UNLOCKING POTENTIAL: THE INTEGRATIVE ROLE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDS IN OMAN’S ARCHAEOLOGICAL TOURISM SUSTAINABILITY

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This paper aims to assess the current utilization of archaeological records in the management of archaeological tourism in the Sultanate of Oman.

Implications of research: It investigates how these records synergistically contribute to the sustainability of archaeological tourism and identifies potential benefits from their integration into the tourism planning process.

Method: Employing a descriptive analytical approach, this exploratory study examines the relationship between archaeological records and archaeological tourism in Oman, utilizing both contemporary and historical data from various sources, including existing archaeological records and input from heritage and tourism stakeholders.

Findings: Findings reveal that Omani archaeological tourism is in its nascent stages, with government initiatives striving to align the archaeology and tourism sectors. The study underscores the significance of archaeological records in optimizing tourism through enhanced planning, criteria, and information exchange. It emphasizes their potential to strengthen collaboration between archaeological resource management and tourism in Oman.

Results and conclusion: Key recommendations include prioritizing improved dialogue, information exchange, stakeholder collaboration, shared record design, accessibility, revenue allocation, and comprehensive training. These measures aim to forge a harmonious connection between archaeology and tourism, fostering mutual benefit and sustainable heritage preservation.

Keywords: archaeological records, archaeological tourism, archaeology, archaeological resource management, Oman.

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DESBLOQUEAR O POTENCIAL: O PAPEL INTEGRADOR DOS REGISTROS ARQUEOLÓGICOS NA SUSTENTABILIDADE DO TURISMO ARQUEOLÓGICO DE OMÃ

RESUMO

Finalidade: O presente artigo tem como objetivo avaliar a utilização atual de registros arqueológicos na gestão do turismo arqueológico no Sultanato de Omã.

Implicações da pesquisa: Investiga como esses registros sinergicamente contribuem para a sustentabilidade do turismo arqueológico e identifica os benefícios potenciais de sua integração no processo de planejamento do turismo.

Método: Utilizando uma abordagem analítica descriptiva, este estudo exploratório examina a relação entre os registros arqueológicos e o turismo arqueológico em Omã, utilizando dados contemporâneos e históricos de várias fontes, incluindo registros arqueológicos existentes e entrada de partes interessadas do patrimônio e do turismo.

Descobertas: Descobertas revelam que o turismo arqueológico de Omã está em seus estágios iniciais, com iniciativas do governo se esforçando para alinhar os setores arqueológico e turístico. O estudo ressalta a importância dos registros arqueológicos na otimização do turismo por meio de planejamento aprimorado, critérios e troca de informações. Ele enfatiza o seu potencial para fortalecer a colaboração entre a gestão de recursos arqueológicos e o turismo em Omã.

Resultados e conclusão: as principais recomendações incluem a priorização do diálogo aprimorado, o intercâmbio de informações, a colaboração entre as partes interessadas, o design de registros compartilhados, a acessibilidade, a alocação de receita e o treinamento abrangente. Estas medidas visam forjar uma ligação harmoniosa entre a arqueologia e o turismo, promovendo o benefício mútuo e a preservação sustentável do patrimônio.

Palavras-chave: registros arqueológicos, turismo arqueológico, arqueologia, gestão de recursos arqueológicos, Omã.

1 INTRODUCTION

Archaeological records serve as the predominant information sources for documenting archaeological sites. These encompass organized compilations of archaeological and historical data concerning specific geographical regions (Al-Belushi, 2023). The persistent pursuit of archaeological research worldwide has led to the substantial accumulation of data, initially organized as basic lists or indices, which has subsequently evolved into extensive computer-stored databases or internet-linked catalogues (Banning, 2020).

In contemporary times, archaeological databases have emerged as crucial tools for the management of archaeological heritage in numerous global regions. They offer vital information that aids a diverse array of managers and decision-makers in making significant choices concerning archaeological sites, notably those linked to archaeological
tourism. The value of these records stems from their extensive informational richness, benefiting researchers, heritage managers, historical environment conservators, and development planners who engage directly or indirectly with archaeological assets. Furthermore, these records play a pivotal role in enhancing public awareness, comprehension, and appreciation of archaeological resources (Gilman & Fernie, 2000, A1).

The significance of archaeological records has grown in response to increasing awareness among individuals and governments of the widespread threats posed by rapid development to archaeological resources (Cuming, 1998; Gilman & Fernie, 2000). Utilizing quantitative techniques like statistical analysis, these records offer decision-makers essential information for evaluating development projects that may impact archaeological sites directly or indirectly (Al-Belushi, 2011). Swift and streamlined decision-making processes, including those related to significant development endeavours within the archaeological context, heavily rely on a comprehensive archaeological record, often supplemented by data concerning the natural environment (ibid.). The absence of such records can significantly hinder the decision-making process. As a result, numerous countries have invested substantial financial and human resources into digitizing their archaeological records and leveraging new technologies for accessibility (Larsen, 1992).

Moreover, the escalating challenges posed by modernization have prompted antiquities authorities worldwide to expand their records geographically and chronologically through systematic national surveys, pre-empting the depletion of archaeological resources (Al-Belushi, 2023). Consequently, in developed nations, archaeological records constitute the primary point of reference for various facets of the historical environment. While the initial purpose of creating archaeological registries was to equip conservation and antiquities authorities, as well as planning bodies, with insights into the historical context of an area, contemporary efforts focus on making this information more widely accessible to diverse audiences while safeguarding sensitive data (Bampton & Mosher, 2001).

In the pursuit of a balanced collaboration between heritage, development, and tourism sectors, innovative technology applications play a crucial role. Archaeological records emerge as a forefront of innovation, serving as essential data repositories for strategic decisions in cultural and archaeological tourism. These records guide planners
in efficiently allocating resources and enhancing sites for tourism, aided by Geographic Information Systems (GIS) that facilitate transparent data exchange and heritage protection. Moreover, archaeological records enrich visitor experiences and safeguard fragile sites from detrimental tourism activities, ensuring their preservation.

The Sultanate of Oman demonstrated early recognition of the significance of recording archaeological sites through the introduction of the National Heritage Protection Law (NHPL) in 1980, mandating authorities to establish and continually update an inventory of national heritage assets (Royal Decree 6/1980). Subsequently, the then Ministry of Heritage and Culture embarked on the collection and documentation of archaeological data and sites, yet these endeavours lacked well-defined strategies. Despite the existence of two databases—one for archaeological sites and another for artefacts—there hasn't been a comprehensive initiative to comprehensively catalogue the nation's archaeological wealth (Al-Belushi, 2011). This gap has implications for the management of archaeological resources, including their role in archaeological tourism.

As Oman embarked on rapid development in the 1970s, specific facets of its archaeological heritage faced susceptibility to degradation (Al-Belushi, 2011). In tandem, the country's drive to diversify revenue sources underscored tourism as a pivotal component of its developmental strategies. Today, Oman places considerable emphasis on cultural tourism, leveraging its expansive and diverse cultural heritage, notably the archaeological realm. However, the incorporation of archaeological databases into archaeological tourism planning remains relatively constrained.

This paper aims to assess the current utilization of archaeological records in archaeological tourism management within the Sultanate of Oman. Additionally, it seeks to investigate the synergistic impact of these records on the sustainability of archaeological tourism in Oman. Furthermore, the paper endeavours to identify the potential benefits that can be derived from integrating these records into the planning process for archaeological tourism. By pursuing these goals, the study intends to highlight the crucial role of archaeological records in enhancing the management and ensuring the long-term viability of archaeological tourism in Oman.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Cultural tourism, a prominent global phenomenon (Cayron, 2017; McKercher & du Cros, 2002), serves as a conduit uniting heritage and exploration. It offers tourists
immersive and captivating encounters, delving deep into the history, traditions, arts, and lifestyles of communities. Recognized as a pivotal driver of economic growth, this tourism variant spawns job opportunities and supports local economies (Ismail et al., 2014). The evolution of transportation technology and rising incomes since 1950 has propelled an explosive surge in the tourism sector, fuelled by the allure of archaeological sites and novel cultural experiences. However, this surge places exceptional archaeological resources under significant strain (Gould, 2017), underscoring the enduring interest and concern for heritage tourism among culturally rich nations (Xu et al., 2020). Consequently, the field of archaeology grapples with the complex interplay between economic development and heritage preservation, often stemming from concerns over the loss of archaeological records and the impact of urban development on heritage (Gould, 2017).

Amidst the relentless pursuit of tourism program goals, and in the absence of adept management capable of harmonizing economic gains with archaeological heritage preservation, a gradual, irreversible erosion of archaeological sites often goes unnoticed. Neglecting vigilant management risks irrevocably forfeiting the scientific and historical essence of these sites (Comer & Willems, 2012). Amidst this absence of balance, development and economic growth invariably overshadow archaeological research and conservation concerns (Gould, 2017).

An urgent imperative emerges to establish a symbiotic link, uniting sustainable tourism and archaeological heritage in safeguarding natural and historical realms, while advancing economic prosperity. Sustainable tourism serves as a potent vehicle for disseminating archaeological heritage through coordinated preservation, nurturing local community distinctiveness. Authentic reverence for historical sites protects the cultural foundation of communities. Equally significant, archaeological sites yield substantial economic advantages, invigorating the tourism sector, enhancing societal well-being, and nurturing a profound sense of heritage and identity. Among these benefits is their substantial economic contribution, generating billions annually (Cayron, 2017). Notably, the Great Wall of China garnered $2.9 billion in 2010, while Egypt's Memphis and Necropolis amassed $936 million (Global Heritage Fund, 2010).

This symbiotic alliance further safeguards ecosystems, ensuring effective protection of archaeological sites. The educational essence of sustainable tourism practices deepens visitor appreciation through interpretation (McKercher & du Cros,
fostering a profound connection to archaeological heritage. By striking a harmonious equilibrium within this relationship, lasting support for archaeological sites is fortified, shielding them from potential deterioration arising from unbalanced tourism pressures.

In striving for this balance and fostering harmonious collaboration between heritage, development sectors, and tourism, innovative technology applications stand out (Gould, 2017; Ndlovu, 2017; Huber, 2017). An innovative forefront of these applications lies within archaeological records. These repositories of data represent a pivotal resource for decision-makers, shaping strategies encompassing cultural and archaeological tourism. They serve as foundational pillars for informed choices, encompassing the identification of suitable tourism-ready archaeological sites, their progression, and the advancement of corresponding tourism endeavours.

These records also guide tourism planners in efficiently allocating essential financial and human resources, optimizing the enhancement and preparation of archaeological sites for tourism purposes. Notably, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) offer a transformative avenue for delineating protective boundaries for sensitive sites, facilitating transparent data exchange among archaeologists, heritage custodians, governments, and businesses. The accessible format fosters novel collaborations aimed at fortifying heritage protection (Gould, 2017).

Furthermore, archaeological records play a paramount role in elevating the visitor experience and deepening comprehension. By furnishing interpretive materials, they empower guides to unravel the intricate tapestry of archaeological heritage for visitors. Concurrently, these records serve as a protective buffer, steering delicate archaeological sites away from unsuitable cultural tourism activities, thus ensuring their preservation.

The incorporation of archaeological records within the realm of archaeological tourism is intricately interwoven with several United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. This synergy advances the cause of sustainable cultural tourism practices, the safeguarding of cultural heritage, and the promotion of social advantages by bolstering local communities (McKercher & du Cros, 2002). It concurrently fosters an awareness of the imperative to preserve both natural and historical environments.

Leveraging archaeological records can culminate in the creation of immersive archaeological tourism offerings, thereby spawning novel avenues for local employment, in alignment with United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 8, which champions the
propagation of dignified labor and economic progression. These records are instrumental in harmonizing heritage into urban planning endeavors, nurturing the propagation of heritage conservation initiatives, and cultivating a shared awareness among both tourists and local inhabitants. This dual effect contributes to the realization of the eleventh sustainable development goal, pertaining to the creation of sustainable and inclusive urban societies.

Furthermore, archaeological records can intricately contribute to the attainment of United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 12, which underscores responsible consumption and production practices within archaeological tourism. The reservoir of data and insights enshrined within these records proves invaluable to heritage stewards and cultural tourism custodians alike. By facilitating the formulation of visitor management strategies and striking an equilibrium between site fragility and visitation levels, these records engender a sustainable and well-balanced utilization of archaeological sites.

Acting as a source of essential knowledge, archaeological records empower custodians of archaeological tourism to provide enriching educational experiences for visitors. The provision of informative materials elucidating the archaeological heritage of visited locales buttresses the pursuit of the fourth sustainable development goal: to ensure universally accessible and high-quality education.

In sum, archaeological records serve as a linchpin bridging archaeological tourism and United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, propelling us toward a more sustainable, enlightened, and harmonious future.

2.1 PREVIOUS STUDIES ON OMAN’S ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDS

A noticeable scarcity of published research concerning archaeological records in Oman is evident. Among the existing studies, one addresses the challenges confronted by archaeological records within the Sultanate of Oman (Al-Belushi, 2011). This particular study scrutinizes the prevailing methodologies and applications carried out by entities responsible for the stewardship of archaeological heritage. It encompasses the collection, organization, management, and utilization of information pertaining to archaeological assets across the country.
The investigation reveals that, although the Omani National Heritage Protection Law (NHPL) of 1980 underlines the significance of documenting the country's archaeological wealth, substantive endeavors toward this objective remain wanting. The limited attempts to systematically document certain sites according to scientific standards primarily align with research aspirations, rather than serving as comprehensive documentation or integral elements of archaeological heritage management (Al-Belushi, 2011).

The study assesses extant archaeological records, encompassing their aims, scopes, evolution, applications, limitations, and their pertinence to contemporary archaeological heritage management data within Oman. Furthermore, the study underscores a range of challenges obstructing the registration of archaeological resources in Oman. Predominant among these obstacles are insufficiencies in legislative procedures, the absence of a dedicated organization for resource registration, and limited collaboration and coordination among relevant entities (Al-Belushi, 2011).

Concluding its analysis, the study advances a series of recommendations aimed at elevating the current standards of archaeological documentation. Paramount among these suggestions is the establishment of a comprehensive, integrated national record for archaeological resources within Oman. Furthermore, urgent emphasis is placed on formulating a comprehensive strategy to record diverse facets of Oman's archaeological resources. Such an undertaking is envisioned through the enhancing of existing databases or the creation of novel ones. Notably, the study accentuates the significance of involving pertinent bodies, such as those associated with tourism, urban planning, and housing, in the record's development and expansion. This collaboration ensures that sector-specific requirements are thoughtfully considered and addressed (Al-Belushi, 2011).

Another study introduced a proposal for the establishment of a national archaeological database for Oman (Al-Belushi, 2012). This study highlighted that Oman's National Heritage Protection Law (NHPL) explicitly underscores the imperative of integrating the recording of archaeological assets as an integral facet of safeguarding the nation's cultural heritage.

The study revealed that by 1998, the Ministry of Heritage and Culture had implemented two electronic databases – one specifically designed for documenting archaeological sites and another tailored to cataloguing artifacts. However, the study concludes that these databases no longer meet the contemporary requisites demanded by
the management of Oman's archaeological heritage. Consequently, a fresh approach is necessary, leading the study to propose the establishment of a national archaeological database in Oman (NADO). The core concepts and structure of NADO draw inspiration from well-established archaeological records, with particular emphasis placed on attributes like flexibility, retrievability, consistency, and updatability (Al-Belushi, 2012).

The suggested database is designed to encompass a comprehensive array of data, including details pertaining to site conditions and conservation efforts. It encompasses information relevant to management considerations, such as survival, condition, hazards, land use, accessibility, site significance, and restoration. Within this context, the study recommends the integration of pre-existing databases into the proposed system. Additionally, the study advocates for the incorporation of all pertinent content from forthcoming archaeological databases into NADO.

There is a distinct lack of research addressing the role of archaeological records in the management and preservation of archaeological resources utilized for tourism purposes in Oman. Within this context, one notable study is that of Al-Belushi (2014), which delved into the relationship between archaeological databases and cultural tourism in Oman. Its focus was on underscoring the potential contributions of databases in the identification and management of archaeological sites and monuments earmarked for tourist engagement.

The study brought to light that Oman's archaeological tourism remains in its nascent stage, with ongoing efforts to foster a productive dialogue between heritage management and tourism spheres. The integration of modern, systematic archaeological databases into the plans of Omani heritage tourism is still in its early stages. The study emphasized that the judicious utilization of archaeological databases within the cultural tourism domain could significantly amplify the effectiveness of archaeological tourism plans. Moreover, it holds the potential to elevate levels of coordination between the heritage and tourism sectors.

Within the realm of archaeological tourism, this investigation signifies that the optimal implementation of archaeological databases holds promise to drive both enhanced operational efficacy and a more harmonious synergy between heritage preservation and tourism advancement.

Hence, this study endeavours to bridge this research gap by focusing on an evaluation of the prevailing utilization of archaeological records in the management of
archaeological tourism within the Sultanate of Oman. Additionally, it aims to dissect the collaborative impact of these records on the sustainability of archaeological tourism in Oman, while uncovering the prospective advantages stemming from their integration during the strategic phases of archaeological tourism planning.

3 METHODOLOGY

This study is of an exploratory and preliminary nature, employing a descriptive analytical method to examine the correlation between archaeological records and archaeological tourism in Oman, utilizing contemporary and historical data. This approach is selected to gain valuable insights into the studied topic and establish a groundwork for future in-depth investigations.

Data were collected from various sources, including existing archaeological records, and inputs from stakeholders in Oman's heritage and tourism sectors. Supplementary information was gathered through a literature survey on antiquities records and archaeological tourism in Oman, as well as data and statistics from the National Center for Statistics and Information related to archaeological tourism. Official documents, such as legislation, royal decrees, and regulations concerning the documentation of archaeological heritage and cultural tourism, particularly archaeological tourism, were also examined.

4 DISCUSSION

While the general value of archaeological records has been a subject of substantial research (Ten Harkel & Fisher, 2021; Robinson et al., 2019; Byrne, 1999; Lang, 1995; 1992; Larsen, 1992), their potential in the realm of planning, development, and management of archaeological tourism remains relatively unexplored. This section of the paper does not aim to compile an exhaustive list of every conceivable value of archaeological records within this domain. Rather, it intends to spotlight those values most pertinent to Omani archaeological tourism. It is anticipated that the significance of these crucial informational resources will capture the attention of tourism planners. This endeavor aims to enhance existing concepts and tools employed in the planning and selection of archaeological tourism projects in Oman, all the while maintaining the delicate equilibrium described by McManamon as the 'justifiable balance' between preservation and tourism (McManamon, 1993: 133).
Ten pertinent values tailored to Omani archaeological tourism are delineated for discourse herein, acknowledging the inherent potential for overlap between these values. They encompass:

**I. Selecting archaeological sites for tourism investment and utilization.**

Archaeological records stand as a primary source of information in the process of selecting archaeological sites for integration into the tourism sector. These records provide exhaustive details about archaeological sites, encompassing their types, attributes, chronologies, geographical coordinates, distribution patterns, physical conditions, legal status, accessibility, spatial interconnections with infrastructure, and other pertinent services. Additionally, they shed light on potential adverse impacts of site utilization on the historical environment.

Leveraging geographical information systems (GIS) (Sanjuan & Wheatley, 1999) and virtual reality (VR) (Goodrick & Earl, 2004) tools, these records extend the opportunity for potential investors to gain heightened clarity and expedited access to various facets, particularly those related to geographical and spatial contexts, enabling informed decisions prior to selecting sites for tourism initiatives (Byrne, 1999).

Furthermore, serving as repositories of comprehensive technical and administrative insights, archaeological records play a pivotal role in establishing comprehensive national criteria for the selection of archaeological attractions suited for tourism integration in Oman. This approach ensures both economic dividends for the tourism sector and robust safeguarding of the diverse Omani archaeological heritage.

**II. Planning future infrastructure projects.**

Archaeological records serve as informative resources in orchestrating the physical infrastructure development of Oman, harmonizing the management of archaeological assets with the growth of archaeological tourism. Employing these records facilitates an enhanced fusion of development and construction activities with the archaeological domain, fostering preservation and comprehension, thereby positively influencing the tourism sector. These records offer the capacity to swiftly assess whether a proposed development necessitates archaeological intervention (Austin et al, 2000: C.36). Furthermore, they aid planning authorities in mitigating potential detrimental visual impacts of tourism facilities on historical sites and locales (McManamon, 1993). The omission of these records in infrastructure distribution planning could result in missed lucrative tourism investment prospects for archaeologically rich sites, potentially...
depriving them of financial support allocated for conservation, protection, and management.

Accessible in user-friendly electronic formats, archaeological records provide planning authorities instant access to information without mandating full consultation with a professional archaeologist for minor inquiries (Murray, 1995). In developed countries, these records notably foster collaboration between planning authorities and archaeological entities. An exemplar is England's local Sites and Monuments Records (SMRs), which supply planning authorities with "professional advice about the implications of proposed developments on the cultural heritage" (Gilman & Fernie, 2000: A.11). To achieve an integrated approach to planning and conservation, certain SMRs have established corporate GIS-based databases, allowing planners and archaeologists to interconnect SMR data with other fragmented datasets within planning authorities, encompassing topographical and planning constraint-related data (Austin et al, 2000: C.37). This comprehensive insight aids in early-stage development planning, offering a holistic understanding of potential archaeological sites for utilization.

III. Providing consultative insights for archaeological tourism planners and investors

Archaeological records serve as primary information sources for both planners and investors engaged in archaeological tourism endeavors in Oman. They facilitate the evaluation of potential implications and associated costs linked to tourism project development (Gilman & Fernie, 2000: A.15). Furthermore, these records offer advisory insights and solutions to queries posed by both the management of archaeological resources and the tourism sector concerning technical, administrative, and legal facets of utilizing archaeological resources for tourism purposes. This collaborative exchange fosters enhanced dialogue, acting as a conduit for communication between these sectors, thereby informing investment decisions.

The retrievability and statistical analytical capabilities inherent in these records empower responses to inquiries posed by investors, enabling archaeological managers and tourism professionals to address intricate questions otherwise challenging to tackle. With the integration of GIS tools, archaeological records extend the ability to address spatial queries from planners, conservationists, and developers, providing insights into site locations and distributions (Austin et al, 2000: E.11).

IV. Monitoring the archaeological resource
Assessing the attrition rates and condition of the archaeological asset over time represents a prominent challenge faced by archaeological organizations worldwide (Lang, 1995: 79; Darvill & Fulton, 1998). Demonstrating their utility, archaeological records have emerged as effective tools in monitoring the state of the archaeological resource and gauging the adverse effects of tourism on it. By ensuring an updated data stream through continuous resource monitoring, Omani archaeological bodies can adeptly manage and mitigate any detrimental repercussions of tourism, intervening promptly to curtail such impacts. This proactive approach safeguards the archaeological resource's welfare, culminating in the realization of sustainable archaeological tourism objectives.

V. Identifying, harnessing, and safeguarding lesser-known and unidentified sites

It has long been observed that commercial tours of archaeological sites tend to prioritize prominent, large-scale, spectacular, or internationally renowned sites (McManamon, 1993; Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1996). Paradoxically, these very sites are often the most vulnerable, particularly when lacking nearby alternative attractions (Feilden, 1993). Utilizing archaeological records as tools, it becomes feasible to pinpoint lesser-known sites and generate comprehensive location-specific information, assessing their suitability for tourism applications. This strategic approach serves to enhance and diversify Omani archaeological tourism offerings, expanding the array of experiences available to tourists. Moreover, this approach aids in alleviating the strain on well-known sites by dispersing tourist footfall towards lesser-known counterparts, thus mitigating potential negative tourism impacts (McManamon, 1993), while simultaneously bolstering revenues through increased visitor engagement, whether from new or existing sources (Hargrove, 2002).

Capitalizing on these lesser-known sites, which may not receive as much management and conservation focus, can also contribute to broadening public comprehension and admiration of the archaeological resource. Furthermore, it opens avenues for generating new financial resources earmarked for safeguarding, conserving, and effectively managing these sites (McManamon, 1993).

VI. Forging novel tourism routes

To counter escalating competition and contrived "heritage" encounters, strategists in archaeological tourism often resort to assembling attractions into themed tours and routes ‘that link sites like a string of pearls’ (Hargrove, 2002: 11). Globally,
archaeological records are frequently the primary sources tapped by planners and destination marketers for creating such routes. In the context of Oman, archaeological records serve as invaluable resources for investigating prospective sites and attractions to cultivate novel tourism routes. These records proffer insights into the viability of integrating and intertwining various categories of attractions that share geographical proximities. The integration of lesser-known venues with their more renowned counterparts not only accentuates the true range and opulence of Oman's tourism offerings but also broadens the horizons of tourist experiences. This approach additionally fosters an equitable dispersal of tourism benefits across diverse regions, propels the growth of lesser-known sites, and diminishes potential technical and administrative shortcomings stemming from overreliance on isolated projects.

Employing GIS spatial applications within archaeological records empowers tourism planners and investors to visualize the spatial interplay among diverse archaeological and environmental elements and attractions within specific geographic domains. Such applications facilitate gauging the extent to which these elements and attractions can synergize, alongside assessing the economic viability and potential amalgamation into comprehensive undertakings.

VII. Promoting archaeological sites to attract tourism investments

Tourism, being an information-centric industry (Şen, 2000), places paramount importance on the availability of coherent and accessible information sources when propelling archaeological sites for tourism investments. Among the prime conduits for advancing the archaeological resource and stimulating commercial ventures therein are archaeological records. Facilitating online access to segments of these records, for instance, amplifies their information dissemination (Austin et al., 2000: E.15; Richards, 2004), streamlining the selection process for potential investors. In Oman, this approach can serve as a gateway for both foreign and domestic investors to unearth the breadth and diversity of the nation's archaeological wealth, enabling them to gauge and assess the economic prospects it proffers. Notably, it curtails the time, exertion, and monetary outlays that would otherwise be expended by both tourism strategists and investors in the absence of such records. Leveraging these records to champion archaeological attractions affords investors a consolidated foundation upon which to base their investment deliberations.
The dissemination of this information also holds the potential to engage the local Omani private sector (which, presently, exhibits hesitance towards and lack of enthusiasm for investing in this sphere), effectively illuminating the economic potency of the archaeological resource. The harmonization of Omani archaeological records with akin regional records, such as those of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, via standardizing structural designs and content, will facilitate seamless information exchange among these records. This, in turn, will streamline archaeological tourism investments across these countries, expanding the landscape of existing regional tourism markets.

**VIII. Presenting the archaeological resource**

Leveraging their integrated GIS and VR applications, archaeological records can be harnessed to elevate the presentation of sites, catering to both tourists and potential investors. Moreover, they can streamline the acquisition of essential information for creating a compelling and enticing presentation of these sites. Drawing inspiration from practices in England, SMR managers actively engage in producing materials, including interpretive panels, brochures, site interpretation displays, accessible literature, educational resources, and organizing site-related events for local leisure services departments (Gilman & Fernie, 2000: A.15). These managers also contribute by delivering presentations founded on the reservoir of data and collections they house within their databases (ibid).

**IX. Enriching the tourist experience**

Possessing up-to-date archaeological records that encompass a comprehensive array of ongoing archaeological activities can significantly elevate the experiences of diverse tourist groups. The inclusion of information regarding ongoing excavations, for instance, can provide tourists with unique opportunities to not only visit but even actively engage in these excavations (McManamon, 1993). However, effectively disseminating such time-sensitive information can prove challenging due to the misalignment between excavation schedules and tourist programs (ibid). To overcome this challenge, certain countries worldwide have structured their databases to provide such timely details through collaboration with excavation teams (ibid). Remarkably, some archaeological entities, notably in the United States, have taken the innovative step of adjusting their excavation schedules to facilitate tourist visits (ibid). Embracing the chance to participate in excavations not only offers the public and tourists valuable guidance on what to
observe, but it also fosters a deeper comprehension of the archaeologist's work, its purpose, and the continued importance of exploring material evidence from the past (Copeland, 2004).

X. Streamlining time, costs, and efforts

Possessing extensive and up-to-date data, archaeological records have the potential to yield substantial time, financial, and labour savings for both tourism planners and service providers. The ready availability and ease of access to comprehensive and organized information encompassing diverse facets of the archaeological resource can aid the tourism industry in circumventing the need for redundant pre-development archaeological assessments and surveys, as this information is already contained within the records. Undertaking such studies often entails protracted periods, substantial financial commitments, and intricate administrative processes. However, the retrievability and streamlined information exchange facilitated by archaeological records are poised to alleviate these constraints significantly.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A swift assessment of Omani archaeological tourism readily demonstrates that the economic exploitation of archaeological resources is in its initial developmental stages. However, concerted efforts by the government have been undertaken to enhance the synergy between the realms of archaeology and tourism. Notably, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has prioritized the economic utilization of cultural assets. Scrutiny of the criteria employed for asset selection reveals a reliance on incomplete and unreliable data sources, leading to a skewed representation favouring certain monument types like forts and castles.

In light of this, the author emphasizes the pivotal role of archaeological records in enhancing the interplay between archaeology and tourism in Oman. These records, when integrated into the planning, development, and management of archaeological tourism projects, stand to refine selection criteria and streamline information exchange between the tourism industry and archaeological resource management authorities.

The discussion presented in this paper underscores the potential value of archaeological records in forging a cohesive partnership between archaeological resource management and tourism in Oman. Realizing these values necessitates both sectors to adopt key priorities:
a) Strengthening dialogue through improved communication strategies.

b) Elevating information exchange among various sectors related to Omani archaeological tourism.

c) Fostering collaboration not only within archaeological and tourist organizations but also encompassing other stakeholders in database development and maintenance.

d) Shared responsibility in designing Omani archaeological records, preventing redundancy and incomplete data.

e) Ensuring accessibility of archaeological records to investors and tourism personnel through technological means.

f) Allocating revenues from archaeological tourism to sustain archaeological record initiatives.

g) Comprehensive training of government and private sector tourism staff in effective utilization of archaeological records.

By aligning with these priorities and effectively connecting the dots, the harmonious fusion of archaeology and tourism can be realized, driving mutual benefit and sustainable heritage preservation.
REFERENCES


