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Workshop on Management of Heritage Places and Artefacts

Petra, Jordan – 17/19 May 2010

Suggestions to the Jordanian Authorities to Improve Heritage Management and Conservation of the Site of Petra

1. INTRODUCTION

This document was prepared as part of the conclusions drawn from the Euromed Heritage 4 workshop on Management of Heritage Places and Artefacts held at the College of Archaeology, Tourism and Hotel Management, Al Hussein Bin Talal University, in *Wadi Mousa* (Petra) on 17-19 May 2010.

The workshop was attended by heritage professionals from around the Mediterranean managing projects funded under the Euromed Heritage 4 Programme. The workshop aimed at introducing participants to the fundamentals of a state-of-the-art integrated Heritage Management Plan (HMP) with the site of Petra as the main case-study. International heritage experts provided background presentations on HMP principles, bases and methodologies, whereas Jordanian experts introduced participants to the issue of management of the site of Petra. This was followed by a site visit and an application of the SWOT analysis method^[1] for a HMP to the case of Petra.

The suggestions contained in this document are drawn from this application exercise and the expertise of the heritage management experts who participated in the workshop. They are based on partial information and knowledge of the site derived from presentations by experts, incomplete documentation, and impressions drawn from one site visit. Falling short of a thorough study of the situation and conditions prevailing in Petra, this document does not purport to offer recommendations. It is merely intended to share the impressions of the workshop participants with administrators, managers and conservationists in Jordan in support of their on-going efforts to improve the management of this extraordinary World Heritage site.

The organisers and participants to the workshop would like to express their gratitude to the Jordanian individuals, authorities and institutions who made this event possible. They extend their sincere thanks to:

- H. E. Nasser Shraideh, Chief Commissioner of the Petra Development and Tourism Region Authority (PDTRA), who presented participants with a detailed review of the current challenges facing the Jordanian authorities in managing the site of Petra and demonstrated a keen interest in the workings and conclusions of the workshop; and to



the staff of the PDTRA, particularly Eng. Tahani Salhi and Mohammed Shobaki who participated in the workshop;

- Dr Ali Khalaf Al-Hroot, President of the Al-Hussein Bin Talal University, and Dr Ziyad Salameen, Dean of the College of Archaeology, Tourism and Hotel Management, for hosting the workshop in the facilities of the College; and to the College staff;
- Dr Fawwaz Al-Khraysheh, Director General of the Department of Antiquities (DoA); and to the staff of the DoA who facilitated or attended the workshop;
- Finally, to the other Jordanian experts who contributed to the workshop, particularly Architect Bashar A. Bitar, Deputy General Manager of Bitar Consultants, for his valuable input on architectural and urban planning.

2. BASES AND PRINCIPLES FOR INTEGRATED HERITAGE MANAGEMENT OF WORLD HERITAGE SITES

In 1985 Petra became one of the sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List in recognition of its unique cultural and natural heritage rendering it incumbent upon Jordan to protect and preserve its physical safekeeping for the enjoyment, scholarship and pride of future generations. Besides its historical and archaeological heritage the Petra region is likewise significant because of the unique and diverse ecosystem, and its sandstone geological formations. Furthermore, the cultural space of the *bedu* living around the site was inscribed on the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2005.

Heritage Management Plans (HMP), although relevant for any heritage site, are of particular importance for World Heritage sites. The current policy of the World Heritage Convention is that all sites nominated for inclusion on the List must have management plans, whereas those already on the List have to develop one^[2]. It has become clear that only those sites with a well-designed HMP are able to monitor changes, positive or negative and to successfully keep up their standards.

A number of international charters and UNESCO conventions provide standards and guiding principles towards defining an appropriate response to particular conservation issues. Main guidelines are:

- Comprehensive analysis of the place;
- Minimum intervention in the historic fabric;
- Precise documentation;
- Respect for contributions from all periods;
- Maintenance of authenticity;
- And the requirement to take a holistic view of the historic environment.

The value added of an integrated HMP is to reach a balanced relationship between the conservation principles laid out by these charters and conventions (that is, integrity of heritage) and:

- The identity of and cultural value of heritage for local people;
- The values and expectations of visitors;
- The sustainability of economic (particularly *tourism*) development and benefits to all



stakeholders;

- The requirements of a participatory process with a large number of stakeholders.

3. SUGGESTIONS REGARDING HERITAGE MANAGEMENT FOR THE SITE OF PETRA

Methodology

During the workshop, the Petra case study was built through three activities:

- Documentation (including presentations by experts);
- On-site visit;
- Plenary sessions and working groups.

Under the guidance of experts, the 40 workshop participants applied the SWOT analysis method to the site of Petra along four themes:

1. Tourism management and presentation & interpretation;
2. Conservation;
3. Urban planning - the site in its territory;
4. Overall management and economic implications.

General impression

The various presentations and the visit through the main area of the site (from the entrance, through the *Siq* and to the restaurant areas near the *Qasr al-Bint* and, for a part of the group, to *Wadi Farasa* and the high-place of *al-Madhbah*) allowed participants to appreciate the outstanding value of the site - both in cultural and natural terms -, its vast geographical extend, and the generally good status of its archaeological heritage. They have also noted the interest of local vernacular architecture in the towns of *Wadi Mousa* and *Taybeh*, and the importance of popular cultural heritage, intangible and tangible.

The site visit was the occasion to witness some of the problematic issues H. E. Naser Shraideh highlighted in his presentation: animal abuse, child labour, visitors hustled into buying souvenirs or ride animals, poor quality of the souvenirs available on the site, shortage and poor maintenance of toilets, relative crowding of the *Siq* due to horse carriages etc. Such issues and behaviours may leave the visitors with the impression that local people and managing authorities have little respect for visitors and the integrity of the site. Rather, as other examples in the world amply show, they are often the result of lack of local sense of ownership of the site.

Participants recognised the efforts undertaken and planned by the Jordanian authorities to manage and conserve the PAP in the face of its size and the various challenges entailed by the high profile of the site, the increased number of visitors, population growth and infrastructure development, and the need to balance tourism development with site conservation. They consider that the recent establishment of the PDTRA is an unprecedented opportunity to further these efforts and introduce a fresh, long-term vision and new approach that considers the PAP within its



context and environment in line with the principles of integrated heritage management planning. Indeed, Petra has the potential to be a tool for development of the whole region for the benefit of its people.

The following are some reactions and suggestions by participants to the workshop based on presentations, working group session and the site visit.

Planning and Management

- The recent establishment of the PDTRA has been analyzed as a very good opportunity, especially if supported by a clear leadership and a governance model that defines roles and responsibilities about decision-taking and implementation.
- Long term planning is pivotal in order to have a global vision and to achieve sustainable results.
- The current management of Petra is focused on tourism. A more balanced approach to site management would give more leverage to conservation.
- The involvement of all stakeholders should be considered part of the planning process.
- The Al-Hussein Bin Talal University should be considered a key stakeholder.
- Ownership needs to be built at all levels by ensuring that local communities participate in the planning process, derive benefits from the site, and that their relationship to the site is respected.
- One quality of site being that it is still in its natural state, no major on-site infrastructure development are needed. Rather, planners should look at improving existing facilities, services and signage systems.
- Actions need to be prioritized by first improving exiting facilities and eventually addressing more complex issues (such as the introduction of shuttle buses to *Um Seyhun*).

Management of visitor flows

- Plans for electronic ticketing are encouraged as the system allows for follow up and monitoring of visitor flows. It is suggested that the system is also used to distribute visitors during the day (by allocating time slots) and seasonally (by allocating dates and possibly offering discounts during low season) as is the case in major heritage places worldwide.
- More ticketing windows are needed in the Visitor Centre.
- Eco-friendly shuttle buses to exit the site via *Um Seyhun* may be a good alternative to the current system of visitor flow. Attention should be brought however to the conservation, environmental and aesthetic impact on the site. Guidance could be sought from relevant organisations, particularly the UNESCO.



Visitor Centre

In the event of plans for redesigning the current Visitor Centre or building a new one, the following aspects are important to take into consideration:

- Visitors have to be able to access interpretation rooms before and after the visit.
- The whole approach to interpretation should be reexamined. Good stories and popular cultural heritage are missing. Interpretation would be more comprehensive and attractive if it presented local heritage in all its aspects: archaeological, historical, natural, traditional architecture, and regional popular culture.
- If the Visitor Centre remained open after the closure time of the site, it would allow visitors to access the interpretation rooms and the various handicraft shops.
- Creating evening attractions and activities (concerts, shows, film screenings, lectures, awareness-raising activities etc.) in or around the Visitor Centre would incite visitors to stay an additional night in Petra.

On-site signage and services

- A good system of information panels about the main monuments has been developed.
- What appears to be particularly lacking is signage for secondary trails (such as the one some of the participants took from the *Qasr al-Bint* to *Wadi Farasa* and up to *al-Madhbah*). A system of panels could be developed to indicate trails, including information about distance, altitude changes or number of steps, and approximate time needed to complete the trail.
- Some of these trails could be marked along the way with appropriate, non-visually invasive marks. It would be a good idea to adopt an internationally recognized system of waymarking for example the French one considered the best by European standards, and to coordinate with other bodies developing walking trails in Jordan (particularly the Ministry of Tourism (MoT)) to ensure the adoption of a unified nation-wide system.
- Properly signing secondary trails would have the advantage of making visitors more confident to venture beyond down-town Petra, therefore relieving the pressure on the main site, and inciting visitors to prolong their stay. Signing is also a security measure to avoid visitors losing their way.
- Some of the existing facilities appear detrimental to the integrity of the site and in need of redesigning or replacement. This is the case with the main dam near the restaurant area, and with the furnitures in the restaurants and coffee shops, including those maintained by members of the local Bedouin community. Plastic or metal chairs and tables could be replaced with wooden furnitures (like benches) in restaurants and floor-cushions in coffee shops. Standards could be developed and made applicable throughout the site.



- There is indeed a need for more fixed (non-portable) toilets and for their proper maintenance.

Local communities

- The behaviour of local community members on the site is detrimental to the visitors' experience and to conservation. Workshop participants were particularly struck by the following: horse and carriage owners harassing visitors for tips; horses and donkey galloping in the *Siq* or stairs that present a serious danger to both visitors and the integrity of the site; vendors who are not always respectful of visitors; and the presence of children selling souvenirs. All these may result in a negative visitors' experience and harm the image of the site and of Jordan.
- There is a feeling that local communities in Petra are pitched against each other and against the authorities. This rift is likely to be the result of an absence of integration of local communities in planning and management which is a prerequisite for building their sense of ownership of and responsibility about the site.
- One of the cornerstones of efficient long-term conservation is public involvement. Local people have to be involved in surveying their own situation, running their own programmes and managing local assets. In Petra, the authorities need to take measures to turn local communities into partners and assets for conservation and tourism development. Such challenging objectives can only be reached through a process of awareness raising/education about the value of the site and its cultural heritage, and through real participation of the various communities in planning, decision-making and implementation.
- No community should be left out or further marginalized in this process. Experiences of heritage management worldwide have shown that marginalization or eviction of local communities fuel conflict and turn marginalized people against the site and visitors. Furthermore, policies of marginalization, especially in high profile World Heritage sites, attract international attention and create a negative image for the site and the authorities involved.
- A rich and living popular cultural heritage is another asset for the development of Petra. The inscription of the cultural space of the *bedu* of Petra on the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage makes it incumbent upon the Jordanian authorities to preserve local Bedouin culture in Petra. This should come as an additional incentive to maintain the presence – albeit better regulated- of Bedouin communities in the site and to involve them in conservation and management efforts.

Conservation

- To match its 2004 National Tourism Strategy that makes archaeological tourism its mainstay, the Government of Jordan could consider developing a national strategy for the management and preservation of Jordan's archaeological heritage.

- Petra has a particularly fragile geology (eroding sand stone) and ecology (threatened by the dry climate and human activities). A comprehensive management plan should include preservation measures against natural and human threats (from earthquakes to garbage).
- It is important to clarify leadership role for conservation and to allocate responsibilities on the basis of technical skills and competencies. This could maybe be achieved through a partnership agreement between relevant institutional stakeholders (PDTRA, MoT, DoA) that would ensure coordination.
- The PDTRA could consider establishing an scientific advisory committee for Petra and its region that would comprise of archaeologists, architects specialising in the preservation and restoration of historical monuments and vernacular architecture, environmentalists, geologists, and specialists of tangible and intangible popular heritage. The mission and mandate of the committee and its various members need to be clearly defined, and an action plan adopted.
 - The Conservation Unit inside the PDTRA is at present too small and understaffed to address the mitigation of short-term and long-term human and natural threats to the various aspects of heritage (archaeological, natural and popular) in such a vast site. Several geologists, environmentalists and archaeologists have to be included with the task to regularly survey, monitor, and maintain rocks, monuments and the natural environment. Contrary to a widespread perception, these activities do not require sophisticated technological tools. It is mainly manpower, definition of tasks and regularity in their performance that is needed.
- A special rangers unit could be created and staffed by local people with recruitment based not on level of formal education but on in-depth practical knowledge of the site, its geography and its ecology. Priority for recruitment into this unit should be accorded to members of local Bedouin communities. The rangers would patrol the site mostly on foot and monitor the status of its monuments and natural environment. They would maintain secondary trails and play an important conservation and safety role for visitors. They would also be actively involved in monitoring the activities of vendors and animal owners. Their role should be clearly defined to complement rather than overlap with that of the Tourist Police. Rangers could double as local guides for visitors interested in walking to the more remote areas of the site. Such a unit could create local employment for up to 20 people.
 - Training should be made an integral parts of a comprehensive management plan. Training is needed in the areas of conservation, local capacity and skill development, mechanisms of community participation, and implementation of a management plan. Developing human and social capital is what guarantees long-term community sustainability.
 - With its research and training facilities, the College of Archaeology, Tourism and Hotel Management in *Wadi Mousa* is potentially an important partner for site and artefact conservation, training the staff in charge of conserving and



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monitoring the site and local guides, and developing awareness raising activities for the local community and visitors.

- Conservation guidelines or a charter could be developed that would include regulations pertaining to the archaeological as well as the natural heritage. A simplified version would then be shared with the Jordanian and international tourism industry to engage their moral commitment to respect the integrity of the site.
- In view of best practices in similarly important World Heritage sites in middle-income countries, experts at the workshop consider that a suitable budget for heritage conservation in Petra would amount to Euros 10 million/year.

CONCLUSION

The conclusions and suggestions of the workshop participants can be summed up as follows:

1. Under the leadership of the PDTRA, planning and management should be long-term, seek a balance between tourism development and heritage conservation, and be inclusive of all institutional and local stakeholders.
2. On-site services and activities need to be improved, starting with ticketing, interpretation and evening activities in the Visitor Centre all the way to trail development and more organized services (shops, toilets, transportation etc) on the site.
3. Community participation should be seen as key to improve management, conservation and the image of the site. A sense of ownership needs to be built among all the groups that constitute the local community through awareness-raising, systematic public involvement in all phases of planning and implementation, and training and job creation.
4. Heritage conservation should be made a priority that includes the historical, archaeological, natural and intangible cultural values of the site. Institutional arrangements together with human and financial means in favour of conservation should be commensurate with the outstanding value of Petra as a World Heritage site.

It is finally suggested that the PDTRA continues to seek international cooperation and expertise in its objectives to improve the management of Petra. Euromed Heritage is available for support to achieve international standards of heritage conservation and tourism management.

[1] SWOT analysis is a strategic planning method used to evaluate the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats involved in a project.

[2] <http://www.international.icomos.org/publications/93touris3.pdf>