Tourism and the Natural and Built Environments in Gadara

Ammar Abdelkarim ALOBIEDAT

Department of Heritage Studies, Arkansas State University, 72467 P.O. Box 69, Arkansas, USA

Abstract: Although tourism is often promoted as a harmless endeavour, it appears that the environmental impacts associated with it, regardless of severity, are inevitable. Using sources such as informal interviews, participant observation, literature, and data from government entities, this research set out to determine the environmental impacts of tourism on the heritage site of Gadara in northwest Jordan. The findings of this research revealed that the negatives of tourism on the natural and built environment outweigh the benefits at Gadara. Environmentally, while tourism in Gadara encouraged the conservation of the ancient tangible heritage, this research uncovered other harmful environmental consequences that occurred due to practices by officials and both domestic and Arab visitors including, but not limited to, leaving garbage and non-biodegradable trash, vandalism, traffic congestion, noise, and construction activities. This article will serve as a springboard for stakeholders to recognize the opportunities and threats tourism poses to the conservation of heritage and the environment.

Keywords: environmental impact, tourism, cultural heritage, degradation, Gadara, Jordan

1. Introduction

In the twentieth century, humans took over the millennia-old role of microbes as chief shapers of the atmosphere. John McNeill asserted that the whole earth and its atmosphere have been impacted more by the twentieth century humans than any other period, and that modern humans have used ten times more energy than all their human ancestors combined preceding the year 1900 AD (McNeill, 2000). Perhaps McNeill’s argument applies to the twenty-first century as well, as tourists rise to the top of human kind. Traveling to destinations different from the tourist’s home environment is a significant draw of tourism. The interactions tourists have with the environment lead to either positive or negative consequences. Factors that influence the environmental impact tourism has on a destination include the intensity of tourist

---

1 Correspondent author: Ammar Abdelkarim ALOBIEDAT, E-mail: ammar.alobiedat@gmail.com. Present Address: 935 Lighthouse #23, Pacific Grove, CA 93950.
use of a site, the extensiveness of development, the fragility of the ecosystem, whether or not the developer has considered the impact of developing the site and future preservation of the area, and the ability of an area to change its basis of tourism from natural to contrived attractions (Cohen, 1978; Holden, 2000; Rad and Aghajani, 2010).

The negative impacts of tourism on the environment of tourist sites are usually due to the numbers of tourists exceeding the ability of the destination to support the tourist population, poor management of tourist sites, or a combination of these two factors. Water and land are often the most impacted by tourists. Soil erosion, habitat loss, pressure on flora and fauna, tourists competing with the local residents for resources are all rife in areas of conventional tourism. Tourism can significantly overload the current infrastructure and magnify already undesirable practices (Ikiara & Okech, 2002; Hawkins & Roberts, 1994; Holden; 2000; Sawkar, et al., 1998; Zurick, 1992). Furthermore, noise and air pollution add to respiratory problems and stress for local populations. Noise from construction, night clubs, visitors, and other tourist-related activities often can cause negative feelings for locals who feel their homes are being invaded and normal life disrupted (Holden, 2000; Rad & Aghajani, 2010).

The interactions tourists have with the environment can also have positive consequences. Tourism contributes to the protection of the natural and physical environment by providing an alternative economic system to other forms of human impact, such as mining or deforestation. Attracting visitors to a location involves maintaining a quality and pristine environment; which will be of course impacted by the visitors themselves. In this situation, though, the environment becomes an economic commodity and to preserve it is to preserve the economic viability of the tourist attraction. Tourism and recreation can become motivations for improving and protecting the environment, although some have critiqued these efforts as being only superficial and covering existing problems which are then ignored to a greater extent (Holden, 2000). Tourism encourages the restoration of prehistoric and historic heritage buildings and monuments, prevents ecological decline, and improves the appearance of the tourist destinations (Cohen, 1978; Perdue, Long and Allen, 1987; Sethna & Richmond, 1978). Tourism development can be helpful in restoring or protecting the physical environment through the creation of wildlife parks and developing plans which work to control destruction and maintain the environment (Akkawi, 2010).

Using the heritage site of Gadara in Northwest Jordan as a case study, this article will analyse the environmental consequences tourism has on the natural and built
environment of this destination. This analysis was accomplished through examination of the environmental impacts of tourism on Gadara and how these consequences affected the local environment.

2. The Research Area

Gadara is located approximately fifteen miles northwest of Irbid in the north of Jordan. Gadara attracts a modest number of foreign and domestic tourists as both a city of Decapolis fame and Biblical legend (Alobiedat, 2014). Tourist arrivals to Gadara show growth from 200,392 visitors in 2012, to 231,493 in 2013 (The Jordanian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, 2013). Gadara is a beautiful and easily accessible site. Most visitors come to Gadara on day trips from the capital, Amman, to see its extensive ancient ruins and enjoy its panoramic views such as the Sea of Galilee, the Golan Heights, the Yarmouk River, and River Jordan. Several Palestinian cities such as Tiberia and Safad as well as several Jordanian and Syrian towns could be observed from Gadara’s vantage point. Gadara attracts three types of tourists. International non-Arab tourists are from the Americas, Europe, Asia, and Australia. The second type of tourist is international Arab tourists from the Gulf and other Arab countries. The third type of tourist that comes to Gadara is Jordanians, also known as domestic tourists. Getting to Gadara from Amman is very easy and cost effective. (Interviews with tour guides and tourists at Gadara, May 23 and 27, 2012).

Tangible and intangible heritage in Gadara is rich and varied, leading to a moderate, tolerant society toward heritage resources. Gadara exhibits a rich tangible heritage which spans from the Hellenistic period to the Roman, Byzantine, Islamic, and Ottoman periods through the contemporary Gadarenes. The town also possesses intangible heritage such as local traditions, performances, handicrafts, and memory. The people of Gadara are tolerant, very friendly, and hospitable. Although Gadarenes are primarily moderate Sunni Muslims, Gadara as a Biblical and historical heritage site, is an ideal destination for visitors seeking cultural and spiritual knowledge. Both men and women in Gadara dress conservatively. Topless is prohibited, revealing clothes are not acceptable, and shorts are rarely worn by either sex, and would be out of place in the town. However, Gadarenes accept and forgive foreigners who break the rules of local customs (Interviews with local residents at Gadara, July 3-4, 2012).

3. Methodology

Data sources used in this study were comprised of secondary and primary sources. Gadara’s residents, Gadara’s municipality, Gadara’s Tourism Directorate, Gadara’s
Antiquities Directorate, the hotel and supermarkets, the Friends of Archaeology Association in Gadara, tourism companies and tour guides, gift shops and booth owners, and tourists are the major stakeholders of Gadara’s heritage sites and sources of informal interviews identified through snowball sampling as discussed in Goodman (1961). Information collected directly from people through over 250 informal interviews with open questions, ethnography, and participant observations took place between May 10 and August 10, 2012, at Gadara (the heritage site and the adjoining local village). Topics discussed included heritage, tourism, residents’ attitudes toward tourist and tourism development and the environmental impact of tourism on the local community. This research was done as part of a larger research project covering the sociocultural, economic, and environmental impacts of tourism at Gadara. Limitations of this study included the difficulty of access to data from governmental entities and academic institutions, the lack of methodical data collection at the heritage site level by employees for statistics, and cultural apprehension about recorded interviews.

4. Results and Discussion

Tourism has the potential to increase public appreciation of the environment. Unfortunately, it also can cause undesirable and irreplaceable damage to the landscape and tangible heritage in addition to natural environmental concerns. In Gadara, this research revealed several major findings regarding the impact of tourism on the natural and built environments. Through observation of Gadara’s heritage site, on the one hand, the structure of the heritage buildings and monuments in Gadara is in good condition. On the other hand, in contrast to the findings of Cohen’s examination of tourism’s impact on the physical environment (1978), Perdue, Long, & Allen’s research on rural resident perceptions and attitudes about tourism (1987), and Sethna & Richmond’s analysis of U.S. Virgin Islander’s local views on tourism (1978), some structures in the Ottoman and more contemporary portion of the site had been demolished while others are deteriorating (figures 1 and 2). For example, the taboun ovens, chicken coops, stone troughs for holding water or feed for animals, and the structure of the water cisterns located on the ground surface are mostly demolished and remain unprotected.

Deterioration is very prominent in the walls, roofs, and structures of the buildings due to the building materials Gadarenes used. The residents of Gadara used mud, hay, barley and wheat straw, or bamboo in the roof construction.
The structures of the roofs were varied widely in size, form, and type such as stone, wooden, or iron beams. Other building materials like plaster and cement were an important ingredient of the wall and floor construction. The roof typology of the heritage building in Gadara consisted of a variety of forms including cross vaulted roofs, arched roofs, and flat roofs. The rafters bridged the walls and the bamboo bars covered the area between them. Although such building materials required regular maintenance, deterioration of the building structures in Gadara is much more than lack of routine maintenance operations (Observation of heritage buildings and landscape at Gadara, Jordan, during the summer of 2012; interviews with the employees and officials of Gadara’s Tourism Directorate at Gadara, Jordan, on May 28, 2012; and interviews with the employees and officials of Gadara’s Antiquities Directorate at Gadara, Jordan, on May 27 and July 13-14, 2012.).

Vandalism, conservation strategies, and certain practices done by both Gadara’s Antiquities and Tourism directorates are all causes of rapid decay and deterioration. While severe damage to the walls and structures of the buildings is due to growing plants and weeds which represent the lack of conservation and maintenance, water cisterns and driving cars at the site demonstrate excellent examples of vandalism, misuse, and bad management (Figure 3). The cisterns were filled with trash, soil, cement, and stones from the excavations done by Gadara’s Antiquities Directorate. Cleaning these huge cisterns costs the Royal Scientific Society JD 2500 (USD $3,530) each (Observation of heritage buildings and landscape at Gadara during the summer
of 2012; interviews with the employees and officials of Gadara’s Tourism Directorate at Gadara, May 28, 2012; interviews with the employees and officials of Gadara’s Antiquities Directorate at Gadara, May 27 and July 13-14, 2012.

Supporting Hall, Gössling, & Scott’s (2015) argument for tourism potentially leading to the preservation of the local environment in only a small percentage of global tourism sites, the mismanagement of Gadara has led to environmental degradation. Tourism development in Gadara has resulted in the establishment of tourist facilities at the heritage site. Construction activities and infrastructure development including large parking lots located at the main southern and eastern gates of the site, public toilets, and roads led to the destruction of the site’s ecology. Construction of such facilities in Gadara caused land degradation, natural habitat loss, and deterioration of scenery (figure 4) (Observation of heritage buildings and landscape at Gadara during the summer of 2012).

Figure 3. Vehicles of employees are parked and driven on the heritage site itself, sometimes within buildings. This causes deterioration of the site and structures. The driving also causes dust pollution. Photo by author, 2012.

The areas outlines in red are parking lots designed for visitors. The parking structures take up a significant portion of the heritage site and covered previous unpaved land. This photograph was taken in 2011 by David L. Kennedy, Aerial Photographic Archive for Archaeology in the Middle East, APAAME_20111002_DLK-0684.

During the 1970s, the Jordanian government forced the villagers to sell their housing and land, and eventually relocated them to new housing projects nearby. The total amount of land confiscated or sold to the government reached 450-460 dunoms (approximately 114 acres). Because Jordan was under martial law, this was not a problem. At the time, the government decree did not specify immediate removal from the premises. Improvements to properties were forbidden, and access to land was only granted to harvest olives as long as no equipment was used. Due to
resident dissatisfaction, the government feared the ultimate abandonment of the area and built an alternate housing project (Brand, 2000; Daher, 1999).

Environmentally, relocating Gadarenes resulted in the reduction of agriculture including small-scale farming operations in Gadara because the land became controlled by the government. It was difficult for residents to reach their remaining fields after they were removed from the old village of Gadara to the new housing project. The traditional use of domestic animals was no longer effective for transportation and management of the land. Relocating the residents has also changed their roles in the ecosystem. Formerly through crop rotation, for example, farmers were able to increase the soil organic matter content which enhances soil health. Due to the accessibility issues, Gadarenes rented their land to farmers from outside Gadara who grew only tobacco for several years. Growing tobacco, according to the informants, depleted soil nutrients, destroyed the fertility, and reduced the land productivity to a level far below its previous state prior to the government confiscation. Low productivity drove the people of Gadara from farming. The residents of Gadara still rent their land to farmers from outside Gadara for as low as JD 10 (USD $14.10) per donor annually (Interviews with the officials of the Friends of Archaeology and Heritage Association at Gadara, May 30-31, 2012; interviews with local residents at Gadara, May 20-21, 2012; interviews with booth owners at Gadara, May 22-23, 2012).

Tourism’s impact on the environment in northern Jordan as a whole is less than agriculture’s impact on the climate and increasing desertification of the region. Expansion of rural land used for structures over arable lands, such as what happened when the Gadarenes were moved to the new housing project, bringing rangelands into cultivation to compensate for the loss of arable lands, improper farming practices, overgrazing, and growing settlements have pushed the marginal lands that buffered the Mediterranean climate in the Northwest from the Jordanian deserts. As a result, the Jordanian northwest has less and less rainfall and increasing soil and water salinity encroaches on the regions in conjunction with growing soil alkalinity (Khresat, Rawajfih and Mohammad, 1998). By removing the Gadarenes from their village and placing them in new houses to the east, the footprint of the developed area has doubled, and other lands were brought into cultivation to compensate for the difficulty of accessing the villager’s former fields.

Like Holden’s research involving tourism and its effects on local protection of the environment (2000), residents at Gadara realized the environmental benefits and impacts of tourism. They explained that depending on the archaeological site is not enough to enhance the image of Gadara. According to them, Gadara has a beautiful
natural landscape surrounded with agricultural land that could be used to establish a beautiful park. Although the price of land has risen significantly in Gadara since the 1980s, it is still cheaper than the other tourism destinations in Jordan. Hundreds of acres around Gadara are suitable to establish such a park. Although the residents realized the importance of a park to improve the tourism industry in Gadara, they understand the economic and political challenges. Such political challenges include the instability in the region of the Middle East especially the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, and the Jordanian army check points around Gadara. Within three miles to the northwest from the heritage site in Gadara, there are four army check points and a number of army watch towers that in most cases deny access to this area, especially at night. The tour guides and tourism companies in Jordan also saw the benefits of landscape based tourism at Gadara. They believe that only the geographic location of Gadara is worth mentioning when it comes to marketing Gadara although Gadara is famous for being the third largest heritage, historical, and archaeological site after Petra and Jerash (Interviews with local residents and booth owners at Gadara, May 22-23, 2012; Interviews with tour guides at Gadara, May 24 and 29, 2012).

The idea of a park in Gadara in addition to taking control of the heritage site grounds is an important step in site development (figure 5). Gadarenes seem to agree with Akkawi’s (2010) study on tourism development in Qatar and the potential positive effects of park creation. Developing a landscape plan which would keep the heritage structures clear of weed damage (Figure 6), and place xeriscape plantings (see Smith and Patrick, 2011) around the site would not only enhance the look of the heritage site itself, but reduce problems with soil loss and fire hazard.

Through the use of native plants and non-native, non-invasive climate-compatible plantings, little to no water would need to be used to care for the gardens.

A properly planned park could give locals and visitors further appreciation of the native plants, perhaps encouraging locals and tourists to care for native plantings. With proper labelling, locals and tourists would be educated about the plants they viewed and what is and is not native to the area. They would also gain a sense of appropriate water-wise plantings for the climate. Water is an especially scare resource in Jordan. A hand-out or publications about the types of appropriate plants and information about xeriscaping would be helpful in designing the park and grounds as well as for further information available to locals and tourists about native and low water plants and water consumption in plantings as well as soil health and protection. In addition, it could serve as a model for the ecotourism industry in
Jordan and similar drought-laden climates which could be looking for ways to more responsibly develop sites for tourism.

Figure 5. Weeds allowed to grow at the site are fire hazards in the summer and attract snakes, scorpions, and other dangerous animals which put visitors at risk.

Figure 6. An example of weeds growing in the walls and on structures at the heritage site of Gadara, damaging structures. Photo by author, 2012.

A properly planned park could give locals and visitors further appreciation of the native plants, perhaps encouraging locals and tourists to care for native plantings. With proper labelling, locals and tourists would be educated about the plants they viewed and what is and is not native to the area. They would also gain a sense of appropriate water-wise plantings for the climate. Water is an especially scarce resource in Jordan. A hand-out or publications about the types of appropriate plants and information about xeriscaping would be helpful in designing the park and grounds as well as for further information available to locals and tourists about native and low water plants and water consumption in plantings as well as soil health and protection. In addition, it could serve as a model for the ecotourism industry in Jordan and similar drought-laden climates which could be looking for ways to more responsibly develop sites for tourism.

Comparable with Zurick’s (1992) findings regarding tourism in Nepal, tourism in Gadara is also associated with significant environmental harm related to garbage and non-biodegradable trash, as a result of direct tourist impact on the landscape (figures 7 and 8). Jordanian and other Arab visitors leave trash behind them damaging not only the heritage site, but the residents' properties, crops, and kill livestock. Some informants also stated that the Antiquities Directorate uses herbicides to kill weeds at
the site. The informants’ primary concern was about the native plants at the site—they knew that these plants were an important source of food for their animals and increased milk production. They stated that several families who kept livestock suggested to the Tourism Directorate that they let the animals graze to control weeds instead of using herbicides. The Tourism Directorate stated it was fine with their office, but that the local communities were angered by the idea. These other locals felt that the site of Gadara needed to be an animal-free zone because animals created a less respectable atmosphere. The informants also mentioned that their animals sometimes eat plastic bags left by tourists; the consumption of which can kill the animals (Interviews with local residents at Gadara, June 9, 2012).

![Figure 7. Trash littering the fields surrounding the heritage site of Gadara. Photo by author, 2012.](image)

![Figure 8. Places pictured are the main gate, the benches by the parking lot, and inside a structure. Photo by author, 2012.](image)

Although residents reached out to these visitors when they encountered them on their land near the heritage site and addressed these problems to the parties responsible for tourism development in Gadara, all of their concerns were ignored. The visitors’ lack of concern, in some cases, had developed to tension between residents, tourists (Jordanian and international Arab tourists, not Western tourists), and the government. In agreement with Holden’s study on tourism and the environment (2000) and Rad and Aghani’s research in Iran (2010), the residents showed negative attitudes toward these tourists because they disrespect and invade their properties. Furthermore, the residents showed positive attitudes to tourism in general and toward the international non-Arab tourists because they
respected the local heritage, keep the site clean, and are eager to experience and learn about the local culture (Interviews with local residents at Gadara, May 20-21 and June 9, 2012).

As noted in Hawkins’ and Roberts’ study on tourism at the Red Sea (1994) and Holden (2000), tourism in Gadara has pressured the already underdeveloped infrastructure of the site and increased negative behaviours of locals and tourists at the site. In addition to the results of the aforementioned studies, Gadara revealed that such negative behaviours are also encouraged by ineffective official tourism strategies. The reasons Jordanian and Arab tourists leave trash behind at sites such as Gadara is probably due to several factors. There is a lack of trash receptacles on site, especially at the remote reaches of the heritage site. The lack of trash receptacles is likely due to a lack of government funds to purchase the cans or a feeling that the cans are unnecessary. The Jordanian government, represented by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and the Jordanian Ministry of Municipal Affairs, may also expect the Gadarenes to care for the trash pickup as it is close to or on their land. Another reason these tourists leave trash behind is there are a lack of penalties associated with and implemented for littering. In addition, littering is not something limited to heritage sites or tourist locations in Jordan. The visitors may also not be educated about or aware of the impact of trash on the environment. Littering is culturally acceptable and prevalent in all areas of the country. It may also be that tourists are encouraged to litter because they see pieces of trash laying around the site when they arrive—akin to giving a chicken a dummy egg in order to encourage laying—a piece of trash encourages tourists to produce additional trash. If the government would clean the site and surrounding areas, it would be interesting to see if this would have the opposite effect of encouraging visitors to keep the heritage site clean. Leaving trash could also be a combination of the above reasons. It was difficult to determine from the tourists themselves why they left trash, as it is inappropriate to question Jordanians and international Arab tourists why they littered due to cultural prohibitions against accusing individuals or groups of wrongdoing. International non-Arab visitors did not engage in littering based on the local resident statements.

Environmental outcomes from tourism in Gadara stretch beyond littering and scenic or visual pollution. The informants also stated that during the high season, visitors contribute to issues such as noise and increased the level of traffic congestion. It also increased the number of driving hazards in the community (figure 9). The residents are extremely dissatisfied with the tourists’ accessibility to their town. Road
infrastructure is bad and there are no guiding signs within or around Gadara. There are also no traffic signs or individuals responsible for organizing traffic. Locals added that transportation emissions from cars and buses contribute significantly to air pollution, rising temperature, and stress in Gadara (Interviews with local residents at Gadara, May 20-21 and 26, 2012; Interviews with surveyors and municipality employees at Gadara, May 26, 2012).

The heritage site of Gadara also shows evidence of vandalism. Most of Gadara's precious heritage buildings were severely vandalized, which creates a more uncomfortable environment for the visitors (figure 10). Protecting heritage sites from destruction is not just about saving heritage, it is also about making these destinations safer places that feel welcoming for guests. Unfortunately, the vandalism at Gadara was done on purpose. Although there are security cameras and a police force present on the site, these cameras and police are not being used to protect the tangible heritage at Gadara. This lack of protection follows the idea that the police and workers at the site are used, along with the security cameras, to minimize interactions between locals and visitors, and for visitor protection exclusively. Although the Jordanian education about the environment and the local heritage has grown in the last decade, ignorance seems to be a major drive behind vandalism. There is a decent portion of history, geography, and environmental education courses that educate school students about the importance of the environment and the local heritage. Teachers in schools are doing their best to be mentors for their students regarding these issues (Observation of heritage buildings and landscape at Gadara during the summer of 2012; Interviews with local residents at Gadara, May 20-21, 2012).

Gadara revealed interesting types of vandalism that were practiced by locals, officials, and visitors. A group of locals and booth owners stated that the bathroom facilities at the heritage site of Gadara close at 4:00pm but the people are allowed at the site for longer. As a result, most visitors who stay later than 4:00pm or come to visit the site after that time have nowhere else to urinate and defecate. Visitors have been urinating and defecating on the premises in the heritage buildings. Unfortunately, according to the informants, this phenomenon was and is still common (Interviews with booth owners and local residents at Gadara, May 22-23, 2012). Furthermore, some locals and some Arab visitors also scratch and write their names among other personal information as graffiti. In general, vandalizing a sacred place such as a mosque is taken seriously by the Jordanian people and within Islam: it is
culturally unacceptable and religiously forbidden. At Gadara, the mosque was extensively vandalized with graffiti.


Figure 10. Images of vandalism and graffiti inside buildings at the heritage site of Gadara. Photo by author, 2012.

Since the majority of graffiti was in Arabic, it is doubtful that this vandalism was done by international non-Arab tourists. The majority was likely done by either domestic or international Arab tourists or perhaps locals (figures 11 and 12) (Observation of heritage buildings and landscape at Gadara during the summer of 2012). Based on the seriousness of vandalizing a mosque, this may represent extreme dissatisfaction with the development of Gadara as a tourism site. Another possibility is that younger locals who have never used the mosque as a place of worship no longer view it as a sacred space, even though desecration of an inactive mosque is still considered a serious cultural and religious offense. This may represent a split in the place-identity of younger versus older villagers. Older villagers maintain connections to the site of Gadara through memory, but younger villagers may have little connection or even no connection to the heritage site, their identity being tied to the new village constructed for the removal of residents. There may also be a loss of the sense of religious taboos and prohibitions amongst the younger generations which would normally have prevented the graffiti in even an inactive mosque or holy site. If the mosque were to have remained active, this may not have happened as it would have remained a part of the community.
Another example of vandalism is that most of Gadara’s findings and artefacts were removed from the site and not returned. Very few artefacts are kept at the museum of Gadara. Some artefacts are even kept as ornamental objects at the front of some of the governmental buildings such as the sarcophagus located at Gadara municipality (figures 13 and 14). Over the years, academic institutions and researchers have destroyed Gadara’s heritage as well. None of these institutions ever and almost all of these researchers never returned any of the cultural materials, artefacts, photos, or documents they borrowed from the residents. According to the informants, when a researcher or an institution conducted research at Gadara, the residents trusted them to photocopy their documents, but they did not return these documents (Interviews with the officials of the Friends of Archaeology and Heritage Association at Gadara, May 30-31, 2012).

The confiscation process and evicting the local residents from the heritage site played a major role in the destruction of tangible heritage. The slow development and investment brought to Gadara, for example, led to destruction some of the site structures by both the climate and the treasure hunters. The visual appearance is polluted by scratching and writing on the buildings (Observation of heritage buildings and landscape at Gadara during the summer of 2012). In this regard, if any government confiscates a heritage destination and there are no plans, funds, or strategies for implementing immediate development at such locations, relocating the local residents is not necessarily the best course of action. It is crucial to integrate the
citizens of such heritage sites in the preservation of sites important and beneficial to their communities. If the Jordanian government did not force Gadarenes to leave their homes, they would have conducted regular maintenance to their houses while living there. Roof structures, courtyards grounds, stone fences, taboun ovens, and chicken coops needed constant annual maintenance.

The practical importance of the major findings of this research is the key to successful tourism at sites of cultural and natural significance becoming a well-developed restoration program that includes tangible and intangible heritage. To achieve this, it is very important to provide thoughtful, research-based recommendations for improving heritage and tourism, enabling the stakeholders to make good policy decisions. In Gadara, only officials were responsible for all decision making, policies, and actions taken for heritage preservation, interpretation, and tourism development. Gadarenes and local businesses were not engaged in decisions, actions, and programs that substantial for their community. Up until the year of 2012, the Antiquities Directorate, Tourism Directorate, and the municipality of Gadara had the same power over the heritage site of Gadara. Each one of these entities could do whatever they liked to do in the site. If the municipality, for example, decided to construct a road next to or through the heritage site, it could not be stopped. If the Tourism Directorate decided to develop something inside the site, in a way which destroyed the local architecture and the environment, it could not be stopped.
5. Conclusion

The findings of this article reveal that tourism development has serious negative environmental influences on both Gadara and its resident population. Having been negatively impacted by tourists, Gadarenes retaliate by showing hostile attitudes toward the domestic and Arab tourists, tourism development in the town, heritage restoration, and tourism agencies and officials. It was interesting to note that, surprisingly, the local residents exhibited hospitable feelings toward the international non-Arab visitors and a well-managed tourism industry. According to the informants, the international non-Arab tourists unlike domestic and Arab guests have respected Gadara’s environment and ecosystem through keeping the heritage site clean as well as not spoiling the environment. Additionally, the tension between locals and heritage and tourism officials has worsened as the latter excluded Gadarenes from Gadara. This tension resulted in vandalism and other destructive behaviours. Although the locals express no gratitude for the way tourism developed in their town, the environmental damage due to tourism was instrumental in awakening their appreciation for Gadara’s natural beauty and heritage endowment.
Although environmental outcomes of tourism on Gadarenes are both positive and negative, the undesirable and harmful consequences exceeded the positive ones. Gadarenes’ attitudes towards the environmental change brought about by tourism development did not vary according to demographic variables such as age, gender, income, marital status, and level of education. Furthermore, the results of this research suggested that the perception of the local residents regarding the environmental changes due to tourism development did not vary according to the degree of exposure to tourists through working in tourism or their location of residency. However, Gadarenes’ attitudes toward these environmental impacts vary due to factors such as seasonality, type of tourists, and cultural differences between guests and hosts. All informants interviewed did not vary in their negative opinions of the unfavourable aspects of tourism, but did differ in the degrees of positive attitudes towards international non-Arab tourists and site development. They also tended to vary opinions according to season, where the high season of tourism created more negativity within residents due to increased amounts of crowding and trash compared with the less popular times of year. Tourism has the capability of bringing both positive and negative environmental impacts for the local host populations; unfortunately for Gadarenes, the effects at the heritage site of Gadara are mostly negative.

The findings of this research can be used in application to other tourism studies, plans for heritage tourism, and policies. The relationship between tourism, heritage, and the environment can be mutually beneficial. It is almost impossible to sustain one without sustaining the others. Therefore, it is very important when developing a heritage tourism destination to not only focus on the economic feasibility, but also take into consideration other sociocultural and environmental outcomes of the pouring of large numbers of tourists into a heritage location. Rather than extensive spending on creating luxurious accommodations and restaurants for visitors, it is pivotal to distribute spending on other improvements that address issues such as cleanliness, vandalism, and management. To meet this objective, it is recommended that not only local residents, but also non-governmental organizations should be given an active role in planning and managing a touristic destination to learn about potential environmental problems and to prepare solutions for them.

References


