## **Culture Development Strategy of Charentsavan, Armenia**

# **Executive summary**

Charentsavan community development plan states about the cultural and touristic vision of the community as such: “*Charentsavan community can grow into a creative hub through development of tourism based on historical and cultural heritage. There is a significant tourism potential in Charentsavan community. The tourism potential of the community is represented by its settlements with rich, healthy nature, forests, mountains, historical and cultural values, natural monuments, healing springs and certain infrastructures.*

This quotation shows the cultural and touristic potential that drives Charentsavan municipality and the project team to think on economic regeneration of the area through culture and cultural heritage. The research conducted by project team revealed the importance of the historic objects, high number of them as well as the importance of city’s industrial past for all industrial cities of Soviet Armenia.

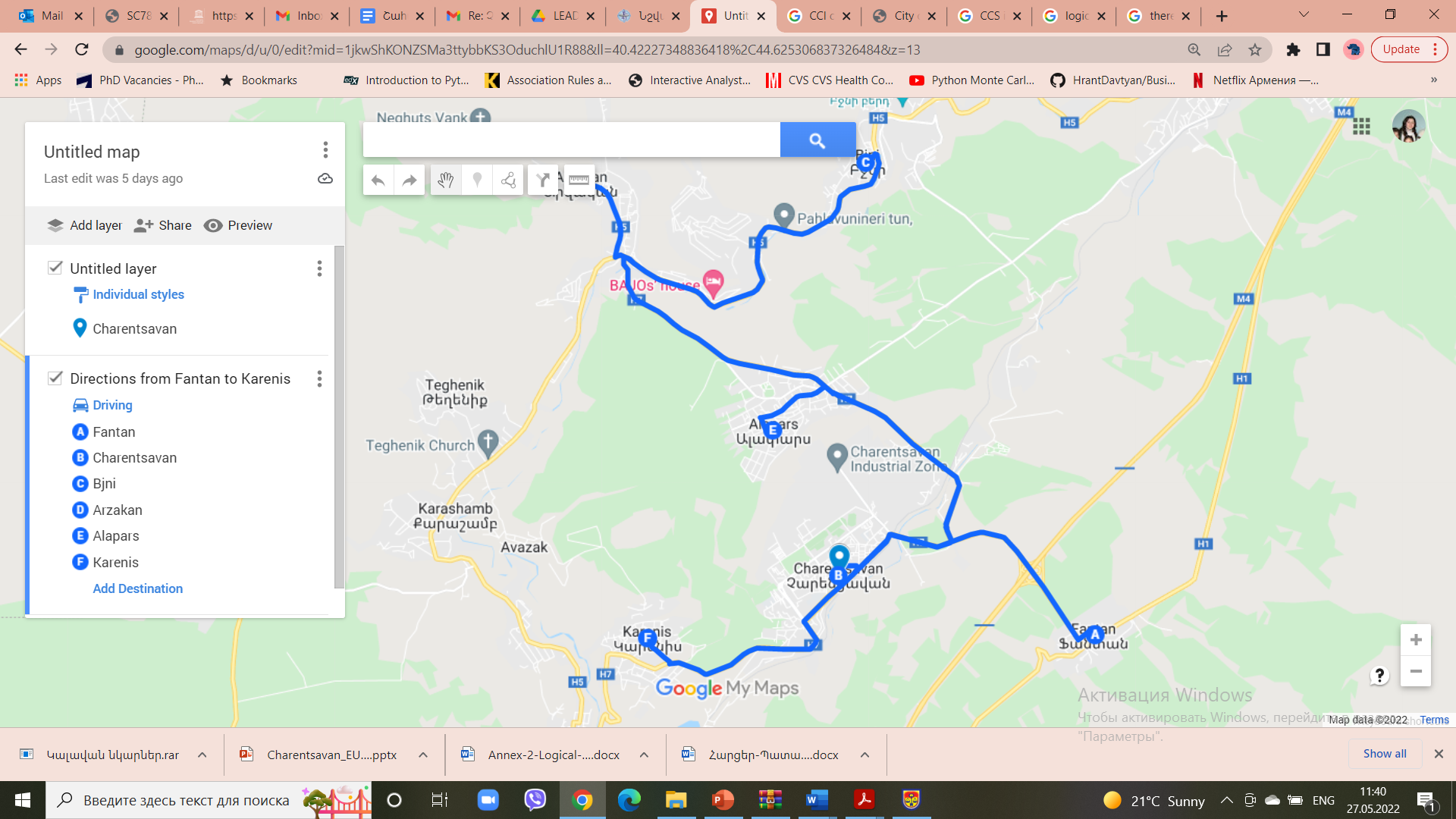
It is planned to reach to cultural revitalization and regeneration of the city through heritage research and preservation, as well as popularization of it among city population and for visitors as a source of endless inspiration of local CCIs, businesses and organization. Launch of heritage museum development of strong brand identity will become the cornerstones of the cultural revitalization, when all agents of change will get inspired by the brand and heritage assets to take actions, create, and develop.

The strategy contains details of cultural heritage assets, the history of the city and keywords of city’s brand identity such as “light”, poet “Charents”, soviet Armenia, industrial greatness, “Getashen rescued raspberry” etc.

It also comes up with a plan to implement cultural heritage museum renovation, creation of an art space for local and visiting artists, also it is important to educate and enhance the capacities of local CCI entrepreneurs, which is planned to conduct via creative incubator. Knowledge and creative businesses will then become the main actors in the field.

Charentsavan Municipality will lead the implementation of the strategy and make in-kind contribution of working and museum space provision, maintenance and museum staff costs, as well as all costs related to stakeholder network development, and will seek from funding institution to receive for museum renovation, capacity building and branding.

# **Presentation of Charentsavan**



\*\* The map of 6 settlements in Charentsavan

Charentsavan is a city in Kotayk region, Armenia, comprising 6 settlements of Charentsavan, Alapars, Arzakan, Karenis and Fantan, and with a population of about 40000 people, situated 35 km in North-East of Yerevan. The city comprises over 24000 ha of forests, industrial areas, populated and agricultural lands on both sides of river Hrazdan. The population mainly come here to work and live as a staff in one of the factories before the Independency. During the years of Independency. Several waves of migrants came here from Nagorno-Karabakh because of 3 major conflicts there/ 1st War, April war and 2nd war/,

The history of Charentsavan went back to 1947, when a town Lusavan was established based on Gyumush Hydroelectric Power Station in the area and workers of the plant were the first inhabitants moved to live there. Lusavan is from Armenian word “luys”, which means “light”. It was the only town in the area with electricity. As it was told, the city was “spreading light” and engaging many talented engineers from all over Soviet Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh and abroad. In fact, it is the first town established in Soviet Armenia. 20 years later, in 1967, on the anniversary of Armenian poet Eghishe Charents, it took his name as Charentsavan. Since then, industrial excellence and cultural richness were blended inseparably into city’s identity up to the collapse of Soviet Union. As the industrial potential faded for the last 30 years, city now is an open-air memorial of its industrial greatness and Armenians’ love to poet Charents.

City’s machine- and tool- building factories, foundry, reinforced concrete structures factory, sewing factory, lysine production factory, Bjni mineral water plant, motor car details factory, and many more, were forming an industrial hub, which gave produce to all over Soviet union and far beyond. Kentronadzul foundry produced important metallic machinery tools for Soviet factories and for export/currently some still in use in Zangezur Copper Molybdenum Combine/. The decors produced in the factory can be found on the gates of Armenia National Assemply, Sport and Concert Complex in Yerevan, also bells were made for the churches in Hrazdan, Meghradzor etc, many notable monuments such as the statue of Curly haired boy in Charentsavan and Hrazdan leopard by the seaside etc. Special attention to be granted to household items produced here and used in almost all houses back then and even now, such as pancake pans, pelmeni cutters, aluminum pots, arishta noodle rolls, hand coffee grinders etc.

Not only the produce, but the factories themselves are notable buildings and preserved up to now, though not always in good shape and condition, however still very massive and impressing with the gates, internal decors and soviet architectural monumentalism of the entire buildings. All the factories are privatized and close to the public; only 3 of them are still operating in the city with much less capacity. Many contains cultural objects inside their walls such as the Charents’s mosaic in the Foundry which is of high cultural importance and needs to get restored, as well as properly exhibited to the public, adding one more “Charents-ian spot” on the city map.

There are many “Charentsian spots” in the city, forming a dense map of objects, monuments and places, such as Charents statue by sculptor Ara Shiraz, another sculpture by E. Tsughunyan in the city main square, Charents street, his memorial house, The Curly haired boy sculpture/ by Kh. Mirijanyan/ and the monument around, situated right in the city entrance / the boy is protagonist of a well- known poem by the author/. There are also modern objects such as market named after Charents.

Memorial house was in close collaboration with Charents museum in Yerevan, sharing exhibits and providing duplicates. Back in 1977, Charents’ daughters themselves chose the city to host the memorial house. It is currently in poor building conditions, still holding interesting exhibits, inside and outside of the building, and having all the potential to become full time operating museum.

Other cultural objects dear to most city inhabitants according to survey results, are city park, the central square with fountains, a walkway with spruces, the Musical school, Cinema building/not operating and privatized/, the train station building. The latter has an outstanding architecture, situated in the central square of Charentsavan, surrounded by trees and full of light and captivating decors inside. The building is in possession of South Caucauses Railway Company, which implements regular rail freight through the city and passenger transportation on during summertime.

Important heritage and culture monuments can be found also outside of Charentsavan industrial area, in the settlements of Arzakan, Alapars, Karenis, Bjni and Fantan, which comprise both historic monuments and picturesque nature, and those of Soviet Armenia era.

Arzakan's and Bjni’s numerous springs can play a significant role in the development of community tourism. Bjni springs are also bottled, and the company is one of the biggest natural sparkling water bottlers in Armenia. Alapars is also famous for its historical and architectural monuments, the most famous of which are St. Mary the Virgin, St. Vardan, Tsiranavor churches, Tukh Manuk chapel. The one-nave basilica of St. Mary the Virgin from the 5th century in Karenis is rather significant. Bjni fortress / medieval /, St. Sargis / VII century /, St. Georg / VIII century /, St. Virgn Mary / 1031/ churches, numerous cross stones, statues of pagan periods are of huge cultural and touristic importance and are beloved places of pilgrimage and excursions for locals and all over Armenia. Notable soviet era monuments of these settlements are memorials to soldiers of the 2nd Patriotic War, which have status of cultural heritage objects of local importance.

The 6 settlements have formed an enlarged community of Charentsavan in 2017, following the amendments made in RA Law on Administrative Divisions. In 2018, the City Council adopted Charentsavan Development Plan for 2018-2022, which can be considered as an integrated plan of needs of all settlements included, with a strong aim of finding solutions for cultural development and preservation of cultural heritage, mainly through tourism development. As the consolidation happened only 5 years ago, several coherency problems are to be resolved between the settlements to ensure sustainable development mechanisms in the city. As people stated in the interviews, they are overall satisfied with the inner communication, quality of roads and public transport between Charentsavan and other settlements. Charentsavan- Yerevan public transport route is well functioning, easy to access and cheap/1 euro per direction/.

It is also notable to mention the great touristic infrastructure and renowned name of Aghveran resorts, situated within the administrative area of Arzakan and operating as a winter and summer resorts/the building were built during soviet time as rest houses for factory workers/. Majority of Arzakan villagers work in the resorts and it is the main source of income for them. What about Karenis, Fantan and Alapars settlements, they are mainly agricultural. Karenis has over 40 ha of raspberry gardens which is a source of income for the families there. A very interesting story of Armenians moved to Karenis from Getashen/currently Republic of Azerbaijan/, who could manage to take with them the raspberry plants and the jam made overnight, in huge rush. It is over 30 years that this “rescued sort” of Getashen raspberry still feeds the families there and is a source of inspiration for people there. It is even a tradition to give a newly married women a bunch of raspberry plants to take it with her to her new family garden. This story is a living intangible cultural heritage still to be researched and told.

Fantan households are the main producer of emmer/hachar, 70% of total production of Armenia/. Chickpea, beans, lentil, flax, many other crops and seeds, fruits and vegetables are cultivated in the lands of Alapars, Bjni, Karenis and Fantan. The produce is mainly sold under other well know Armenian brands, however, not mentioning the origin or the area of production, which could be done within the own brand of the communities. During the interviews, villagers said they never think of having their own brand.

All these wonderful cultural, religious, and historical objects are not properly represented on the touristic maps, and even not known very well among city inhabitants. These objects are not used or anyway represented in the art works of local producers, too.

The cultural economy of Charentsavan is represented, as the study shown, by 40 local entrepreneurs operating in hand made toys and music and dance performing industries. There were some 15 more artists and entrepreneurs in the area not reached via our interviews.

The center of cultural life in the city is fostered in the institutions and community organizations providing cultural education to kids. There is no offer of cultural education for adults, except for the a few classes of basic cooking in the vocational college in Charentsavan.

The sector is highly represented also by private centers. The total number of children between5 to 16 years old, is 6360.

The chart represents basic info on cultural institutions:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| The type of institution | N | The location | Type of services provided | Notes |
| Library | 2 | Charentsavan, Karenis |  |  |
| Art school | 2 | CHarenstavan, Alapars |  |  |
| Musical school | 1 | CHarentsavan |  |  |
| Community cultural center | 0 |  |  | /there are 2 notable building in need of restoration/ |
| Museum, gallery | 1 | Charentsavan |  |  |
| Private centers providing cultural education | 10 | Charentsavan, Alapars | Musical instruments teaching, drawing classes, traditional dances | The dance and musical classes are of high popularity among kids |

Cultural centers host limited number of children, from nearby settlements, where the cultural education is not accessible to all. Cultural institutions themselves play crucial role for the respective settlements as cultural hubs, so for any further interventions, these centers are to be considered as very important.

Musical school in Charentsavan has a unique hall with 350 seats and a unique organ, 1 of only 3 working organs in Armenia, and with only classes of organ music all over Armenia. The school also have a choir of adults and numerous children studying in musical schools. Several concerts per year happen here in collaboration with national institutions.

These all assets are strong basis for becoming a creative city with strong potential of internationalization.

# **SWOT-analysis**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Strengths/S | Weaknesses/ W | Opportunities/O | Threats/T |
| **Culture and people**: Cultural monuments, objects and places spread evenly in the area  Charentsavan is an open-air monument of industrial city and Soviet architecture  Potential of cultural and creative economies to become number one  Intangible cultural heritage assets such as the stories of Getashen migrants, soviet industrial greatness and Charents’s “spirit” of the city  People in all settlements are longing to “consume” culture, willing to spend on cultural education for the kids  High level of literacy among population  1 of 3 organs in Armenia put in a concert hall for 350 seats  Nagorno-Karabakh people well represented in the area with their traditions  **Economic:** Strategic location; on the M4 highway and Yerevan-Sevan railway route, good quality of roads, easy access to Yerevan and to Hrazdan city via public transport  Aghveran/within the Arzakan village/ is a major center of winter and summer tourism, and have developed infrastructure  Agricultural production volumes of national importance  **Creative potential:**  Creative industry artists are focused on souvenir production and dancing  **Environment:** Variety of natural zones within the area such as forests, rivers Hrazdan and Dalar, industrial city, agricultural production and gardens, both for production and recreation | Industrial potential is in deep crisis in the city/only small-scale production is available for governmental needs only/  City has lack of own financial resources and ideas to revitalize life in urban areas  For cultural industry artists it is more of additional income generation than a main source of income, as the potential and volumes are low  Cultural artists have lack of education in business development strategy, sales and marketing and communication  Very poor or no cooperation between cultural institutions and CCI artists  Stakeholders in cultural sectors do not cooperate and do not have agenda of joint efforts  No local policy to boost, connect and develop local creative potential  City’s poor representation on touristic maps of Armenia, very few alterative tourism offerings  No local brands and value-added economy, just production and distribution  Local symbols and cultural objects are not used in production for branding, even in souvenir production  No local touristic brands and touristic notable products  No inter-community transportation routes/besides from Charentsavan to other settlements and vice versa/, low level of cultural and economic connections between the communities  Local businesses in creative industries operate in a few spheres, such as crafts and music  Few CSOs operating in Charentsavan, covering very few fields of operation, however no cultural project implemented so far  Local government needs capacity-building in managing cultural heritage | Armenia gained new position in post- soviet area as an open and welcoming country / because of many economic migrants visiting Armenia from Russia since February/  Soviet era, culture and life is a constant object of research and creation in cultural industries  Armenian and international tourism offerings have become more focused on alternative tourism offerings, outside the main cities and in more authentic environments  Cultural and creative industries gain more share in the economy in the world, Armenia is enhancing its export  There are many interesting examples of creative environments and industry developments, success stories and strategies to learn from all over the world  Creative and innovative business ideas are being promoted for marz level SMEs among many business incubators and economic development programs disseminating the importance of innovation and entrepreneurship | “Soviet” culture and life is not always positively accepted in Armenia and abroad  Touristic mobility issues due to war conflict in the region  Lack of business communication and English language knowledge among youth and creative industry representatives to ensure access to new tools and new markets  Local people, organizations and businesses have low level of motivation to cooperate, make changes into their operations and may not take initiatives very quick |

# **Vision and mission**

*Our vision:*

*Charentsavan is a sustainably growing area, with its rich industrial past and cultural heritage loved and cherished; it is a source of inspiration, creativity and economic growth for locals and visitors in creative industries and beyond.*

*Our mission:*

*Seize a once in a generation opportunity to make the city a better place to live, to bridge the innovative and productive past with modern economy through culture, entrepreneurship, and innovation, through joint efforts of locals, various stakeholder and those get inspired by it.*

# **Goals and actions**

The overall goal of the strategy is to support th revitalization of Charentsavan through cultural heritage research, spatial development and strenghtening the local actors. The main impact is expected to envision the knowledge increase among local artists, entrepreneurs and population, motivation and inspiration to become part of revitalized creative city Charentsavan and to reach to economic growth through it. The main outcomes that will lead to it are in -dept research of cultural heritage to reveal the great potential and bring it for the joy of the public; creation of strong cultural foundation to carry out the transformation in the city, to create strong brand as a catalyzer for cultural and economic growth, spatial development and involvement of all institutes and groups of population into revitalization of the city and its settlements, and finally through strengthening knowledge and skills of local CCI artists to become the driving force of creative economy there. As a result, the city will become notable cultural center, where inhabitants have found new development pattern and are self-sustainable through culture.

# **Required steps / work plan (Annex #2)**

The main actions of the strategy is cultural heritage research and establishment of local cultural and industrial greatness museum. The museum will present both the industrial greatness of the city, as well as its importance in everyday life of Armenians. It will have long-term impact on economic regeneration of the community, as individuals will get inspired to take actions based on the museum findings, stories and enriched interest to the city.

Another important action the creation of strong and beloved brand based on cultural heritage of the city to act as an “umbrella” for economic and creative potential development.

A set of actions are to be conducted to ensure dissemination of information and opportunities throughout the settlements and spheres through strong network of local actors.

# **Implementation plan**

The strategy is developed by Charentsavan Municipality, and it will take the leading role in implementation of the actions. For organization and better management of the actions, as well as to ensure sustainability of the projects, it will establish a Foundation. The Foundation will run the current strategy and will look for sustainability options.

Charentsavan community council will be involved into regular reporting of the actions. For the coming 2 years, the Foundation will build the local potential of development organizations and teams, which will be involved actors, recipients of the actions, as well as as monitoring party. The baseline and project end evaluations are to be conducted by respective companies and results reported.

# **Summary of pillars**

Cultural heritage research and establishment of museum and art space based on the findings will create strong linkages between the historic context and its modern interpretation of local actors. Cultural heritage will become available and “consumable” in the city through different open-air events, to ensure strong linkage, adherence, and development.

Network pillar is to be strengthened through internationalizing actions and through cooperation with different national cultural institutes and platforms, which could have strong interests in the city/ for instance. The Museum after E. Charents in Yerevan etc./

Capacity building is addressed profoundly through different info sessions, creative incubator and exchange of experience of all target groups.

Local polices are to be revisited during the first year of the strategy implementation and will be synchronized wit national policy.

Strategy stakeholder groups are already formed during the research process and will be enhanced in future activities and actions.