

# NGO and Government Collaboration in Archaeological Site Management: The Case of Petra, Jordan

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**Abstract:** The Petra National Trust (PNT) is a nongovernmental and nonprofit organization that was established in 1989. It is one of the organizations responsible for the preservation of the cultural and natural heritage of Petra. PNT does not set policy but works with the policy makers in the government of Jordan and with other nongovernmental organizations to achieve its objectives. This paper addresses the experience of Jordan in site management, using the case of Petra to portray developments in this field. It describes the situation in Petra today and cites some of the management models that the government has adopted. It concludes with a proposal for how Jordan should proceed toward management of its archaeological heritage.

Petra is located halfway between the Red Sea and the Dead Sea (fig. 1) and has been inhabited for more than two hundred thousand years. Traditionally the tribes were shepherds and farmers. Today people in the area live in modern hillside villages and Bedouin encampments. In recent years, with the arrival of tourists, they have moved closer to the archaeological site and earn a living by working on excavations and guiding tourists. One of the most spectacular sites in the Near East, Petra (fig. 2) has long attracted travelers and explorers, and archaeological investigations have been conducted in the area since the 1930s.

The site of Petra covers a protected area of 264 square kilometers and is surrounded by six main villages (fig. 3) with a total population that has grown from 2,000 in 1960 to 25,000 today. In the absence of zoning and building regulations, came

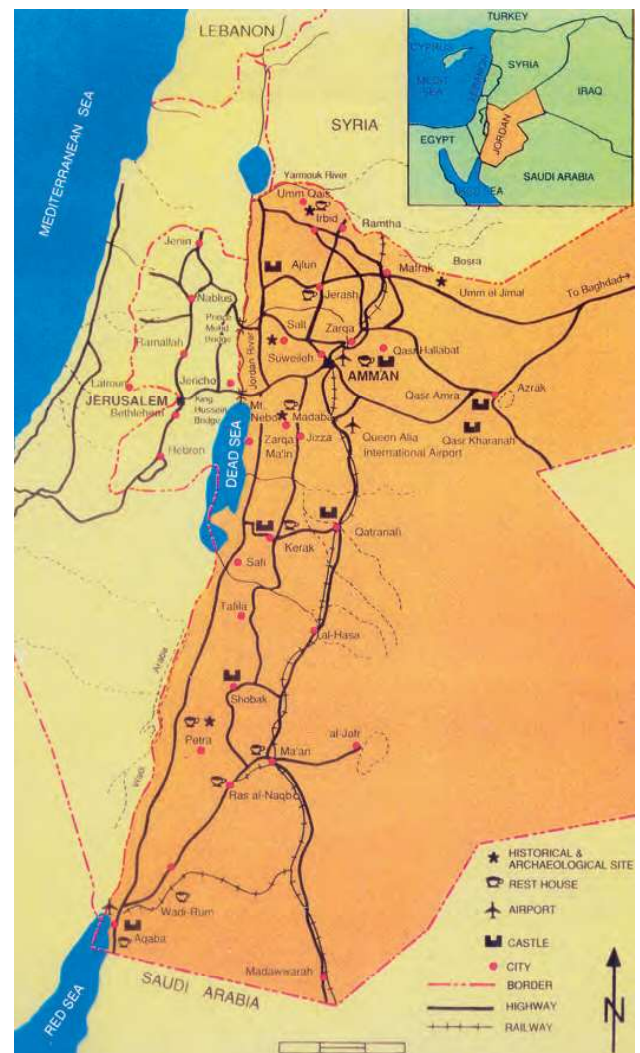
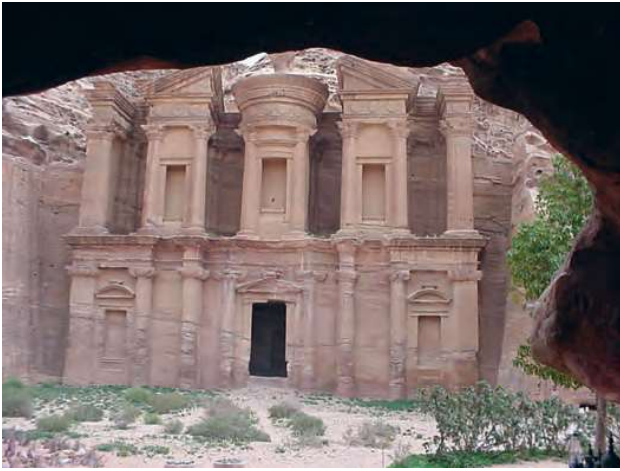


FIGURE 1 Jordan. Courtesy of Petra National Trust



**FIGURE 2** al-Deir. Courtesy of Petra National Trust

uncontrolled construction to meet the expanding requirements of the communities and to cater to tourists. Statistics issued by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities show that the number of tourists more than quadrupled between the years 1989 and 2000. The high concentration of visitors coupled with the lack of circulation plans within the site presented a threat to its integrity (fig. 4).

### Site Management

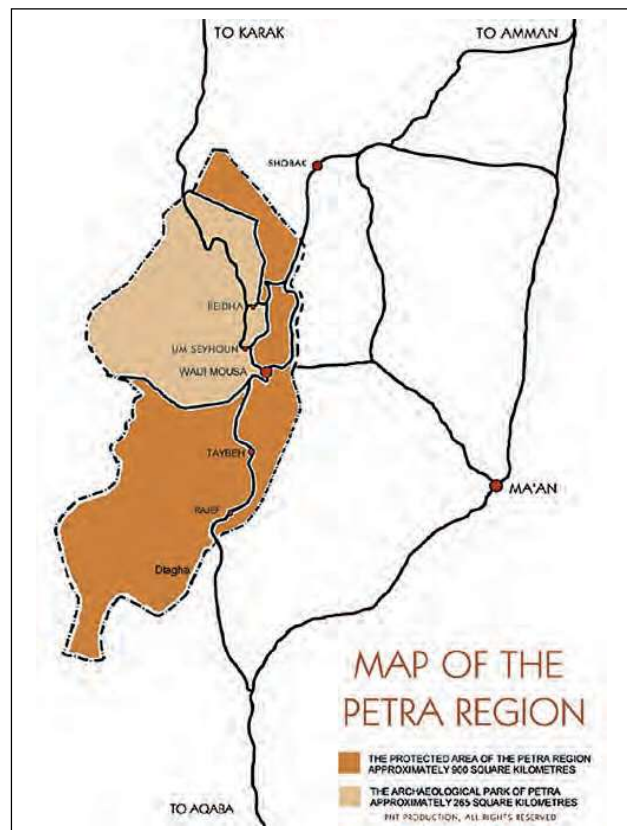
Petra Archaeological Park is managed by the Department of Antiquities, which is part of Jordan's Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. Numerous other government departments are also involved, and their responsibilities often overlap. Jordan has undertaken a number of measures to resolve the confusion in responsibilities and chain of command, as explained below. The sudden surge in numbers of visitors spurred by the peace agreement with Israel in 1994 abruptly brought to the surface the issue of site management. The Department of Antiquities, whose primary concern had been archaeological research, found itself unprepared to effectively manage Petra or other sites in Jordan.

**FIGURE 3** Petra region and protected area. Courtesy of Petra National Trust

### Stakeholders

A number of stakeholders have an interest in the region as a whole. These are

- local inhabitants
- the government, including the Department of Antiquities, the Ministry of Tourism, the Jordan Tourism Board, the Petra Regional Authority, and other ministries
- Jordanian and international archaeologists
- conservation professionals
- international institutes and aid agencies involved in research and preservation
- tour operators, tourism investors, hotel owners, and souvenir vendors
- tourists
- NGOs





**FIGURE 4** Restaurant. Courtesy of Petra National Trust

The differing and often incompatible interests and roles of these groups need to be reviewed and defined to avoid friction between them.

### Management Plans

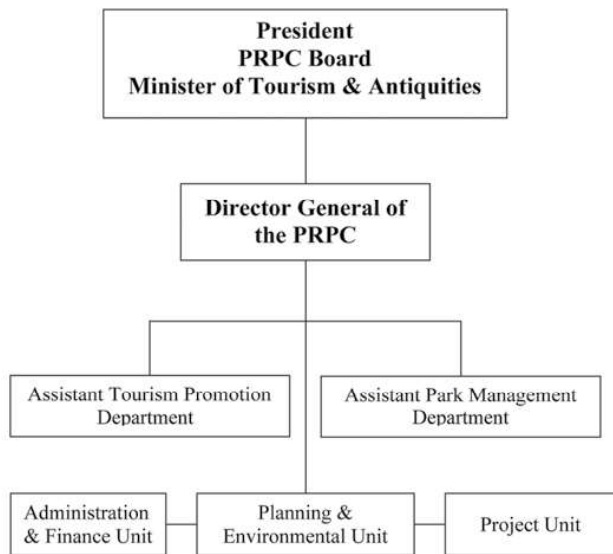
In 1985 Petra was inscribed on the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites in recognition of its unique cultural and natural heritage. In 1999 Petra was put on the World Monuments Fund's Watch List of 100 Most Endangered Sites, and that designation was renewed in 2002. Well before those dates, the government, in response to the potential impact of increasing tourism and later the increase in visitation numbers, invited international institutions, on four occasions, to prepare management plans for Petra:

- the U.S. National Park Service Master Plan for the Protection and Use of the Petra National Park, in 1968;
- the UNESCO Petra National Park Management Plan, in 1994;
- the US/ICOMOS Management Analysis and Recommendations for the Petra World Heritage Site, in 1996; and
- the U.S. National Park Service Operational Plan, in 2000.

In 1968 the U.S. National Park Service (NPS) was invited to prepare a master plan that was to be used as a guide for the use, development, interpretation, protection, and general administration of what came to be known as the Petra National Park. Many of the issues identified in this plan have now intensified. Whereas the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities is now independent, in 1968 it was a department within the Ministry of Culture, and there is no institutional recollection of the procedure that was followed by the U.S. NPS in this study. In the ensuing plans, some participation of Jordanian counterparts was included. It is clear, however, that there was no systematic participation of stakeholders in any of the stages of master plan development or thereafter in the formulation and follow-up of the recommendations they presented, and to this date this approach largely continues.

The first two studies analyzed the management structure at a time when the Ministry of Culture and later the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities managed Petra from their headquarters in Amman. The Ministry of Tourism was responsible for issuing development licenses; the Department of Antiquities was responsible for scientific research and the management of the archaeological resources. With limited staff and poor coordination, the management of the entire area was ineffective. Most of the problems then and now are a result of this circumstance. On the basis of their findings, the U.S. NPS and later UNESCO stressed the need to create a single independent governmental authority that would manage and coordinate all aspects of park management. They differed in their approach as to whom this new body would report to. The outcome was the Petra Regional Planning Council (PRPC), which was established in 1995 (fig. 5). The charter gave the council the mandate to comprehensively manage an area of 1,000 square kilometers, inclusive of the protected area, disregarding the fact that the Law of Antiquities gives the Department of Antiquities (DOA) full authority to manage all aspects of the park. Herein lies one of the fundamental problems affecting the efficient management of the park—that of the appropriate location of this body within the government.

The 1996 study conducted under the auspices of ICOMOS recommended the introduction of a separate authority for the protected area of the park, the Petra National Park Agency (PNPA), which would be dedicated solely to the management of the park. Once again the location of the PNPA within the framework of the government was disputed; its final location was a subject of intense controversy.

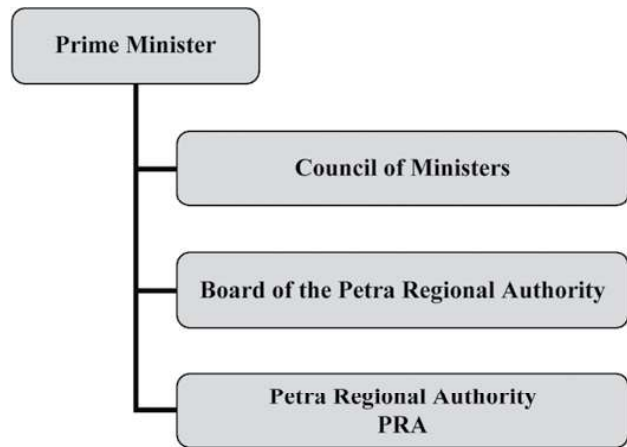


**FIGURE 5** PRPC organization chart. Courtesy of Petra National Trust

In 2001 the PRPC was replaced by the Petra Regional Authority, now reporting directly to the Prime Minister's Office rather than the Ministry of Tourism (fig. 6). The new board was composed of government officials and a few members of the local community, but it eliminated the membership of PNT. The undeclared reason was that in its efforts to protect the buffer area from overdevelopment, PNT was seen as an obstruction to progress. The new law gave the Petra Regional Authority control of the entire area; however, more important, the jurisdiction of all aspects of the management of the Petra Archaeological Park finally lay with the Department of Antiquities, thus resolving on paper at least the issue of which governmental department would be responsible for the management of the site.

The government has not officially endorsed any of these plans. Nevertheless, they have served as a reference point in many instances, for example, in the development of the institutional capacity of park staff and tourist-related facilities. The neglect of the recommendations, on the other hand, has had a negative effect on several parameters, social, environmental, economic, and visual.

The final plan that was submitted in July 2000 differs from its predecessors in that it constitutes a major step toward



**FIGURE 6** PRA organization chart. Courtesy of Petra National Trust

the establishment of comprehensive management policies, detailed operating procedures and standards, a training plan, and the recommended position of Petra Archaeological Park under the purview of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities. Regrettably, however, some very important prerequisites such as the financial and human resources essential to making the plan feasible were missing, and the practicability of any plan depends on the government's commitment to providing the necessary resources. Once again, the preparation of this plan did not include any local participation until after its submission to the government. Difficult as it may be to coordinate, local participation of key stakeholders is vital if the plan is to be identified with and implemented. To date, this plan has not been put into practice.

### The Role of NGOs in Site Management

Today we discuss archaeological and cultural sites in very specific ways. It should be emphasized that Jordan is only beginning to define how it preserves, conserves, and yet makes available the wonders of its cultural heritage. Both government and nongovernmental organizations are involved in site management and preservation of heritage, and cultural and natural heritage NGOs have existed since 1966. There are three NGOs whose activities are related to this field in Jordan, the earliest being the Royal Society for the Conservation of



Nature (RSCN), which was established in 1966; it owns and manages six natural parks successfully. PNT was established in 1989. In reality it is the only cultural NGO that has been actively involved in the preservation and protection of archaeological sites, although its mandate is restricted to Petra, and as such it is a pioneer. Over the years it has been active in two main roles, advocacy and preservation. As such, it maintains a close relationship with both the UNESCO World Heritage Centre and the World Monuments Fund. For example, it played a pivotal role in supporting the creation of a separate entity within the park to manage the site of Petra independently under the aegis of the Department of Antiquities and consequently resolved the controversy regarding which government body ultimately was to be responsible for the management of archaeological sites. In its role as a preservation organization, it has executed a number of preservation projects in the fields of hydrology (fig. 7), biodiversity (fig. 8), and local community development. In the execution of these projects, PNT partners with the government and conservation specialists in the private sector. Finally, the Friends of Archaeology was established in 1990; its main involvement has been concentrated on public awareness about the field of archaeological heritage.

### Site Management Models

Three site management models involving NGOs have been experimented with recently: in Petra, in Wadi Rum, and at the Baptism site. All three sites fall within the boundaries of semi-autonomous regions—the Petra Regional Authority, the Aqaba Special Economic Zone (ASEZA), and the Jordan Valley Authority. These models are described here briefly. In the case of Petra, unlike the other two models, and in compliance with the Law of Antiquities, the site is managed by the Department of Antiquities. The U.S. NPS Operational Plan, submitted in 2000, is yet to be implemented. Its implementation will constitute a major step toward the establishment of a comprehensive policy for safeguarding Petra and the sustainable development of its region, as well as the implementation of much-needed sound management and conservation practices. Whereas PNT has been instrumental in initiating and following up cooperation between the U.S. NPS and the government, its future role in the implementation stage is currently under consideration. Because of lack of experience in site management, the government needs the assistance of an NGO—PNT or a similar body—that can serve as facilitator



FIGURE 7 Water channels. Courtesy of Petra National Trust

and catalyst between the U.S. NPS and the government to ensure adaptation of the plan to local conditions and constraints as well as its long-term continuation.

In the case of Wadi Rum, the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature was contracted to prepare a master plan



FIGURE 8 *Cercaetus gallicus*. Courtesy of Petra National Trust

for the management of the area and to conduct training. The RSCN was successful on both counts: however, as the RSCN is specialized in the protection of natural parks and not in the preservation of cultural sites, its management plan reflected weakness in archaeological conservation. Despite its good performance, the regional authority under whose jurisdiction Wadi Rum falls preferred to manage the site itself rather than exercise the option of partnering with an NGO. It should be noted here that the initiative to contract an NGO to introduce more effective site management was promoted at the outset by the World Bank and not by the government..

The third model is the Baptism Site Commission, founded in 2002. It was established by royal decree and operates independently of the Ministry of Tourism, the Department of Antiquities, and the Jordan Valley Authority within whose boundaries it falls. While the Department of Antiquities retains responsibility for archaeological conservation, the Site Commission manages other aspects of the site.

The concept of establishing protected areas to manage cultural heritage sites in Jordan is still in its very early stages. The 1996 USAID study addressed important park policy issues by providing recommendations for a protected area policy and an integrated management system. It investigated several options but fell short of recommending a specific organizational structure. This document has not been activated, and to date there is no national policy streamlining the responsibility for the management and protection of the multitude of archaeological sites in Jordan.

## Conclusion

Site management has been a concern for at least the past thirty-four years. As the region became more accessible, policy makers understood the importance of Petra and other sites for economic advancement. Hence the number of studies conducted and models adopted. There has been consensus in the government recently for the need to explore innovative approaches to site management and to allow NGOs to participate; however, it has been inconsistent in its approach, which has been prompted more by economic factors than preservation and protection, and it has hesitated to relinquish some

responsibility to NGOs. Instead of developing a unified park policy throughout Jordan, the government selected models that have resulted in overlapping responsibilities, duplication, and the ultimate fragmentation of the role of the Department of Antiquities. There is an urgent need for the parties concerned to come together to consolidate the numerous studies and their recommendations and to reevaluate the role of the Department of Antiquities and its appropriate position within the government, as well as its role vis-à-vis the geographic regions within the country; and to assess the management models adopted and emerge with an integrated nationwide policy for the protection of archaeological sites. The integrated approach being put forward here speaks to a complementary partnership between governmental and nongovernmental organizations in the field of site management, which is the most effective way for Jordan to achieve this objective. NGOs, unlike the government, are in the unique position of being nonprofit and, therefore, not motivated by economic gain; at the same time, they are not overburdened by bureaucracy, which gives them the ability to operate effectively. For this union to succeed, both the Department of Antiquities and related NGOs need to expand their capacity and hence their effectiveness. The department furthermore is required urgently to reinforce its role and to enhance its capacity to manage sites at Petra and elsewhere.

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