

CHAPTER 7

Collaboration and Multivocality in Heritage and Museum Practice

Lessons from Jordan

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Abstract

As part of a research project on how to better engage the young in learning about their past in Jordan, we report on our investigation into what constitutes good museum practice in the Jordanian context. We present some of the results of our work, which focuses on establishing and sustaining partnerships between museums, universities and schools for the purpose of guiding future capacity-building and enhancing standards across the sector. The chapter also sheds light on the benefits of collaborative work across cultures within internationally funded projects, and the importance of maintaining an equal platform for sharing ideas and making decisions.

Keywords: partnership working, cross-cultural projects, multivocality, good practice, museum education, Jordan

Introduction

In February 2018, the project *Learning from Multicultural Amman: Engaging Jordan's Youth* was launched. Funded by the AHRC's Newton-Khalidi Fund, a team of 12 professionals from six institutions in Jordan and the UK began working together over a period of 24 months, searching for effective and sustainable practices for engaging the youth with their heritage in Jordanian museums.¹ The process involved capacity-building of museum staff and experimenting with educational activities in partnership with schools and universities. The outcome of this process was twofold: identifying good practice in museum education in Jordan; and appreciating the value of collaborative work and shared decision-making in international projects. These two strands are discussed here by five members of the project team, each in a separate section, reflecting on their experiences of an increasingly locally driven project underpinned by principles of equal partnership.

In essence, we provide an insight into the mechanisms of international project management, challenging the dominant heritage discourse as a path to decolonisation.

Project Concept

Learning from Multicultural Amman: Engaging Jordan's Youth aimed to identify good local museum practice in youth engagement, in partnership with schools and universities, and to ensure that all those involved would share resources and understand each other's potential, challenges and needs – although sustaining these partnerships will require support from policy-makers in the heritage and education sectors (Figure 7.1).

Schools in Jordan need learning resources like museums. Most of Jordan's multicultural past (1.5 million years) is ignored in the National Curriculum, which focuses on the Islamic period and the modern history of Jordan (Badran 2011). While there is now more freedom to use textbooks other than those produced by the Ministry of Education, particularly in the private sector, education curricula that contain heritage or archaeological topics (e.g., citizenship) are compulsory to teach in all schools. Other restric-

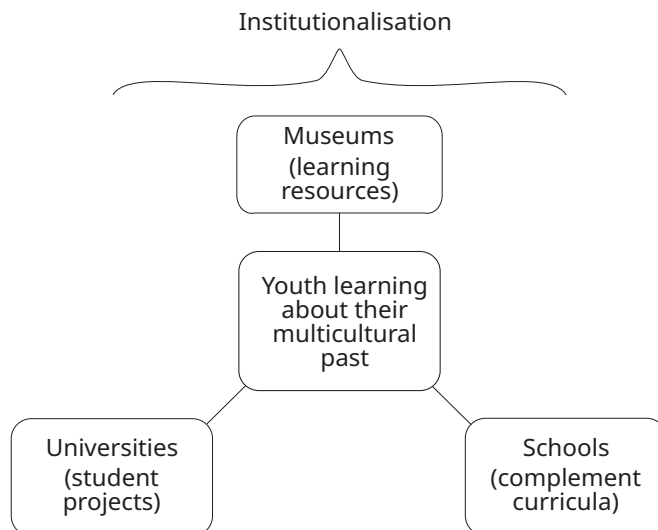


Figure 7.1: Learning from Multicultural Amman project concept: Formation of museum, school and university partnerships for better engagement of the youth in learning about their past.

(Image: The authors.)

tions on the teaching of these topics are related to teachers' lack of knowledge and the pressures of completing the curriculum requirements by the end of the school year.

Undergraduates are a product of the same National Curriculum that poorly represents heritage. Furthermore, most of their university educational experience is spent in lecture halls or the library, with little physical interaction with material remains, practice and employment. There exists, however, plenty of underutilised potential for them to engage with museum collections and to contribute based on their skills and creativity across many disciplines, from archaeology, conservation, heritage management or tourism to architecture, marketing, IT and art.

There are over 40 museums in Jordan, holding tens of thousands of objects, with great potential to become learning resources for young people. Moreover, many museums are site museums, providing opportunities to link their activities contextually to the wider historical landscape. Heritage educational services, however, are currently provided on an ad hoc basis, due to a general lack of sector vision, strategy, funding and capacity-building.

It is important to identify good practice for Jordan. Museum education discourse in the 'West' is longstanding and has dominated the international scene. There is a large body of research on the value of learning through museums, how learners learn in museums, and what the best ways are of serving their interests and needs. It is not surprising that the first and most comprehensive standards of good practice and accreditation schemes for museum education were published in the US and the UK. While there has been some research on the topic in Jordan (e.g., Al-Qaoud 2002; Al-Shayyab and Al-Muheisen 2008; Badran 2018; Malt 2005; Tawfiq 1994), active discussion of this field has generally been absent. Furthermore, there are currently no local standards of good practice in museum education in Jordan.

Collaborative Heritage: Navigating Theory and Practice

The project combined Jordanian and UK efforts towards exploring good museum practice in a local context. It was based on an equal platform that embraced multiple voices across a variety of contexts and practices of heritage – a concept that has been advocated by heritage commentators for decades. The beginning of the twenty-first century saw the development of critical heritage studies in response to a persistent authorised heritage discourse (AHD) that excludes multivocality (Smith 2006). The old field of heritage studies has since been described as ‘politically naïve at best’, needing to reflect on the notions of power, representation and control that are bound up in traditional understandings (Witcomb and Buckley AM 2013, 562).

More specifically, critical heritage studies grew out of ‘particular nuances of heritage in colonial environments, and postcolonial responses to them’ (Harrison and Hughes 2009, 234). These debates soon led to a call for the decolonising of the discipline (e.g., Atalay 2006; Mignolo and Walsh 2018), flagged by Schneider and Hayes (2020) as a vital movement to ‘undiscipline’ the discipline and challenge established colonial ontological approaches. These developments are particularly relevant to Jordan, whose visions and structures for the heritage sector were originally established by colonial agendas of the nineteenth century. As a result, historical narratives, chronologies and terminologies in Jordan remain a legacy of former colonial rhetoric and practices, and are disconnected from local interests (Abu-Khafajah and Miqdadi 2019; Porter 2010).

Colonial legacies in post-colonial contexts have shaped the contemporary identities and futures of whole countries (e.g., Giblin 2015). The way forward, Porter (2010) suggests, is to create a collaborative framework that empowers a variety of stakeholders (heritage professionals, government and non-government agencies, and local communities). This kind of collaboration helps to challenge AHD across different contexts and scenarios. It is one

way to counteract state control over heritage or the privileging of one narrative or local group over another (Abu-Khafajah et al. 2015). Furthermore, it helps to challenge academic wisdom, decentralising control over knowledge and promoting learning from collaboration with stakeholders outside the traditional academy (Nilsson Stutz 2018; Winter 2013). Collaborative heritage is advocated by many scholars, driven by their ethical responsibility towards inclusivity and multivocality (e.g., Schmidt and Pikiriya 2016; Thomas and Lea 2014), and is described by Jameson (2019, 1) as taking on ‘voluntary activism’ in various cooperative settings and stakeholder interactions.

Our project has been driven by a shared desire to practice collaboration on an equal footing between various stakeholders. We began our collaboration at the early stages of the funding application, holding a meeting with our partners in Amman to discuss the project concept and ensure that both sides were on the same wavelength. The outcome of these interactions informed the development of our subsequently successful application. During the project period, February 2019 to January 2021, shared management of activities with project partners relied on organising a planning meeting at the start of each stage and a reflection and feedback meeting at each stage’s end. Information was circulated on a regular basis related to planned activities, roles and responsibilities, and any new developments or changes. Email and social media (WhatsApp, Messenger and Imo) were the main methods of communication, in both English and Arabic. Project partners took turns in leading and delivering five training programmes on museum education theory and practice: two in Jordan, one in the UK and two online. Based on the training, project partners worked with museum professionals to experiment with designing and piloting education activities and learning resources. Our collaboration proved resilient when international travel became restricted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. None of the UK team members could travel to Jordan, and thus Jordan’s members took the lead in completing the project’s remaining activities, including online. There are many inside stories and examples to tell, some of

which are presented in the following sections, reflecting on how the project's ethos worked in practice. A discussion of these reflections, along with the project outcomes and outputs, is presented at the end.

Reflections by Shatha Abu-Khafajah: Liberating Youth Engagement through Creative Material

In this section, Shatha Abu-Khafajah, the principal investigator on the Jordanian side, reflects on her work with her students at the Hashemite University, who as part of the project were actively engaged in producing 'creative material' for schoolchildren to learn about their multicultural heritage. Together, they were immersed in developing multiple interpretations of the Amman Citadel.

Theoretical Framework: On Creativity, Learning and Meaning-Making

This section examines two types of engagement with heritage that took place during our project: the Hashemite University students' 'instinctual' engagement with heritage to produce 'creative material', and their engagement with schoolchildren using this material. We define these types of engagement in contrast to the 'authorised' engagement criticised by Smith (2006, 34) as rigid, passive and uncritical. The students' engagement with heritage couples their academic knowledge (i.e., documentation and evaluation of heritage) with their own perceptions and analysis of that heritage knowledge to produce 'instinctual engagement' (Abu-Khafajah et al. 2015, 192). Their engagement was undertaken as part of the Heritage Management Module taught in year four at the Architecture Department, where practical experience is introduced to complement theoretical frameworks.

The students first created material as a result of their engagement with the Amman Citadel, a site known for its accumulative



Figure 7.2: Hashemite University students using creative material to engage schoolchildren at the Jordanian Archaeological Museum.

(Photo: Shatha Abu Khafajah.)

civilisations. This material was then presented to schoolchildren from Balqis Secondary School at the Jordanian Archaeological Museum located on the Citadel (Figure 7.2).

We define the material the university students produced as ‘creative material’ because it exceeds the ‘inquiry into the past’ and becomes a ‘celebration of it’, to use Lowenthal’s (1998, x) words. In this sense, the creative material bridges two gaps in the Jordanian education system. The first, between heritage and university students, is bridged by the creative material turning heritage from a static material to be studied, assessed and managed into a dynamic entity that is open for analysis, criticism and reinvention. The second gap, between the university students and the schoolchildren, is bridged by the creative material providing a medium of communication between the two groups. Stein (1953, 311–12) defines

creative work as ‘a novel work that is accepted as tenable or useful or satisfying by a group at some point in time ... The extent to which a work is novel depends on the extent to which it deviates from the traditional or the status quo.’ Presenting heritage using material that deviates from copying the reality is unfamiliar practice in heritage studies. However, it derives from the necessity to transform heritage sites, buildings and museum collections into active material that engages schoolchildren with information in an interesting way. In this sense, creativity is the process of analysis, synthesis and design that results in creative material able to transform interaction with heritage from a passive process into an active one (Abu-Khafajah et al. 2015, 195). Following McManamon’s note (1991, 124), the creative material was designed to initiate ‘more mass-media education projects and programs ... [that are] positive, short, and sweet’. The benefits of creative material must be recognised in the museum context as well.

Using creative material in learning lay at the heart of this project. Biesta (2013, 36) captures the essence of learning in the following statement: ‘the point of education is never that children or students learn, but that they learn something, that they learn this for particular purposes, and that they learn this from someone’. Heritage, as part of the learning process, turns into a semiotic project in which the students analyse the heritage in question – the physical remains, and the scholarly work written about it – then reassemble it in a way that makes sense to the schoolchildren. This chapter might not be the place for elaborating on the use of semiotic theories in learning and informal education. However, it is worth noting that:

semiotic theories of learning provide a new set of guiding principles to describe links and coherences between different approaches that have one thing in common: they consider that the foundation of learning and cognition involves the meaning-making activity of the subject, an activity that articulates this subject, its peers and its environment. (Stables et al. 2018, 18)

Similarly, the set of guiding principles in the learning from this project synthesises the different approaches to heritage with those to education through ‘meaning-making’ educative events. According to Campbell (2018, 541), an educative event ‘is expressed in a coming into presence with others, articulated by the emergence of previously unactualised possibilities for action and perception in a constantly evolving environment’. The aim of an educative event is to create an experiential transformation ‘where what has been passed down through social learning can be reborn, and reinterpreted by the new generation – so the infinite flow of signification may continue, advancing the adaptive capabilities of the social group’ (Campbell 2018, 546). Campbell’s (2018) perception of an educational event as an experiential transformative activity reflects the power of engagement that happens through the activity. The following section explains the levels of engagement with heritage that took place in the project.

Educative Encounters with Heritage

First, a meeting was held at the Amman Citadel, where the students were introduced to the project and its partners. This helped to engage the students with the project, to understand their role in it and to feel the importance of the creative material they would produce for engaging the schoolchildren. It was an opportunity for the students to engage in the project as representatives of the Hashemite University. As Neary (2016) stresses, ‘engagement activities give students a sense of being, belonging and becoming as well as feeling part of their institutions’. According to one of the students, this partnership ‘affirmed our capability to go out and do real work ... and contribute something positive to the children and their learning’ (Ahmad, 2020, personal communication). Furthermore, all of the partners had the chance during this meeting to talk to the students about their role, their careers, and the nature of work in archaeology and education. This engagement enhanced the cross-sector, multi-stakeholder partnership in the project and engaged diverse partners, ‘which is thought to

bring together diverse knowledge, experience, resources and perspectives needed to address complex challenges' (Sun, Clarke and MacDonald 2020, 3).

In the classroom back at the university, the students had their formal encounter with the 'approved' knowledge on heritage provided by processes of documentation and evaluation. This encounter resonates with the 'authorised' approach to heritage defined by Smith (2006, 34) as 'the wisdom and knowledge of historians, archaeologists and other experts'. Nonetheless, this encounter equipped the students to understand the physical entities of the Amman Citadel site as a prerequisite to their next encounter with heritage.

One of the project partners delivered a lecture to the students about schoolchildren's engagement in the learning process. The information delivered focused on how children use their senses to learn, and what designers can do to deliver educational material for them. The information helped the students decide on logos and interpretive models as the creative material to engage the children. They capitalised on the knowledge they already had, as fourth-year students, about the elements and principles of design, and coupled this with the lecture and further readings suggested.

Creativity and Engagement with Heritage

At the stage of creative material production, heritage became, according to one student (Adam,² 2020, personal communication), 'less rigid and more fun ... [as] it was re-created on paper and cardboard using colours, lines, and shapes'. Another student (Rand, 2020, personal communication) explained that heritage became dynamic because creative material 'went beyond reflecting the physical reality of heritage into attracting attention and triggering curiosity of the children ... [Y]ou cannot do that with rigid material'. Furthermore, the students pursued different methods of engagement besides creative material. For example, to enhance the children's engagement with the logos, the students decided to design alternative logos and ask the children to nomi-

nate their favourite by adding a sticker to the logo they liked most. Another means of engagement was to ask the children to redraw and redesign their favourite logo, perhaps improving its appearance or even creating something other children could relate to.

Durability was an essential factor in designing the models, especially since they were to be handled by children, based on their ease of handling, and maybe dismantling, without damaging the model. In addition, models were designed to give not only a three-dimensional representation of the exterior but also a perspective on the interior and the construction material used. The representational power of the model is captured by Soreanu and Hurducaş (2015, 12):

[I]n its three-dimensions it mixes the grammars of bi-dimensional and three-dimensional space; it transgresses the interdictions stated by a rational organisation of space, though it is not irrational. It resists the 'lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more' (De Certeau 1984, 92). Instead, it gestures towards a planning of depth, which starts from the elemental, the sensuous, the non-discrete, the temporally pluralised. It starts from enunciations of the joy of dwelling, even when recorded in materialities.

Consequently, one of the models that presented the throne hall in the Citadel provided engaging detail on the materials and the methods used to construct the dome over the hall. Another model presented the Citadel as layers to be dismantled by children while they discovered it. This model proved to be the most popular, as children dismantled the geographic and cultural layers and rearranged them to tell different stories of the Citadel. The children's engagement with this model invokes Soreanu and Hurducaş's (2015, 3) remark on children's engagement with models as 'recombinatory practices that juxtapose or mesh a wide variety of materials, thus giving us access to an urban imaginary of depth'. This is important because it explains the educative role the children can play in this engagement process. Planners, project partners and policy-makers can learn from children the 'fluidity' of herit-

age and its capacity to reappear in contemporary time as a living entity rather than a fossilised object.

Reflections by Maria Elena Ronza: Locally Driven Innovation in Learning Resource Development

In the next paragraphs, Maria Elena Ronza, from the NGO Sela for Training and Protection of Heritage reflects on the process of designing and piloting learning resources, from staff upskilling to the development of and experimentation with archaeology-themed models, an activity sheet, DIY kits and storybooks, and emphasises the importance of targeting these at Jordan's youth.

In its first year, the project succeeded in creating an active network through a series of training sessions hosted by different museums in Jordan and in Durham, UK. The practical nature of the training presented different approaches to the same challenge of engaging schoolchildren with museums and facilitated the exchange of experiences and ideas between the Jordanian and British partners. Our staff members at Sela, who partook in the training, greatly appreciated and benefited from such a stimulating environment. The training was an opportunity for Sela's staff to reflect on museum practices in Jordan, but also to compare knowhow and to experience a more pragmatic approach both to heritage management and to community engagement, especially with younger generations.

Towards the end of the first year, on-the-ground activities with schoolchildren in Jordan were scheduled, and some had been implemented. With COVID-19, however, the project faced major challenges. In its second year, the introduction of travel restrictions, and lockdowns and the moving of education online made it impossible to implement any activities in museums with schools and universities. Drastic changes were sought, and the grassroots strategy and synergy between the Jordanian and British partners proved to be crucial in the project's success.

Despite the challenges, project partners leveraged on the knowledge acquired within the training and the network created during the first phase. They consequently designed and implemented several activities, some of which were online (training via Zoom, producing online learning materials) while others were undertaken on the ground at times when the pandemic situation was less severe. Within the framework of the project's activities, Sela designed a series of archaeology- and museum-themed activities for Jordanian schoolchildren, to be implemented at different museums, in schools and at archaeological sites. Sela's team worked with two main objectives in mind: to tailor the activities to the Jordanian audience in order to engage children with their heritage by presenting it outside the traditional tourist framework; and to design the activities with sustainability in mind to achieve long-lasting impact.

Three sets of activities were developed. The first activity was stratigraphy boxes, produced as educational tools to be used by museum staff during school visits (Figure 7.3). The aim of the boxes is to educate children about the excavation process and the study of stratigraphy used by archaeologists to investigate the past. Each transparent box is filled with coloured sand representing different archaeological layers and miniature replicas of artefacts. The box is accompanied by an activities booklet presenting the museum visit as a treasure hunt.

The second activity comprised four different children's activities designed and carried out by Sela in schools, museums and archaeological sites. The activities included mosaic making, ceramic conservation, pottery making and an excavation mock-up. With each activity, educators proposed to the children some insights into the history of Jordan and of the DIY craft project, aiming at engaging children hands-on with their heritage. The materials and supplies needed to perform those activities were designed to be easily transported (all tools and equipment for a classroom of 25–30 children fitted in the back of a pick-up truck), easily mounted and dismantled, durable, and reusable multiple times. Once most COVID-19 restrictions were lifted in Jordan in



Figure 7.3: The children's stratigraphy boxes as educational resources for Jordanian museums.

(Photo: Sela for Training and Protection of Heritage.)

the late spring of 2021, the children's activities were implemented in cooperation with different public and private institutions and in different communities in Jordan (e.g., as part of the summer camp organised by the Petra Development and Tourism Authority in Petra; as part of a community outreach programme at the Faynan museum; as part of the winter camp organised by the Società Dante Alighieri in Amman).

The third set of activities involves educational archaeology-themed toys that were developed and tested by Sela as prototypes, including excavation kits, DIY mosaics and pottery kits. Two prototypes were selected for production: a DIY mosaic kit and a

series of storybooks with collectibles (small replicas of archaeological objects).

The mosaic kit includes two frames, one with an unfinished mosaic (based on a detail of a mosaic from Mount Nebo in Jordan) that children need to complete, and a second, empty frame to be filled with a new mosaic. The kit includes a booklet with information about mosaic production and illustrations of several examples of ancient mosaics from Jordan for inspiration. The storybook series with collectibles has been particularly successful. The idea was born within the network created by the project. Sela collaborated with Rasha Dababneh and Ghaida Brieghsheh from the Children's Museum to produce the first book in the series – the story of a child called Karam visiting Amman Citadel and interacting with the giant Hand of Hercules that is found beside the Temple (Figure 7.4). The book series targets children aged 6–8 years old and aims to engage them with Jordanian heritage by telling stories set at different archaeological sites in Jordan. The main character, Karam, discovers the marvels of Jordan with his grandmother, who is herself an archaeologist.³

Following the first book launch, several projects and archaeological missions in Jordan expressed an interest in producing a book for the series about specific sites, which we are now working on – looking into ways to foster the active engagement of the community and children in the creative process. Book readings are held for schoolchildren in the communities targeted by the new books, to collect feedback and ideas. This process enhances the sense of ownership of Jordanian heritage by promoting active involvement in its presentation to a wider public.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that these activities and products were developed by Jordanians for a Jordanian audience. All written materials are in Arabic, which is significant, since the literature about Jordanian history and archaeology is predominantly in English and therefore not accessible to large sections of the Jordanian population, especially the younger generations in rural and semi-rural communities. Moreover, the Jordanian authorities' attention to tourists' experience rather than local interest



Figure 7.4: The children's storybook as an educational resource for Jordanian museums.

(Image: Sela for Training and Protection of Heritage.)

has created a disconnect between host communities living near archaeological sites and their heritage (Abu-Khafajah et al. 2015). This disconnect is enhanced by the marginalisation of host communities from the archaeological narrative, which in Jordan consists largely of the narration of the magnificent march of empires versus the micro-narratives of local adaptation. Such a narrative foregrounds the idea of the irrelevance of regional histories within the wider framework of the great empires and creates a sense of alienation (Porter 2010).

Reflections by Robin Skeates: Striving for Equality and Inclusiveness in Project Partnerships

Through his involvement in the project as the UK principal investigator, Robin Skeates reflects on museum practice in Jordan, positioning the discourse between international good practice and local needs and expectations. He also advocates an ethos of inclusivity and shared decision-making to combat inherent inequalities in managing international projects in post-colonial contexts.

Formally, my role in the project was as principal investigator. I was invited to lead the project by Arwa Badran, with whom I wrote the original grant application and directed the project, together with Shatha Abu-Khafajah. From a research point of view, my role was to draw on my wide-ranging prior knowledge and experience of archaeological heritage and museum studies to help inform our work on museum education in Jordan (e.g., Skeates 2000, 2017; Skeates, McDavid and Carman 2012). This turned out to be a very positive learning experience for me, and hopefully of value to our Jordanian partners. Personally, I also saw my role as offering encouragement, support and thanks to my colleagues on the project, and I think this contributed to the positive working ethos and relationships that we developed together. From a management perspective, however, I was accountable both to our funders and to my own institution, to ensure that the project's promised outputs were delivered within the specified budget and timeline. This proved challenging, not least in the bureaucratic context of Jordan and with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, although ultimately the success of our project was recognised in its being shortlisted for the 2020 Newton Prize.⁴

Enhancing the Educational Potential of Jordanian Museums

Something that initially struck me while visiting museums in Amman and engaging with museum and heritage professionals from across Jordan was the similarity between good museum education practice as understood in Jordan and that widely accepted internationally. Looking back, I think I had expected to encounter more culturally diverse educational principles and practices, prior to discovering how relatively well informed many of my Jordanian colleagues are on international standards. Indeed, I rapidly learned that there is a long history of museum and heritage professionals in Jordan working with international teams, and that several Jordanian colleagues had already undertaken training provided by institutions in the UK and USA and with UNESCO, including doctoral research (e.g., Badran 2010). I did, however, often encounter a mismatch between knowledge of good practice and – due to systemic inertia and inadequate funding – the ability of Jordanian colleagues to actively engage in good museum education practice on the ground. This is something that our work together began to change, particularly through extensive professional training and some experimental educational events involving Jordanian schoolchildren and university students (described above), and we all hope to maintain this momentum in the future.

It is, then, relevant to note that there is a substantial body of published information on museum education. National organisations such as the American Alliance of Museums and Group for Education in Museums share, online, both standards and resources for museum educators. There are journals dedicated to the theory and practice of museum education. A variety of textbooks exists on the subject (e.g., Falk and Dierking 2018; Hein 1998; Johnson et al. 2017; King and Lord 2016; Talboys 2018). There is also a substantial and wide-ranging corpus of specialist research papers, covering areas such as evaluations of the impact of education techniques and technologies in museums; case studies in working with diverse museum learners; and critical perspec-

tives on museum education and social change. A few publications also deal with Jordanian museums, although these concentrate mainly on their historical development and rationale (e.g., Ajaj 2009; Alawneh, Alghazawi and Balaawi 2012; Amr, Kafafi and Abdallah 2009; Bisharat 1985; Maffi 1998), one recent exception being a museum visitor survey (Allan and Al-Tal 2016).

In Jordan, awareness of and access to these published resources may be restricted mainly to the best-connected academics and museum professionals, but this accumulated knowledge does still filter down and become translated into critical thinking, a strong desire for change and examples of good practice. Consequently, I would suggest that in Jordan, good museum education practice lies at the interface between international experience and local needs. This is particularly true when it comes to recognising the educational potential of Jordanian museums and staff, characterised by internationally significant collections and some passionate staff who want their fellow citizens to learn about Jordan's past – both of which have tended to be overlooked by the Ministry of Education, National Curriculum and related textbooks. It was encouraging, then, to learn of the inclusion of at least a few pages about the Children's Museum in a textbook, which has enhanced the regularity and number of school visits to that museum (Badran, 2020, personal communication). Indeed, no one can doubt the ambition of Jordanian museum professionals to put good principles into practice by establishing museum education policies; providing training for museum staff and school teachers in museum education; creating dedicated education spaces; formulating school education programmes; using a more exploratory approach to teaching and learning; engaging visiting pupils in hands-on learning activities; working museum texts and displays to make them more accessible to visitors of different age groups; attracting families and welcoming visitors with disabilities; strengthening relationships and outreach work with schools; tapping into the enthusiasm of university students; developing teachers' packs and online educational resources focused on collections; and establishing dialogue with and support from

the relevant authorities. In particular, the relatively well-funded (national) Jordan Museum and Children's Museum (which enjoys royal patronage) are leading the way and are now collaboratively sharing their expertise with other Jordanian museums. As part of our project, for example, the Jordan Museum recently led a training programme on 'Museum Learning during COVID-19', with the goal of establishing and improving the quality of online museum education in Jordan. From my perspective, then, good museum education practice in Jordan is constituted by a characteristically Jordanian openness to 'outside' people and ideas, but also a thoughtful and critically aware appreciation of how these might enhance existing practices, particularly given the significant constraints within which the Jordanian museum sector operates.

From International 'Aid' to Partnership Working

When I first visited museums and archaeological sites in Amman, I was shocked to see labels and signs boldly proclaiming the 'aid' provided by international 'partners', such as the United States Agency for International Development (Figure 7.5). This ideology and symbolism of aid struck me as insensitively neo-colonial. Together with Shatha Abu-Khafajah and Riham Miqdadi's (2019) powerful critique of the unequal power relations in 'collaborative' cultural heritage projects involving Western experts and Jordanian professionals, this made me reflect on the nature of our own 'development grant' from the Newton-Khalidi Fund, and on the strict constraints on spending that came with it from the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council. These, for example, left me in sole control of the budget, despite having a Jordanian co-principal investigator without whom the project would never have received funding, and covered the 'full economic costs' of the UK-based staff yet contributed nothing to our Jordanian colleagues' time and institutional overheads. Economic inequality and 'aid dependency' was, then, perpetuated by our own project, and was something that I could do little to counter. My Jordanian



Figure 7.5: Sign in the Children's Museum, Amman acknowledging US sponsorship.

(Photo: Robin Skeates.)

colleagues must have been aware of this disparity, although they were too polite to say so directly.

Despite this uncomfortable reality, one of the most interesting and rewarding aspects of working with Jordanian colleagues was, for me, in consciously experimenting with a new model of international and national partnership working. Partnership working is widely accepted as an important strategy by museum leaders and, despite a continuing emphasis on the significance of museums as tourist attractions contributing to economic development (e.g., Wireman 1997), a critically aware literature has grown around museum partnerships (e.g., Nicks 1992; Semmel 2019). Furthermore, ours is not the first international project to work more self-critically on cultural heritage with local stakeholders in a post-colonial context (e.g., Näser and Tully 2019), but it may be the first of its kind in Jordan. In our case, our collaboration

was characterised by working with reference to the principles of inclusivity, critique, shared decision-making and equal benefits. We also worked in a context-specific manner that actively placed Jordanian interests first and adapted international standards pragmatically to local circumstances and solutions. For example, our project membership was open, inclusive, expansive and relatively informal: starting with a small core group of Jordanian and UK-based academic and professional partner institutions and individuals, but steadily drawing in more and varied Jordanian institutions and individuals through our training programme and experimental educational events, and through word-of-mouth and social media. Obtaining official permission to involve museum staff from the Department of Antiquities presented challenges but was essential, and was secured thanks to the commitment of a 'gatekeeper' who served as an influential advocate for our project. Regarding decision-making, my predisposition as principal investigator was to keep our project efficiently on track regarding the milestones agreed with our funders. I benefited and learned to adapt, however, from persistent reminders from our Jordanian post-doctoral researcher and project manager that it was essential to share decision-making and find consensus with our Jordanian partners, even if the process took longer. This approach strengthened trust, commitment and friendliness in our working relations. Through good practices such as these, I believe that we concluded our partnership work with a sense that benefits had been widely shared, despite the inherent inequalities created by our international project funding.

Reflections by Ross Wilkinson: Cross-Cultural Collaboration and Knowledge Exchange

In this section, Ross Wilkinson reflects on his experience working collaboratively with project partners to develop a sustainable training programme in learning and engagement in Jordan and the UK. He uses his knowledge and experience in museum education to

compare and contrast attitudes and practice in youth engagement between the UK and Jordan, highlighting valuable lessons to learn on both sides.

Personal Perceptions of Jordanian Museum Learning and Engagement

The professional museum learning context I have trained, practised and am now involved in is the north-east of England and wider networks across the UK, where the museum education sector focuses primarily on school engagement and raising aspirations, within the context of university museum and heritage practice; and civic responsibility through providing access to collections and cohesion among local, faith and cultural groups represented throughout those collections. This is achieved through visits, digital practice (both online and asynchronously), outreach and specific project engagement. I came into the Jordanian museum professional sector unsure of what to expect and what resources were available.

Through collaborative working with our Jordanian partners, it is clear to see that there are many similarities and differences between the UK and Jordanian sectors. It became very clear, similarly to the UK, that there is a disparity between funding in museums and the opportunities these museums have open to them. For example, non-governmental museums operate a similar educational and engagement model to those in the UK, with the ability to secure funding and run formal and informal school and community learning and engagement programmes complete with dedicated educational spaces and highly trained and experienced staff.

In contrast, government-funded museums have limited funding and staffing, focusing mainly on collections expertise. The dedication of the staff and the knowledge held cannot be questioned. But with limited resources needed for collections care, there is little or no capacity for engagement activities with com-

munities or schools. This is not to say there is no good practice in terms of education or engagement taking place, but this is led by curatorial staff when and how they can. The other element, in the case of curators leading these sessions, is that it is done with no formal training in planning, developing or delivering museum learning and engagement activities.

So why is there a disparity between these museums with regard to their ability to deliver education and engagement activities? Prior to this project, my observations were these: the first major difficulty is finance, as with every organisation, but the second seemed to be that there is no formal offering of training from public or private organisations for the sustained professional development of learning and engagement activities. This contrasts with my own experience, where there are organisations which offer training, sometimes freely available, to museum professionals in many fields, including in learning and engagement delivery and development.

Impact of International Project Collaboration

Entering this project as a learning and engagement service manager from a multi-site, relatively well-funded university museum, archives and special collections organisation, I was very conscious of not coming across as the 'privileged' institution arriving telling everyone what to do. In fact, the complete opposite was the case. Through working with groups, museums and professionals working with different environments, collections, socioeconomic users and resources, you learn so much more regarding innovative and contrasting styles of practice (Figure 7.6).

From the outset, it was also apparent that there was 'project fatigue' among museum professionals in Jordan. Due to the unique collections and heritage sites, a lot of foreign research projects appear for a restricted period of time, heavily and intensively invest in one area (often to support their own agenda regarding research outcomes, funding objectives or evaluation) and then disappear. The consequences of this demonstrate little or no obvi-



Figure 7.6: Ross Wilkinson, Ahmad Al-Mousah (President of Sela) and Shatha Abu-Khafajah discussing contrasting styles of museum practices, training at the Oriental Museum, Durham.

(Photo: Asma Abaza.)

ous impact or legacy for the actual professionals working in Jordan.

My personal view is that there is a real benefit in creating a network of professionals who can offer training and support each other through their professional development, hence the need, through this project, to create a training programme and, in time, a lasting network. However, what I learned through partnership are these key points:

- I can plan training logistics and deliver where appropriate, but there is already great practice in Jordan that needs to be identified and brought into the training programme.
- Collaboration in training is crucial for true partnership. Even as a trainer, through working with the trainees I witnessed a range of different techniques, particularly around archaeological engagement with a breadth of community and school

groups, which I can apply through my own practice and pedagogy.

- International projects must have the country and people involved at their heart, not prioritising the foreign organisation. This means, for example, Jordanian professionals delivering to Jordanian professionals, in Arabic and with their local context at the heart of their delivery.
- Legacy and network are vital. There is no point doing this if the practitioners involved in delivering training or being trained do not continue to run their own training sessions and set up a formal professional development programme.

It is equally important to consider the added intangible value. A prime example comes from the UK-based element of the training at Durham University's Oriental Museum. The trainees and the Learning and Engagement Team at the museum were delivering a school session with a local primary school. The session was on ancient Egypt and was being led by one of our learning assistants. What became immediately apparent when the children were engaged in gallery-based activities was the very different approach the Jordanian professionals took in working with these young children. Without any formal training in some cases, the natural family-centred cultural background of Jordan shone through. The caring, personable Jordanian manner was very different to the formal educational approach taken in the UK. The children responded perfectly and loved talking to the Jordanian professionals – the teacher commented on how great this was – and due to the paternal/maternal approach to the teaching, the children were immediately comfortable. This is especially relevant given the cultural context of the children, who come from predominantly rural, British, white and northern backgrounds, with minimal to no exposure to other ethnicities or cultural backgrounds.

The very way of being and natural family orientation of the Jordanians that made the children incredibly comfortable is a key learning point, and one we have implemented in our teaching

delivery, to the considerable benefit of the children. Even in our online delivery, we have focused less on the formal and more on our manner, and the children have responded positively. This technique, often used in early years education, is evidently applicable across other age groups, but in a very uniquely Jordanian way, which could only have been possible through shared practice in this training programme.

Reflections by Fatma Marii: Mutual Benefits of National and International Partnerships

In this final section, Fatma Marii reflects on her involvement in co-organising training and museum activities. She highlights the mutual benefits of national and international partnerships, in terms of museum professionals sharing experiences, museums working collaboratively with schools and universities, and professionals in Jordan and the UK engaging together in exploring museum practice.

Our project provided an opportunity to demonstrate the necessity of partnerships between museums, schools and universities. Joint activities were underpinned by cooperation between groups of museum staff, university students and school pupils. This interaction provided greater opportunities for youth engagement with heritage and museums. School pupils showed great interest in and enthusiasm about heritage. They took part in a museum activity and interacted with museum staff and university students. This was a unique learning environment that it would not have been possible to create through textbooks or in the classroom. Hence, what was done during our project provided a first step for pupils to think of a museum or a heritage centre as a pleasant memory that will bring them, and maybe their families and friends, back to museums later.

As for university students, having them participate in activities in museums made them really enthusiastic about their studies. These activities provided the practical side needed to complement the theoretical basis. Moreover, the students sensed their

own importance and belonging in training and supervising the next generation in relation to their heritage and its management. Conducting such activities encouraged university students to be innovative and to develop new ideas for their future careers, especially during these difficult times where cultural heritage job opportunities are scarce.

The museum curators who were involved in the project also felt enthusiastic about raising awareness, publicising information and interacting with the local community, particularly as they are constantly challenged to engage the youth in learning about their heritage when they are more interested in digital and technological developments. In addition, these curators, whose work monotonously revolves around looking after collections on display and in storage, became excited again about objects and their stories, as well as being busy with preparing spaces and material to run the activities.⁵ In time, they became more open to ideas on how to work with the local community to raise their awareness of heritage. This was noticed when they started to develop digital material to maintain interaction with their communities during the second half of the project, when the planned activities could not be implemented due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

As part of the project, museum curators began creating online learning resources, joined by students from the University of Jordan who were asked to film themselves describing to a younger sibling or relative a personally valued old object from their house. They had to write a script for the film, where they needed to explain the importance of this object, its value and what methods are used to preserve it. Students were excited to experiment with different ideas and create these short films, as well as to receive feedback for a non-academic activity related to their studies. The idea was to highlight the connection between personal and valuable objects in the home and heritage artefacts in museums, and how in many cases artefacts that are privately owned and valued have also become valuable as world heritage. Participants in this activity also benefited from interacting with each other in a non-academic environment, which strengthened links between the

topics taught in higher education and issues relevant to present-day communities. Students have since asked me to do more such activities, indicating that they appreciated this approach to studying heritage conservation that relates to the local community. Students also realised that museum artefacts are not just static objects; there are stories behind each of them. The students concluded that engaging school pupils in such activities would help to increase the young people's appreciation of cultural heritage and encourage that generation to study, work and even volunteer in the heritage sector in the future.

Museum professionals also had the opportunity to learn from each other through our project. The project's training programmes, which gathered museum professionals from all over Jordan, from both the governmental and the non-governmental sectors, provided a platform for the discussion and sharing of ideas (Figure 7.7). Differences in the way the two sectors operate were highlighted on several occasions: governmental museums have limited budgets compared with non-governmental museums, which have the privilege of operating on larger budgets and with flexibility around raising funds. Governmental museums' staff flagged the lack of funding as one of their most challenging issues and one that hinders their progress and has led over time to loss of motivation to create and search for ways to improve. It does not help that their employment situation is long term – their contracts are permanent, hence they can remain in their jobs until retirement. Non-governmental museum staff also explained that maintaining funds builds continuous pressure on staff to keep working, coming up with new ideas, and at the same time maintaining steady progress and a high quality of services. This project provided the opportunity for museum curators to discuss the challenges and solutions to some of their difficulties, as well as creating opportunities for future cooperation in events and projects.

Overall, one of the key achievements of the project was in providing the prospect for a new phase of community engagement in heritage in Jordan, through the interaction, across different coun-



Figure 7.7: A platform for sharing ideas and practices for museum professionals from all over Jordan: training at the Royal Tank Museum, Amman.
(Photo: Arwa Badran.)

tries, between museum professionals, school pupils, university students, teachers, academics and other stakeholders.

Discussion and Concluding Remarks

There are several interesting points to highlight from our reflections above in relation to what constitutes good practice in museum education in Jordan and the value gained from engaging in collaborative and equal partnerships. In some ways, the two dimensions feed into each other.

Collaboration between museums, schools and universities provided opportunities for a variety of ideas, approaches and interactions to emerge. University students' critical and analytical engagement with disciplinary epistemologies escaped the traditional AHD and produced experimental educative activities with children, who in return shaped the designs and perceptions of the students. The process of students working with children in designing and redesigning the Citadel models and logos allowed

‘instinctual’ engagement in a meaning-making exercise and a reinterpretation of heritage from different viewpoints. This process also gave schoolchildren an opportunity to interact with museum staff and engage with collections in ways that enriched their curriculum-, text- and classroom-based learning. Equally, university students’ exposure to such stimulating learning environments and their contributing to museum programmes equipped them with positive feelings of confidence and satisfaction. It also created a ‘laboratory’ outside their lecture halls, where they could engage practically in their field in real settings and become better prepared for employment later. University students who produced educational films were similarly engaged with dynamic stories rather than static objects.

On a professional development level, museum staff were enthusiastic, experimenting with new methods of engaging children in learning about their heritage, and in particular moving on to developing digital material to reach their audiences in light of the museum closures imposed by the global pandemic. Gathering museum professionals from different sectors in one place during training and activity implementation allowed greater exchange of experiences and understanding of each other’s strengths and weaknesses. Once communication channels had been opened, governmental and non-governmental museums were brought closer to each other. The interaction between professionals from Jordan and the UK created new learning trajectories on both sides, whether through deciding on themes and topics in the training programmes, observing how and why museums function differently in different contexts, or learning lessons both directions from similarities and contrasts in styles and practices. Discussion about what good practice is was in itself instrumental in challenging our ‘fixed ideas’ about what is right and what is not, and how to manoeuvre between the international and the local in creating something that works in practice. Experimenting with different ideas proved successful. A totally unexpected outcome of the Jordanian trainees’ participation in delivering an activity for schoolchildren at the Oriental Museum was the impact of their caring

manner on children's comfort – an approach taken up by the museum's Learning and Engagement Team. Similarly, Sela staff who joined the training in the UK got the opportunity to see how the Oriental Museum worked with interactive learning resources. Upon their return, they added trails with landmarks and quizzes to their existing tours for children (A. Al-Mousah, 2020, personal communication) and developed models, toys, replicas, activity sheets and a storybook for various museums and heritage sites.

Much of the museum practice in Jordan remains unrepresented in academic publications, and most of the published work on museums in the 'West' is restricted to a few academics in Jordan. International collaboration between professionals and institutions is therefore helpful in facilitating a greater international flow of information and knowledge exchange, not only for Jordan but for the Arab region as a whole. It also adds multiple perspectives to challenge the dominant discourse as the way forward to decolonisation.

The team members arrived at this project from different backgrounds and specialisations, bringing various perceptions and expectations. Project members collectively brought in cross-disciplinary experiences and skillsets, constantly manoeuvring between theory and practice and a reflexive process of self-evaluation. This combination proved highly beneficial to the project, which aimed to be inclusive in its approach, with each member having a voice, a role and a contribution to various aspects at various stages. Despite coming from different countries, individual and institutional cultures, and knowledge systems that underpin our practice, we were united by shared values that saw the good in collaborative work. We actively sought to challenge the dominant heritage management discourse (globally and locally) by being open to different ideas and different ways of doing things based on trust and respect for each other's knowledge and abilities – an attitude which Nilsen Stutz (2018) advocates as a path to decolonisation:

If we accept the premise that there are different worlds, different ways of knowing, then we must respectfully bring what we can

offer to transdisciplinary engagement with communities outside the academy. If we want to continue on the path of a decolonisation of the discipline, we must focus our efforts on adjusting our attitude, not our insights and knowledge. We need to think in terms of relations – as in power and respect – rather than in terms of essence of determining ‘a more correct way of knowing’. (Nils-son Stutz 2018, 54)

What constitutes good practice in museum education in Jordan remains an open question. Some of it was identified during the project, such as establishing collaborative partnerships between museums, schools and universities, encouraging engagement in experimental activities and multiple interpretation, continuous and targeted capacity development, and creating opportunities for sharing practices and experiences locally and internationally. We have produced the first ever guidelines to good practice in museum education for Jordan (Badran et al. 2023). We have also created a local network of museum professionals who now share news and discuss their practice on social media platforms created for this purpose. We have created training material and resources as a point of reference for future capacity-building. We have also developed a set of learning resources, which are designed, piloted and ready for museums to use for children’s activities. It is no coincidence that a Jordanian Museums Association was established on the 18 May 2021 under the patronage of HRH Princess Sumaya Bint Al Hassan. The association will act on a national level to develop institutional infrastructure, human resources and care and display of collections for museums according to international standards (R. Dababneh, 2021, personal communication). We believe in the necessity of such an association for Jordan, which was one of our prime project recommendations. Such an umbrella organisation can make use of the project’s achievements to move forward and help support the development of the Jordanian museum sector.

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Notes

- 1 The project was recognised by the Council for British Research in the Levant (CBRL) with affiliated status.
- 2 Students quoted in this chapter are pseudonymised.
- 3 The production, marketing and distribution of these two products have been taken over by Entimaa', a Jordanian registered trademark established to raise funds for the preservation of Jordanian heritage and to develop community heritage businesses. These businesses have the potential to provide job opportunities and bring communities into closer relationships with heritage. Entimaa' offers handmade products and experiences associated with Jordanian heritage. Through their purchases, customers support heritage preservation in Jordan.
- 4 www.britishcouncil.org/education/he-science/newton-fund/newton-prize.
- 5 Non-governmental museums in Jordan are equipped with learning spaces and learning officers. However, this is not the case for governmental museums. Although the latter is a larger sector, it relies on one curator per museum (on rare occasions, with an assistant curator) to manage the day-to-day museum work, whether related to collections (e.g., registration and research) or public engagement (e.g., tour guiding).

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