

**INVESTIGATING THE MUSEUM VISITOR EXPERIENCE AT THE
ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUMS OF JERASH AND UMM QAIS**

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Abstract:

Museums today are faced with a number of challenges and currently are searching for ways to attract, retain audiences and engage with the public. In order to address these issues, researchers have called for studies to help construct a complete understanding of the visitor experience. Few studies employ methodological approaches that provide in-depth accounts of the museum experience. This article reports preliminary findings from a narrative research study that is aimed to explore sustained visitor/museum relationships. The narrative methodology adopted for this study provides novel insights into the nature of these relationships and extends our understanding of those museum experiences that build and strengthen relationships with visitors, including the affluent ones. Historically, museums have served as important sites for cultural engagement. Despite the significant role they play in society, museums today are faced with a number of challenges. Some of these challenges stem from reduced government funding, resulting in increased pressure to attract diverse audiences and a need to justify the public value of museums. Other challenges may be attributed to the rapidly changing society in which we live—changes in demographics, lifestyle, leisure time activities, as well as communication and technology. The main purpose of this research is to identify the profiles of visitors, and understand better their needs as well as the numerous ways in which they experience Jerash and Umm Qais museums in Jordan. This study showcases also the main problem of Jerash and Umm Qais museums; a revision in quality of services, a marketing plan, and an activation of the educational programs in these two museums are highly recommended.

Keywords:*Museum**Visitors**Sustainability**Jerash**Umm Qais***1. Introduction**

In recent years, museums have had to address issues of sustainability and re-examine their roles and missions. In response, many museums have adopted a strong visitor focus and are currently searching for ways to relate to their audiences and engage with the public [1,2]. Consequently, museums must seek new ways

to stay relevant, attract and retain visitors, and secure their position as important cultural institutions. In the context of these challenges, researchers have called for studies to help construct a more complete view of museum visitors' experiences. Although the field of visitor research has grown rapidly over the last few decades,

there are still significant gaps in our understanding of the museum experience [3-5]. Several factors contribute to these gaps. First, much of the existing body of visitor research employs survey research to either collect data for demographic profiles or evaluation studies to measure the effectiveness of specific exhibitions and programs. Museum visitors' studies are of great importance; Since it provides us with detailed information about the visitors and their needs [6] Varieties of methods are desirable in such research; the questionnaires (written and oral) before and after visit are the most direct simple way to obtain reproducible data about museum visitors [7]. The recent years have witnessed an increasing in the number of museums in Jordan, especially those of archaeology and history. Most of archaeological Sites in Jordan has, at least, one museum. Each Site yields archaeological objects and artifacts which are ultimately destined for display in museums [8]. The history of visitor studies in museums bears out that such studies are very significance for the museologists, since it help in the evaluation and assessment of their programs and exhibitions. [9]. The experiments by Gilman [10] and Wilttin [11], and the study by Robenson, Melton and colleagues [12] illustrate two approaches for museums visitor studies: qualitative and quantative. They can serve to illustrate and introduce a more general discussion of the possibilities for visitor research in museums [13]. The interpretation of such surveys is very useful for the decision-makers for their planning and programming for their museums [14]. The narrative research design adopted for this study provides opportunities to delve deeply into the complexities surrounding the phenomenon of visitor/museum relationships, and to gain novel insights, from the visitor's perspective, about the role museum visiting plays in individual lives. The purpose of this article is not to report on the whole study, but to illustrate the uses of narrative inquiry in visitor research through the analysis of

data generated from the outcome stastics quistionere. Jerash and umm qais mueums were selected because of their importance in tourism and archaeology, hense they are represented the most recovery Decapolis cities in Jordan. As well as Jerash is considered the biggest dicapolis city ever built outside ancient Rome, while Umm qais (Jadara) was considered as the city of philosophers and it was consedered as a recreation and healing tourist destination.

2. Methodological Study

Based on preliminary research, a review of the literature, the problem of comprehensive understanding of the visitors of Jerash and Umm Qais museum in Jordan was concluded in this research. Jerash and Umm Qais museums have been selected in this research due to their number, size, and frequency of visit in comparison with the other types of museums in Jordan. Statistics exhibit that the number of visitors and tourists have been increasing gradually in these two museums since 2011, tab. (1) [6]. A study was stopped in 2019 due to the Covid 19 pandemic. Our focus should now be on attracting diverse visitors, both locals and tourists to Jerash and Umm Qais museums. This will allow museums to interact directly with its customers, some of which can become public ambassadors of the museums leading to more referrals and increase in their customer portfolio [6]. It is imperative to increase our knowledge about the visitors and comprehend how they feel about their visits. In addition, the study seeks to examine how Jerash and Umm Qais museums in Jordan should comply with the international standards and laws for host visitors. The secondary aims are to identify the different categories of visitors of some Jerash and Umm Qais museums in Jordan, to illustrate the different assumptions about the types of visit in Jerash and Umm Qais, to find out more about who the visitors of Jerash and Umm Qais museums are, to find out what visitors think and feel about the Jerash and

Umm Qais museums and their collections, to evaluate the quality of services and facilities provided by these museums, to help staff working in Jerash and Umm Qais museums in Jordan in regards to reaching more visitors and create appropriate program participants, to help the decision makers of the Jerash and Umm Qais museums in Jordan in order to ameliorate their museums and services. This research is carried out through the following methodology:

- I) Literature review of publications related to this research proposal.
- II) Filed work; two types of survey was generated
 - a) **Questionnaires** (written and verbal) were made to assess the reactions, needs, level of satisfaction of visitors.
 - *) Lab work; documenting and classifying the questionnaires used in the field.
 - *) documenting the results in tracing the questioner. Tracing the questionnaires' results.
 - b) **Theoretical work**; after the field work and the documentation of the results is obtained, an analytical study will be undertaken. This will be divided into Data analysis: qualitative and quantitative data analysis. Comparing the results of the two types of questionnaires used in the field one-on-one, and studying the behaviors of selected museums visitors in order to render proper conclusions.

Table (1) Total numbers of visitors to the main archaeological sites of Jordan (2011-2019)

Year	Jerash	Umm-Qais
2011	322566	201236
2012	345621	205456
2013	323525	196542
2014	300215	208524
2015	340323	214588
2016	338211	217636
2017	302145	211452
2018	480322	245877
2019	521457	256821

3. Results

In view of the fact that findings of visitor studies are closely associated with the rise of museum's programs evaluation, this research provides more information about visitors of the Jerash and Umm Qais museums in Jordan with detailed statements of what individuals are able to do during their experience in an exhibition or program. The evaluated strategies of visitor studies will help manager or curators of the Jerash and Umm Qais museums of Jordan to compare our research findings with their goals and objectives as well as to enhance in services and to consider expanding their facilities. In addition, these findings might contribute to a wider study of visitors at other Jordanian museums.

3.1. Jerash museum

In 1985, the museum was moved to another building under the name "Jordan through History". Then, under the supervision of Yarmouk University and the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, it was relocated to another place, which had formerly been used as a rest house. The current [9] building does not represent any local architectural type of building, although it was once a part of an important ancient city. It lies on the eastern hill over-looking the old city forum, the modern and old Jarash making it a prominent distinguished place. The museum contains collections of pottery, numismatic and other objects displaying the different periods of settlement at Jerash archaeological site. Jarash city, fig. (1) is located about 45 km north of Amman with about 153,650 inhabitants [14]. Jarash is one of the three great classical city sites of the near east. Set in a wide, fertile valley high in the hills of Gilead, Jarash is also the best preserved of the cities of the Decapolis. Jerash archaeological museum was first established in 1962. It was located in the basement of a building near the temple of Artemis in Jerash.

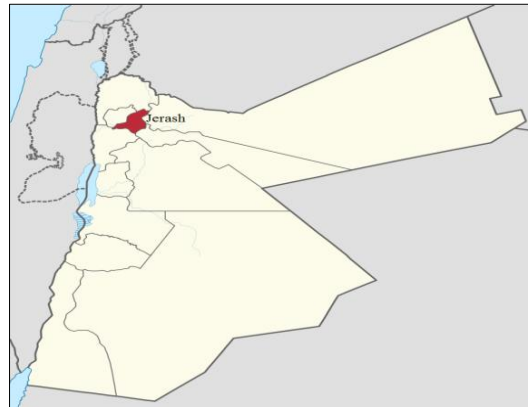


Figure (1) Shows the location of Jarash city within the map of Jordan.

Questionnaire

Country	Asia 8%	Europe 80%	USA 9%	Australia 3%		
Profession	Student 15%	Other 85%				
Gender	Male 46%	Female 54%				
Age	Under 19 (8%)	20-29 (22%)	30-39 (30%)	40-59 (35%)	60+ (5%)	
How many museums did you visit in the past 12 months?	None 3%	(1-2) 7%	(3-6) 40%	(7-12) 25%	13+ 25%	
Have you originally planned to visit the Museum today?	Yes 58%	No 42%				
Did you find what you want?	Yes 78%	No 22%				
Have you ever visited this Museum	Yes 15%	No 85%				
Which of the following prompted your visit today	Journal 0%	Brochure 6%	T. Book 48%	Pers. Reco 24%	Internet 5%	Other 17%
your purpose	Education 12%	Curiosity 66%	For fun 28%	Other 4%		
Will you encourage others to visit this place?	Yes 80%	Non 20%				
Opinions	1	2	3	4	5	
The quality of services	10%	10%	25%	30%	25%	
Enjoyment of the visit	7%	11%	20%	45%	17%	
Interactive displays and exhibitions	20%	21%	28%	18%	13%	
Displays and activities for children and schools	11%	7%	32%	28%	22%	
Educational opportunities for all age groups	4%	12%	27%	37%	20%	
Public access to the collections	5%	15%	19%	30%	31%	
The current selection/range	6%	16%	35%	31%	12%	
Do you think that this museum system will encourage the tourism	3%	3%	29%	34%	30%	
The facilities in this museum	10%	15%	25%	40%	10%	
The staff	10%	11%	20%	39%	20%	
The reception	10%	12%	8%	30%	40%	
The labels in this museum	6%	12%	22%	25%	35%	
Exhibit areas	15%	30%	35%	10%	10%	
Your General satisfaction	8%	12%	30%	30%	20%	

Results show that 75% of the museum visitors are Europeans; 49% of them are males and 51% are females., and the majority of the visitors are above 30 years old (33% are between 30-39 years old, 36% are between 40-59 years old and 7% are above 60 years old). Travels books and personal recommendations are the main two marketing tools to promote the museums. Newspaper, radio and other local tools of media have no efficient role in the museums marketing. 54% of the visitors state they visited the museum for curiosity and 32% of them for fun. 81% of them achieved their objectives and 21% did not. Visitors show a positive overall satisfaction of their visit.

3.2. Umm Qais museum

The Department of Antiquities in Jordan renovated one of the houses from the Ottoman period at the archaeological site of Umm Qais (ancient Gadara), fig. (2) in 1987 and it has been used as a museum ever since. The museum consists of two separate halls, the first of which has three showcases; One displays the pottery collection belonging to different historical eras, beginning with the Hellenistic period till the Islamic periods; Another showcase displays what has been excavated at the site of Umm Qais; The last showcase in that room displays stone and flint tools. The second hall displays statues and stone sculptures, which belong to the Roman-

Byzantine period. The museum has its own courtyard, in which basalt sarcophagi, tombstones and mosaics are exposed. Gadara is one of the Decapolis league (the "ten cities" in Greek) that first appears in the historical records shortly after the conquest of the region by the forces of Alexander the Great in 333 BC [14]. The ruins of Gadara cover the east side of a triangular plateau; whose highest point is 378 m. above m.s.l. in a bountiful environ-

ment. The surrounding splendid environment includes the perennial Yarmouk River to the north, the forested hills of the Ajloun range to the south, the fertile lands of the Irbid plateau to the east and the Jordan Valley to the west, with several therapeutic thermal mineral springs in the Yarmouk gorge. Gadara developed into a major town because of the combination of the rich.



Figure (2) Shows the location of *Umm Qais* city within the map of Jordan.

Questionnaire

Country	Asia 11%	Europe 69%	USA 10%	Australia 10%	
Profession	Student 16%	Other 84%			
Gender	Male 44%	Female 56%			
Age	Under19(2%)	20-29 (28%)	30-39 (16%)	40-59 (38%)	60+ (16%)
How many museums did you visit in the past 12 months?	None 4%	(1-2) 28%	(30-39)38%	(7-10) 22%	(11+) 16%
Have you originally planned to visit the Museum today?	Yes 82%	Non 18%			
Did you find what you want?	Yes 90%	Non 10%			
Have you ever visited this Museum	Yes 8%	Non 92%			
Which of the following prompted your visit today your purpose	Journal 0%	Brochure 2%	T. Book 68%	Pers. Reco 30%	Internet 0%
Which of the following best describes you	Education2%	Curiosity 70%	For fun 20%	Other 8%	Other0%
Will you encourage others to visit this place?	Local 7%	Day visit 42%	Study 6%	+ than 40 45%	
Opinions	Yes 92%	Non 8%			
The quality of services	<u>1</u> 6%	<u>2</u> 10%	<u>3</u> 20%	<u>4</u> 40%	<u>5</u> 24%
Enjoyment of the visit	7%	11%	33%	27%	22%
Interactive displays and exhibitions	8%	30%	32%	18%	12%
Displays and activities for children and schools	13%	25%	32%	17%	13%
Educational opportunities for all age groups	16%	26%	28%	16%	14%
Public access to the collections	12%	10%	16%	38	24
The current selection/range	10%	10%	26%	34%	18%
Do you think that this museum system will encourage the tourism	10%	10%	30%	34%	16%
The facilities in this museum	6%	14%	40%	28%	12%
The staff	4%	6%	30%	34%	26%
The reception	6%	12%	22%	36%	24%
The labels in this museum	6%	10%	32%	28%	24
Exhibit areas	4%	8%	30%	36%	22%
Your General satisfaction	5%	5%	18%	40%	32%

4. Discussion

There are some encouraging signs that visitor research is maturing into a distinct field of inquiry "application with a more clearly identifiable countenance. Results

show that 69% of the museum visitors are Europeans; 58% of them are males and 42% are females, and the majority of the visitors are above 30 years old (76%).

Travels books and personal referrals are as well the main tools to promotion the museums. Newspaper, radio and other local tools of media have no efficient role in the museums marketing. 55% of the visitors states they visited the museum for curiosity and 21% of them for fun. On the other hand, 90% of them achieved their objectives and 10% did not. Visitors show a positive overall satisfaction of their visit.

5. Conclusion

This study illustrates the rich understanding that may emerge when narrative inquiry approaches are employed to investigate questions in the field of visitor studies. The narrative methodology adopted for this study provides a deeper understanding of the museum experience and highlights the unique qualities of each visitor's engagement with museums. An important contribution narrative research makes to understanding visitors is the opportunity to place museum visitation within the broader context of people's lives. The narrative research design provides opportunities to follow threads and identify tensions. The study was a general survey of Jerash and Umm Qais museums seeking to define the different types of their visitors and to increase our knowledge about the visitors, their satisfaction rates, and objective during their visits to such museums. The study confirmed the different types of visitors and the main issue(s) of Jerash and Umm Qais museums. Jordanian archaeological museums need a new plan to improve their quality of services. The museums have to activate their facilities, and require an integrated marketing campaign. Activities and programs in archaeological site museums should be targeted at visitors of ages 20-39 years old. Such insights about visitors can facilitate experiences that better meet visitor needs in order to deepen engagement and strengthen visitor/museum relationships. Although the time requirement involved in narrative research may restrict its use in the field of visitor studies, this study's methodological approach and findings have implications for future visitor research. Museum evaluation practice might incorporate some use of narrative work to add depth, insight, and richness to standard survey methods. In addition, because of the great potential sustained visitor/museum relationships offer museums in terms of expanding their outreach and service

to the community, additional research about this important audience segment is needed and much recommended.

Endnotes

(a) This table relies on statistics gathered until year 2019 since the political situations in the Middle East have been unstable almost in the last two years. These statistics do not represent the actual or current situation of tourism in Jordan.

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