

Building Awareness: The Challenge of Cultural Community Engagement in Petra—The Temple of the Winged Lions Cultural Resource Management Initiative

Introduction

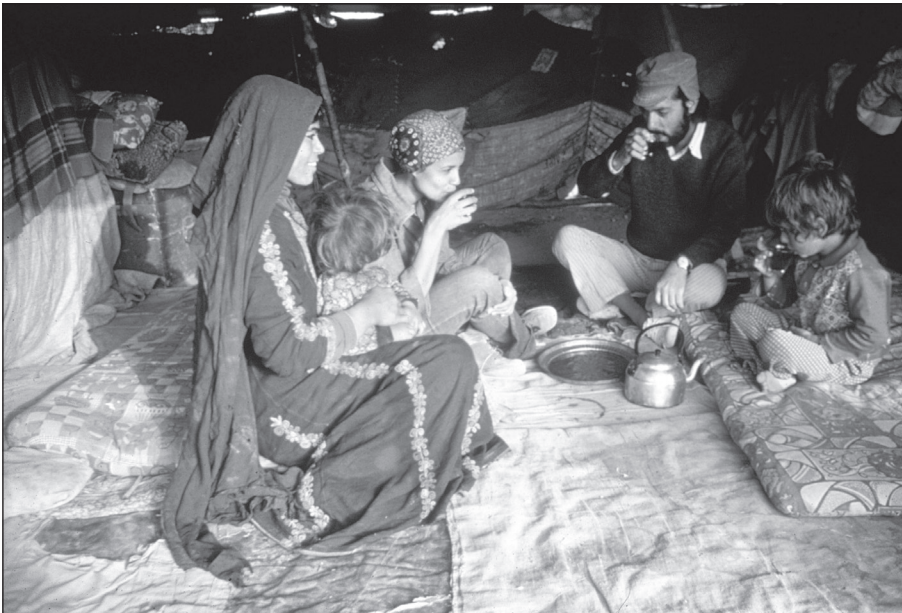
The Temple of the Winged Lions Cultural Resource Management (TWLCRM) Initiative is a multi-component project that aims to conserve, restore, present, and re-publish the Temple of the Winged Lions precinct in Petra. All of these components are unified by a grassroots approach rooted in social engagement.

This pioneering approach was first developed in Ḥisbān, in the Mādabā region, under the lead of Andrews University anthropologist, Dr. Oystein LaBianca (LaBianca 2007: 275-289).

Andrews University, over 40 years of dedicated work, developed a model of archaeological intervention that placed a priority on the role of the local community (LaBianca and Ronza 2009: 443-458).

This model was based on continuous consultation and exchange with not only key local stakeholders, but also every single member of the local community who expressed a willingness to actively participate in the project (FIG. 1).

Year after year, the Andrews University teams, together with the local community,



1. Ḥisbān in the 1970s. (Photo courtesy of Andrews University).

built a strong cooperative network with local institutions, such as the Department of Antiquities, the Hisban Municipality, and several local associations and schools. The project developed a system of local employment and hiring that was reflective of the village's tribal structure, and also encouraged the reporting and recording of local "living memories" (FIG. 2) that served to strengthen the community's sense of attachment to the archaeological site and its history.

The main concept behind the Hisbān project was that excavation, restoration, and presentation must be part of the ongoing life of the archaeological site and its community, rather than the beginning of its musealization.

A Grassroots Model for Petra

The American Center of Oriental Research's TWLCRM Initiative began adapting the Hisbān model of community engagement to the communities living around the World Heritage Site of Petra in southern Jordan. As Jordan's primary archaeological site and tourism destination, attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors each year, Petra has a very large social and economic impact zone and is the primary source of income for thousands of people living in surrounding communities.

The economic impact of the site, however,

decreases proportionally the further one moves from the park and the site's immediate region of influence. Likewise, while the immediately surrounding communities do benefit both directly and indirectly from the income generated by Petra, the site is typically considered only an economic resource and is poorly understood and undervalued as a cultural resource.

These factors contribute significantly in efforts to maintain, preserve, and present the site.

Inspired by the model of Hisbān, the TWLCRM Initiative attempts to develop best practices in cultural resource management through the direct involvement of Petra's local communities in the process. The active involvement of local communities aims to build awareness about the different outstanding universal values of Petra, promote cultural interest in the site, and encourage a greater sense of local stewardship over Petra's historical and environmental heritage.

Similarly, local communities can no longer be viewed only as a pool of potential labor and workmen for archaeological projects. It is incumbent upon archaeological and cultural heritage professionals to provide true vocational opportunities for the communities we engage with, and to educate the local public about the enormous work (and passion) that lies behind the study, presentation, and



2. Hisbān in the 1970s. Meeting on site with the entire crew. (Photo courtesy of Andrews University).

management of the archaeological sites they live with everyday. Offering real opportunities and raising awareness will restore and return “ownership” of sites to their communities and allow “shared heritage” to be something more than just a meaningless concept discussed in scientific publications and conference papers.

Applying a Grassroots Model at the TWLCRM Initiative

The TWLCRM Initiative is a long-term project, which implies a continuous, nearly year-round presence on site with regular involvement and outreach to local communities.

Since 2012, almost 500 members of Petra’s local communities have been involved with different tasks on the TWLCRM Initiative. As work has progressed, these local team members have shared in the vision and goals of the project and their input and ideas have been continuously harnessed to inform work on site. As such, the project has become quite flexible, adapting with changes and adjustments to the work strategy as new ideas emerge from local team members.

What is more, the active involvement of Petra’s surrounding communities in the project is generating a renewed sense of cultural ownership over the site. Such perceptions are critical to overall site preservation, which needs not only the technical and financial support of large-scale projects like the TWLCRM, but also the daily care and concern of the people who work and live around the site. In this regard, the project’s social engagement policy is already showing dividends, with local team members regularly picking up trash on site (and in many cases carrying it several miles to the nearest trash bin!), monitoring and reporting site-related problems to competent authorities, and helping inform tourists about the importance of site preservation. In the long term, all of these small acts of care will contribute not only to the well being of the site, but also to the entire Petra community.

During the course of everyday work on site, however, it can be quite easy to lose sight of the project’s objectives. As such, the TWLCRM regularly tries to convey to local team members the crucial role that each individual plays in contributing to the final goals and outcomes of the project. On 18 May 2013, for example, the TWLCRM organized an on-site event to demonstrate the proposed restoration strategy, with replica, lightweight columns and capitals erected within the temple’s cella (FIG. 3).

For the event, local authorities and stakeholders, sponsors and donors, members of the surrounding communities, and especially local team members were invited to not only participate, but also provide comments and ideas about how to improve the project’s restoration vision. The idea of contributing to something greater is a powerful means to generate motivation and passion, as is the sense of being part of a team and, therefore, indispensable to the completion of a project’s goals.

The TWLCRM Social Engagement Strategy *Enlarging Petra’s Direct Impact Zone*

A primary goal of the TWLCRM Initiative is to enlarge the impact area of Petra in terms of its role in improving the well being of not just directly affected communities like Umm Şayhūn and Wādī Mūsā, but also nearby villages such as Bayḍā, Rājif, Udhrūḥ, Ṭaybah, and some villages in Wādī Arabah. Likewise, in involving the entire range of local communities, the TWLCRM is encouraging different communities and stakeholders to come together, working side-by-side towards the long-term preservation of Petra.

Cooperation With Local and National Institutions

At the institutional level, cooperation with the Department of Antiquities (DoA) and the Petra Archaeological Park (PAP) has been very fruitful and crucial in the project’s social engagement strategy. Regular visits by DoA



3. Building the model. (Photo: Qais Tweissi).

and PAP staff to assess the project's progress have had a huge impact on local community members, who are beginning to perceive these public institutions as tangible and effective rather than abstract entities removed from local realities. The local realization that Jordanian institutions are fully contributing partners to the project and its success also serves to reinforce a growing awareness of Petra as a site of both local and national heritage (FIG. 4).

Vocational Training Opportunities

The project's cooperation with PAP has also served to create vocational training opportunities for Park junior staff, several of whom have joined the TWLCRM team for short periods in order to share and improve their skills in site restoration and documentation. Similar opportunities are offered to all TWLCRM local team members, with the specific purpose of building local vocational capacity for sustainable site conservation and maintenance.

The ultimate aim is to create small local teams capable of implementing specific contract jobs, whether in the Park or elsewhere. The vocational training provided by the project covers several basic aspects of cultural resource management, including:

Archaeological Excavation: Team members are trained in excavation methods, screening/sifting soil, identifying, sorting, and registering finds, and processing pottery (including washing, sorting, weighing, and counting sherds, and identifying diagnostic pieces for cleaning and registration).

Conservation and Restoration. Training includes how to properly clean stone surfaces, mix mortars, and make basic mortar repairs. For the May 2013 event, another small unit was trained to build the replica lightweight drums and capitals needed for the model restoration.

Archaeological, Topographic, and Architectural Documentation: Three different groups have been trained with specific skills.



4. The Petra Archaeological Park regularly provides the TWLCRM with heavy equipment to facilitate work on site (Photo: Maria Elena Ronza).

The archaeological documentation trainees register and document stone ashlar recovered from excavation and dump removal. The topographic documentation group, trained by DoA surveyor Qutaiba Dasouqi, uses a total station to create accurate maps of the site. The architectural documentation trainees draw walls, soil sections, and register and document architectural fragments scattered across the site.

A small team has also been trained in the re-documentation of finds from “dead projects.” This team worked, for example, to re-bag and re-tag pottery from the 1992/93 excavation of the nearby Petra Church Project.

Job Opportunities

Vocational training opportunities help foster team member motivation and dedication. In fact, a major objective of the project is to build local capacity through employment and training opportunities. The TWLCRM Initiative has

developed an egalitarian, gender-blind, first-come hiring system, with worker registration and rotation organized by communities, tribes, family units, and gender to ensure participation by the broadest possible range of community members. The project’s pay scale is applied to all team members and allows for advancement based on skill acquisition, commitment to the project, and other standard criteria.

In the beginning, the idea of having a mixed-gender team appeared challenging, but it has turned out to be very successful. While only six women signed up for the project during its first season, more than 100 women have joined the team since, with the percentage of women and men working on site now about the same (FIG. 5).

To date, nearly 500 local people have been employed through the project. There is a core team that remains on staff year round, while other team members rotate every three to four



5. TWLCRM team members Ahmad Salama Mowasa and Amal Arbey Samahin (Photo: Eman Abdalsalam).

weeks in order to ensure the greatest number of employment and training opportunities. The rotation is based on an employment register begun by the project in 2012. Anyone who wants to join the team can register, and different employment registers are created according to a person's desired training, community, tribe, and family so that opportunities are offered equally to the various communities, villages, and families that surround Petra. All who are hired join with a starting, basic salary which can then increase based on acquired skills and commitment to the project.

Outreach

Having women on the team also assured the involvement of younger generations with the site. Mothers who worked on the project would go home and talk to their kids about the site and the positive aspects of their new work. Many reported that their kids were very excited to learn more and so in April 2012 the TWLCRM Initiative organized its first Family Day, in which team members brought their children to the site to learn about the project and its different components. The fun-filled day allowed children to try out some of the project activities, including digging, brushing dust from a column drum, washing pottery, and mixing mortars (FIGS. 6-7).

The day proved so successful that the project provided a similar experience to the Petra National Trust in 2013, during which a group of local teenage students participated in project activities for a day. Such outreach initiatives have



6. A moment from the 2012 Family Day on site (Photo: Qais Tweissi).



7. A moment from the 2012 Family Day on site (Photo: Qais Tweissi).

allowed the project to engage positively with a wide range of communities surrounding the site.

Another outreach strategy was the creation of job opportunities for women, both at home and on site. Besides getting women involved in office work and object processing, local women were also employed in their homes through the production of much-needed sandbags. Sandbags are used on site to protect the monument, control foot traffic, and buttress areas in danger of collapse. The project's sandbags are produced by local women from different communities, including Baydā, Umm Şayhūn, Wādī Mūsā, and Udhrūḥ, who modify used burlap rice bags to serve as sandbags. In Udhrūḥ, one of the women even organized an informal cooperative and worked with the project to distribute bags for modification to women who requested work. The Udhrūḥ cooperative was very successful, producing 1,000 bags in less than a week, and the cooperative model is now being piloted in other communities (FIG. 8).



8. TWLCRM team member Ageleh Motlaq Jmeidi works on site to sew closed the filled sandbags (Photo: Qais Tweissi).

Conclusions

For the TWLCRM Initiative, community involvement is not limited to simply creating paid opportunities for manual labor. Rather, the project focuses on actively engaging the community in the process of site preservation and conservation, with the hope that vocational training, employment, and educational outreach will eventually offer new opportunities for the local community to participate in the monitoring and maintenance of the site, thereby building capacity for a more sustainable future.

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