

# A perspective from the field: facing the dilemma in following the ICOMOS Charter for the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites in the case of Tell Balata, Palestine

## *Una perspectiva desde el campo: enfrentando el dilema de seguir la Carta para la Interpretación y Presentación de Sitios Patrimonio Cultural en el caso de Tell Balata, Palestina*

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Recibido: 23-03-2016

Aceptado: 15-6-2016

### ABSTRACT

*Contemporary archaeologists and heritage managers are considered to have a responsibility towards their various publics and stakeholders. They are, more than ever, expected to strive for social inclusion, to take a variety of heritage values into account, to engage with the public, to consider heritage as a driver for development, to respect cultural human rights, etc. Various international conventions and charters, such as the ICOMOS 2008 Charter for the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites, aim to stimulate and assist us in our efforts to achieve these objectives. Moreover, we have numerous handbooks, guidebooks and journals at our disposal that provide us with the latest experiences and the best of practices. But what if the local situation a heritage manager or archaeologist is working in makes it very hard or almost impossible to apply the cardinal principles of one or more of these charters, conventions, codes of conduct, standards etc.? Basically, these doctrines tend to be optimistic and positivist, in a sense that they emanate the engineering of the heritage domain through top-down instruction of archaeologists or heritage managers with (practical) recommendations, but often there is a large gap between theory and practice, between the generally accepted standards and norms we are expected to follow and the situation on the ground. This dilemma will be discussed in relation to the challenges of the Tell Balata Archaeological Park project in Palestine, where it is almost impossible to comply with such professional standards and to follow the 2008 ICOMOS Charter due to the political, social, and economic situation.*

**KEY WORDS:** *Tell Balata Archaeological Park Project, Palestine, ICOMOS Charter for the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites, Local Community, Local Heritage Consumption, Tourism, Economic Benefit, Social Inclusion, Human Rights.*

### RESUMEN

*Los y las arqueólogos y gestoras de patrimonio tienen una cierta responsabilidad hacia diversos públicos y agentes en la contemporaneidad. Se espera, más que nunca, un esfuerzo en pro de la inclusión social, al considerar el patrimonio como un conductor hacia el desarrollo, al respeto de los derechos humanos, etc. Varias convenciones internacionales y cartas, como la Carta de ICOMOS 2008 para la interpretación y presentación de Sitios Patrimonio Cultural, intentan estimular y asesorarnos en nuestros esfuerzos para alcanzar estos objetivos. Además, tenemos numerosos manuales, guías y revistas a nuestra disposición que nos proporcionan las últimas experiencias y las mejores prácticas. Pero, ¿y si la situación local en la que trabaja un gestor de patrimonio o un arqueólogo hace muy difícil o casi imposible aplicar los principios básicos de una o más de estas cartas, convenciones, códigos de conducta, estándares, etc.? Básicamente, estas doctrinas tienden a ser optimistas y positivistas, en la forma en la que emana el dominio de la ingeniería del patrimonio través de las instrucciones de arriba hacia abajo ("top-down"), de profesionales de la arqueología y la gestión de patrimonio con recomendaciones prácticas. Pero muchas veces hay un gran abismo entre la teoría y la práctica, entre los estándares aceptados de forma general y las normas que se espera que sigamos y la situación en el campo. Este dilema será tratado en relación a los retos del proyecto del Parque Arqueológico Tell Balata en Palestina, donde es casi imposible cumplir con tales estándares profesionales ni seguir la carta de ICOMOS del 2008 debido a la situación política, social y económica.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *proyecto Parque Arqueológico Tell Balata, Palestina, Carta de ICOMOS 2008 para la interpretación y presentación de Sitios Patrimonio Cultural, Comunidad local, Consumo de Patrimonio Local, Turismo, Beneficio Económico, Inclusión Social, Derechos Humanos.*

**SUMMARY:** 1. Introduction. 2. Why is inclusion difficult? 3. International Tourism. 4. Economic Impact. 5. Human Rights. 6. Our Role. 7. Crowd Funding and Alternative Tourism. 8. Moving forward.

## 1. Introduction

Together with the Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MOTA-DACH) in Palestine and the UNESCO office in Ramallah, the Faculty of Archaeology of Leiden University has worked from 2010 till 2014 on an archaeological site in Palestine. This site, Tell Balata (near Nablus), and its surroundings is on the World Heritage tentative list (Taha 2009) and the aim of the project, which was funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was to preserve the site sustainably, to develop it into an archaeological site park with visitor facilities and to prepare a plan for the future management of the site and the park. Given that community inclusion in heritage-related leisure and tourism is especially in less-developed countries considered a driver of development and poverty alleviation (e.g. Timothy and Nyaupane 2009), one of the implicit objectives of the Tell-Balata Archaeological Park project was to involve and include the Palestinians, both local inhabitants and fellow citizens, but also to share the available knowledge of the site's habitation history with the larger (international) audience.

In developing the management strategy and engagement plans, we obviously aim to apply the codes of conduct we have signed through our membership of (international) associations and to comply as much as possible with professional management and engagement standards, as laid down in international conventions and charters. One of those is the ICOMOS Charter for the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites (2008), another one is the ICOMOS Declaration on Heritage as a Driver of Development (2011). We are also well aware of the modern heritage management motives and value-based approaches, and that it is regarded important “to consider the contexts of a heritage conservation project—social,

cultural, economic, geographical, administrative as seriously and as deeply as the artifact/site itself is considered” (Mason 2002: 5). But in doing so, the joint team of local and Dutch archaeologists encountered both practical and ethical dilemmas.

One of the difficulties is that Tell Balata experiences low visitation levels, of both the domestic audience and international tourists. For 2011, we estimated that only around 230 people visited monthly (**Fig. 1**), in 2013 –after a lot of promotion activities– the number had gone up to around 450. Not having serious numbers of visitors and other interested citizens implies that it seriously complicates attempts to contribute to the sustainable conservation of such sites, through promoting public understanding of, and participation in, ongoing conservation efforts, as advocated amongst others by the 2008 ICOMOS Charter. The park simply cannot generate a stable income for its maintenance from such a small number of visitors, of which a substantial part consists of local schoolchildren. Nor do such visitation levels help to bring a real economic benefit and development for the local community, while the preliminary results of a survey we conducted among the community in 2015 suggest that over a third of the people living nearby expects to be able to develop a business activity in relation to the site. In addition, it also makes it difficult or almost impossible to achieve inclusivity, to enhance the public appreciation and to encourage (local and foreign) individuals and the Palestinian communities (or other groups like pilgrims) to establish a meaningful connection to the site.

To give an example, the 2008 Charter proposed interpretation and presentation programmes are intended to facilitate the physical and intellectual access by the public to cultural heritage sites (first principle), but what if this physical access is hindered by external, political and economic factors that can hardly be



**Figure 1.** Tell Balata is worth a visit, and some religious tourists and pilgrims do, but the largest part of the international tourists does not leave Israel for a visit to the West Bank region of Palestine (Photo by M. van den Dries, Courtesy Tell Balata Archaeological Park Project).

influenced? The charter itself, nor any other heritage charter, declaration, or professional standard is very helpful in dealing with such complications. In this paper, the situation that we encountered in the West Bank region in Palestine with regard to local heritage consumption, tourism, and the economic benefits will be highlighted and considered in the context of social inclusion and human rights. Discussion on whether archaeologists, site managers, and other heritage professionals could and should do more –apart from trying to implement the principles of our charters and conventions– to try to help improve the situation in difficult countries like Palestine, will also be included in this article, as well as, what the role of the public could be.

## 2. Why is inclusion difficult?

The West Bank region is –together with the Gaza Strip– located in a ‘country’ that has not been granted full United Nations membership yet. Although the region is today recognized by three-quarters of the world’s countries to be part of the State of Palestine, this status is not

recognized by the United Nations, Israel and major Western nations, including the United States. Palestine is for a large part occupied territory. This brings along various difficulties. First of all, there are serious barriers for domestic tourism. Palestine has 4.8 million inhabitants (2016) that are potential visitors for local heritage sites, but these Palestinians are not free to move. Due to the 1995 Oslo II Accords, Palestine is divided into three administrative divisions, the so-called A, B, and C-zones. The A-zones consist of the larger Palestinian habitation centres (Soeterik 2010). They are under full (civil and military) control of the Palestinian Authorities. B-zones are under military control of Israel while civil affairs are controlled by the Palestinian Authority. Small villages usually belong to B-zones. The C-zones are under full control of Israel, they consist of more sparsely populated areas, military areas and Jewish settlements. The A-zones cover 18.2 per cent of the Palestinian territory, B-zones 21.8 per cent and the C-zones the remaining 60 per cent (Soeterik 2010: 68). However, the small A and B-zones together comprise of around 1.8 million inhabitants, the larger C-zone around 250.000 (World Bank 2010: 13).

This division has turned the West Bank into a fragmented set of social and economic islands that are cut off from one another. Between the zones there are often road blocks and check points, which cause tremendous delays for people travelling from one zone to another. Moreover, ordinary Palestinian citizens are not allowed to travel on many Israeli roads, especially not on roads in C-zones that lead to newly established Israeli settlements on the West Bank. So there are numerous deviations and a small distance trip of only some dozens of kilometres may take many hours, as the Balata team experienced.

Apart from the deviations and road blocks there is the obstacle of the separation wall that Israel has built (**Fig. 2**). It separates the West Bank from the non-occupied Israeli territory in an attempt to better protect the latter. As this wall does not run along the Israeli-Palestinian border but through the West Bank region, mostly on Palestinian territory, in an attempt to include most of the new Israeli settlements, it consequently annexes an additional ten per cent of the Palestinian land on the West Bank

that lies between the wall and the border (World Bank 2010). This ten per cent is lost for Palestinians to use for farming or pasture or for travel. Having a total length of around 700 km when it is completed, which is more than twice the length of the 320-km Green Line (the 1949 Armistice Line) between Palestine and Israel (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 2011), the wall also cuts off roads, isolating many villages and their inhabitants from the rest of the world.

These physical barriers are however not the only obstacles for people to move around. There are also legal impediments. For instance, people living at the West Bank need a permit to visit the place they consider their capital, East-Jerusalem, but these are difficult to obtain (Suleiman and Mohamed 2011: 42). For people living in Gaza the situation is even more difficult as they are not able to leave the area, except to go to Egypt. They are not allowed to travel through Israel or to use the Ben Gurion Airport. In fact, persons with a Palestinian passport (even people who live abroad and who own a second foreign ID-card) are, according



**Figure 2.** The Separation Wall that is under construction since 2003 will be a 725 km long structure that runs through the West Bank, mostly on territory occupied by Israel. It isolates lots of communities and separates tens of thousands of people from services, lands, and livelihoods (World Bank 2010, 12) and it forms a time-consuming obstacle for travel (Photo by M. van den Dries, 2011).

to the travel information given by Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2013), not allowed to travel through Ben Gurion.

Those hindrances actually keep people from moving around, as can be deduced from survey results of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. These show that in 2010 98.0 per cent of households in the Gaza Strip did not travel outside the Palestinian Territory. In the same year, only 11.4 per cent of the West Bank households (at least one member) made an out-bound trip (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics 2011: 14).

It must be stressed however, that the travel obstacles do not hinder exclusively Palestinians. Also the 7.5 million Israeli citizens (including people living in East Jerusalem, the Golan Heights, and the Israeli settlement in the West Bank region) encounter travel restrictions. They are victims of the situation too. As an example, they are not allowed to enter A-zones on the West-Bank, while there are important religious places located in these areas that they would like to visit. An exception is only made for tourist guides taking foreigners. These restrictions form another huge barrier for the domestic travel as they keep away several million potential Israeli visitors (both Arabs and others) from the heritage sites at the West Bank they consider important as well.

Besides having difficulties to move around freely, there are not many stimuli for Palestinians to travel either. The economic situation has been quite hopeless for many years, with an unemployment rate of over 75 per cent for males and nearly 80 per cent for females in 2006 (World Bank 2010: 26) and a poverty rate of 46 per cent with West Bank households (World Bank 2010: 17). Especially due to the 2000 to 2005 Second Intifada, many people lost their incomes. Thus, people first of all are trying to survive. Hence, visiting an archaeological site is not the main priority of the Palestinian community. Results of a domestic tourism survey indicate that 37.8 per cent of the West Bank households conducted domestic trips during 2010 (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics 2011), when it was relatively quiet, but this went back to 20 per cent of the households in 2012 (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics 2013). According to an earlier

survey that also included the purpose of the inbound visits, the domestic travel concerns predominantly (88.9%) family visits (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics 2006: 24). Only one per cent of all travel is for recreation and leisure purposes.

Beside the economic constraints, the political situation is not very helpful either. The clashes of 2012 and 2014 between Israel and the Palestinians living in Gaza clearly illustrate that the situation remains unstable. And also at the West Bank there are frequent agitations between the two populations, especially between the Palestinians and Jewish settlers, with the Israeli military police (United Nations General Assembly 2011b: 4-15), and with Jewish pilgrims paying nocturnal visits to holy places in Palestinian areas.

### **3. International Tourism**

Also with regard to attracting international visitors, there are lots of obstacles and challenges. First of all, Palestine suffers from a negative image. Lots of people associate the region with violence, both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, which does not stimulate tourism. It is generally acknowledged that war and conflict are major hindrances to travel and tourism. Families obviously avoid unstable areas like that, as surveys among tourists show. Few visitors are younger than 20 (11.6%) and also the age groups of 31-40 and 41-50 are underrepresented (both 14.6%) (Suleiman and Mohamed 2011: 46). Consequently, as the political situation is not expected to change considerably at short notice, the tourism industry is the least likely sector to start to flourish at short notice in Palestine (Isaac 2010a).

Palestine also suffers from the fact that it has no control over its borders and that it does not have its own airport. Visitors that want to go to the West Bank region of Palestine usually fly in via Ben Gurion airport of Tel Aviv and they can then pass the border to the West Bank in Jerusalem, or they can go to Amman (Jordan) and then cross the border via the Allenby-passing (King Hussein Bridge). In both cases, tourists have to travel through Israel. Hence, all travelling is governed by Israel, which considers

travelling *and* travellers to Palestine a safety risk. As a consequence, people travelling to Palestine are being questioned or interrogated quite severely and the military authorities can easily stop them from going there. Visitors who are allowed to enter can expect an even more thorough treatment of questioning when they want to leave the country again. This seems to be standard procedure, as the author has experienced with each visit. It is even mentioned in the travel information given by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2013) and indeed all Dutch members of the project team and the students we brought along, experienced this treatment, while many were travelling separately.

We immediately got the feeling once we arrived on Israeli territory that we were not quite being encouraged to go to the Palestinian areas. We even experienced that a friendly taxi driver suddenly changed into a grumpy man once he learned we wanted to be dropped off near the Damascus Gate in East Jerusalem and that we aimed to travel to the West Bank region. Another barrier is that it is also not very easy to travel if you are not part of an organised tour. You have to understand for instance the permit system of taxi drivers. Their permit may not allow them to take you to your destination. So, one has to be rather persistent if one wants to travel to Palestine for a holiday. One must be willing to make an effort and ready to accept obstacles and impediments. It therefore attracts mostly young people between the age of 20-30 (Suleiman and Mohamed 2011) and people who dare to ignore travel warnings (Timothy and Daher 2009: 159).

The above difficulties concern however, only tourists who are in principle allowed to enter the country. There are also millions of people, Arabs from bordering countries, who cannot visit Palestine even if they would want to do so. Israel does not permit them to travel through the country, so these people cannot visit Palestine either. This was also experienced by archaeologists from various parts of the world who wanted to attend the inter-congress on structural violence, organised by the World Archaeological Congress in Ramallah, in 2009 (<http://worldarch.org/blog/statement-on-the-wac-inter-congress-in-ramallah/>). Even if an agreement with a neighbouring country

exists, it seems to be very difficult for its citizens to get a visa (Suleiman and Mohamed 2011). On top of all other constraints, this keeps away another huge group of potential visitors. Consequently, much of the very rich tourism potential that tourism researchers and the World Bank bestow the Holy Land and the West Bank region, is not yet being utilized (e.g. Timothy and Daher 2009; Isaac 2010a, 2010b; World Bank 2014: 32).

#### 4. Economic Impact

The main reason I want to raise this issue here is not that it is a disadvantage for the management of a site like Tell Balata, nor that it brings along dilemmas for the archaeologists and heritage managers that are involved. It is in the first place, a disaster for the Palestinian community. The main consequence of the discussed practice is that they are obstructed in enjoying what they consider their heritage and that they miss out on the potential revenues and other economic and social benefits that especially tourism can bring along. The tourism industry constitutes one of the largest sectors of the global economy, with an estimated annual revenue of US\$3 trillion (UNESCO 2012: 13). It was calculated that the travel and tourism activity generated even in an economically bad year like 2009 9.4% of global GDP and it employs over 235 million people across the world (World Travel and Tourism Council 2010). However, Palestine does not get a fair share of that. In fact, the whole Middle East is a less attractive tourist destination, it only has a share of 4.8 per cent of all global tourist arrivals (Isaac 2010c: 16).

Tourism is also very important for the (archaeological) heritage sector. For many heritage sites it is the main source of revenues and as such, a driver of conservation. And even though tourism to archaeological sites and surely overcrowding may bring along major problems (like soil erosion, damage and wear of built structures, looting of artefacts, environmental exhaustion, stress for local communities, etc.) and management challenges (e.g. UNESCO 2002; Bandarin 2005; Timothy and Nyaupane 2009; Comer 2012) and may even

infringe human rights of local communities (e.g. Ekern *et al.* 2012), not having serious numbers of visitors also creates difficulties, as we experienced with the Balata project.

That the Palestinian community misses out on the economic benefits of tourism is evident when we look at some figures. In 2010, Israel had 2.8 million tourist arrivals, versus 545.000 at the West Bank and Gaza, in 2015 it was 2.9 million versus 556.000 (website World Bank 2016). In fact, tourism in Israel has grown tremendously in the last decades. It is one of its major sources of income. While 'the tourism industry contributes less than 3 per cent to the Palestinian GDP' (World Bank 2014: 30), the contribution of travel and tourism to the GDP of Israel was 6.4 per cent in 2010 (US\$12 billion) and had grown to 7 per cent in 2015 (World Travel and Tourism Council 2010, 2016) despite a downturn in the number of visitors in 2015. Although the World Travel and Tourism Council unfortunately does not offer tourist arrival data or forecasts for the Palestinian territories, it is apparent that there is a considerable interest to visit the West Bank region of Palestine, especially with pilgrims. Between the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993 and the 2000 Intifada, the whole tourism industry at the West Bank had shown a considerable growth and a subsequent rapid development of hotels and other facilities (Isaac 2010c).

This does not imply however that Israel's tourism industry is stable. On the contrary, it is highly susceptible to socio-political developments in the region and it shows large fluctuations. Especially violence and conflicts immediately influence the arrivals negatively. For example, the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics expected for 2012 the number of tourist arrivals to grow, to over 3.5 million, as tourism in Israel had hit an all-time high in the first quarter of 2012 (website Travelujah 2012), but it eventually stagnated that year at 2.7 million (Central Bureau of Statistics 2012). This probably had to do with the increased rocket firing from Gaza into southern Israel in the autumn of 2012. In 2015 another drop of 4.5 per cent in international arrivals was broadcasted due to the continued instability in the region during 2014 (website Middle East Monitor).

When the situation is quiet, there are many potential visitors among the people travelling in Israel, but less than twenty per cent of them actually visit the West Bank. And if they go, they stay just a few hours and literally spend the night again in Israel. It can be seen from a survey among visitors of Bethlehem (Suleiman and Mohamed 2011: 49) that almost forty per cent of the visitors of Bethlehem only takes a day trip. Moreover, they stay near Jerusalem. Few visit other cities at the West Bank other than Bethlehem and Jericho; only 15.7 per cent said to visit Nablus, in the Northern part (Suleiman and Mohamed 2011: 48).

Another important factor that seriously limits the economic impact of tourism for Palestine, is the policy on tourist guidance. They are predominantly accompanied by the 8.000 Israeli certified tour guides, as there are only few Palestinian guides from the West Bank that have a permit to work in Jerusalem or other parts of Israel (Alqasis 2015). Israeli law says that only Israeli residents and citizens can be certified as tour guides to work in Israel and in Israel-controlled C-zones at the West Bank. Tour operators in Israel say there is a market for Palestinian guides, but due to this policy there is a severe shortage of permits for Palestinian guides based at the West Bank.

It also does not seem to be very attractive for Israeli tour operators to work with Palestinian guides. There are reports from tour operators based in Jerusalem that were arrested during a tourist excursion because they worked with Palestinian tour guides (e.g. Abu Sarah 2011). The arrest turned out to be a mistake, because the tour guide had a permit and was doing a legal job, but if you are running a business, these are not the typical experiences with which you want to surprise your clients. It is therefore understandable when Israeli tour operators are tempted to boycott Palestinian tour guides in order to avoid police harassment.

So while actually Israel benefits most from tourists visiting the Palestinian areas at the West Bank, it also tries to keep away the tourists and to influence the Palestinian tourism industry negatively (Isaac 2010a, 2010b, 2010c; Suleiman and Mohamed 2011; Alqasis 2015). This implies that this policy is conducted even at the expense of the Israeli tourism sector.

## 5. Human Rights

Obviously, these problems have been repeatedly noticed and discussed in several publications of international organisations. For example, a World Bank report (2010) on the economic effect of Israel's control over the movement of Palestinian people, goods, and resources, concludes that the controls on movement that followed the 2000-2005 Second Intifada, ensued a massive economic decline in both the West Bank and Gaza that led to a drop in employment. The gross domestic product fell and poverty rates rose (World Bank 2010). Also, consecutive reports of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on the situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories (e.g. United Nations General Assembly 2011b, 2015) show numerous human rights violations. For instance, Bedouin communities living in Area C of the West Bank experience a systematic dispossession of their land and resources. The report urges the Israeli government to comply with the opinion of the International Court of Justice with regard to the separation wall.

Moreover, in the December 2011 report of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Israel and Palestine it was stated that Israel operates against the verdict of the United Nations International Court of Justice (International Court of Justice 2004) that "the construction of the Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and its associated regime contravene international law" (United Nations Economic and Social Council 2011, 2-3). Although it must be stressed that it is acknowledged in the report that it is not a one-sided problem and that there are various things the Palestinian Authority ought to do to improve the situation on their side, a total of thirty recommendations addressed the State of Israel in relation to its violation of the economic, social and cultural human rights as declared in the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Political rights. In fact, it is clear that things like erecting barricades and all other kinds of obstacles that hinder free movement and thus (social and economic) enjoyment of cultural heritage, conflicts with international conventions on human rights. It is in violation with at least articles 1, 13 and 27 of the Uni-

versal Declaration of Human Rights ([www.un.org](http://www.un.org)).

Clearly, the above mentioned practices are also in violence with the UN Human Rights Council Resolution of June 2011, which explicitly states that cultural rights are included within human rights and that States must promote cultural rights. This resolution was instigated by the special report Ms. Farida Shaheed, the then so-called Independent Expert in the field of cultural rights of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), presented in May 2011 on "Access to cultural heritage as a human right" to the Human Rights Council. Based on a wide consultation of stakeholders, she has come to state amongst others that "The right of access to and enjoyment of cultural heritage forms part of international human rights law [...]" (United Nations General Assembly 2011a: 20) and that "Individuals and groups, the majority and minorities, citizens and migrants, all have the right to access and enjoy cultural heritage." (United Nations General Assembly 2011a: 16). Applied to Cultural heritage, both physical and economic access and access to information should be ensured (*idem*, 16).

Despite these apparent infringements of human rights, hardly anything is undertaken by the international community to discourage the State of Israel to continue with its violation practices. So, the main question I want to raise in this article is what we as archaeologists or heritage managers can or ought to do when confronted with such a situation of social injustice and gross violation of human cultural rights. This in spite of the fact that, like the 2008 ICOMOS-Charter, many international archaeological and heritage organisations stress in their charters, conventions, and ethical codes the importance of the participation of individuals and communities in defining and stewarding cultural heritage but also in enjoying it. As due to the above mentioned reasons, it is not possible for many Palestinians and Israelis at present to have physical access to many heritage places, let alone to have economic revenue and benefit, I believe that we, as the international community, and as archaeologists, have a task here that goes beyond attempts to implement the cardinal principles of interpretation





**Figure 3.** Various measurements are being taken to improve intellectual access to the site and to attract visitors to the Tell Balata Archaeological Park (Photo by G. van der Kooij, Courtesy Tell Balata Archaeological Park Project).

and presentation such as the ICOMOS 2008 Charter proposes. Otherwise, we are only paying lip service with our archaeological ethics, our heritage management conventions, charters and standards, and with our human rights resolutions if we sit back and wait further developments. Perhaps we cannot stimulate the physical and economic access for large parts of the Palestinian population, other than by establishing a variety of visitor facilities (**Fig. 3**) which may create awareness and stimulate further learning, experience, and exploration, but we do not have to stay silent. We should at least point out this social and economic injustice to the world, repeatedly if necessary.

## 6. Our Role

How to help more concretely is however a dilemma for us archaeologists involved in the project. If we turn our heritage work into a political debate, it may complicate or hinder our activities in Balata. That is not so much of a problem for us, but it would affect the local project team too. If we are no longer able to collaborate with the locals on the job in the field, it would yield the reverse effect of what the joint team aims at with the project. We

have therefore mainly been trying to find other sources of funding, to communicate the site's values and significance to a variety of audiences, by means of a website ([www.tellbalata.com](http://www.tellbalata.com)), leaflets (in Arabic and English), an oral history booklet, a logo competition, a teachers handbook, a family day, etc., and to bring the project under the attention of colleagues and the wider public through publications and conference papers (e.g. Rhebergen and Nogaredo 2012; Van den Dries and Van der Linde 2012; Van den Dries 2014a, 2014b; Van der Kooij and Taha 2014). In addition, we have also been applying strategies of tourism marketing to promote the site (Van den Dries and Van der Linde 2014). This implies contacting tour operators and publishers of guide books, and collecting local intermediaries to distribute information to, like hotels, museums, etc., (Szalanska 2012). It is through these means that we attempted to spread the word that it is worthwhile to visit the site and that ordinary Palestinians are extremely friendly, interesting and hospitable people.

For the Dutch members of the team it felt like rowing against the strongest of streams, but we were convinced we could not stop when the Tell Balata Archaeological Park Project was officially finished and reported (Taha and Van der Kooij 2014b). So the Leiden team members decided to continue to raise awareness for the site, the community interests and the overall situation. We for instance included the heritage and community work for Tell Balata in the NEARCH project (2013-2018) that is funded by the European Commission ([www.nearch.eu](http://www.nearch.eu)) and which focuses on scenarios for community involvement. This allowed us, for instance, to invite Palestinian heritage managers for a conference visit and study tour to the Netherlands, which enabled them to present their case study and to discuss issues with international colleagues. We also worked together with the Balata site managers and colleagues from the Palestinian Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage to conduct a survey on the social and economic impact of the Balata park on the life of inhabitants of Balata village. The results will be included in international publications. Moreover, a video impression of the oral history project at Balata has been included in NEARCH's international exhibition

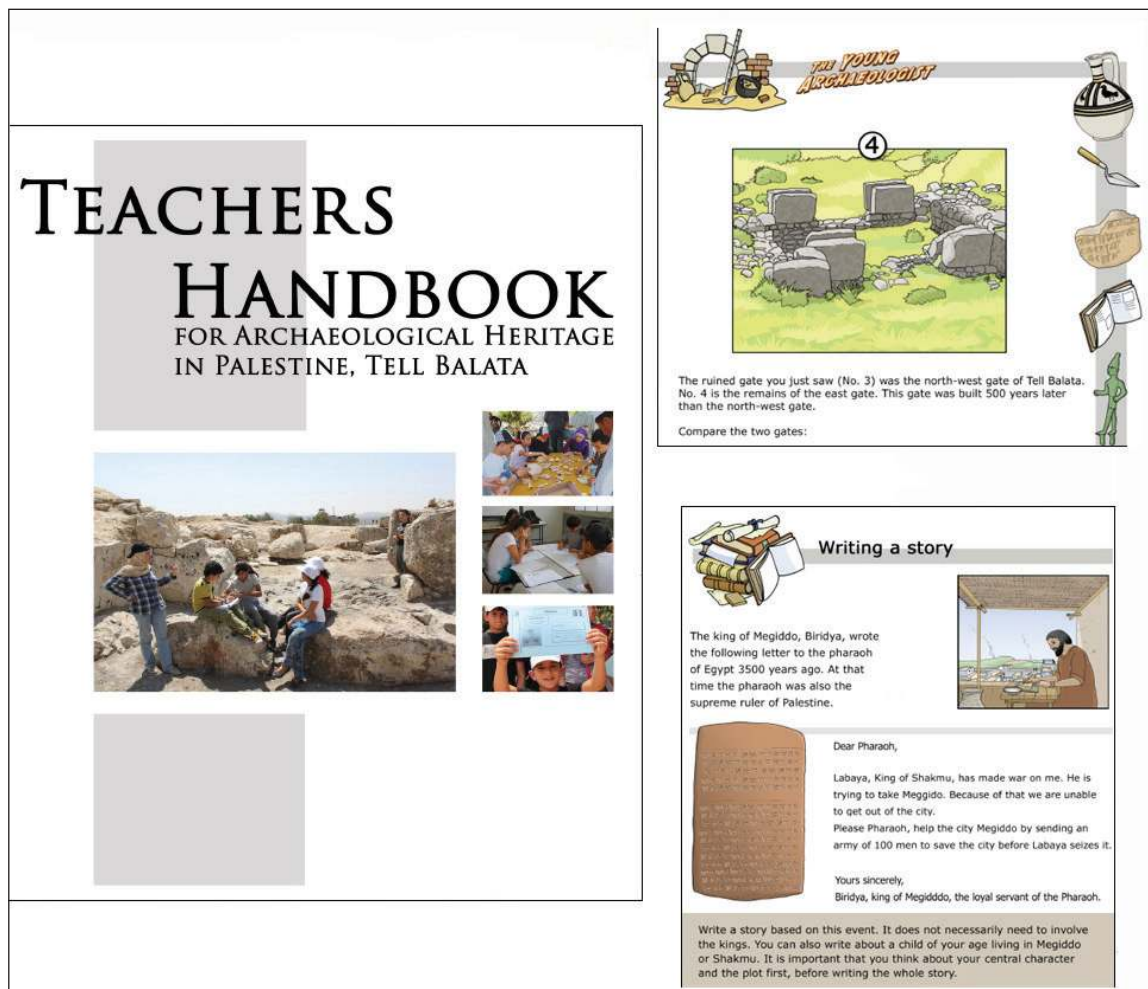
“Archaeology and me” (2016-2017) in the National Roman Museum (Rome, Italy).

### 7. Crowd Funding and Alternative Tourism

The public can be helpful too. We usually tend to think that we as individuals, as the international audience, cannot do much, if anything, about such difficult situations that are caused by severe political conflicts. But there is actually something the international public can do. The public cannot solve the conflict, but one way to help the situation for the local communities to improve, is to avoid the travel ob-

stacles on the ground and to go there through cyberspace. For that purpose the project team created a webpage, within the projects database of Common Sites ([www.commonsites.net](http://www.commonsites.net)), where people could donate a small sum, for instance the admission fee that they would normally be willing to pay to see the site, for a particular heritage activity or project.

It is through this crowd funding approach that the Palestinian-Dutch managed to get a teachers handbook published. With this book, that was inspired by a teachers handbook developed by the Institute of Archaeology of University College London for the site of Ancient Merv in Turkmenistan (Corbishley 2005),



**Figure 4.** By means of a heritage handbook for teachers at secondary schools, it is attempted to encourage the children of the West Bank region to reflect on their own perceptions of heritage in general and the Tell Balata site in particular and to establish a meaningful intellectual or emotional connection to it (Illustration: Tell Balata Archaeological Park Project).

it was aimed to inspire teachers of elementary schools to pay attention to heritage education in a more structural way than they were hitherto used to. It has been developed in cooperation with local teachers and the Ministry of Education and provides ready-made lessons, with learning objectives, ideas for educational materials, on-site assignments, tests, etc. (Taha and Van der Kooij 2014a). It is available in both Arabic and English (Fig. 4).

The phenomenon of applying crowd funding for heritage projects is still in its infancy, and archaeologists or site managers may need to learn how to apply it effectively, but it allows individuals to actually contribute positively to an otherwise hopeless situation. Our team believes that it has the potential to help make a difference for local communities. It could for instance provide support for local heritage programmes, such as the successful rehabilitations of old city centres (Assi 2012; Touma 2012) or help to initiate new ones.

Another new and potentially promising phenomenon that could be helpful in the Palestinian case, is 'alternative tourism'. It means that when we visit countries like Palestine as a tourist, we do it in a more responsible way by considering the political situation a *pull* factor instead of a *push* factor, a driver rather than a hindrance (Isaac 2010a, 2010b). Alternative tourism in Palestine and Israel consists of dual narrative tours that Israeli NGO's and some tour operators have started to offer in order to show both sides of the story. They, for instance, tell religious, political, and cultural narratives and they take tourists to visit both Israeli and Palestinian families, rabbis, imams, Christian clergy, Jewish settlers, Palestinian refugee camps and to academics and politicians of both sides. These travel agencies usually hire guides from both sides, or they may even be run by collaborating Israeli and Palestinian tour operators (see for instance Westhead 2012).

Alternative tourism consists of a tiny part of the entire industry and involves only a small group of tourists. It may also not easily expand because especially tour operators have to bear disapproval by fellow citizens as they are seen as traitors. Nonetheless, it is considered a growth industry by the tourism sector and its popularity may slowly grow. It has al-

ready generated quite some attention –even local newspapers like Haaretz give accounts of such tours (Gelfond Feldinger 2012). As it is considered a tool that can stimulate peace at micro level, by establishing relationships, collaboration and understanding between the citizens from the two nations (Isaac 2010b: 584), hopefully more international tourists will support this just by getting interested in hearing and observing the two sides of the story and exploring the West Bank region and its heritage treasures further than those trips and places that the Israeli government orchestrates.

## 8. Moving forward

With concern to the main question that I wanted to raise in this article, whether the public and archaeologists (site managers, and other heritage professionals) could do more to try to help improve the situation in difficult countries like Palestine, the answer should in my opinion be affirmative. We have shown what initiatives the public could support and what we as individual researchers have done so far, but the archaeological community could do more as well. As politicians and world leaders have shown for many decades, they are not willing or capable to change the situation for the better, and given the observation that the current separation and disparity policy of the local leaders only enlarges the social and psychological barriers between Israeli and Palestinians, we better put our hopes on additional or alternative bottom-up approaches, like the private initiatives of the collaborating tour operators, and the more responsible attitude of (international) tourists. In addition to these initiatives, to the human rights activists' endeavours and to humanitarian aid projects, archaeologists and heritage managers may also contribute to achieve that finally a powerful fist will be taken against this outrageous unethical practices that both Palestinian and Israeli citizens unabatedly have been enduring for almost a lifetime now.

I am not normally an activist, neither do I aspire to become one, but being active in heritage management in an area like Palestine's West Bank region, and being sensitive for the social, economic and political aspects of our

work and to the motives of social inclusion and local economic development, it is simply impossible to keep your eyes closed from the apparent human rights violations, both in and beyond the cultural heritage context. Another reason why especially we as outsiders ought to become more active, is that it is much more difficult for Palestinian and Israeli archaeologists to fight these injustices than it is for us. Even though they take initiatives from both sides to work together (Scham and Yahya: 2003), it is extremely difficult or impossible for them to meet and to physically join forces in the field due to the movement restrictions (Scham and Yahya 2003: 410). Moreover, archaeologists based elsewhere (in Europe and beyond) may have better access to funding opportunities which target countries like Palestine, such as to the Heritage Protection Fund of the British Council ([www.britishcouncil.org/arts/about/cultural-protection-fund-2016-2020](http://www.britishcouncil.org/arts/about/cultural-protection-fund-2016-2020)).

As archaeologists or heritage managers, we also have international conventions, charters, codes of conduct, etc. at our side. According to various scholars, heritage can be seen as a “dialogic medium for promoting discussions about social justice” (Silberman 2012: 252, based on Ablett and Dyer 2009). There is even a substantial contingency of archaeologists that is convinced that archaeology has the power to transform communities and to accomplish social change and which encourages colleagues to think of effective ways to participate in civic renewal (Little and Shackel 2007; Stottman 2010). They advocate that “an engaged archaeology involves looking beyond the discipline itself for ways in which archaeology can contribute to society” (Little 2012: 403). Moreover, the UN and other intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations have already adopted a policy for over a decade ago to anchor their activities in human rights-based approaches to planning and project implementation (Ekern *et al.* 2012).

However, unfortunately, we lack concrete and practical guidelines (with but few exceptions, see i.e. Documents on Best Practices on World Heritage 2012 and 2015). Charters like the 2008 ICOMOS one on interpretation and presentation do not consider the major gaps between the ideal and the diverging realities in

the field. In a way that is fine, because a charter like that provides a general approach and does not intend nor can it cover all possible abnormalities. It is nevertheless valid and valuable for many other situations. Its limitations do illustrate, however, that we need additional guidelines and tools, like Silberman’s proposed heuristic model for right-based heritage interpretation (Silberman 2012).

If, however, “the role that members of the local or associated communities play in a site’s interpretation is crucial to its significance in the flow of their contemporary lives” (Silberman 2012: 253), and if therefore social inclusion is such a basic and intrinsic aspect of contemporary heritage management work, should we not also try to advocate and establish that this basic principle should be met as a premise before we even start to think of presenting and interpreting? Otherwise, heritage workers active in the field may end up with unethical heritage management behaviour. Assumingly they intend to do a proper job, but they may have to decide to conduct a project knowing they cannot comply with our professional standards of, for instance, inclusion. I therefore believe that people in the field definitely need to get more tools in their toolkit to enable compliance with the professional standards. Moreover, as a profession, are we not implicitly contributing to exclusion if we accept that in individual and exceptional cases inclusion will not be feasible?

Should we therefore not strive for more than just *respecting* human rights in our work, even though various case studies show that it is already quite challenging (Silverman 2007). As nowadays UNESCO – a partner in the Tell Balata Archaeological Park Project – explicitly states that ‘people and their well-being should be at the centre of local development initiatives to achieve sustainable cities and fulfil human aspiration’ (UNESCO 2016: 132), and therefore deems it crucial to understand, respect, encourage, and accommodate the values and practices of local communities in sustainable heritage management approaches (see also Ekern *et al.* 2012), it may now be the right time to pursue a more active approach to push the reinforcement of human rights forward and to look for ways to stimulate that

violations will be countered. As the right of access to and enjoyment of cultural heritage is defined part of international human rights, cultural heritage institutions could consider adopting the UN policy of anchoring projects in human rights-based approaches. This is something that may at least be put on the agenda when forthcoming heritage management directives and doctrines are being discussed. Hitherto, quite some attention has been given in heritage declarations to the rights of Indigenous Peoples, especially in relation to World Heritage, but far less for minority groups and suppressed communities. It is time to further

broaden this scope. Moreover, human rights issues should also not just relate to World Heritage sites or those on the tentative list, but to all heritage sites, as the former two constitute only a small minority of all the sites that are valuable to people. Perhaps ICOMOS could make a significant contribution, by taking its Florence Declaration on Heritage and Landscape as *Human Values* –a declaration of principles and recommendations on the value of cultural heritage and landscapes for promoting peaceful and democratic societies (ICOMOS 2014)– one step further and turn it into a declaration on *Human Rights*.

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