

CULTURAL FOUNDATION
"ROUTES OF
THE OLIVE TREE"

COUNTRY SHEET

TUNISIA
TUNISIE
ΤΥΝΗΣΙΑ



Cultural route
of the Council of Europe
Itinéraire culturel
du Conseil de l'Europe



INTRODUCTION

The domestic olive tree, *Olea europaea sativa*, is native to Asia Minor and Syria. Over time, it spread throughout the Mediterranean region following the trade of olive oil. The Phoenicians and Greeks are the peoples who spread the culture of the olive tree in the Mediterranean region from the sixth century BC. It is at this time that we find traces of this tree in Ifriqiya (current Tunisia).

CHARACTERIZATION OF THE TERRITORY



GEOGRAPHIC AND DEMOGRAPHIC FRAMEWORK

Tunisia is a country located on the African continent and has a surface area of 162 155 km². It shares borders with Algeria and Libya. The Tunisian population is 11.7 million.

POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE FRAMEWORK



Tunisia is a semi-presidential and representative republic, shaken by the Tunisian Revolution in 2011. The capital and largest city is Tunis. The country is divided into 23 governorates.

History

The first olive tree plantations arrived in Tunisia thanks to the Carthaginians. The Roman emperors, wishing to make Africa a producer of olive oil, encouraged the cultivation of the olive tree. Olive oil was the source of the fortune of certain families and cities. Since then, the development of olive growing is at the center of development policies to allow the sector to increase its yields and improve the quality of its products while preserving biodiversity.

Geography of olive growing

Tunisia has 5 million hectares of arable land. This represents 20% of the world's olive growing area. These lands are distributed in the North, the South and the center of the country. The country has an extremely variable climate. This is a challenge for Tunisian agriculture, as it leads to an unstable agricultural production. The variety of soils varies from one region to another. Indeed, 2% of the arable land is located in humid areas against 78% which are located in arid or semi-arid areas. The density of olive groves depends on the rainfall. For this reason, the North contains more olive groves than the South.

-The North

In this region, the soil is well irrigated resulting in a high density of olive groves and a better-quality oil.

-Center

65% of the Tunisian olive growing area is located in the center. The rainfall is low and the climate is extremely variable. These olive groves are less productive than those in the North.

-The South

The climate of this region is arid. The agriculture is extensive and the olive trees are cultivated only in monoculture.

Soils and Varieties

Tunisia has strong climatic variations. Many cultivars such as Ouslati, Gerboui, Zalmati, Zarazi, Barouni Chamchali or Gafsa are grown in Tunisia. However, the two main cultivars are :

- Chemlali

Mainly cultivated in the center and south of the country (hot coastal areas and in the low steppe), this cultivar represents 80% of the total production of olive oil.

- Chétoui

Mainly cultivated in the North (coastal region, valleys, high plateaus), this cultivar represents 20% of the total olive oil production.

ACCESSIBILITY

• **Air routes**

Tunisia has 29 airports including 9 international airports. These airports connect the country to nearly 50 international cities. Each year, they welcome 19.05 million passengers. Of these 9 airports, 7 are administered by the Tunisian Civil Aviation and Airports Office and 2 are administered by TAV (a private company under Tunisian law). The two main airlines are Tunisair and Tunisair Express. The network of domestic flights is less developed.

• **Roads**

The main urban centers are connected by 20,000 km of roads and more than 640 km of highways. The extent of this road network guarantees a great efficiency of transport services. Tunisia's population growth is leading to rapid urban development. The number of cars in the city has increased as well as the cost of transportation. To remedy this, the government is promoting public transport, especially the train.

For long journeys, buses are the most comfortable form of public transport. The "Société nationale du transport rural et interurbain" manages daily connections between cities.

For long-distance travel, the fastest means of transportation is by "louage". It is a collective cab. Depending on its service, the color of its body will be different. It will be white with a red stripe for long distances, blue for regional services and yellow for local services. The cost is the same as for the bus. The particularity of this means of transport is that the driver waits until the vehicle is completely full before starting.

ACCESSIBILITY

- **Railways**

The Tunisian railway network is made up of 267 stations and stops. It covers the entire country and extends over 2,167 km. 316 trains run daily. In order to encourage bimodal transport (combining rail and road transport), 4 rail-road links have been set up.

- **Maritime routes**

The maritime network consists of 7 commercial ports and one oil terminal. As the maritime transport sector represents an important part of Tunisia's foreign trade, the government has modernized its port infrastructure and strengthened the security and safety of ships and port facilities.

- **Cycling routes**

The network of bicycle paths is not developed in Tunisia. To travel by bicycle, it is preferable to use coastal routes. Collective cabs accept to transport bicycles.

ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK

Since the Jasmine Revolution of 2011 and the removal of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, the country has been experiencing economic difficulties. This situation has been aggravated by the economic crisis related to the Covid-19. The main Tunisian sectors of activity such as tourism have been considerably impacted leading to a decline in GDP of 8.6% in 2020. Many Tunisians have demonstrated their discontent.

The main sectors of activity are:

- **-Agriculture**

According to World Bank figures for 2020, this sector accounts for 10% of Tunisia's GDP and employs 12% of the working population. This sector has managed to develop thanks to the improvement of its production methods and its modernization. The most exported agricultural products are olive oil, dates, olives and fruits. In 2010, olive oil production accounted for 15% of national agricultural production. The development of olive growing in Tunisia contributes to curb the rural exodus and migration to the cities.

ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK

-The industry

This sector represents 22% of the Tunisian GDP and employs 32% of the working population. Until 2019, the textile and chemical sectors were growing. The Covid-19 pandemic has strongly impacted this sector.

-Services

This sector accounts for 61% of Tunisian GDP and employs 54% of the workforce. The sectors with the greatest growth are professional training and research.

FOCUS ON THE OLIVE TREE

Olive resources

In 2012, 45% of arable land was devoted to olive trees. According to the National Oil Office (ONH), 1.4 to 1.5 million hectares of land are used for olive oil production. The rest of the land is devoted to the production of table olives. Despite a variable climate, Tunisia produces an average of 282,000 tons per year.

Commercial trends

-Exports

Tunisia is the third largest exporter of olive oil in the world. It exports mainly its olive oil to Spain, Italy and France. However, it should be noted that since the twenty-first century, exports to the United States have continued to increase.

-Imports

The olive oil needs of the Tunisian population are entirely covered by national production.

Self-consumption of products

In the southern Mediterranean countries, the consumption of olive oil is constantly increasing. We observe the opposite phenomenon in Tunisia. Individual consumption has gone from 6 kilos in 2000 to 3.5 kilos in the 2010s. One explanation is that the focus is no longer on the development of the domestic market, but on the development of the external market. In addition, in recent years, the Tunisian government has encouraged people to consume other vegetable oils to reserve olive oil for export.

CULTURAL FRAMEWORK

UNESCO supports the Tunisian cultural sector. For example, the pottery skills of the women of Sejnane have been included in the international organization's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage. The country also has a considerable cultural and historical heritage. The proof is that Tunisia has 8 sites inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The Tunisian cultural sector is very active, especially during festivals that welcome a large number of tourists such as the International Festival of Carthage or the International Festival of Plastic Arts of Mahrès.

As in many countries, culture plays a key role in the consolidation of democracy. This is why the European Union is helping Tunisia to enhance its cultural production. The Tunisian government also wishes to support the development of this sector. The latter has set up a Fonds Relance Culture (FRC) with the aim of accompanying and supporting artists, cultural spaces and companies in the sector.

FOCUS ON THE OLIVE TREE

Olive oil is very present at cultural events

There are many international events focusing on olive growing. In particular, we can mention the Festival of the olive tree in Sfax. Considered as the capital of olive oil in Tunisia, this city welcomes every year an important number of tourists. The International Olive Festival of Kalaa Kebira is also a flagship event in the sector. These festivals are an opportunity to highlight this tree, the olive tree, symbol of prosperity and longevity, but also on all disciplines related to olive farming (environment, economy or social).

Eco-tourism

Ecotourism is not extremely developed in Tunisia. This green tourism is not yet proposed by all travel agencies. It is not easy to find a competent guide in this sector. Nevertheless, it is possible to make tours in small groups in natural sites.

- **Characterization of the territory**

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3. National Company of Tunisian Railways. Site consulted on 29/07/21 at the following address: http://www.sncft.com.tn/Fr/reseau_11_34

- **Focus on the olive tree**

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- **Cultural framework**

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- ***Economic framework***

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3. Fonds Relance Culture de la République tunisienne. Site consulted on 30/07/21 at the following address:
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5. Jackson David, Paglietti Lisa, Ribeiro Marsha, Karray Boubaker, "Tunisia Analysis of the olive industry", Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2015 File accessed on 07/28/21 at:
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