

Title Research

Residents Attitudes and Perceptions Towards Tourism Enhancement Projects in Umm  
al-Jimal

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**Abstract**

To achieve suitable tourism development, it is necessary to highlight residents' perceptions and attitudes. Since 2014, Umm al-Jimal has undergone tourism enhancement and site development projects. This paper aims to investigate residents' attachment, awareness, and tourism desired level in the early stages of tourism enhancement projects. A survey was conducted over two stages (2017, 2019) and data were analyzed through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software version 20. Results indicated that residents encouraged tourism enhancement and development projects. However, it is necessary to track the changes in their perceptions and attitudes to maximize positive and minimize negative outcomes.

**Keywords:** Tourism enhancement, attitude, perceptions, Local Residents, Umm al-Jimal.

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## Introduction

Tourism is one of the world's fastest-growing market, contributing USD 8,811 billion to global gross domestic product (GDP) in 2018 and a market share of 10.4% percent (WTTC, 2019). As one of the most important economic drivers in the second half of the 20th century, tourism attracted the attention of governments and different entities including tourism operators and investors around the world as a new generator of development and economic growth (Fernandez, Escampa, & Vázquez, 2016). The United Nation World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defined tourism as "the activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business, and other purposes." (Zamil, 2011, p. 43).

In the early 1990s, researchers highlighted the importance of involving host communities in tourism planning and management, where this involvement was seen as fundamental to the effectiveness in planning and management to ensure tourism sustainability (Stylidis, Biran, Sit, & Szivas, 2014). Host communities must be able to express their willingness to participate and share culture and heritage. This can be measured by various factors and indicators that may influence their attitudes and daily life (Zhuang, Yao, & Li, 2019). Investigating the relationship between the integration of host communities and the development of the tourism sector, Nzama (2008) clarified that it is a positive relationship. However, the supportive residents are those who benefited economically (Eshliki & Kaboudi, 2012).

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and governments around the world are encouraging the participation of host communities in tourism (Al-Oun & Al-Homoud, 2008). This integration process minimizes the negative impacts of tourism and enables host communities to play a vital role as owners and service providers who ensure the continuity of traditions and culture for future generations. Host communities can provide tourists with different services such as food, tour guiding, hostels, and entertainment, and at the same time, they have the opportunity to raise their economic situation, meet people from different cultures, and expose themselves to new perspectives (Zaki, 2015).

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Countries worldwide compete in the development of the tourism market as it offers considerable economic and social benefits, and also helps to preserve cultural heritage and the natural environment (Funa, Chiunb, Songanc, & Naird, 2014; Rhaman, 2016). In 2017 Jordan was ranked as 75 out of 136 globally in tourism. It achieved a top ten ranking among countries in the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) according to the World Economic Forum report of Travel and Tourism Competitiveness (WEF, 2017). As a leading country in the field of tourism, the Jordanian Government, especially Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA), prioritizes the development and growth of the tourism market because it is considered to be a key contributor to the national economy with receipts average of 3,5 billion JD yearly (MoTA, 2019). The tourism sector provides 6% of total jobs with an annual growth rate of 1-2%. Around 51 thousand Jordanians work directly in the tourism sector where most of these workers are in hotel and restaurant sectors (40% share each), followed by travel agencies with a 10% share (MOTA, 2018). In addition, an average of 2.3 million tourists visits Jordan annually due in part to its strategic location, moderate climate and political stability (MOTA, 2018).

Host communities are among the most affected stakeholders in the growth of the tourism industry, which has a direct and indirect impact on the daily lives of the residents. This study aims to measure and evaluate the impact of tourism enhancement projects on residents. In addition, this study will evaluate data related to the development of the tourism sector in Umm al-Jimal to inform decision-makers and professionals who seek the sustainability of the tourism sector.

### Objectives

- To evaluate the level of awareness and knowledge among residents of Umm al-Jimal regarding the tourism enhancement projects being implemented in their community.
- To identify and analyze the positive and negative perceptions held by residents towards the tourism enhancement projects and their anticipated impacts on the community.

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- To investigate the perceived socio-economic impacts of tourism enhancement projects on residents' quality of life, including economic opportunities, infrastructure development, and cultural preservation.
- To measure the level of community support for the tourism enhancement projects and to explore the extent of residents' willingness to participate in and contribute to these initiatives.
- To formulate recommendations for local authorities and project stakeholders on how to effectively engage with the community, address concerns, and enhance the positive impacts of tourism development in Umm al-Jimal.

## Methodology

The study was conducted in Umm al-Jimal town, Northern Badia, Al-Mafraq Governorate from October 2017 to October 2019. Umm al-Jimal, an ancient settlement located in Jordan's Northern Badia near the Syrian border. Approximately 20 kilometers east of Al-Mafraq City, umm al-jimal is a home for 4,886 people distributed over 942 houses.

Tourism promotion in Umm al-Jimal based on several outstanding characteristics related to an archaeological site within the town. The site is well known as the best-preserved Byzantine town in the Southern Hauran region which includes distinguished architectural features, religious buildings, and an ancient water harvesting system. Furthermore, the archeological site was named to the World Heritage Site program's tentative list in 2001 and considered as an invaluable cultural heritage site based on evidence of past human activities and technology (UNESCO, 2001). With a total area of 0.43 km<sup>2</sup>, the archaeological site lies in the middle of the modern town of Umm al-Jimal and separates it into two parts (Figure 1).



**Figure 1 :** Aerial photography for Umm el-Jimal town 2014 (UJAP, 2014)

Since 2014, Umm al-Jimal has received tourism enhancement projects as a result of the cooperation between the governmental sector and NGOs including MoTA, Department of Antiquities (DoA), The Umm al-Jimal New Municipality, The Umm el-Jimal Archaeological Project and Peace by Pax Foundation. Tourism enhancement projects included infrastructure development and the enhancement of tourism services such as Umm al-Jimal trails and interpretive signage, Interpretive and Hospitality Center on site, and Hand by Hand Heritage company that provides site tours, home stays, and food services through the local community.

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In cooperation with the Umm el-Jimal Archaeological Project, the authors managed to obtain the Umm al-Jimal Community Interest Survey in order to examine residents' perceptions towards the tourism enhancement projects in Umm al-Jimal. The Community Interest Survey was legally conducted where The Umm el-Jimal Archaeological Project obtained Internal Review Board (IBR) approval from Calvin University and worked under the memorandum of understanding with the Jordanian DoA for the academic research permit. The questionnaire survey was carried out over two stages 2017 and 2019 to measure the change in residents' attachment to the antiquities, Awareness of tourism enhancement projects, their desired level of tourism was divided into three main topics: heritage-related questions, tourism-related questions, demographic-related questions investigating residents' attachment with 17 items; residents' awareness with 18 items, and opinions about tourism with 15 items (UJAP, 2017-2019). The survey questions were presented in two formats, most using the Likert Scale to provide numerical data with responses ranging from (1) meaning strongly disagree to (5) meaning strongly agree, and a few open-ended questions for narrative. A random sample was selected and targeted the adults' residents from Umm al-Jimal town in the age above 18 years old.

Data were collected from 197 residents and the sample size was determined based on the following formula:

$$\text{Sample size} = \frac{\frac{z^2 \times p(1-p)}{e^2}}{1 + \left(\frac{z^2 \times p(1-p)}{e^2 N}\right)}$$

N = population size

e = Margin of error (percentage in decimal form)

z = z-score

The study used descriptive statistical analysis to explore residents' perceptions toward tourism enhancement projects. Questions measured attachment, awareness, and desired level tourism for Umm al-Jimal. The questionnaire reliability and consistency test was carried out using Alpha Cronbach's test of variables. The normality distribution test (P\_value) using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was carried out to measure the natural distribution of the data. Furthermore, the changes between

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resident's perceptions and attitudes in 2017 and 2019 have been compared with the following hypotheses:

1. The null hypothesis  $H_0$ : There is no difference in mean for pre- and post-Tourism enhancement.
2. The alternative hypothesis  $H_1$ : There is a difference in mean for pre- and post-Tourism enhancement.

## Results and Discussion

### Reliability and consistency of questionnaire

#### A. Alpha Cronbach's Test

As shown in the following table the reliability for Community Interest survey items is acceptable according to Alpha Cronbach's requirement of 0.60 or higher for explanatory research. (Nunally & Bernstein, 1994).

**Table 1.** Alpha Cronbach's test for community interest surveys.

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Alpha Cronbach's coefficient</b>	<b>Number of paragraphs of the questionnaire</b>
Community Attachment	0.819	17
Community Awareness	0.608	18
Tourism Option	0.835	25
Questionnaire as a whole	0.942	53

#### B. Normality Test

To achieve the requirements of the scientific tests, in this case hypothesis testing, the normality distribution test ( $P_{value}$ ) was carried out to reveal if the data displays a natural distribution. Results indicate data for all the variables trace normality distribution with a significance ratio from 0.05,  $P_{value} < 0.05$ , and  $P_{value}$  for the variables were  $P_{value} < 0.001$  which is the level approved in the statistical processing of this study (Krzywinski & Altman, 2013).

## Community Attachment

The following tables show the arithmetic averages and standard deviations of participants' responses that measure community attachment with the archaeological site in both 2017 and 2019. This dimension includes 17 questions: 15 of them follow the five-point Likert scale format, one investigates site visit frequency, and the final one is in "yes or no" format. The 2017 survey showed a moderate level of attachment with a weighted average of Moderate level since the weighted average of 3.41 lies in [2.40 - 3.79] with a successful Std. deviation of 0.76. Community attachment increased somewhat by the 2019 survey while remaining at a Moderate level with a weighted average of 3.69 lies in [2.40 - 3.79] and a successful Std. deviation of 0.59.

**Table 2.** Responses analysis to community attachment variables based on 5-point likert scale.

Item	2017		2019	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
I know about the history of my family	3.87	1.07	4.08	0.91
I know about the history of my community	3.54	1.20	3.92	0.96
I find the Umm al-Jimal archaeological site important to my family's history	3.48	1.30	3.92	0.94
I know about the archaeological site	3.22	1.27	3.46	1.13
I learn/learned about the site from my school	2.10	1.25	2.00	0.93
I learn/learned about the site from my family	2.88	1.41	3.50	1.15
I learn/learned about the site from my friends	2.50	1.43	2.96	1.06
I am interested in archaeology	2.58	1.28	2.87	1.04
I am interested in the history of the site	3.34	1.20	3.82	1.02
I will visit the Interpretive and Hospitality Center when it is complete	4.08	1.10	4.02	1.04
How much do you value the archaeological site?	3.84	1.15	4.16	0.72
How much do you value your sense of ownership of the site?	3.70	1.21	4.38	0.90
How much do you value protecting the site from theft and vandalism?	3.83	1.26	4.26	0.92

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How much do you value the accessibility of the site to you?	3.96	1.06	4.40	0.80
How much do you value the community heritage celebrations for the community on the archaeological site?	4.08	0.96	3.63	1.11
<b>Total Weighted Mean and SD</b>	3.41	0.76	3.63	0.59

**Table 3.** Responses analysis to community attachment variables based on investigating site visit frequency.

Item	Daily	Once/Week	Once/Month	Once/Year	Never
How often do you visit the site? 2017	18	33	75	57	14
How often do you visit the site? 2019	29	51	71	40	6

**Table 4.** Responses analysis to community attachment variables based on yes or no format.

Item	Yes	No
Would you be more likely to visit the archaeological site if there were basic facilities and services?2017	195	3
Would you be more likely to visit the archaeological site if there were basic facilities and services?2019	167	30

Umm al-Jimal residents' responses for the 2017 survey indicated a high degree of interest among respondents in visiting the interpretive and hospitality center, that they valued holding celebrations on the archaeological site, and that valued their accessibility to the site. In 2019, respondents' highest average responses showed that they prioritized the value of their accessibility to the site, they valued their sense of site ownership, and site protection from theft and vandalism. On the other hand, the lowest average responses for both 2017 and 2019 showed that respondents did not learn about the site from school or from their friends and that they were not interested

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in archaeology. Although responses were higher in 2017, respondents indicated that they would increase their visitation to the archaeological site if there are basic facilities and services. In general, community attachment of Umm al-Jimal residents to the archaeological site increased between 2017 and 2019, though it still moderate. However, this change indicates that tourism enhancement projects have affected Umm al-Jimal residents.

### Community Awareness

The following tables show the arithmetic averages and standard deviations of participants' responses for the measurement of community awareness of the value of the archaeological site and the potential benefits and opportunities in 2017 and 2019. This dimension includes 18 questions: 12 of them follow the five-point Likert scale format, 5 of them are in "yes or no" format, and the final one measures potential job opportunities created by the archaeological site. Results indicated that community awareness for 2017 registered at a Moderate level since the weighted average of 3.75 lies in [2.40 - 3.79] with a successful Std. deviation of 0.61. On the other hand, community awareness for the 2019 survey increased over time to a High level since the weighted average of 3.87 lies in [3.80 - 5] with a successful Std. deviation of 0.56.

**Table 5.** Responses analysis to community awareness variables based on 5-point likert scale.

Item	2017		2019	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
I think that the site benefits the modern community of Umm al-Jimal	3.95	1.03	3.80	0.98
I understand what the archaeologists are doing	4.07	0.99	4.00	0.87
I will visit the Interpretive and Hospitality Center when it is complete	4.08	1.10	4.02	1.04
I have seen tourists coming to visit the site	3.25	1.33	3.26	1.06
I have seen tourists coming to visit the UJ village	2.46	1.51	2.45	1.04
How much do you value the archaeological site?	3.84	1.15	4.16	0.72
How much do you value more visitors coming to the UJ community?	3.67	1.27	4.11	0.98
How much do you value protecting the site from theft	3.83	1.26	4.16	0.92

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and vandalism?

How much do you value the installation of the

Interpretive and hospitality center on the 4.13 1.06 4.03 0.80

archaeological site?

How much do you value the installation of the signs

explaining the archaeological site on the site? 4.30 0.85 4.21 0.76

How much do you value the installation of the

preserved and safe buildings on the archaeological 4.55 0.80 4.53 0.70

site?

How much do you value the informational tours on

the archaeological site? 3.50 1.29 3.60 0.84

<b>Total Weighted Mean and SD</b>	3.75	0.61	3.87	0.56
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**Table 6.** Responses analysis to community awareness variables based on yes or no format.

Item	Yes	No
The Umm al-Jimal archaeological site benefits the modern community of Umm al-Jimal 2017	182	15
The Umm al-Jimal archaeological site benefits the modern community of Umm al-Jimal 2019	152	45
I am aware of the UJ Interpretive Hospitality Center 2017	77	116
I am aware of the UJ Interpretive Hospitality Center 2019	164	33
In your opinion, would increased tourism be good for Umm al-Jimal? 2017	184	12
In your opinion, would increased tourism be good for Umm al-Jimal? 2019	147	50
Does the lack of basic facilities and services, such as bathrooms, prevent you from visiting the archaeological site? 2017	182	3
Does the lack of basic facilities and services, such as bathrooms, prevent you from visiting the archaeological site? 2019	115	82

Would you be more likely to visit the archaeological site if there were basic facilities and services? 2017	194	2
Would you be more likely to visit the archaeological site if there were basic facilities and services? 2019	167	33

**Table 7.** Responses analysis to community awareness variables based on multiple choice format.

<b>Item</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2019</b>
potential job opportunities at the archaeological site		
Archaeologist	13	11
Conservator	38	32
Food services	37	44
Tour guide	48	22
Guard	33	27
Other	17	28
No interest	11	33

The highest average residents' responses for the 2017 survey indicated that respondents valued the installation of the preserved and safe buildings on the archaeological site, the installation of the signs explaining the archaeological site on the site, the installation of the Interpretive and Hospitality Center on the archaeological site. In addition to valuing the installation of the preserved and safe buildings on the archaeological site, responses for the 2019 survey indicated that respondents valued site protection from theft and vandalism, and installation of the signs explaining the archaeological site. For both surveys 2017 and 2019, the lowest average responses showed that respondents did not see tourists visiting the village or the archaeological site.

Responses to the “yes or no” questions in both 2017 and 2019 revealed that respondents believe in the role of Umm al-Jimal archaeological site and increased tourism in the benefit of the modern community of Umm al-Jimal. The awareness of

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the Umm al-Jimal interpretive and hospitality center was very high in 2019 compared to the low awareness in 2017, meanwhile the lack of basic services did impact site visits, but less than in 2017 which makes sense because basic services had increased on the site in the interim. Furthermore, umm al-Jimal residents were aware of the potential job opportunities provided by the site where the highest responses in both 2017 and 2019 indicated that food services, conservation, and tour guiding were the most popular fields. Interestingly, in 2019 respondents with no interest were highly represented, with the same percentage as conservation.

Community awareness increased from a moderate level in 2017 to a high level in 2019 which indicates that residents are more aware of the archaeological site and the potential benefits and opportunities. This change indicates that tourism enhancement projects have affected Umm al-Jimal residents.

### Tourism Option

The following tables show the arithmetic averages and standard deviations of participants' responses for the measurement for tourism options 2017 and 2019. This dimension includes 25 questions: 8 follow the five-point Likert scale format, 3 are in "yes or no" format, and 14 are responded with " You & your family" or "Tourist" or "Both". Results indicated that the tourism option for 2017 recorded a High level since the weighted average of 4.11 lies in [3.80 - 5] with a successful Std. deviation of 0.60. On the other hand, the tourism option 2019 survey remained at a High level since the weighted average of 4.04 lies in [3.80 - 5] with a successful Std. deviation of 0.57but dipped slightly from 2017.

**Table 8.** Responses analysis to Tourism option variables based on 5-point likert scale.

Item	2017		2019	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
I will visit the Interpretive and Hospitality Center when it is complete	4.08	1.10	4.02	1.04
How much do you value more visitors coming to the UJ community?	3.67	1.27	4.11	0.98
How much do you value the installation of the	4.13	1.06	4.03	0.80

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Interpretive and hospitality center on the archaeological site?				
How much do you value the installation of the signs explaining the archaeological site on the site	4.30	0.85	4.21	0.76
How much do you value the informational tours on the archaeological site?	3.50	1.29	3.60	0.84
Rate the degree to which you would want visitation to the archaeological site to increase among Local visitors (UJ Municipality)	3.97	0.96	3.73	0.93
Rate the degree to which you would want visitation to the archaeological site to increase among Jordanian tourists	4.58	0.75	4.14	0.82
Rate the degree to which you would want visitation to the archaeological site to increase among Foreign tourists	4.69	0.67	4.45	0.96
<b>Total Weighted Mean and SD</b>	<b>4.11</b>	<b>0.60</b>	<b>4.04</b>	<b>0.57</b>

**Table 9.** Responses analysis to Tourism option variables based on yes or no format.

Item	Yes	No
In your opinion, would increased tourism be good for Umm al-Jimal? 2017	184	12
In your opinion, would increased tourism be good for Umm al-Jimal? 2019	147	50
Does the lack of basic facilities and services, such as bathrooms, prevent you from visiting the archaeological site? 2017	182	3
Does the lack of basic facilities and services, such as bathrooms, prevent you from visiting the archaeological site? 2019	115	82
Would you be more likely to visit the archaeological site if there were basic facilities and services? 2017	194	2
Would you be more likely to visit the archaeological site if there	167	33

**Table 10.** Responses analysis to Tourism option variables based on " You & your family 1" or "Tourist 2" or "Both 3" format.

Item	2017	2019
	Mean	Mean
Who do you think would benefit from the park	2.39	2.30
Who services do you think would benefit from the landscaping	2.49	2.62
Who do you think would benefit from the benches/seating	2.79	2.83
Who do you think would benefit from the shade structures	2.61	2.83
Who do you think would benefit from the games/play area	2.18	2.16
Who you think would benefit from the bathrooms	2.51	2.45
Who do you think would benefit from the drinks/Food	2.40	2.29
Who do you think would benefit from the informational signs	2.34	2.54
Who do you think would benefit from the educational materials	2.04	2.07
Who do you think would benefit from the educational program	2.11	2.12
Who do you think would benefit from the community events	2.36	2.53
Who do you think would benefit from the tours/field trips	2.34	2.40
Who do you think would benefit from the visitor center	2.56	2.68
Who do you think would benefit from the event space	2.30	2.38
<b>Total Weighted Mean and SD</b>	2.38	2.44

The highest average residents' responses for both the 2017 and 2019 surveys indicated that respondents wanted to increase site visitation among foreign tourists, valued the installation of the signs explaining the archaeological site on the site and wanted to increase site visitation among Jordanian tourists. Both surveys 2017 and 2019 shared the same lowest average responses showed that they did not value the informational

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tours on the archaeological site, while in the 2017 survey they did not value more visitors coming to the Umm al-Jimal community, and in 2019 survey they did not want to increase site visitation among local visitors (Umm al-Jimal residents).

The responses to the “yes or no” questions were the same in both 2017 and 2019 surveys, showing that more tourism would be beneficial for the town and that better facilities would help bring tourists to the site; however, in 2019 there were more “no” responses to the questions than in 2017.

The final series of questions showed that in 2017 and 2019 respondents believed that both local residents and tourists would benefit from many of the developments. Residents were willing to share public spaces such as parks, playing areas, the shade structure, and seating areas with tourists and to exchange their culture with tourists through community events, educational programs, and the visitor center.

Tourism option results in 2019 have slightly decreased compared to 2017, Nevertheless, the interest level remained high enough to indicate that residents still encourage the tourism industry and enhancement at Umm al-Jimal, however, they are more conservative now.

## **Conclusions**

The research seeks to investigate the changes in Umm al-Jimal residents' attitudes and perceptions before and after tourism enhancement projects that help decision-makers and tourism professionals to reach a better understanding of residents' expectations in order to ensure the sustainability of the tourism industry. The results of this research indicate that Umm al-Jimal residents perceived tourism enhancement projects positively. Tourism is recognized as a generator for development in rural areas, where these areas are rich in environmental features, socio-cultural identity, and historical monuments that Umm al-Jimal is strong in all three.

Local residents are among the most affected stakeholders in the tourism industry. Therefore, giving primary attention to their attachment, awareness and desired level of tourism is necessary to ensure its sustainability. Enhanced tourism services and related job opportunities contribute to the increased awareness of the benefits of

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tourism for local residents in increased economic activity, female participation in the economy, and the reduction of unemployment.

This study, distributed over two stages, targeted local residents in order to measure perception over time and to confirm previous findings regarding residents' attachment and awareness of enhanced tourism services as well as their desired level of tourism in their community. The results of residents' responses between 2017-2019 showed that their attachment to the archaeological site had slightly increased, though it remained at a moderate level. Community awareness results increased from a moderate level to a high level, which indicated that the awareness among Umm al-Jimal residents towards the potential benefits that improved presentation of the archaeological site and enhanced tourism facilities promise to generate has increased. Responses towards tourism options were positive, indicating that Umm al-Jimal residents encouraged tourism enhancement.

For Umm al-Jimal residents, tourism is seen as an opportunity to improve their wellbeing and economic situation. According to survey results, residents are aware of the potential job opportunities that enhanced tourism at the archaeological site provides whereas residents are more willing to support tourism enhancement when their personal benefits are perceived and they are personally in the industry. Furthermore, the greater and faster they receive economic, socio-cultural and infrastructure benefits, the higher their support will be.

It is important to note that, the tourism industry in Umm al-Jimal is still in the early stages in which a smallish number of tourists with irregular visitation patterns currently offer limited benefits to residents. Therefore, conducting a questionnaire periodically to track residents' and tourists' perceptions, expectations and needs as well as the socio-economic impact of tourism as tourism development increases in Umm al-Jimal is important to help decision-makers and tourism professionals ensure the sustainability of this sector for the benefit of local residents.

In 2012 Darmouth's Tuck Business School conducted a comprehensive cultural heritage market analysis in Jordan. Of 35 sites visited it selected eight for further study. Among those eight Umm al-Jimal ranked first overall in potential tourism market development and also ranked highest in the category of "Local Community

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Commitment” (Dartmouth’s Tuck Business School, 2012, p. 16). The 2017 and 2019 surveys have borne out this potential. These combined surveys confirm that the community is poised to engage the increased flow of tourists in business and hospitality now that the archaeological site is equipped with state-of-the-art presentation and visitor facilities.

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