Urban heritage ‘space’ under neoliberal development: a tale of a Jordanian plaza

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What happens when urban heritage spaces within developing countries, such as Jordan, are subject to touristic development funded by international bodies, such as the World Bank? This question is explored theoretically and practically by considering a popular local plaza in the secondary Jordanian city of Jerash that has been subject to three tourism development projects funded by the World Bank. The study, which incorporates and critiques the discourse of neoliberalism within urban heritage development studies, seeks to analyse the World Bank projects and, more specifically, how they have defined, approached and produced outcomes in the Jerash plaza and its context. In so doing, the study triangulates the analysis with accounts by local respondents that identify major drawbacks in the World Bank approach, particularly its emphasis on conventional ‘readings’ of urban space that highlight universal values and histories, while neglecting and marginalising local values and understandings. The triangulation offers attentive ‘readings’ of the plaza as a place understood and experienced by a people. The challenge is to break with the neoliberal paradigm that dominates urban heritage development programmes (and their associated West–East dualisms and top-down approaches) by presenting local sociocultural and economic contexts as assets to enrich development projects, rather than obstacles to be ‘fixed’ and ‘fitted’ for tourism.

Keywords: urban heritage development; neoliberalism; local context; secondary cities; Jordan

Introduction: setting the contexts and the concepts

What happens to urban heritage space under development? What if the development is funded by international bodies, such as the World Bank, and undertaken in a developing county, such as Jordan? What if this urban heritage is an essential part of a people’s past and present and reflects different cultures and histories? These questions are explored by reflecting on a plaza (urban heritage space) in the secondary Jordanian city of Jerash, popular and widely known for its monumental Roman remains and, therefore, the focus of three different World Bank tourism development projects: the First Tourism Development Project (1976–1983); the Second Tourism Development Project (STDP) (1997–2005); and the Third Tourism Development Project (CHUTDP) (2007–2013).

The Roman remains are found largely on the west bank of a valley that runs through Jerash, while much of the modern city is situated on the east bank, having

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evolved and developed during the Ottoman governance of the region, especially after 1878 when Circassian refugees were settled in the area, primarily near the Roman ruins known as the East Baths (*hammam*) (Browning 1982, 75, 141). The plaza discussed here lies in front of the East Baths and between the prominent Hamidi and Hashemi mosques. The modern urban history of Jerash evolved around the Circassian construction of the Hamidi mosque, named after the Ottoman Sultan Abdul-Hamid II (Ha’obash 2002, 57). The mosque was built adjacent to the East Baths in 1887. A market (shown in Figure 1) was built opposite the mosque, reflecting a characteristic feature of Arab-Islamic cities in which the mosque, the market and the open space constitute a ‘coherent architectural complex’ (see also Lapidus 1973; Hakim 1986; Bianca 2002, 38). In 1936, the Hashemi mosque was built 50 metres to the west of the Hamidi mosque by residents of Jerash hailing from Damascus. These residents were known locally as *Al Showam*, which referenced their origins in *Sham*, a common way of referring to Damascus. Local documentation shows that the Hashemi mosque was opened by King Abdullah I as an acknowledgement of the Showam’s social and economic importance within Jerash. Stairs link the plaza to the street where the Hamidi mosque’s entrance is located (Figure 2). The plaza
became known as the Hashemia plaza in reference to the Hashemi mosque. A commercial strip of small shops, dated to the 1950s and owned by the Jerash municipality, defines the east edge of the plaza along with the Hamidi mosque.

Development projects conducted in developing countries and under the patronage of international bodies, such as the World Bank, reflect neoliberalism (Jessop 2002; Larner 2003; AlSayyad 2008; Gunay 2008; Springer 2013). This study uses neoliberalism as a conceptual setting to critically analyse the World Bank tourism development projects, particularly, their efforts in the Hashemia plaza. It reviews the underlying concepts of neoliberal development and its consequences for people and places, with special emphasis on the Middle East, where such development ‘continues to serve as an unquestioned sign of progress, no matter how illusory or inappropriate the underlying concept of development may be’ (Bianca 2002, 189). The result of such development is twofold. On the one hand, development projects ‘tend to disaggregate previously integrated urban and social structures, thus dissolving the contextual values which constituted the strength of the historic urban fabric’ (Bianca 2004, 71). On the other hand, they produce ‘urban restructuring and emerging forms of spatial ordering and engineering …

Figure 2. The stairs leading from the Plaza to the Hamidi mosque.
Source: Shatha Abu-Khafajah.
that lead to urban geographies of inequality and exclusion and to spatial/social displacement’ (see also Ghannam 2002, 120; Daher 2011, 277). Development projects that prioritise investment and tourism over local contexts: peoples’ social, cultural, political, economic and historical specificities, often lead to spatial and social degradation.

Interest in local contexts and their possible contributions to development projects has increased as scholars attempt to move beyond the West–East polarisation and ‘narrative of loss’ that dominate the literature of neoliberalism, and begin to focus more on peoples and places effects on development projects. Thus, the role of local contexts, cultures and peoples in localising global forces are increasingly considered in urban development projects, and viewed as a source of inspiration in projects design and as a tool for sustainable approach. AlSayyad (2001, 13) argues that ‘urbanism will continue to be an arena where one can observe the specificity of local cultures and their attempts to mediate global domination’. Similarly, Elsheshtawy (2004a) initiates a discourse to ‘[uncover] the potentially “positive” qualities of “globalisation” which is moulded by city residents’ needs and desires’ (Elsheshtawy 2004a, 21). This study argues that local contexts of tourism development can inform projects specially at the identification/evaluation stage. This will localise development projects, make them inclusive of local people’s needs and, more importantly, respect the culmination of the unique local histories, memories, meanings and uses found within the targeted urban heritage space. Accordingly, this study argues that part of heritage experts’ job would be to include local contexts in the identification/evaluation process of heritage, and to incorporate peoples’ accounts in this regard with their work, in order to prevent standarised, simple, abstract and naive designs that mark neoliberal development projects.

Incorporating the discourse of neoliberalism within the discussion of urban heritage development offers attentive ‘readings’ of both urban heritage and development projects. These readings go beyond the rhetoric of investment and tourism, as they explore the local sociocultural and economic contexts. For this study, exploring the local context of the Hashemia plaza involved conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews during the summers of 2009, 2011 and 2013 with 20 respondents from the local community. The respondents, all of different age groups, were selected from people who worked and lived near the plaza. Their accounts reflect local histories, stories and memories of the plaza. As Steinberg stresses (1996, 463), such accounts are an essential part of urban heritage that should be considered during the heritage identification/evaluation process in order to bring ‘politics of location and the social construction of space and place’ (Preuce and Meskell 2007, 216) into the development of urban heritage. The respondents’ accounts offer insight into local perceptions of the plaza and the various development projects. In these interviews, the plaza is both a spatial manifestation of local history and a backdrop for neoliberal tourism development. While the projects prioritise tourism and marginalise the local community, local accounts place the stories, memories and activities of local people at the centre of the plaza’s definition, viewing tourism as a transparent layer of peoples and practices, ‘a passing cloud’, to use an informant’s expression, ‘that cannot shape the future of the plaza, which should initiate from its past and present’. If those in charge of urban heritage policies had sought local memories and stories of Jerash and incorporated them in development projects, people might have embraced tourism as a substantial economic resource.
Neoliberalism and urban heritage development

Neoliberal development projects coincide with ‘colonial, neocolonial, and imperial processes’ (Harvey 2005, 43). Linking neoliberalism with colonialism is valid, as ‘neoliberalism positions itself as the confirmation of reason on “barbarians” who dwell “out there”, beyond the gates of “western civilization”’ (Springer 2013, 159). Angotti (2013, 16–17) identifies western hegemony and ‘the tendency of experts at the centre of global power to present their own subjective, culturally biased views of the rest of the urban world as if they were facts’. This urban orientalism directly links development projects to the top-down historical relationship between West and East. The various World Bank projects in the Arab World are increasingly viewed as a continuation of this relationship, which typically implies western economic and cultural hegemony and can therefore be identified as neocolonialism (Warren 1976, 20; Daher 2000; Meskell 2003, 151; Elsheshtawy 2004a, 6; Al Rabady, Rababeh, and Abu-Khafajah 2014, 258). In these projects, local governments ‘still take for granted the “superiority” of the foreign paradigm and neglect to question both the validity of the imported principles and the alleged obsolescence of their own traditional urban heritage’ (Bianca 2002, 189). Governments and their aligned forces of local academic, social and economic elites facilitate and legitimise implementation of these projects, and thus superficially mitigate their top-down structure and the passiveness with which they are received and implemented. Their role as facilitators prevents them from critical engagement with projects policies that could produce more appropriate, context-oriented alternatives.

In order to suit tourism, urban heritage space under neoliberal development is ‘clearly deterritorialized … highly mediatized … commercialised … spectacularized … [and] reappropriated’ (Martí’s 2006, 98–99). Harvey (2005, 33, 43) identifies neoliberalism as ‘financialization of everything’ that results in commodification, privatisation, suppression of local rights and ‘… appropriation of assets (including natural resources)’ to attract investment and tourism. Urban heritage is among these assets. Natural and cultural heritage in the Middle East is appropriated and restructured to produce ‘landscapes of neoliberalism’ that ‘reflect dominant political and ideological practices of power’ (Daher 2013, 100), and are manufactured, as in the case of Dubai’s iconic Burj Al-Arab and Palm Island, to attract international investors and tourism (Elsheshtawy 2004b; AlSayyad 2008, 157). Similarly, the underlying concept of development projects in Middle Eastern cities with long and rich historical traditions, such as Cairo and Beirut, is to imitate the modern western planning and architectural projects of wealthier, oil-rich cities with their ‘soaring glass towers, glitzy shopping malls, and various events [that] are looked at as a “true” sign of progress and modernization’ (Elsheshtawy 2004b, 193–196). Cities with temporal depth are losing their social and spatial identities, and are continuously forged to accommodate foreign investment and tourism.

Within Jordan, development projects funded by international bodies are concentrated in the capital, Amman, with specific emphasis on the city centre because of its historic, political, social and economic importance. Moreover, it features significant Roman remains, most notably a Roman theatre and odeon. These development projects approach Amman’s people and places as passive, as they ‘lie in wait for the tourism and investment that will open them to a world renewed by global market forces’ (Parker 2009, 112). The state and its local actors – the Amman municipality and the local experts involved in such projects – channel policies, plans and funds
to generate tourism-based development that, in turn, fosters an image and identity for Amman ‘that could be perceived globally’ (Beauregard and Marpillero-Colomina 2011, 68), thus enabling Amman to compete with other Middle Eastern cities for foreign investment and tourism. Since the 1968 Jordan Park project, creating a ‘favourable image in the eyes of [Amman’s] visitors’ has meant demolishing recent heritage and instead highlighting the city’s ‘antiquities’ (Jordan Park Planning Report 1968, 13). This demolition policy aimed at creating a ‘favourable image’ was continued with two later development projects of Amman’s city centre: the 1984 urban renewal project and the 2009 regeneration project. Both projects significantly restuctured the central urban space of Amman, sacrificing local heritage to celebrate the city’s classical past (i.e. the Roman remains), while also incorporating designs that were thought to be more appealing to tourists (a detailed study of these projects is found in Abu-Khafajah and Al Rabady 2013). The result reflects ‘the official approach to … [cultural heritage] in Jordan … designed to provide a physically and mentally “peaceful” experience for western tourists’ (Abu-Khafajah, Konwest, and McGill 2012, 22).

Tourism development projects and the politics of cultural heritage in Jordan

International funding bodies have been operating in Jordan since the 1980s, when the ‘direct state-to-state transfers, particularly from Arab oil countries’ stopped (Robinsons 1998, 389). The World Bank’s strong economic presence in Jordan through tourism development projects coincides with three crucial sociocultural and political developments: (1) a shift within heritage studies from monument conservation to urban heritage management (Abu-Khafajah, Konwest, and McGill 2012, 22) an interest in decentralised models for socio-political reform and sustainable urban development in historic cities (Al Rabady and Abu-Khafajah 2013; Al Rabady, Rababeh, and Abu-Khafajah 2014, 257); and (2) the signing of a peace treaty with Israel in 1994 (Robinson 1998) that resulted in the emergence of a ‘peace economy’ with tourism at its core (Ababseh 2013). Tourism development projects were inevitable.

Historically, main cities rather than secondary ones have been the object of neoliberal development projects. These projects represent an extension of western modernisation in urban planning and design that took place in most of the main cities in the developing world in the first half of the twentieth century (Skovgaard-Petersen 2001, 10). While secondary cities and rural areas were less directly influenced by modernisation, neoliberalism found its way to secondary cities in Jordan through tourism development projects, as these cities often included cultural heritage monuments and landscapes, precisely those assets that are often appropriated for tourism purposes. Modernisation might have prepared main cities for neoliberal projects, but secondary ones remained largely traditional and thus their exposure to neoliberal development projects was often sudden and confusing.

Neoliberalism and the politics of cultural heritage intersect when neoliberal projects are conducted in heritage sites. Historically, approaches to cultural heritage in the Middle East conducted before, during and after colonisation of the region celebrated the remains of the distant past, especially classical and Christian heritage sites, as they present the roots of the coloniser’s (i.e. western) civilisation (Bahrani 1998, 166; Wengrow 2006, 189, 194; Maffi 2009, 12), while sites associated with the more recent past and local realities were simply neglected or deliberately destroyed (Abu-Khafajah 2011, 191–193). Robinson and Smith (2005, 6) explain
that the celebration of Jordan’s classical past while ignoring more recent heritage is a western imposition that is ‘playing to the [tourism] market … [thus] obscuring the very essence of local and national identity’. In Jordan, this monument-oriented, aesthetic-based and historically biased approach persists as the state continues to document, preserve and market Roman, Greek and Christian antiquities (Daher 1999, 37; Maffi 2009, 27), while every effort is made to ‘distance the state from things Islamic and from the particular fragrance of danger they seem to carry’ (Addison 2004, 245–246), especially given that Islam is increasingly associated with terrorism in western media and culture. The state designs policies and fabricates landscapes to ‘make Western tourists feel at ease’ (Maffi 2002, 220).

Fabricating space for tourist consumption is an essential part of tourism development projects (Blake 2007, 242). Such commodification of space, however, is possible only if the social processes through which the space and its meanings are produced and reproduced are ignored (Prescott 2012, 108–109). Thus, space is approached as an empty container, valued for specific physical features, and visually reproduced to introduce symbols ‘which [construct] both a currency of commercial exchange and a language of social identity’ (Zukin 1995, 1, 24). This process is described by Urry (2002, 115) as objectification of space and the activities conducted in that space in order to satisfy tourists. In order to counteract this approach, development policies should take into consideration ‘focused grass-roots involvement, qualified plot-by-plot decisions and permanent feed-back’ that can mitigate the ‘simplistic top-down implementation of abstract planning schemes which are too remote from the realities on the ground’ (Bianca 2004, 71). Politics makers should start wondering about the possibilities that local contexts can bring to development projects.

Imaging and reimaging urban space (and the activities conducted in it) is at the heart of the urban heritage development projects funded by the World Bank in Jordan. The following examines how Jerash’s Hashemia plaza is imaged in the three World Bank tourism development projects. It then weighs these images against those constructed by the local community of Jerash and thereby, offers attentive ‘readings’ for the plaza.

**The plaza as defined by the development projects: a monument within a fragmented space**

The First Tourism Development Project in Jordan (1976–1983) focused on improving tourism infrastructure in the two main monumental archaeological sites in Jordan: Jerash and Petra. The project relied on earlier plans (dated to 1968) prepared by the United States National Park Service to generate ‘integrated investment’ by protecting and conserving monumental archaeological sites and improving tourism infrastructure that would result in increased visitor numbers and improved visit quality (World Bank 1976, 5). In Jerash, although the project was mainly implemented in the monumental archaeological part of the city (the west bank), in the east bank, only the East Baths were conserved. In accordance with the politics of cultural heritage in Jordan, the local heritage, represented by the Hamidi and Hashemi mosques, was completely ignored.

In accordance with Principle I for the ICOMOS Charter for the Conservation of Historic Towns and Urban Areas, the STDP (1997–2005) was designed to develop a sustainable tourism infrastructure that would make ‘the conservation of historic
towns and urban areas … an integral part of coherent policies of economic and social development’ (ICOMOS 1987). Thus, while the plaza was at the heart of the STDP, it was defined as ‘the urban space around the Roman Baths’ (World Bank 2005a, 22), thereby defining the plaza in reference to the classical past, as accords with the politics of cultural heritage in Jordan that is based on celebrating the classical past and excluding other pasts including the most recent and relevant to contemporary context, basically the Islamic. Not surprisingly, the mosques are absent from the plaza’s definition, as are other more recent and contemporary local features. Within tourism development projects, Mourad (2008, 17) sees the marginalisation of local peoples, histories and contexts as a contemporary extension of colonial and postcolonial cultural heritage policies in the Middle East, where projects are geared towards an end product that targets foreign investment and tourism.

The Third Tourism Development Project (2007–2013), also known as the Cultural Heritage Tourism and Urban Development Project (CHTUDP), defines the plaza as a number of fragmented ‘zones’ (World Bank 2007), a pragmatic definition that ignores the sociocultural relations imbedded within urban space, and the continuous production and reproduction of those relations through action and interaction. The use of the word ‘zones’ depersonalises space and thereby enables the space to be reappropriated for neoliberal development. Even time was reappropriated, as the plaza was categorised in reference to the Roman past, with the word ‘post-Roman’ (World Bank 2005c, 6) being used to describe the old market that was built during the late Ottoman period. Again, the mosques are not mentioned.

Furthermore, the CHTUDP defines Jerash as a fragmented urban space, and that fragmentation is echoed in the city’s fragmented community (World Bank 2005b, 14). In describing the local community, the World Bank Report (2005b, 14) explains how Jerash is composed of different communities and has, since its modern establishment, frequently been disturbed by immigrants, thus producing a disintegrated urban fabric, decayed public spaces and disconnected realities. This explanation hardly acknowledges the historical and sociocultural factors that have enabled diverse groups to live together and overcome sociocultural differences and economic challenges. In the first place, Arab nationality, language, religion and shared traditions are among the factors that have shaped the modern history of the plaza, and Jerash more generally. All (or at least some) of these factors enabled Jerash to accommodate the Circassian and the Showam, among others, in the beginning of the twentieth century, and they have continued to influence the community in recent years. But the World Bank report viewed this diversity as fragmentation, and thus identified one of its major challenges as restoring harmony to Jerash’s ‘chaotic’ social and spatial system. The CHTUDP, to use Springer’s view of neoliberalism (2013, 149), was thus ‘positioned as a “civilising” enterprise in the face of any purported “savagery”’.

The plaza as defined by the local community: Local contexts reflection
As every urban space has its own qualities and contexts that differentiate it from other spaces and make it the unique place of a particular community, approaches to urban development should differ accordingly. Identification/evaluation of such space is difficult, precisely ‘because of its novelty and because of the real and formal complexity that it connotes’ (Lefebvre 1991, 32). In conventional development projects, this complexity is ignored, as they often seek to impose a limited set of developmental models on traditional contexts, thus producing standardised places (Angotti 2013,
that ‘deprive the inhabitants of a consistent, meaningful architectural setting and interrupt the intimate interaction between man and his built environment – the very source of cultural identity’ (Bianca 2002, 189). Counteracting standardisation in development projects requires alternative ‘readings’ of urban heritage and ultimately, rethinking of the dominant development project paradigm. It is possible to ‘read’ urban heritage differently when heritage space is viewed as a ‘social product’ and a ‘practised’ space – a place. This requires consideration of local contexts in the identification/evaluation process, and acknowledgement that the sociocultural context is an asset that can enhance, rather than threaten, urban development.

For this study, accounts from respondents provided insights into local histories of the plaza, as well as the diverse uses and meanings associated with the plaza in light of its sociocultural and economic contexts within Jerash. One of the main insights provided by the respondents was that the plaza and its setting are viewed much more broadly than just the area of the East Baths and the mosques. The plaza is located on the eastern extension of the Roman decumanus, which is linked to the city’s west bank by a bridge (known as the south bridge) that spans the valley (Figure 3). The plaza, therefore, provides a balance to the agora found among the Roman ruins where the cardo and the decumanus intersect on the west bank. In addition, adjacent to the agora are the ruins of an eighth-century Umayyad congregational mosque, discovered in 2002 (Walmsley 2003a, 2003b; Damgaard 2011) and thought to be the first congregational mosque in the region. Thus, the plaza’s setting is seen to include and incorporate the broader range of Roman, Islamic and local buildings, and spaces. Indeed, seven of the respondent accounts perceived the plaza as being part of a wider setting that includes the agora, the decumanus and the bridge (Figure 4). One account, for example, reads,

this road [decumanus] exhibit[s] a series of mosques … a ruined one in there [in reference to the Ummayad mosque] where the columns stand in a circle [the agora] … and two in here [in reference to the Hamidi and the Hashemi mosques] … I wish you and those who study Jerash could tell us something about that.

To our knowledge, no previous study has taken into consideration the local connection made between the three mosques (perhaps of general religious interest) and the adjacent public spaces of the agora, the decumanus and the plaza. Indeed, local
communities ‘can offer valuable insights on a variety of issues … and other activi-
ties that derive from their special interests (e.g. singing, charity, gardening, even
religion)’ (Brezovec and Bruce 2009, 109–110).

In addition, all respondent accounts mentioned that the uses and meanings asso-
ciated with the plaza were an extension of its surrounding buildings, namely the
mosques and the East Baths. Historically, urban space has been essential in the
development and planning of Arab-Islamic cities. Such space is usually ‘detached
from the main arteries in order to differentiate it according to specific uses and to
integrate it into corresponding public buildings, such as mosques, madrasas and car-
avanserais’ (Bianca 2002, 39). Mosques have always been characterised by their
openness, with open spaces either incorporated within their design (i.e. inner court-
yards), or preceded mosques (i.e. plaza). This openness has generally provided a
context for socio-economic, political and non-ritual activities that are often carried
out alongside or in addition to regular prayer activities (Rasdi 1998, 218; Bianca
2002, 38). The Jerash plaza serves as an open space for the Hamidi and Hashemi
mosques and, as such, was a traditional focal point for religious as well as sociocul-
tural and economic activities. Unfortunately, some activities no longer take place in
the plaza, meaning respondent accounts and memories are now the only documenta-
tion we have for their existence. The respondents, who recounted either their own
memories of the plaza or stories they had heard from elders, associated it with a
number of different uses, many of which were accompanied by different names and
meanings reflecting Jerash’s local history. One of the more recent uses was shaped
by a local market and bus terminal that served Jerash and nearby villages from the
1960s until 1999 when the bus terminal was relocated as part of the STDP. Figure 5,
photographed in January 1994, shows the plaza (with the East Baths in the back-
ground) as a busy sociocultural and economic space.

The bus terminal and local market were a continuation of similar activities that
had been carried out in the plaza since the early twentieth century. The plaza was
known as Khan Haroun; according to one of the respondent accounts, ‘from 1910
until the 1960s Haroon, who was a Christian merchant, used the hammam as a park-
ing for equines, which were not allowed inside the old market’. This account shows
not only how the plaza was used, but also how different activities carried out there
(i.e. transportation and shopping) were organised and related. Moreover, it shows
that the city’s Roman heritage, the hammam, was a ‘practiced place’ (de Certeau
1984, 117) invested to accommodate daily life in the plaza. The plaza was also known as al-baboreih (in reference to babor, a portable kerosene stove). As every house had at least one babor for heating and cooking, there was a booming business in fixing babor stoves. This repair business often took place in the plaza where, according to one informant, ‘babor is fixed in summer … [while] in winter the repairers took refuge in the hammam’. The name al-baboreih, therefore, indicates a community attachment to the place of the plaza through the activities that were carried out there. Indeed, naming spaces ‘correspond[s] to a specific use of that space, and hence to a spatial practice that they express and constitute’ (Lefebvre 1991, 16). Another account associates the mosques and Friday prayers in the plaza with ‘merchants selling scents and rugs … in the 30s or 40s … The smell and the colours were overwhelming’. This memory of smell and colour is shared by 9 of the 20 respondents. In this sense, the plaza represents an urban space with ‘condensed human imagination, in both material and spiritual form, where narratives and well-structured syntax can be found’ (Hatt-Olsen 2012, 100).

Thus, the plaza is not only a gathering space; it is ‘a means for promotion of human contact’ (Herzog 2006, 8) and a locus of interaction between peoples and buildings. This interaction was created as people recognised the possibilities inherent in the plaza, and made use of them for their own purposes, a situation described by Frank and Stevens (2007, 2) as creation of a ‘loose space’. This interaction changes a space to a place ‘in which we can physically and mentally stop and where we experience stories being created’ (Hatt-Olsen 2012, 104). The physical and mental engagement, and the stories that result from it, should be an essential part of the identification/evaluation process that precedes the development of urban space.

The plaza as approached by the development projects: tourism emphasis

The ways the tourism development projects defined the plaza and its peoples were reflected in the various urban development interventions. The following examines the main drawbacks that resulted from the projects.
The bus terminal scandal

The STDP’s plan to upgrade the plaza included removing the bus terminal and local market mentioned above, since ‘[a] new bus terminal with a commercial complex was constructed outside the old city core to ease traffic’ (World Bank 2005a, 22). This resulted in what is referred to as ‘the bus terminal scandal’. The bus terminal was relocated outside the core of modern Jerash and began operating in 1999. Ironically, the subsequent CHUTDP described the new bus terminal as being ‘unusable especially by women, who, preferring not to be in such a secluded area, get on and off the buses in the main streets, by doing so just adding to the traffic jam’ (World Bank 2005b, 11). Therefore, clearing the bus terminal and the local market was hardly studied from a sociocultural and economic point of view, and the new location was decided upon without considering the local context. One cannot help wondering about the amount of money, time and effort that could have been saved had local community been consulted in the first place. However, the new bus terminal did create clear visual and physical access to the plaza’s Roman remains, the East Baths (Figure 6), regardless of the adverse sociocultural and economic effects on people’s lives.

Accordingly, the plaza lost major components of its spatial character that had previously made it a ‘practised place’. One respondent described the plaza as ‘empty … vacant … [and] impotent space’, while others used terms such as ‘hollow’, ‘lifeless’, ‘disturbing openness’ and ‘not ours’ to describe the changes that had taken place. Indeed, ‘When a town loses this quality of being an agora, a market and meeting place, it becomes sterile, and its society becomes de-urbanised rather than over-urbanised’ (Gazzola 1957, 57–58). The STDP not only neutralised the plaza but also the local community’s relationship with the space. For the locals, they felt as if they had become the plaza’s secondary users, despite the fact that they had for so long been its main and only users. Instead, the new primary user was intended to be the tourist, for whom the development projects were designed. Ironically, the

Figure 6. The Plaza as it appeared in 2004 after the STDP implementation. Source: Shatha Abu-Khafajah.
new primary user hardly showed up to the plaza, as tourism in Jerash remained restricted to the Roman ruins on the west bank. Ultimately, the prospect (or hope) of tourism came to dominate the space, while the local community’s relationship with the plaza suffered and deteriorated. Lawless (1980, 205) captures the alienation felt by locals in the wake of development projects:

In most conservation schemes in the Middle East attention has focused almost exclusively on the most profitable projects, often geared to an expanding tourist market, while the poor inhabitants of the historic centers have either been totally neglected or in some cases forced out to make way for new tourist developments or rehabilitation schemes which benefit higher income groups.

Inventing new ‘elite’: the young and the women

In their documentation of the local and national heritage discourses in Jordan, Jacobs and Porter (2009, 86) state that Jordan ‘incorporates the local antiquity sites into a discourse aimed at national elites and tourists’. National elites are basically people with economic capital and, consequently, sociocultural and political influence. These elites are usually established in Amman, with far fewer living in secondary cities such as Jerash. We argue that the neoliberal development projects in Jerash are inventing new elites by specifically targeting and elevating two groups: women and the young. As development projects are ‘conspicuous for cleanliness and newness, with no space for untidy litter, the old, the shabby or the worn’ (Urry 2002, 134–135; emphasis added), the CHTUDP aimed to reinvent the plaza by assigning it a ‘new “social and economic mission”’ (World Bank 2005b, 14; emphasis added). This ‘newness’ aims to address the specific economic and social needs of women and the young. Given that, the young ‘in the current situation, [are] locked into the bipolarity between the space of the family and the space of the education’, the reinvented plaza was intended to provide a space for ‘the communication and the leisure’ (World Bank 2005b, 14). While communication and leisure are described as standardised activities for the newly designed urban space, the plaza’s local identity, derived from its history and the two adjacent mosques, is neglected in favour of a ‘new social and economic mission’.

Likewise, local culture and practice related to gender separation were viewed by the World Bank as practices that would adversely affect tourism (World Bank 2005b, 11), rather than being sociocultural constructs characteristic of Jerash’s urban space and Arab-Islamic cities in general (see Escher 2001, 164–165). The World Bank report summarised the issue as follows: ‘Due to religious practices, currently interaction between men and women is minimal and segregation of activities is evident … [Accordingly] [i]nteraction of residents with the tourists is … affected’ (World Bank 2005b, 11). Furthermore, in a community with ‘limited skill sets’ (World Bank 2005b, 12), the CHTUDP praises women for possessing skills needed in the tourism industry, i.e. traditional handicrafts (World Bank 2005b, 12). Therefore, the CHTUDP elevates Jerash’s women by presenting them as having the capacity to be part of the tourism industry, unlike others who have ‘limited skill sets’. By targeting the young and women, the project is ‘othering’ the rest of the local community and, at the same time, creating an audience of new elites.
The tourist and the ‘other’: the uneducated, the conservative and the immigrant

The CHTUDP acknowledges the importance of working with local communities to gain insights into ‘the role of urban space in social interaction and cohesion’ and to make tourism development projects socially and culturally acceptable (World Bank 2007, 149). For this participatory approach to work, at least in theory, local communities need to be empowered (Arnstein 1969). The local community of Jerash, as described by the World Bank (2005b, 12), has ‘low education level … little knowledge of [the] city’s culture and history … limited skill sets … [lack of] ability to converse in a foreign language … [and is] not inclined towards tourism’. In addition,

[m]ost of the municipalities [where the CHUTDP was conducted, including Jerash, were] … neither well organised nor adequately staffed. Further, they lack[ed] adequate planning and management systems and tools … [and] had no clearly defined urban strategy. (World Bank 2006, 3)

This description indicates peoples and a municipality that are disempowered and hardly capable of influential engagement with the development project, especially with the presence of influential tourism stakeholders. Such stakeholders always exert pressure on less-powerful interests in order to facilitate the implementation of projects that serve their economic goals (Brezovec and Bruce 2009, 108). Moreover, this description reflects an elitist perspective that echoes earlier colonial perceptions of local peoples as barbaric and therefore in need of guidance and supervision (Dirks 2004; Mourad 2008, 54–55; Angotti 2013, 156). The perspective in turn led to lack of communication between the people and municipality of Jerash on the one hand, and the project’s main facilitators (the World Bank and the Jordan Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities) on the other. This lack of communication led directly to ‘the bus terminal scandal’.

Likewise, the World Bank (2005b, 11), indirectly and covertly, links terrorism (and its adverse effect on tourism) with the religious attitudes of local peoples, who are then viewed as a threat to the public space. It states that ‘the convergence of people from adjacent villages to live in the city [introduces] more religious attitudes and conservatism’ (World Bank 2005b, 11; emphasis added). However, as one respondent states, ‘Jerash is the villages around it’, meaning the surrounding villages are an essential sociocultural and economic component of the city. In failing to recognise this fact, which is operative throughout Jordan’s primary and secondary cities, the World Bank inherently misunderstands the demographic fabric of the country in which it operates.

Religious attitudes and conservatism have never affected tourism in the ancient part of Jerash. However, in dragging tourism into the urban areas of modern Jerash, the CHTUDP worries that the increasing ‘religious attitudes and conservatism’ (World Bank 2005b, 11) will present a challenge to creating a welcoming environment for tourists. Manifest within this concern is an understanding of tourism as a modern idea that contradicts religion, particularly Islam. The project thus seeks to provide a neutral space that is tourist friendly. One respondent sums up the project this way:

Tourists got bored of seeing ruins, they want to see ruins with us [people of Jerash], so they [the government] decided to move them to here and give them a tour in front of the hammam. Tourists want also to see people in the market, buying and selling, so they made the walkways broader and clean for them, and thus made our streets.
narrower and more congested. They emptied the old market from our shop and put antique shops for them [the tourists] to shop in.

For all the respondents, the ongoing developments within the plaza and its surroundings are epitomised by two issues: narrower streets and higher traffic congestion. According to the respondents, the anticipated economic benefit from tourism ‘has not arrived’, ‘most likely won’t happen’ and even if it happens, ‘its revenue will be limited to [a] few antique shops’. One account, which echoes much of what is stated by both respondents and official news reports, says: ‘[N]arrowing the streets in order to provide wider walkways to go with the anticipated floods of tourists to hit Jerash [is what CHUTDP about]. Now the roads are always congested, and if there is an emergency … the ambulance will arrive … too late’. Another account, given by one of Jerash’s municipal engineers, reads: ‘when we make broad walkways for tourists, the roads get narrower, and this can be solved by creating multfloor parking that was not implemented’. Interestingly, the idea of a multi-floor parking lot was what had initially ‘made some people optimistic about the project when it was first issued. Now the project is over and the parking was cancelled from the project … we gained nothing’. Indeed, ‘When tourism development starts to interfere with the daily activities of residents, support for tourism changes’ (Brezovec and Bruce 2009, 108).

Conclusion: Urban heritage beyond neoliberal tourism projects

The monument-oriented, aesthetic-based, historically biased approach to conservation that marked the beginning of interest in archaeological sites has persisted in urban heritage development projects. The marginalisation of local contexts, including peoples, places and histories, has accompanied monument conservation and urban heritage development alike. However, the adverse effects of this marginalisation are intensified in urban heritage development projects, where space must be identified/evaluated as a ‘social product’; otherwise, development projects result in interventions that neutralise, fragment and reproduce space as a ‘tourist product’. While urban development projects promise prosperity and development, in reality, they often result in the destruction of local culture and way of life. As they deliver unity and organisation, they eliminate variety and locality, the very components that give spirit to a place. Such projects create spaces with ‘wandering existence’, to use Foucault’s words (1964, 8), spaces that are expelled of public life and introduced to another reality, tourism, yet still cling to the local context of people’s daily lives.

These projects represent neoliberalism, as they callously separate ‘public and private space … destroying the traditional integration of everyday life and replacing it with an urban territory of fragmented private enclaves’ (Angotti 2013, 60). The challenge is to break from the neoliberal paradigm that continues to dominate approaches to heritage everywhere. The alternative approach should consider tourism as a means for sociocultural and economic development rather than an aim unto itself. In this sense, local sociocultural and economic contexts are assets rather than hindrances to urban heritage space development. Door-to-door interaction with lay peoples whose urban heritage is under development can be the most direct and honest way to have in-depth insight into this heritage as a peoples’ place rather than a project site. Rethinking development in relation to local contexts is essential not only in development projects conducted in developing countries but also in western
countries where urban development projects, as Zukin (1995, 53) states in her description of Disney World, ‘[abstract] both the technical and architectural elements of a place and the emotions that places evoke’.

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