraoun Catchment (SLMQ) Project – UNDP:

Rachaya does not have an officially validated master plan or detailed master plan, currently the UNDP has launched a call for proposal for a Sustainable Land Management in the Qaraoun Catchment (SLMQ) project. The final documents are expected to be submitted by the Consultants form to be selected by the end of 2019). The SLMQ will tackle the embedding of sustainable considerations in land use planning and development activities in the Qaraoun Catchment area. It targets several levels of intents all in favor of reshaping land and natural resource management: alleviate land degradation, maintain existing ecosystem services, and improve livelihoods in the Qaraoun Catchment. The SLMQ project will include the following tasks:

Task 1: Master Plan for the districts of Zahle, West Bekaa and Rachaya including Local Development Action Plan.

→ OBJECTIVE: spatial strategic organization

Task 2: A Strategic Environmental Assessment

→ OBJECTIVE: align environment protection with strategic planning measures

Task3: Develop Detailed Urban Plans covering the districts of Rachaya and West Bekaa

→ OBJECTIVE : valorize built and natural assets and heritage

Task 4: Establish a list of physical, economic and social indicators required for monitoring and revising the DUPs

→ OBJECTIVE: monitor and suggest needed policies



Districts of Zahle, West Bekaa and Rachaya

E- DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

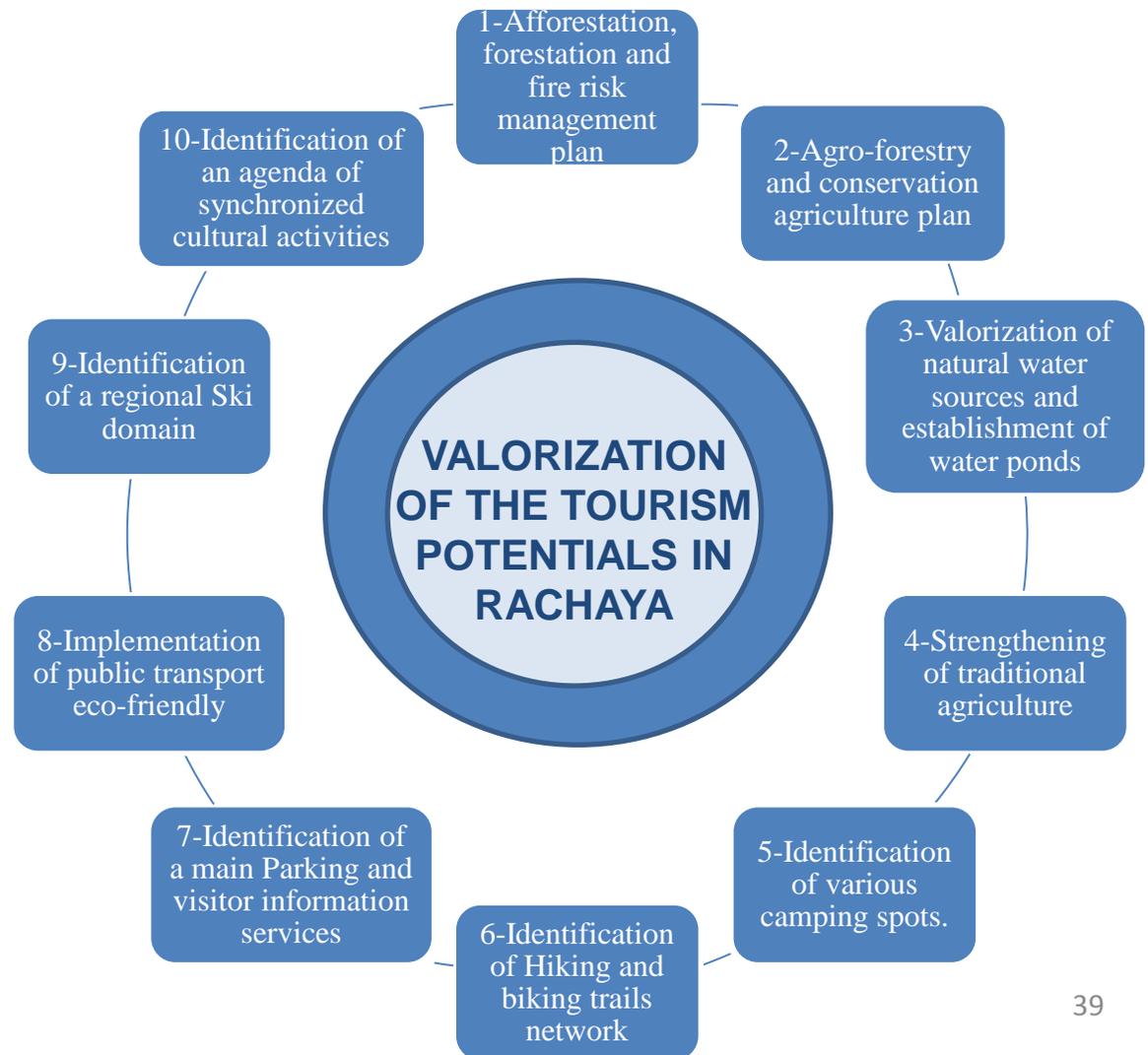
REGIONAL SCALE – ECO-TOURISM

Accompanying measures to the SLMQ

It is recommended that Rachaya Municipality elaborates on the regional scale and the city scale, the following documents to accompany the elaboration of the SLMQ by UNDP.

Regional scale:

To facilitate the elaboration of the task 1 of the SLMQ, Rachaya locality can, with the help of experts, elaborate a spatial plan with guidelines that identifies location and criteria's for the below components. These components are essential to valorize the tourism potentials of Rachaya, as identified previously.



E- DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

REGIONAL SCALE – ECO-TOURISM

Eco-tourism Strategy for Rachaya

The development strategy for Rachaya should promote the valorization -and not exploitation- of natural resources. Ecotourism is a form of tourism which focuses on contributing to the preservation of natural and cultural resources while promoting economic contribution to local communities. Successes factors in ecotourism development such as an integrated approach, planning and a slow start, education and training, maximize local benefits, and evaluation and feedback will serve as a backbone for the strategy. These main criteria's should be re-evaluated and factors identified using an ecosystem management approach which puts the health of the environment as the foundation of tourism development. Standards need to be set and then strategies assigned to maintain standards for preservation and economic well-being.

5 SUCCESS FACTORS

1- INTEGRATED APPROACH

2- COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING AND A SLOW START

3- EDUCATION AND TRAINING

4- MAXIMIZE LOCAL PROFITS AND ATTRACT INVESTMENTS

5- EVALUATION AND FEEDBACK

E- DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

REGIONAL SCALE – ECO-TOURISM

Success Factors

1- INTEGRATED APPROACH: a) encourage synergies between different activities. (camping. Trekking water etc. b) Integrate modern alternatives in production and development with community knowledge and traditions; And labeling and marketing etc...)



2- COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING AND A SLOW START : a) planning: accompany the SLMQ on both regional and city scale. B) Slow start is to leverage on activities that could be used as an entry point to increase massively the number of tourists coming to Rachaya : rehabilitation of the citadel with its cultural programming.



Source: Unknown author

E- DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

REGIONAL SCALE – ECO-TOURISM

3- EDUCATION AND TRAINING: a) increase the capacities of community members to protect and manage their natural patrimony in a sustainable way; b) Encourage appropriation of the project's activities by the local population through the implication of local organization and civil society

4- MAXIMIZE LOCAL PROFITS AND ATTRACT INVESTMENTS: a) generate employment opportunities for community members: target various segment of the economic sector : from labor to well educated population. B) secure opportunities for investors form the area or originated form the area as many of these have migrated to invest in their village.

5- EVALUATION AND FEEDBACK: a) monitor the process through specific indicators that prioritize on the social and economic well being of the community as well as the capacity to valorize natural resources. B) Have this project serve as a model for establishing other similar programs, and facilitate the exchange of information and experiences among surrounding communities



Source: Unknown author



Source: Unknown author



Source: Unknown author

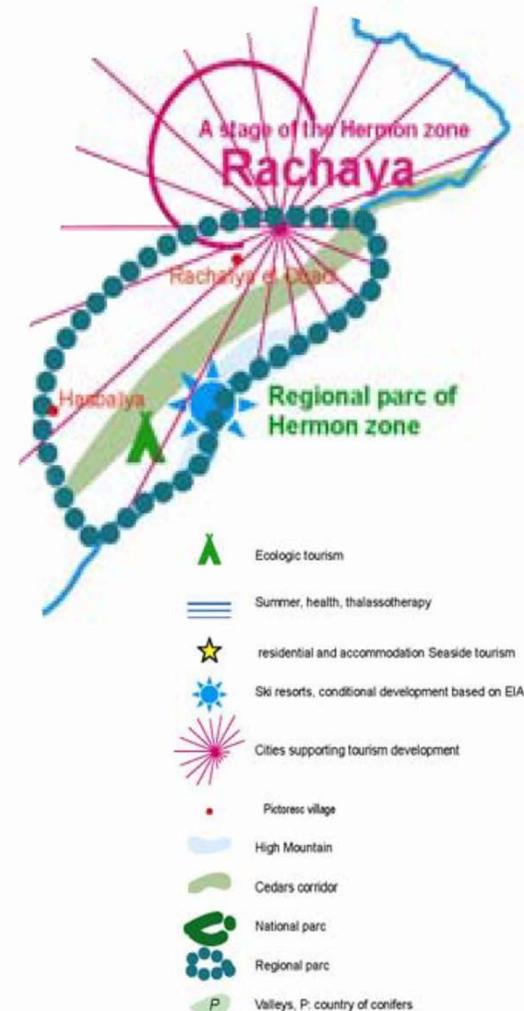
E- DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

CITY SCALE

Despite the importance of the development strategy at the regional scale, however, it would be very essential to develop a complementary strategy for Rachaya's city especially, the Souk area, which should be considered as a center for the whole region, as well as a functional heart reflecting the identity of Rachaya, attracting tourists from different countries and supporting the economic situation of the region.

Tourist hub at the regional scale:

In the NPMLT, Rachaya village is the only candidate relay city located within a Regional Park in Lebanon. Its role, seen in the same document, as a city supporting tourism development opens the way to a set of measures that should strengthen its capacities as a tourist regional hub



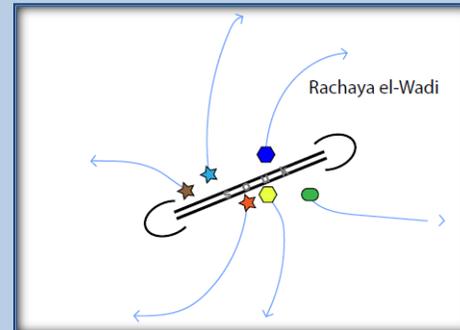
E- DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

CITY SCALE

Rachaya city as a Backbone for tourist activities

In order to reinforce the synergies between the city scale and the regional scale, the traditional center of Rachaya, is invited to play the role as a “tourist backbone” :

- 1) Home base for exploring, or a Place of convergence and divergence of activities (information, starting points and ending points, focal point with the citadel)
- 2) Place to accommodate for longer stays (place to sleep and places to deimbulkate)
- 3) Display / vitrine for local products



Home base for exploring



Guest House



Rachaya Souk

Source: Unknown author

E- DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

CITY SCALE

Synergies between regional and city scale

At the city scale, the existing tourist assets evolves essentially around religious , cultural and leisure activities:

Cultural activities

- 1) Churches (Christians) and Kheloueh (Druzes)
- 2) Ancient cinema and Citadelle
- 3) Built Heritage (the traditional architecture in the souk and surrounding streets: haras, etc..)

Leisure activities

- Shopping activities (mainly local products)

These activities complete the ones existing on the regional scale :

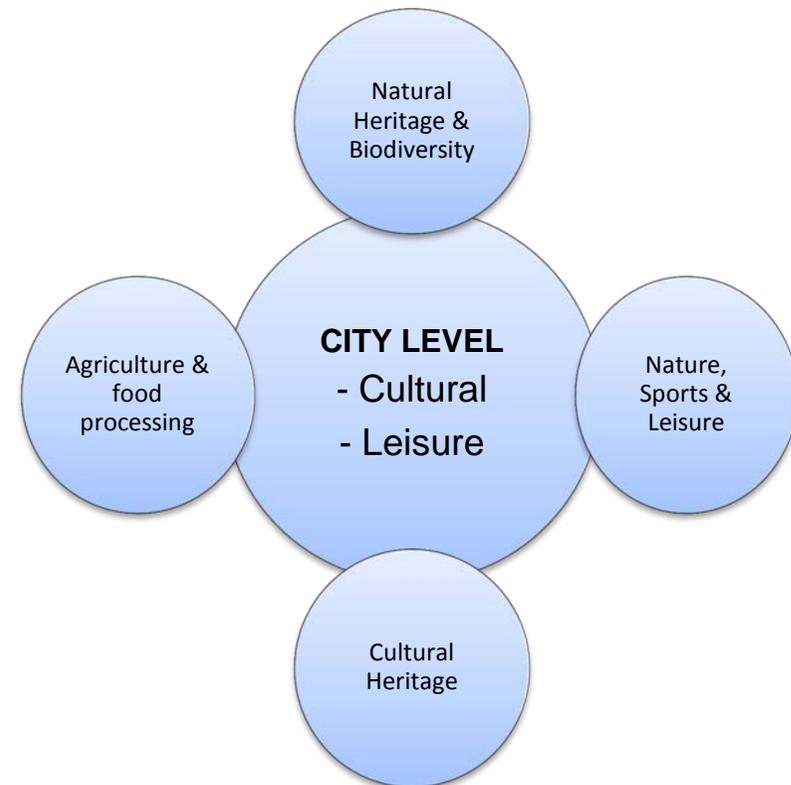
Natural Heritage & Biodiversity

Agriculture & food processing

Cultural Heritage

Nature, Sports & Leisure

The development of activities at the local scale should be put in synergy with the ones located at the regional scale in order to reinforce tourism sector and enhance its attraction level



E- DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

CITY SCALE

Spatial quality

It is important to highlight the essential role of the quality of public spaces in the tourists' impressions, hence the importance to enhance the network and structure of this public space.

In fact, the comfortable and safe public space, the pleasance of the places to stay, the well-structured roads for cars and pedestrians, the availability of parking spaces, besides the welcoming entrances of the area contribute all to build an interesting social public space, taking into consideration that in a village like Rachaya, the community plays a very big role and the public space (souk) can be considered as another kind of place for the reunion of the inhabitants, far from their works or their houses. This idea is strengthen by the presence of the architectural character of the souk, its variation in functions and activities reflected by the interesting and attracting elevations as well as its different characteristics listed above.

Therefore the enhancement of all these elements should be the main goal of the city scale strategy to be put in synergy with the regional scale one, performing the revalorization of the city and promoting the tourists attraction.



Rachaya Souk, source: www.lorientlejour.com/article/1077289

E- DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

CITY SCALE

The creation of two public squares at the beginning and the end of the souk, contribute to the valorization of these two places linked by the main axe of the souk.

In fact each square can have an impressive impact on the city, it can help citizens feel better connected to their cultural, and administrative institutions.

The square can also strengthen the identity of the place , for instance the one located in the area of the municipality can be called "Municipality square".

It can be considered as an important focal point in this area due to its location at the end of the souk, near the municipal building and its strategic position towards the perspective of citadel of independence.



Souk squares proposal

E- DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

CITY SCALE

On another hand, and since the character of Rachaya is highlighted by its private spaces or squares named “haras”, a link can be created between these spaces, and the main souk area through the different pedestrians breakthroughs.

This relation can ensure a safe connection between spaces as well as an interesting relation between public and private spaces with the economical activities within the souk.



Link the private squares to the souk

E- DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

CITY SCALE

The strategy should include also a well study mobility plan for Rachaya, taking into consideration that the streets should be well organized and designed as comfortable and safe places for everyone; for pedestrians as well as drivers.

Therefore, the main axe of the souk should be converted to a one way road with priority for pedestrians.

The secondary accesses linking the Souk to the second plans should be dedicated to the pedestrians also.

The vehicular roads should be limited in the periphery area of the souk, and public transportation system with the creation of public parkings should be developed.

This proposition can enhance the social situation in the city center area leading to an economical development of the souk.



Network of public space

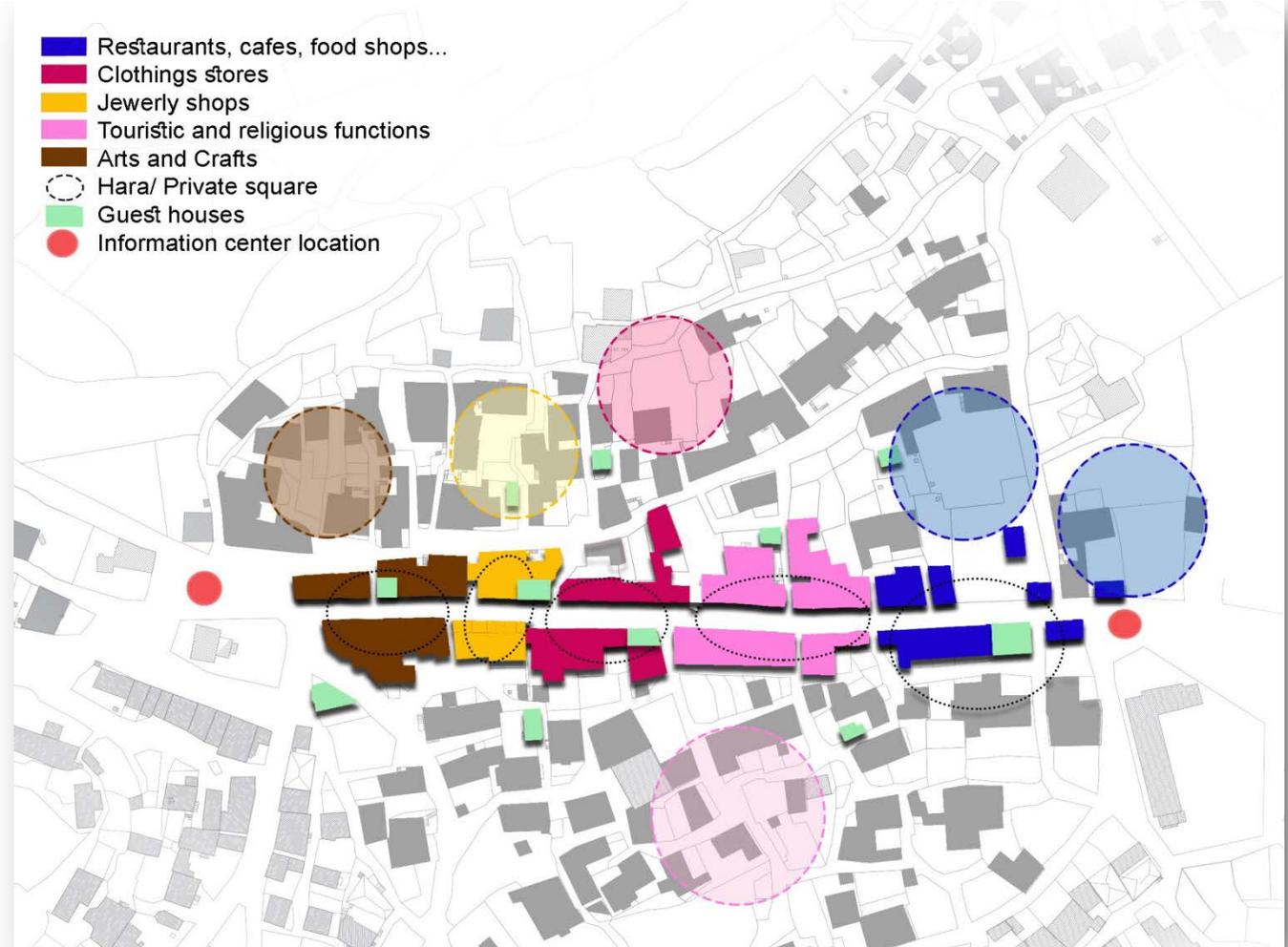
E- DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

CITY SCALE

We can clearly notice, the disorganization of the activities located at the heart of the souk, this can be the main reason of the actual weakness of the souk market.

Therefore, if we try to organize the different functions according to the existing attractive poles in Rachaya, we reclaim in this way the traditional system of the old souk composed by several micro-souks (such as souk al tayeb, souk al sagha, souk al lahamin in the old souk of Beirut...), noting that Rachaya has a very interesting additional characteristic as shown previously, the existence of many Haras/ private squares in the parallel plan of the Souk which enriches and supports also this concept of old souk.

On another hand, the creation of some guest houses along with two information centers located at the main entrances of the souk, constitute an essential point supporting the touristic attraction in Rachaya.



Souk area proposal