Events and Tourism Review

Student-led Initiatives for Cultural Heritage Awareness:
The Case of "Meshkat", Jordan

Waed Al Tamimi

Mohamed W. Fareed

Monther Jamhawi

University of Sharjah, UAE
Correspondence: mw.fareed@gmail.com (M. W. Fareed)

For Authors
Interested in submitting to this journal? We recommend that you review the About the Journal page for the journal's section policies, as well as the Author Guidelines. Authors need to register with the journal prior to submitting or, if already registered, can simply log in and begin the five-step process.

For Reviewers
If you are interested in serving as a peer reviewer, please register with the journal. Make sureto select that you would like to be contacted to review submissions for this journal. Also, be sure to include your reviewing interests, separated by a comma.

About Events and Tourism Review (ETR)
ETR aims to advance the delivery of events, tourism and hospitality products and services by stimulating the submission of papers from both industry and academic practitioners and researchers. For more information about ETR visit the Events and Tourism Review.

Recommended Citation
Tamimi, W. A., Fareed, M. W. & Jamhawi, M. (2023). Student-led Initiatives for Cultural Heritage Awareness: The Case of "Meshkat", Jordan. *Events and Tourism Review, 6*, 58-66.

Abstract

Jordan's rich cultural heritage, including its historical landmarks, architecture, and traditional crafts, is a source of pride for its people. However, the lack of systematic awareness and consciousness puts it at risk of being lost or forgotten. Many activities and campaigns had been conducted but they were scattered and unorganized. On the other hand, there were some student-led initiatives that played a promising try in promoting cultural heritage and in raising awareness. This study aims to explore the role of student-led initiatives in raising awareness of cultural heritage, using the case of "Meshkat", a student-based initiative conducted at the University of Jordan. The study employed a qualitative research approach, and data were collected through interviews, discussions, and observation of Meshkat's activities. The results indicate that this initiative provides an effective platform for students to engage in volunteer work and gain practical experience. Additionally, student-led initiatives offer an opportunity for collaboration between students, local communities, and experts in cultural heritage preservation. Therefore, this study recommends promoting and supporting similar initiatives in other communities.

Keywords: Heritage; Cultural Heritage Awareness; Intangible Heritage; Community Participation; Students Initiatives

[1] Meshkat is a student-led initiative initiated in 2012 at the University of Jordan by Waed Al-Tamimi when she was a student. Its primary objective was to raise awareness among the university students and the people of Jordan who has a diverse cultural heritage. The initiative's name "Meshkat" was inspired from the Nich's lamp. It is mentioned in the Holy Quran as "a lamp in a niche" (Surah An-Nur, 24:35), The Meshkat initiative used this name as means of enlightenment to encourage students to explore and discover the cultural heritage of Jordan, which is often hidden and unknown to many.

Introduction

Maintaining a community's identity and values through cultural heritage awareness is a vital aspect of preserving cultural heritage (Stankova & Vassenska, 2015). Strategies such as heritage festivals, walks, trails, awards, street plays, newspapers, and integrating heritage into education have been implemented to achieve this (Shimray, 2019). However, research has emphasized the need for community participation and education in cultural heritage preservation. Education is viewed as the primary means of transferring a society's knowledge, morals, ethics, values, principles, and beliefs (Boxtel et al, 2011). Heritage education, on the other hand, utilizes cultural artefacts, artworks, and values to facilitate learning (Shankar & Swamy, 2013). Heritage education aims to enable learners to understand history and culture and appreciate the creative endeavours, scientific knowledge, and contributions of diverse groups (Srivastava, 2015). In this context, student-led initiatives can play a crucial role in promoting cultural heritage awareness. However, there is a research gap regarding the role of such initiatives in this field. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to filling this gap by exploring the unique ways in which student-led initiatives can promote cultural heritage awareness. The research question for this study is: What is the role of Meshkat, a student-led initiative, in promoting cultural heritage awareness?

This study is significant as it has the potential to provide policymakers, practitioners, and

academics with insights into the critical role of students in promoting cultural heritage awareness. The study focuses on Meshkat, a student-led initiative at the University of Jordan, which was founded in 2012 by the students of the Faculty of Archaeology and Tourism. The initiative aimed to translate theoretical material into practical activities and involved over 70 students who collaborated to create a unique collaborative setting.

Literature Review

In accordance with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which serve as a roadmap for achieving a more sustainable future, the Meshkat initiative at the University of Jordan embodies the interconnected and interdependent nature of economic, social, and environmental challenges. It acknowledges the crucial role that Higher Education Institutions, such as the University of Jordan, play in contributing to these goals through research, education, their own operations, and community engagement (United Nations, 2019).

Within the framework of Goal 4, "Quality Education," one of the key targets is to ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills required to promote sustainable development. Meshkat aligns with this objective by fostering an environment of education for sustainable development, emphasizing the importance of knowledge, skills, and values in advancing a more sustainable future. This approach is in line with the principles of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) (Le Blanc, 2015).

The implementation of ESD principles at the University of Jordan can occur through various channels, including the formal curriculum, co-curricular and informal activities, as well as the hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum represents the subtle, implicit learning that takes place within the university environment (Winter et al., 2015; Briggs et al., 2019; Nilsson et al., 2016).

Aim and Objectives

This research aims to demonstrate effective strategies for utilizing student activities and events as a means of raising community awareness about the significance of cultural heritage. By showcasing a range of activities implemented by the Meshkat initiative, the ultimate goal is to promote cultural awareness on both tangible and intangible cultural heritage, considering cultural awareness as a preventive conservation tool. In order to achieve this aim, the following objectives were identified:

- Objective 1: To identify, classify the key activities implemented by Meshkat through thematic analysis.
- Objective 2: To identify the challenges faced by Meshkat in implementing cultural heritage awareness activities and explore strategies adopted to overcome these challenges.
- Objective 3: To explore the potential for Meshkat's cultural heritage awareness activities to be scaled up and replicated in other universities and communities within Jordan and beyond.

Research Methods

This study used a qualitative research approach to investigate the impact of Meshkat, a student-led initiative at the University of Jordan, on promoting cultural heritage awareness. Qualitative research was chosen as it provides an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon under investigation, allowing for the capture of participants' experiences and perspectives. The study's

methodology involved observing Meshkat's activities and conducting thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes in the data.

Thematic analysis was chosen as it is a useful method for analyzing qualitative data, providing a framework for identifying and categorizing patterns and themes. The data analysis process involved coding the data and grouping it into themes and sub-themes. The analysis aimed to identify Meshkat's role in promoting cultural heritage awareness, including its impact on students, the community, and cultural heritage preservation.

Qualitative research and thematic analysis were suitable for this study as they allowed for a comprehensive exploration of Meshkat's impact on cultural heritage awareness. The approach enabled the identification of key factors and themes related to the research question, providing a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. By using this method, the study was able to capture the complex and diverse perspectives and experiences of the participants, providing valuable insights into the role of Meshkat in promoting cultural heritage awareness. Overall, the study's methodology was appropriate for investigating the research question and provided meaningful results.

Results

Key Activities Implemented by Meshkat: A Thematic Analysis

The activities of Meshkat were organized thematically around seven main topics as follows:

A. Preserving archaeological sites focused on preventing encroachment and vandalism. In 2013, Meshkat organized a theatrical performance about the Umm Jimmal site in Jordan, which was attended by the director of the Department of Antiquities and other officials responsible for safeguarding Jordan's heritage. The event was open to the public and was attended by approximately 1,000 people. The main goal was to raise awareness of the importance of preserving archaeological sites. This theme emphasizes the need to safeguard Jordan's heritage for future generations.

B. Promoting Jordanian heritage on the occasion of World Heritage Day. Meshkat arranged an exhibition in 2013, which showcased and identified Jordan's archaeological sites, with a particular focus on those that are less known. The photographs on display were taken by college students during their field visits. This theme emphasizes the importance of raising awareness in promoting Jordan as a tourist destination.

C. Celebrating Jordanian History, is focused on encouraging students to research and gather information on notable local and international Historians who wrote about the history of Jordan including "Popular Proverbs of the Levant" by Bin Zaid Al Uzaizi which highlighted the intangible heritage of Jordan through spoken Arabic proverbs. This theme highlights the importance of connecting younger generations with history through research.

D. Showcasing crafts and handicrafts, is focused on displaying a variety of artisanal products for university students to explore. This theme highlights the importance of preserving traditional crafts and handicrafts and enhancing the local economy through the promotion of these products.

E. Definition of civilizations characteristics; on the occasion of Saturnalia, the ancient Roman holiday starting on December 17 and coinciding with the winter solstice, Meshkat organized an event to demonstrate how knowledge is transmitted across generations and to showcase the various aspects of civilizations, including sciences, arts, economy, agriculture, as well as

customs and traditions of ancient Rome through various activities such as a theatrical show of Roman wedding, military show, workshops, video of Roman architecture, etc.

F. Promoting shared heritage and responsibility, in 2015, Meshkat organized a workshop where a Jerusalemites Tour Guide discussed the shared heritage between Jordan and Palestine and how to promote responsibility for their preservation and promotion.

G. Tours within Jordan with local committee engagement, which involved arranging tours across Jordan's northern and southern regions for public and private school students, as well as Jordanian families. This theme emphasized the importance of experiential learning and the role of travel in promoting cultural exchange and understanding. The tours allowed participants to visit archaeological sites, museums, and other heritage landmarks and provided opportunities for them to learn about Jordan's rich cultural heritage and history firsthand. This theme highlighted the role of promoting educational and cultural tourism in fostering a deeper appreciation for Jordan's cultural heritage.

Overall, the themes of Meshkat's activities are focused on promoting cultural heritage and history, raising awareness of the importance of preserving archaeological sites, promoting cultural exchange and understanding, and fostering collaboration and cooperation between countries in the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage. These themes are important for achieving the goals of cultural preservation, education, and tourism, and emphasize the role of organizations such as Meshkat in promoting cultural heritage and history.

Figure 1. Key Activities Implemented by Meshkat: A Thematic Analysis,
Source: (Proposed by Researchers, 2023)

THEME	FOCUS	METHOD	GOAL/HIGHLIGHT
THEME (A) *Preserving archaeological sites*	Heritage Vandalism prevention	Theatrical performances	Safeguard Jordan's heritage for future generations
THEME (B) *Promoting Jordanian heritage*	Less known heritage sites (Hidden gems)	Photography Exhibition	Promoting Jordan as a tourist destination
THEME (C) *Celebrating Jordanian History*	Historians of Jordan	Academic Research	Connecting younger generations with history
THEME (D) *Crafts and handicrafts*	Local Craftsmanship	Handicraft Exhibitions/workshops	Enhancing the local economy through the promotion of Handicrafts.
THEME (E) *Characteristics of civilizations*	Roman Civilization in Jordan	Theatrical performances Open-Air Event	Showcasing the various roman influences in Jordan heritage
THEME (F) *Shared heritage and responsibility*	Shared heritage between Jordan and Palestine	Dialogue session	Sharing heritage knowledge between nations
THEME (G) *Jordan Tours*	Community Engagement	Guided Tours	Fostering a deeper appreciation for Jordan's cultural heritage

Challenges and Strategies in the Implementation and Sustainability of the Meshkat Initiative
The Meshkat initiative, aimed at promoting cultural heritage awareness, encountered several

challenges and limitations during its implementation. The primary challenge faced by the initiative was the lack of adequate financial support to cover the costs of materials and activities. Initially, the faculty members and an engineering office provided personal support for the first event. However, the initiative later received support from the Deanship of Student Affairs at the University of Jordan, which allocated funds for the implementation of its activities. Despite limited financial support, the initiative overcame this challenge by effective planning and focusing on essential issues. Instead of letting the lack of significant financial support hinder its progress, the initiative collaborated with government agencies such as the Jordanian museums of folk costumes and utilized available resources to effectively communicate its ideas.

Apart from financial challenges, the Meshkat initiative also faced the issue of a high number of student volunteers interested in participating in heritage-related activities. To address this challenge, the initiative implemented an organizational structure to manage its activities effectively. This involved listing the names of interested students and their fields, and distributing tasks through groups based on student preferences determined through a questionnaire. This approach allowed students to choose the field they were interested in, with some participating in acting, while others conducted research. To ensure effective collaboration, the initiative appointed leaders for each group when the number of students grew to over 70. Meetings were organized during university hours and between lectures.

The Meshkat initiative acknowledged the need to ensure its long-term sustainability beyond the graduation of its inaugural class. To tackle this issue, the initiative implemented a strategy, but encountered a major obstacle in maintaining productive communication and collaboration between alumni and current students. This challenge hindered the initiative's efforts to sustain its operations. As a result, Meshkat decided to shift its focus and establish connections with private schools. Additionally, the initiative organized heritage exhibitions and tours. However, despite these efforts, the success achieved outside of the university environment did not match that of the initiative's original operations. This was primarily due to the lack of a dedicated full-time team of volunteers following graduation.

Potential for Meshkat's Activities to Be Scaled Up and Replicated

Based on the themes of Meshkat's activities, there is potential for similar student-led initiatives to be scaled up and replicated in other countries or regions. By replicating the themes and activities of Meshkat, students can contribute to the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage in their own communities and beyond based on the following potentials:

A. By organizing events or campaigns to raise awareness about the importance of preserving cultural heritage and the consequences of vandalism or encroachment. They can also collaborate with local authorities to establish protection plans for archaeological sites.

B. By Promoting local heritage through exhibitions, cultural festivals, or workshops to showcase the unique cultural heritage of their region or country. They can also use social media or other digital platforms to promote cultural tourism and attract visitors.

C. By Celebrating history: Students can research and present the history of their region or country through various forms of media, such as documentaries, podcasts, or online articles. They can also organize conferences or seminars to discuss important historical events or figures.

D. By Showcasing crafts and handicrafts: Students can collaborate with local artisans to showcase their traditional crafts and handicrafts. They can also organize workshops or training programs to pass on the skills and knowledge of these crafts to younger generations.
E. By Promoting shared heritage and responsibility: Students can collaborate with students from neighbouring countries to discuss and promote the shared heritage and cultural diversity of their respective regions. They can also organize cultural exchange programs or joint initiatives to preserve and promote cultural heritage.
F. By Educational tours: With the aid of the university's administration and travel agencies, students can organize tours or field trips to archaeological sites, museums, or other cultural landmarks to provide hands-on learning experiences for themselves and other students. They can also incorporate educational activities or assignments to deepen their understanding of cultural heritage and history.

Discussion of the Outcomes/Effects

The findings underscore that student-led initiatives, such as Meshkat, offer a platform for students to engage in volunteer work, but questions arise regarding the practical value of this involvement. While these initiatives claim to promote cultural heritage awareness and preservation through collaboration among students, local communities, and heritage preservation experts, the effectiveness of such efforts remains questionable. Numerous significant challenges, such as issues related to funding, administrative support, and logistics, persistently hamper the operations of these initiatives. Meshkat's responses to these challenges, including soliciting external organizational support and establishing partnerships with local communities, raise concerns about their sustainability and autonomy.

Meshkat's approach to cultural heritage preservation and promotion, while outwardly creative, leaves room for critique. Their initiative to raise awareness about archaeological site preservation, as seen in the Umm Jimmal event, raises questions about the long-term impact of theatrical performances in safeguarding cultural heritage. Similarly, their celebration of World Heritage Day and the showcasing of archaeological sites through student photography may not have the profound impact claimed, as the link between these events and increased tourism remains speculative. Encouraging students to research and present historical works, although forward-thinking, may be an inadequate response to the deeper issues of disengagement from cultural heritage. Their promotion of traditional crafts and handicrafts, while involving students, lacks innovation by merely proposing digitization as a solution to make these skills globally accessible.

The exploration of ancient civilizations through events like Saturnalia appears as a superficial endeavor in the absence of critical assessment of the educational outcomes. Furthermore, Meshkat's focus on shared heritage and responsibility, alongside experiential heritage tours, lacks an evidence-based approach to measuring their impact, leaving room for skepticism about their real influence. Their strategies to address challenges and the proposed thematic analysis fall short of addressing the structural issues plaguing such initiatives, raising concerns about their long-term viability. The themes and their adaptability to diverse cultural contexts are inadequately substantiated, casting doubt on their effectiveness in inspiring cultural heritage preservation efforts globally. In conclusion, Meshkat's efforts in the cultural heritage preservation field present a veneer of innovation with substantial room for critical scrutiny and reassessment.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Innovative student-led initiatives like Meshkat serve as dynamic platforms for hands-on learning, offering the potential to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical engagement, particularly in the realm of cultural heritage preservation. While these endeavors are commendable, a critical evaluation reveals the need for reevaluation and innovation to secure their long-term impact and sustainability. Challenges such as financial constraints, administrative support, and logistical hurdles persist and demand proactive resolution. Meshkat's multifaceted approach to cultural heritage preservation, although laudable, warrants a deeper examination of its efficacy in driving substantive shifts in cultural attitudes and behaviors.

Recommendations for these initiatives include rigorous impact measurement, diversification of funding sources, the integration of technology, sustainability planning, community-centered approaches, advocacy for policy changes, global collaboration, and a relentless focus on research and innovation. In essence, a renewed commitment to assessment, innovation, and sustainability is essential to propel student-led initiatives like Meshkat towards more enduring and impactful contributions in the domain of cultural heritage preservation and beyond. To maintain the sustainability of student-led initiatives, institutionalizing the initiatives as official programs through the Initiatives Office at the university or the college responsible for overseeing the initiative is recommended. This approach offers a sustainable solution for the continuity of the initiative and allows future students to build on the achievements of their predecessors.

References

Boxtel, C. V., Klein, S., & Snoep, E. (2011). *Heritage education: Challenges in dealing with the past*. Netherlands Institute for Heritage, Amsterdam.

Shimray, Somipam R. and K. Ramaiah, Chennupati, "Cultural Heritage Awareness among students of Pondicherry University: avStudy" (2019). *Library Philosophy and Practice* (e-journal). 2516. https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/2516.

Shankar, B., & Swamy, C. (2013). Creating awareness for heritage conservation in the city of Mysore: Issues and policies. *International Journal of Modern Engineering Research*, 3(2), 698-703.

Srivastava, S. (2015). A study of awareness of cultural heritage among the teachers at university level. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 3(5), 36-44.

Briggs, S.J., Robinson, Z.P., Hadley, R.L. and Laycock Pedersen, R. (2019), "The importance of university, students and students' union partnerships in student-led projects: A case study", *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, Vol. 20 No. 8, pp. 1409-1427. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSHE-01-2019-0050

Nilsson, M. Griggs, D. and Visbeck, M. (2016), "Policy: map the interactions between sustainable development goals", Nature Comment, [Online], available at: www.nature.com/news/policymap-the-interactions-between-sustainable-development-goals-1.20075

United Nations (2019), "About the sustainable development goals", accessed at: www.un.org/ sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/ (accessed 27 January 2019).

Le Blanc, D. (2015), "Towards integration at last? The sustainable development goals as a network of targets", *Sustainable Development*, Vol. 23 No. 3, pp. 176-187.

Winter, J., Cotton, D., Grant, V. and Hopkinson, P. (2015), "The university as a site for
transformation around sustainability", *International Journal of Innovation and Sustainable
Development*, Vol. 9 Nos 3/4, pp. 303-320.

Stankova, M., & Vassenska, I. (2015). Raising cultural awareness of local traditions through festival
tourism. *Tourism & Management Studies*, 11(1), 120-127.