

# A Proposed Management Plan for Abila

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# Introduction

- Abila, of the Decapolis is a newly excavated historical site in northern Jordan.
- This management plan will serve as a model for undeveloped historical sites that are not familiar among tourists.
- Thus, it will focus more on the development of the site, connecting it with the other nearby sites, and developing local community rather than marketing it as a main attraction at the current time.
- After developing the site and making it accessible with the necessary infrastructure and superstructure, will come the role of marketing in general and promotion in particular in order to sell the site in a systematic way.

# Management Plan Objectives

- 1- Preserving the archaeological remains and the environment
- 2- Restoring the monuments in their natural setting
- 3- Tourism development
- 4- Creating and enhancing awareness among visitors and local community
- 5- Solving management deficiencies of the site.
- 6- Deep understanding of the site and its integrity.
- 7- Infrastructural development
- 8- Visitors management



# Main Threatening Forces

- **Lack of information**
- **Protection and security measures**
- **Government policy**
- **Accessibility**
- **Signposting**
- **Awareness**

# Management Plan Structure

## 1-The physical Environment

(Location , site description, cultural profile , hydrology and water resources, geology )

## 2- The Bio- ecological Environment

## 3. The socio- economic environment

(Demography, social and administrative data, land tenure , land use, farming and trading systems)

## 4. Values and Objectives

( Abila identity and concept of site, cultural values, natural values, socio- anthropological values, geological values, economic values)

# Management Plan Structure

**5- Existing management conditions**

**6- Impacts of natural factors and existing activities**

**7- Management plan**

( Cleaning the water System, Archaeological excavation / presentation , Physical Planning ,The Development Plan, Infrastructure and Personnel, Tourism)

**8. The proposed management structure**





# Hydrology and Water Resources

- Ain Quailbeh spring is the main source of water used to supply the site with the necessary water.
- Underground wells were dug to preserve water.
- Canals were built to distribute water within the site during its occupation.




# Tourism use

**A few tourists visit Abila during the recent years because of:**

1- its poor development and absence of the minimum facilities and services.

2- Tourism development policies in the Kingdom.

 In the year 2015 , the number of tourist arrivals to the site is not expected to exceed the number of the current visitors to the nearby Umm Qais (around 8000)

## **2. The Bio- Ecological Environment**

- The area around the archaeological site of Abila is describes as a fertile land for vegetation in the stream of the water availability, rich soil, and gentle climate.
- The vegetation lands are deteriorating owing to unwise human intervention, particularly using agricultural land for housing purposes, and overgrazing.
- Among the most familiar plants in Abila are olive trees, grape plants, pomegranates.
- Cereals such as wheat and lentil are highly cultivated at Abila.
- Owing to the topography and urbanization, a few wild animals could be found in the area.

### 3. The Socio- Economic Environment

- Abila is part of the administrative district of "Kfarat", one of the richest agricultural areas in Jordan, particularly for olive trees and pomegranates.
- At the nearby town of Hartha, there are many facilities and services that enhance its socio-economic development. Among these are a youth club, a medical center, charity society running a stitching unit and kindergarten, schools, and cattle and pottery farms.



# Values and Objectives

- Abila conserves outstanding and representative sample of the national and the world's cultural heritage
- It represents a melting pot of ancient civilizations, encompassing the gentle climate and strategic location (The actual meaning of cultural understanding).
- It provides opportunities to sustain natural ecosystem process through the conservation of resources on which they depend.



# Abila: Identity and Concept of Site

- Only by starting from the identity of Abila can a development and marketing concept be developed.
- Several scientific approaches could be identified to the site: historical, rural, artistic, urbanistic, ecological, geological, anthropological, and religious.
- The theme *of cultural understanding, trade, and outstanding landscape could be used as unique selling prepositions (USP) for promoting Abila as a distinctive cultural heritage attraction in northern Jordan.*

# Cultural values

- The natural setting provides the basis for the development of a society whose essential activities were cattle-herding, trade, and agriculture.
- The availability of water, fertile soil and gentle climate provide a potential for agricultural development and trade between Abila and the nearby areas.
- Successive occupation of the site and cultural understanding are among the main values of the site .

# Natural Values

- Until now, aside from the "heritage landscape" that are indirectly valued , the other assets are not valued : i.e. the scenic values , the geological values, the ecological values , the biological values , and water related values.
- The Roman had started the process of water conservation in Abila. Their techniques of collecting, distributing and conserving water display outstanding ingenuity, skill and imagination.



## **Socio – Anthropological Values**

- Developing this cultural heritage site will **decrease the level of migration from the nearby villages** to the main towns.
- The above will highly contribute to **increasing the social tact among the local residents.**
- **Enhancing the traditional culture and way of life that was mainly dependent on traditional sectors** like agriculture through developing agricultural tourism is expected to be a vital tool for socio- cultural development.



# Geological Values.

- The location of Abila, where it is **overlooking the areas around** could be used as a unique factor of attraction.
- The **geographical diversity of the place including hill stations, mountains, valleys and plateaus** is a distinctive asset, especially for nature-based tourism development.

# Economic Values: Tourism

- Tourism represents the backbone of the Jordanian economy.
- Sustainable development of tourism in Abila could highly serve the concept of pro-poor tourism, especially in an area with high rates of unemployment and poverty.

## 5. Existing Management Conditions

- Any proposed management plan should consider Abila in its broader environmental context.
- There is a total absence of any management effort in this regard, except the excavation work carried out every second year.
- Regarding the legislative aspects, Abila is protected through the Archaeological and Cultural Heritage Protection Law.



- Sufficient number of employees is not available to protect and manage the site.
- Water springs are neither maintained nor managed in a systematic manner.
- Visitors circulation is not controlled within the site.
- No fence, or lighting exist in the site.
- Abila archaeological site is very poor in services and facilities.
- There is no water, electricity, sewage system, or police and fire protection.



## **6. Impact of Natural Factors and Existing Activities**

**There is a great impact of:**

- Rain water run off in the site
- plants growing within the site
- uncontrolled visitation of people/ circulation within the site
- grazing ,looting and thefts.
- Also, there is a complete absence of sanitary facilities and signage system.

# TOURISM

## **Main objectives of tourism development include:**

- Enhance the attractiveness of the site
- Diversify the products offered to tourists both outside and inside the site
- Increase the average duration of stay per tourist
- Increase the average expenditure per tourist
- Link the archaeological site with Hartha town and other attractions, especially the nearby Decapolis.

- **The following should be considered while developing Abila:**
  - **Tourism Diversification:** Tourism could be a factor for conservation and an economic opportunity that should certainly be preferred to harmful and destructive industries, if managed well.
  - **Hotel Development:** Hotel development should not be permitted until an urban plan, including a land use plan and a careful planning of infrastructure will be drawn up.
  - **Ecotourism:** Abila and its surroundings offers such a variety of landscape .The trip with guides , on foot , on horseback, with donkeys , could be made using temporary accommodation and PGAs.



- **Urban Tourism:** Abila is close to Irbid, the largest city in north Jordan and the second largest city in the kingdom regarding its population.
- **Religious Tourism:** Tourists may enjoy a visit to the Jordan Valley to experience the Islamic shrines and tranquility of the place in addition to the nearby Yarmouk battle site.
- **Cultural Tourism:** Abila could play as a hub and central attraction in the northern tourism region in Jordan.
- **Landscape Tourism:** Especially in spring and summer, no similar landscape could be found in Jordan better than Abila and the surrounding area in particular and Irbid district in general.

# Tourism Trails

## **Suggested trail could be:**

- A Decapolis trail - Abila, Beit Rass, Pella, Jerash, Amman
- An educational trail: Yarmouk University, Jordan University of Science and Technology, Irbid University, Gadara University
- A religious trail: Yarmouk Battle site, Jordan River (shrines)
- A geological tourism trail: Abila and the areas around, northern mountains
- An Ecotourism trail: Hilly stations, pomegranate and olive fields, Ajloun Nature Reserve, prince Hamza Nature Reserve.
- Urban trail: Tours within Irbid district
- Rural trail: Visits and experience of the daily life of local inhabitants in the rural areas in nearby villages.
- Therapeutic trail : Abila , Hemma spa, Shuna spa,Pella.

# Tourism Development

- **Creation of short visits to Hartha and the Nearby Villages:**
- **Establishing a visitors' center**
- **Establishing sanitary facilities**
- **Handicraft Development**
- **Establishing pilot workshops**



# The Development Plan

## The Plan should have three stages:

- **First stage** implies **extensive and comprehensive excavation** of the site to find out the city shape as it was planned and constructed. It is suggested that we cooperate with academic institutions that have interest in excavation. Here the site management should train and employ local people to make them benefit and to guarantee local community supports. Those people could employ their experiences acquired in the next stage.
- Also it is necessary to carry out **preventive measures and actions to protect the site** from malpractices such as thefts or illegal excavations. Constructing a fence around the site and employing guards are necessary steps at this stage. Electricity must be extended to the site to enhance protection and stop looting and unauthorized intervention. Well built road network, water pipes and sewage system must be carried out. Research needs to be implemented to document the rich flora and fauna of Abila.

- **The second stage** involves **active conservation, interpretation and presentation of the site**. This tells the story of the site and the way in which people managed to live during the past periods. We suggest making an entrance that helps in the protection of the site besides the organization and control of visitors to the site. A visitors' center needs to be established in order to explain the historical periods of occupation and present Abila as a prominent site along with the other Decapolis. Moreover, in this stage internal and external signage and accessibility of trails must be assured.
- In the **third stage**, we are going to **introduce the site to the visitors and encourage them to visit the site and stay for longer periods**, making use of the attraction and nearby attractions as well as the connection of Abila with Hartha which could act as a center for promoting agro-cultural products and offer B&B and PGA establishments. To enhance the image of Abila, a comprehensive internet site is to be established to help potential visitors decide on its visit.

# Planning guidelines

- Any expansion of Abila should take place away from agriculture land.
- The development of the town should be protected by avoiding sporadic peripheral growth.
- The rural land including the landscape character, flora and fauna should be protected and enhanced.
- A successful policy for the balanced development of Abila must start with housing.
- A comprehensive plan must include rational pattern movement, taking into account land uses, topography and the environment.



# Site development guidelines

- A spatial town center control zone should be established
- The elevation treatment of any building constructed within this area should be restricted to traditional forms of design
- The development of new tourist facilities should take place without negative impact on the urban form of Abila , particularly at the entrance of the site
- New buildings must be designed to blend with their surroundings by having forms and heights, materials and colors which reflect the traditional local character.
- Special consideration should be given to historical sites in terms of recording where restoration is necessary and the possibility of appropriate reuse proposals put forward.

# Implementation of Abila Upgrading

- Improved circulation. Improvement of internal route and organization of pedestrian paths will be a priority for the upgrading works.
- A park for cars and buses should be provided. They should be asphalted and landscaped with some tree planting. Parking fees would be charged in order to repay the capital cost and upgrading of the site.
- Townscape improvements. Until the upgrading of the site is completed, it is difficult to imagine its development for tourism. The proposed new "Suq" development should be accompanied by shops and specialized Suq for the inhabitants. If the tourist facilities were built without a corresponding upgrading of the civic and residential quarters, the uneven development of the two areas would create social tensions.

- A Suq consisting of shops , cafes and handicraft shops should be provided along a pleasant pedestrian spine adjacent to the entrance area with appropriate services
- Appropriate surface treatment and careful planting are required to unify the space leading to the entrance area
- Inside the entrance area , careful design is required of the route to the monuments and to the organization of facilities



# Interpretation

## Establishing of a visitors' center

- The most important themes which should be explained in the visitors' center that better enhance the understanding of the site are: The landscape of Abila, the Roman history, the Greek history, the ancient water supply system, the characteristics of its monumental architecture, itineraries for archaeological discovery, itineraries for discovery of the natural site, and the geological history of the region.
- An interactive virtual display system should be used to make the visit more enjoyable and interesting.
- The major themes would be developed in the form of maps, graphic panels and showcases housing selected objects from each historic period.
- A lecture theatre should be equipped with a permanent audiovisual show using projectors to give a lively, panoramic presentation of the site in all its aspects.
- Design of Coherent signage and Information panels
- Site Museum

# Communication

- **Design and Dissemination of Social Educative Materials:** It is necessary to design, publish and disseminate educative materials to four kinds of targets: Scholars and young people, local population, elected representatives, students and tourists. Such materials could be posters, brochures and pamphlets, guide books, maps, CDs, video cassettes, etc. presenting the history of Abila, its cultural and natural values.
- Editions of video documentaries of the principal themes proposing the various products offered by the site could be broadcasted in the visitors' center
- **Research and Monitoring**
- **Additional Inventories/ Monitoring:** A partnership could be developed simultaneously with the site management, DOA, Ministry of Tourism, Yarmouk University, NGOs and local administration and institutions to monitor, collect and process information related to flora and fauna, vegetation, pasture lands, Wadi, archaeological sites, etc.



## 8. The Proposed Management Structure

- At the time being, an autonomous management unit should be responsible to the development and management of Abila.
- A board of trustees will be in charge of managing the different affairs of the site, and a management committee should approve and supervise the implementation of the project's activities.
- The board of trustees is the supreme authority, consisting of representatives from local community, DOA, specialists, local institutions, responsible for setting and approving management policy and strategies to achieve the objectives of the management plan and monitor its implementation.
- It should not exceed 7 persons including 2 representatives from the local community.
- The management committee should be small (5-6 persons) and meet regularly. Responsible for policy issues as a consultation body (staff organization) to assist the director.
- Could be composed of: Irbid governor, Hartha Municipality, Water Authority, Agriculture Department, Dean- Faculty of Archaeology- YU, Director of Public Security-Irbid.
- Technical advisors could be specialists in Conservation, interpretation, documentation, presentation. Need not to be full time advisors, but on task basis.