Heritage, tourism, and community: developing community-based tourism in Old Dongola, Sudan

Abstract: In 2019, the Dialogue community engagement project at Old Dongola began collaborating with local communities to develop community-based businesses that would deliver direct economic benefits to the people living near the archaeological site. Archaeologists are usually not trained in economics or marketing, and there are limits to the social impact an archaeological project can achieve. Yet the implementation of two collaborative programs —one focused on community-owned tourist accommodation and the other on souvenir handicraft production— offered insights into the potential roles that archaeologists can play in supporting community-based initiatives and safeguarding intangible heritage. They also demonstrated how archaeology can contribute to local economy, empowerment, and heritage. The article discusses the ways in which the author worked together with the local community within the framework of the Dialogue project, citing visitor data and the results of community surveys collected in Old Dongola.

Keywords: heritage, empowerment, tourism, economics, community-based business, Old Dongola, Sudan

Tomomi Fushiya[1]

[1] University of Warsaw, Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology

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INTRODUCTION

Archaeological sites and their surroundings in Sudan hold significant potential not only to attract tourists but also to create new opportunities for local economic development. Located at the crossroads linking Sub-Saharan Africa, the Red Sea, and the Mediterranean via Egypt, Sudan has a rich and unique archaeological heritage that reflects its long history of human activity and the ancient and medieval kingdoms that once flourished in the Middle Nile Valley. It is no coincidence that Sudan's archaeological monuments and sites have attracted travelers and scholars from outside of the country —especially over the past two centuries— to explore, discover, and study the Sudanese past (Adam and Taha 2022).[1]

Since regaining independence in 1956, Sudan has experienced political and economic turmoil, which has hindered the country's global image and discouraged both tourism and investment. In the absence of public interest, supportive policy, and private investment, tourism saw little development until around the 2010s. Between 2013 and 2019, however, over 40 archaeological projects were active in the country, many supported by the Qatar–Sudan Archaeological Project, QSAP, which aimed to promote Sudan's archaeological heritage as a driver for tourism (Leisten 2017; Ahmed 2021).

The population in Sudan has long suffered from economic stagnation, inflation, a lack of accessibility of basic infrastructure such as clean water and sewage systems, as well as limited access to quality medical and educational services. This challenging situation is reflected in Sudan's Human Development Index (HDI), which stood at 0.516 in 2022, ranking 170th out of 193 countries (UNDP 2024). Archaeologists who work in Sudan often stay in or near modern villages during fieldwork, directly witnessing and experiencing the living conditions of local communities. These experiences have seemingly prompted some archaeologists to respond to local needs by supporting communities in various ways — such as providing materials and funding renovations of local schools, digging wells, offering transportation during medical emergencies, donating clothes to schools or mosques, and mobilizing friends and colleagues to contribute donations for communities in Sudan. Support thus tended to be incidental and ephemeral, often relying on relationships built with local people, especially excavation workers and their families, through archaeological work (Humphris, Bradshaw, and Emberling 2021: 1132). The employment of local people —mostly men— in excavations and household work is often seen as a form of financial support to communities. However, a recent study shows that their salaries have not kept pace with the rapidly rising inflation and are less attractive economically compared to other available jobs (Bradshaw 2018).

1 It can be assumed that local communities held an interest in and reverence for past remains and monuments, as evidenced by their preservation until today and the incorporation of some sites into local stories and cultural practices (Osman 1992; Bradshaw 2017; Fushiya 2020).

Over the past decade, the relationship between archaeology and local communities in Sudan has received increasing attention, with growing efforts to improve it through research, community programs, and critical reflections on archaeological methodologies (Tully 2014; Bradshaw 2017; Näser 2019; Näser and Tully 2019; Fushiya 2020; Minor et al. 2020; Buzon and Marshall 2022; Lemos 2022; Drzewiecki et al. 2023; Schrader et al. 2024; Spencer et al. 2024). In their review of recent community-related activities and research spurred by the QSAP scheme, Jane Humphris, Rebecca Bradshaw, and Geoff Emberling (2021: 1131) summarize the relatively positive development of community participation and collaboration in Sudanese archaeology — an area that had previously "lagged behind" compared to some other African countries. However, what still appears to "lag behind" is a discussion on the economic value of archaeological and heritage sites, and how Sudan's rich heritage resources might contribute to socio-economic benefits for and overall sustainable development of local communities. Only a few studies have directly addressed this topic in recent years (Bradshaw 2018; Belotti 2024a; 2024b). As Claudia Näser (2019: 384) rightly argues, creating significant socio-economic impact through archaeology requires a broader project scope and a range of expertise that most archaeological projects do not possess (also see Gould and Burtenshaw 2014). Not all archaeological sites or community projects have the potential to generate economic benefits for local communities, due to factors such as location, site type, placement on tourist itineraries, or the availability of local infrastructure and resources (e.g., Amara West/Abkanisa, see Fushiya 2020: 92–93). However, the intersection of archaeology and development is gaining increasing attention, with more and more research funding bodies now requiring proposed research projects to demonstrate social impact. The potential for development also raises the profile of archaeology, reinforcing the importance of site conservation and management in today's global context (Gould 2016). While community archaeologists are typically not trained in development studies or economics, research findings —along with dialogue with communities about their perceptions and experiences of archaeology and local social environment— can inspire donors to initiate new community-based projects. In turn, this may encourage community members to propose new ideas and pursue new opportunities independently (Burtenshaw et al. 2019).

Over the past two decades, projects that integrate heritage research and conservation with local economic development have been carried out in Egypt, both within the scope of foreign archaeological missions and large-scale international aid programs. One example is a community archaeological project launched in 1999 at the Roman harbor site of Quseir el-Qadim, which aimed to generate economic benefits by supporting community-led design, production, and sale of quality souvenirs (Moser et al. 2002; Tully 2007). Another is the Azhar Park and Darb el-Ahmar revitalization project, led by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, which focused on the restoration of historic buildings in the heart of Islamic Cairo. This initiative helped boost the

local economy and improve living conditions through better housing, job opportunities, micro-credit loans, and training programs in areas ranging from heritage management for local experts and craft production to adult literacy (Aga Khan Trust for Culture 2005). More recently, in 2016, USAID launched the VISIT-Esna project, implemented by Takween Integrated Community Development and led by one of the trained experts from the Historic Cairo project. The initiative sought to revitalize Esna as an important tourist destination through the conservation of historic buildings, documentation of local tangible and intangible heritage, improvement of tourist infrastructure, promotion of local traditional food and handicrafts, renovation of shops in the tourist market, and training local people in tour-guiding and handicraft production (USAID 2020; 2023).[2]

In Sudan, archaeological projects have more recently received significant funding for excavations, research, and publications through the QSAP, whose primary aim was to promote the country's archaeological heritage (Ahmed 2021) and encourage the growth of domestic and international tourism to its archaeological sites (Leisten 2017).

At Old Dongola, archaeologists have engaged with, supported, and felt part of the communities around the site since 1964, when the Polish archaeological mission began its investigations. The first director of the mission, Kazimierz Michałowski, took an active interest in the well-being of excavation workers and their families (Michałowski 1983: 30), as he and his team had also done at Faras, another Nubian site (Jakobielski 2021). This commitment to supporting local people and building rapport was continued by Stefan Jakobielski who directed the Polish mission at Old Dongola for forty years (1966–2006) (Łajtar 2024).

Following the acquisition of QSAP funding, a tourism development plan was drawn up and partially implemented (Tarczewski and Dziedzic 2015). In 2019, with the support of a multidisciplinary grant, "community engagement" became a formal component of the research through the launch of the Dialogue project. These initiatives introduced programs and research focused on local heritage and its social values [*Table 1*],[3] aiming to explore the potential of heritage in and around the site for inclusive and sustainable development, in cooperation with local communities and other stakeholders (Fushiya 2021a; Larsen 2021; also see Obłuski and Dzierzbicka 2021). The overarching goal of the Dialogue project was to strengthen relationships between archaeologists and nearby communities and foster a mutually beneficial collaboration in the fields of

2 See https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/visitesna (accessed: 14.01.2025).

3 The Dialogue community engagement project (2019–2022) was implemented within the framework of the multidisciplinary project entitled "ArcheoCDN. Archaeological Centre of Scientific Excellence", led by Artur Obłuski, funded by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Poland as part of the DIALOG funding scheme, agreement No. 0298/2018. The project encompassed pilot projects in geology, geophysics, community engagement, setting up the archaeological archive, and development of virtual reality (VR) applications for the site of Ghazali and a monastery in Old Dongola.

heritage, archaeology, and sustainable development (Fushiya and Radziwiłko 2019; Fushiya 2021a). As part of this initiative, the project sought to strategically identify how an international archaeological project could contribute to sustainable development with local communities and take action accordingly. The sustainable development at Old Dongola centered on community-based tourism while also promoting local stewardship of heritage and customary land ownership, encouraging local entrepreneurship, and empowering women (Larsen 2024).

Table 1. Community engagement programs and local heritage studies in three projects conducted at Old Dongola (2019–2023)

2019	•	Community meetings
(Feb.)	•	Community survey
	•	Visitor and tour guide surveys
	•	Handicrafts survey
	•	Poster workshop
	•	Site Open Day
	•	Research on social values (interviews)
2020	•	Sustainable development planning
(Jan.–Feb.)	•	Object Open Day (knowledge exchange)
	•	Handicraft program
	•	Poster workshop
	•	Site Open Day
	•	Research on social values (interviews)
2021	•	Stakeholder meeting for sustainable development
(Jan.–Apr.)	•	Community Archaeology and Heritage Management training course
	•	Object Open Day (knowledge exchange)
	•	Handicraft program
	•	Evaluation survey
	•	Poster workshops
	•	Site Open Day
	•	Publication of *Old Dongola: Continuity and Change from the Medieval Period to the 21st Century*
2022	•	Evaluation interviews (with community and archaeologists)
(Jan.–Mar.)	•	Handicraft program
2022	•	Research on social values of the mosque (interviews)
(Nov.)	•	Community meetings
2023	•	Conservation & management of the mosque
(Jan.–Mar.)	•	Recording of oral histories about the maintenance of the mosque
	•	Community engagement facilitator training course
	•	Handicraft program
	•	New heritage workshops
	•	Site Open Day
	•	Research on social values of the mosque

This paper begins with an overview of the current state of tourism at Old Dongola and a summary of a stakeholder meeting focused on sustainable development at the site. It then discusses the aims, processes, and outcomes of two key community-centered programs: tourist accommodation and handicraft production. Both initiatives were launched within the framework of the Dialogue project (2019–2022) and continued —without additional funding— until March 2023, when fieldwork was suspended due to the outbreak of conflict in the following month.

The four years of project implementation were marked by major external challenges, including the dramatic political changes in April 2019, ongoing political instability in Sudan, the global pandemic in 2021 and 2022, and escalating political tensions in 2023. These circumstances significantly affected tourism, which had been envisioned as a central driver of sustainable development within the Dialogue project. Nevertheless, these challenges also offered valuable lessons that may benefit other archaeological projects seeking to incorporate aspects of sustainable development into their scope. The conclusion highlights both the vulnerabilities of tourism and the (potential) resilience of community-based tourism at Old Dongola.

This article is based on fieldwork conducted between 2019 and 2023,[4] up until the outbreak of the conflict in Sudan in April 2023. Since then, all archaeological projects in the country have been suspended, with the exception of emergency safeguarding measures and community engagement programs at certain sites which are being implemented by the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums (NCAM). No active armed conflict has occurred in the area of Old Dongola, and as of October 2024, local schools have remained open, albeit with limited resources. Yet, the ongoing conflict has severely impacted all aspects of economic and social life. Due to the difficulty of fully understanding these changes given the limited availability of information, the descriptions presented in this article reflect conditions as observed by the author prior to the outbreak of the conflict.

DIALOGUE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROJECT AT OLD DONGOLA

OLD DONGOLA AND ITS LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Old Dongola is located on the right bank of the Nile in the Northern State. It is a unique site that reflects the history and cultures of northern Sudan from the late 5th century CE to the present day (Godlewski 2013: 7). Known as Tungul in Old Nubian, it was the capital of the powerful Kingdom of Makuria. Following the flight of the Christian royal court and the ruler's conversion to Islam in the 14th

4 The fieldwork was conducted in February 2019, January and March 2020, January–February 2021, January–February and November–December 2022, and January–March 2023.

century, it became known as the center of the Kingdom of Dongola. From the 16th century onward, it evolved into a center of Islamic teaching and a political and economic hub (Obłuski 2021). Old Dongola is the only archaeological site in Sudan that preserves churches and monasteries with extensive wall paintings and inscriptions *in situ*, along with well-preserved fortification walls and extensive settlement remains — testaments to the wealth and power of its rulers and the city's significance as a regional hub [*Fig. 1*]. Some structures at the site remain directly linked to local communities. The mosque at the center of the site, originally built in the 9th century as a church or royal throne hall, was used by the local population until 1969. Several residential houses were inhabited into the 20th century, while the tombs of Muslim *shyūkh* (pl. of *sheikh*) or *fuqara* (religious teachers, community leaders) — known as *qibab* (pl. for *qubba*, domed or conical tombs) continue to be visited by local people. Descendants of those buried there still reside nearby. These more recent historic structures also attract tourist interest, especially the *qibab*, which form part of Old Dongola's distinctive desert landscape [*Fig. 2*].

The houses and *qibab* form an important part of the local communities' heritage. Some residents of the nearby

Fig. 1. Archaeological site of Old Dongola (PCMA UW | photos T. Fushiya)

villages —Ghaddar, Bokkibul, Ghaba, and Hammur [*Fig. 3*]— are direct descendants of those who once inhabited Old Dongola. These families hold customary ownership of land along the river within the site and of some houses in the southwestern part of the site called Hillat Dongola, known among the archaeologists as the "Abandoned Village" (Fushiya 2021a; Larsen 2021: 88–91). The families continue to maintain and use these houses for festivities and communal gatherings.

The Muslim cemetery at the site also remains an active burial ground. Descendants of a *sheikh* or *faqir* buried in a *qubba* or *baniya* (a structure associated with a *sheikh*'s miracle) are interred near their ancestors, and some locals —especially women— visit these graves to seek *baraka* (blessing) (Fushiya 2021b). Men from Ghaddar and Bokkibul have also contributed to archaeological research at Old Dongola since 1964, serving as excavation workers and household staff —adding another layer to the enduring relationship between the community and the site. Particularly close ties developed with the community of the southern part of Ghaddar, where the archaeologists' houses were located for nearly six decades until a new research center with accommodation was built near the site entrance in 2020. Since 2019, when various heritage programs and community-based tourism development initiatives were launched, the archaeological team's local network has grown even further (Fushiya and Radziwiłko 2019; Fushiya 2021a) [see *Table 1*].

Fig. 2. Hillat Dongola (above) and the Muslim cemetery (below) (PCMA UW | photos T. Fushiya)

TOURISM AT OLD DONGOLA

Among the archaeological sites in Sudan, Old Dongola is relatively well visited and regularly features on tourist itineraries offered by Sudanese tour operators, most of whom are based in Khartoum. Tourism began to gain significance in Sudan from the 2010s onward, particularly after the secession of South Soudan in 2011 and the subsequent loss of oil revenues. In 2012, Sudan signed a bilateral cooperation agreement with Qatar, and the QSAP, mentioned above, supported over 40 archaeological initiatives between 2013 and 2019. These projects included site management, conservation, and public engagement components.

Tourism development, promotion, and sustainable growth in the country were also encouraged at the national level, notably with the visit of the Secretary-General of the UN World Tourism Organisation to Khartoum in 2016 (Tourism... 2017). Tourism showed promising growth[5] in the years leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2022) and the outbreak of conflict in April 2023. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, tourism contributed to 3.1% of Sudan's GDP in 2014 (Ritter 2014: 906), expanded to 10.4% by 2019, and declined to 7.6% in 2022 (WTTC 2023).

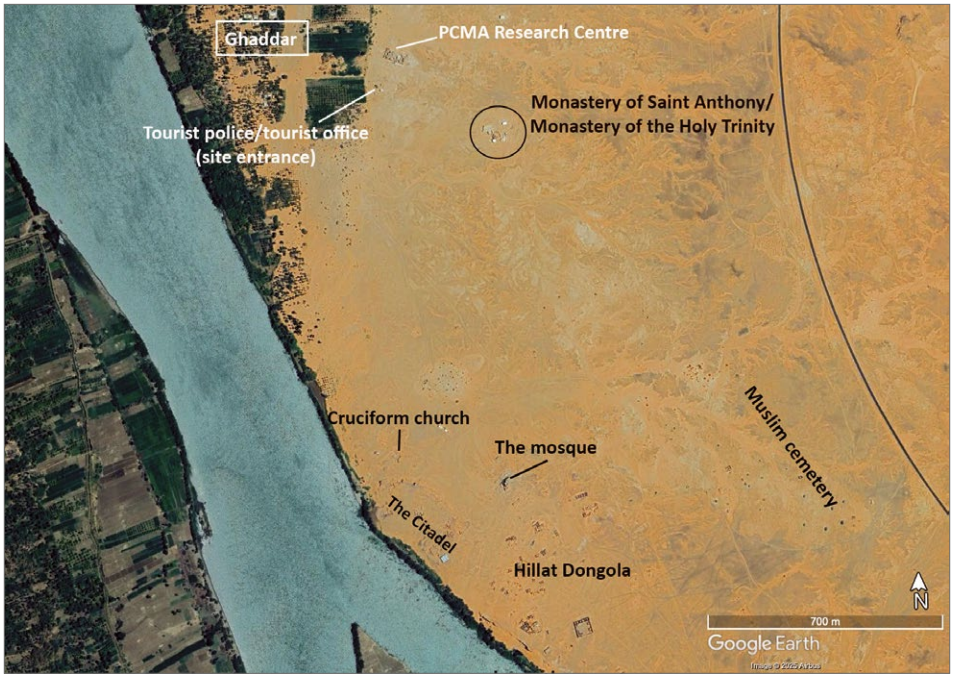

Fig. 3. Map of the area (satellite image Google Earth Pro | processing T. Fushiya)

5 In 2014, 506 thousand individuals entered Sudan for "personal holidays, leisure, recreation and other purposes". This number grew to 619 thousand in 2018 (UN World Tourism Organisation 2019), although it should be taken with caution since this category also includes Sudanese nationals residing abroad (UN World Tourism Organisation 2019), who came to Sudan to visit family or for other purposes (i.e. archaeological work, research visit).

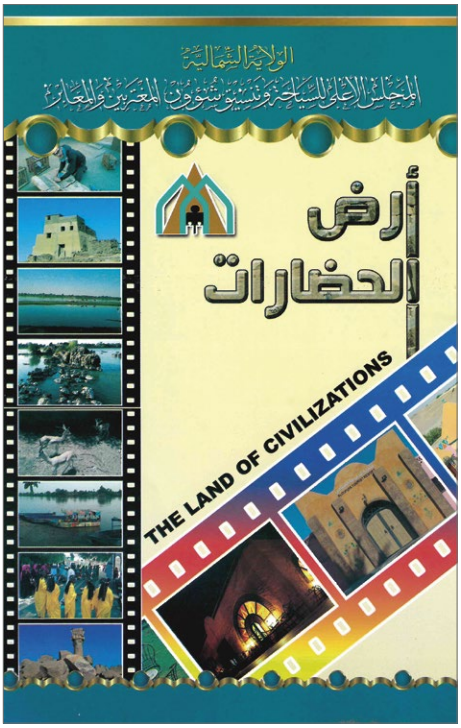

Fig. 4. Cover of *The Land of Civilizations*, a booklet published by the Northern State Higher Council of Tourism and Antiquities

The Northern State (*ash-Shamaliya*), home to several key archaeological sites —including the UNESCO World Heritage site of Gebel Barkal and the Sites of the Napatan Region, as well as Old Dongola— has shown a strong interest in developing cultural tourism around major archaeological sites and monuments located in the region. In 2017, the Ministry of Investment, Industry and Tourism of the Northern State published a magazine titled *Osool*, promoting tourism investment, and in 2018, the Higher Council of Tourism and Antiquities produced a bilingual Arabic–English tourist guidebook, *The Land of Civilizations* [*Fig. 4*], which introduced 11 archaeological sites and 10 public and privately-owned tourist accommodations, some of which were newly established in the 2010s.

Old Dongola is located about 350 km north of Khartoum —a five-hour drive— and lies within a few hours of

Fig. 5. Tourists visiting Old Dongola —often in organized groups— with 4WD vehicles (left), and, occasionally, by bicycle (right), 2019 (PCMA UW | photos T. Fushiya)

both the state capital, Dongola (about 110 km), and the city of Karima (about 145 km). Karima is situated near the UNESCO World Heritage site of Gebel Barkal and the Sites of the Napatan Region, while Dongola serves as a gateway to several major tourist destinations farther north, including Kerma, Tombos, Soleb, and Sai Island. Although this proximity to other larger cities is an advantage, it also poses a challenge: most tourists only spend a few hours at Old Dongola before continuing on to these cities for accommodation. Some tour groups camp in the desert between Old Dongola and Dongola, which may appear as part of the tour's attractions but is in fact often a practical response to the limited accommodation options in the cities. Local guides suggest that homestays could offer a more meaningful alternative.

Most tourists travel in rented cars, although bicycles are not uncommon [*Fig. 5*]. Reaching Old Dongola by public transportation —such as coach buses, minibuses, or taxis— from cities like Dongola, Karima, or Khartoum, or nearby towns like Debba, is possible but challenging, time-consuming, and typically requires knowledge of Arabic.

In the 2019–2020 tourist season,[6] Old Dongola received 1028 non-Sudanese visitors[7] [*Table 2*]. According to both the tourist office of the Old Dongola Unit[8] and local tour operators, it was a particularly active season (Belotti 2024a: 221). Most international visitors were from European and North American countries [*Table 3*], and their numbers varied from over 30 in a single day to none. However, the seasons following 2019–2020 were challenging for the tourism industry. Civilian protests continued after April 2019, leading to several violent clashes in Khartoum, and the COVID-19 pandemic paralyzed global tourism. Despite this, between November 2021 and January 2022, Old Dongola still received about a few dozen international visitors each month, totaling 102, including one group that arrived in two helicopters.

A visitor survey (36 participants: 12 female; 10 male; 14 unspecified) was conducted over a week in mid-Febru-

6 The tourism season in the northern part of Sudan typically lasts for seven months, from October to April. The rest of the year is unsuitable due to the severe climate.

7 Sudanese visitors may enter the sites without tickets, therefore their number is not recorded at the tourist office. The author has met several groups of Sudanese exploring archaeological remains and buildings together with family members and friends from the local area and Khartoum on the occasion of their family or neighbors' weddings. In addition, local residents visit Old Dongola during the *Eid*s (Islamic festivities), weddings, and other family gatherings (see Fushiya and Radziwiłko 2019; Fushiya 2021a). Presumably, the Sudanese visiting Old Dongola outnumber the international visitors. The Kerma Museum, for example, next to the western Defuffa, received 574 international visitors and 22261 Sudanese ones in 2012 (Bundi 2013).

8 "Unit" is the administrative division under the Locality, the State Government, and the National Government. Old Dongola archaeological site is located within the territory that falls in the Old Dongola Unit, Goulid Locality in the Northern State. Each administrative unit has a tourism office. The Old Dongola Unit has its main office in the administrative complex near the Ghaddar market and a satellite office at the site entrance.

ary 2019.[9] Although the sample size is too small to allow for statistically valid generalizations, the author presents the results and several observations below to offer insights on the international tourists who visited Old Dongola. Most respondents (28) were European citizens [*Table 4*], and the majority came to Old Dongola as part of organized tour groups. International visitors typically travel in convoys of several 4WD vehicles, accompanied by a Sudanese or international guide, a cook, and drivers with camping equipment. Only a few respondents were independent travelers visiting the site with their family (3 respondents), partners (2), or friends or relatives (3); one did not answer.

The primary motivation for visiting Old Dongola was archaeology and history (23 responses), though many also indicated a more passive reason — they had not actively chosen the site but visited it as part of a prearranged tour itinerary (17 responses) [*Table 5*]. These results show that many tourists rely on their tour operators to select destinations and accommodations, likely due to limited access to information about Sudan. For instance, there is only one recent guidebook in English (Ibbotson and Lovell-Hoare 2012), while the Lonely Planet website[10] lists only a few tourist attractions in Sudan —Old Dongola is not included— and offers no practical information. Compared to Egypt, archaeological and cultural sights in Sudan remain largely unknown to tourists. A visitor told the author that they were surprised to discover Christian culture in Sudan; a few others said they had never heard of Old Dongola before their trip. Nevertheless, they enjoyed their visit, praising both the site's historical significance and its natural surroundings [*Table 6*]. However, as shown in [*Table 7*], few respondents expressed interest in visiting a handicraft shop or joining a self-guided or guided tour in the nearby village. At the time, this suggested that handicraft businesses targeting tourists were not viable, though it later became clear that many tourists were indeed interested —some even purchased basketry made in Old Dongola (see below). It may be that what tourists claim to seek as "local culture" requires more nuanced investigation. The limited interest in hiring local guides likely relates to the group travel format — most visitors were already accompanied by a tour guide.

Table 2. Number of non-Sudanese visitors to Old Dongola in the 2019–2020 season (Source: Tourist Office at Old Dongola)

			2019				2020	
February	March	April	September	October	November	December	January	**Total**
309	142	34	6	28	131	170	204	**1028**

9 In total 38 responses were collected, but 2 were disregarded since tour guides filled the questionnaire. See Fushiya 2025.

10 https://www.lonelyplanet.com/sudan (accessed: 05.01.2025).

Table 3. Number of non-Sudanese visitors to Old Dongola by nationality in the 2019–2020 season (Source: Tourist Office at Old Dongola)

Europe	716
Americas	122
Oceania	51
Asia	63
Africa	18
No answer	58
Total	**1028**

Table 4. Country of residence and level of education of the visitor survey respondents (*n*=36)

Country of Residence	
Switzerland	14
Netherlands	6
France	4
Sudan	2
Italy	2
Austria	1
Belgium	1
Other	1
No answer	5

Final education	
Bachelor's degree	9
Master's degree	8
PhD	9
Secondary school diploma	4
Technical/vocational school diploma	1
No answer	5

Table 5. Respondents' reasons for visiting Old Dongola (*n*=36, multiple answers)

I'm interested in archaeology and history	23
Because it is a part of a tour itinerary	17
I'm interested in cultures of Arab/African countries	12
Other[11]	2
I have been there before	0
I'm interested in educational materials	1
I live near the site	0

Table 6. The aspects of Old Dongola most appreciated by respondents (*n*=36, multiple answers)

History of the place	27
Natural environment	10
Local cultures and customs (crafts and food)	5
Other	0
No answer	0

11 One of the respondents who chose "Other" noted that it was because "I work near the site", and the other did not give any reason.

Table 7. Aspects that would have improved the respondents' visitor experience at Old Dongola (*n*=36, multiple answers)

Information panels	18
Visitor center or museum	16
Access to the interiors of the church and monastery	15
Information booklet	7
Toilets	8
Self-guided visitor path	4
Sitting area	3
Self-guided visit to the local village	1
Guided visit to the local village	1
Camel riding	0
Local craft shops	0
Rest house (café and restaurant)	0
No answer	7

LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

While the project considered tourists' expectations for their visits to Old Dongola, its primary focus was on understanding the expectations and concerns of local communities concerning tourism development — and if they desired tourism development at all. It has long been known among local people that tourists visit the nearby

Fig. 6. February 2021 stakeholder meeting (PCMA UW | photo M. Rekłajtis)

archaeological site. Two families living near the site entrance had even cooperated with several tour companies, occasionally offering overnight stays or local meals in their homes. Surveys conducted in Ghaddar in 2019 (Fushiya and Radziwiłko 2019; Radziwiłko 2025, in this volume) and again in 2021 (Fushiya 2021a; Appendix) revealed that local respondents were generally very positive about tourism development and saw it as a potential source of new jobs and improved infrastructure. This result was somewhat surprising, given that the prevailing form of tourism — organized group tours— had brought few tangible benefits to the communities, and most residents had very limited opportunities to interact with tourists.

Within the framework of the Dialogue project, a stakeholder meeting was held on 12–13 February 2021 at the Polish research center in Old Dongola to discuss and develop a strategic plan for the site's sustainable development. The meeting was led by Peter Larsen, with support from Baloula Mohamed Baloula Abbas [*Fig. 6*] (Larsen 2021). It was attended by 37 international, national, and local stakeholders, along with researchers from the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw (PCMA UW) [*Tables 8, 9*]. The event began with a site visit guided by archaeologists, Artur Obłuski and Maciej Wyżgoł, and a community representative, Sheikh Mohamed Sati Babiker. During the discussions, participants exchanged ideas, identified the site's potentials, and raised concerns — particularly regarding land ownership and restrictions on local practices such as cultivation and expansion of agricultural areas within the site boundary. The meeting resulted in a shared vision and led to the formulation of several documents: *Heritage and Sustainable Development Strategy*, the *2021 Action Plan for Old Dongola*, and the *Nafir Commitment* (Lars-

Fig. 7. "Six strategic pillars" discussed during the stakeholder meeting (After Larsen 2021b)

en 2024). The action plan was formalized through participants' signing of the *Nafir*[12] as an expression of their joint commitment to implementing the plan (Fushiya 2021a; Larsen 2021).

The plan, centered around "six strategic pillars" [*Fig. 7*] (see Larsen 2021; 2024), was discussed in detail during the meeting. It was prepared in both English and Arabic[13] and distributed to all participants. A notable outcome of the stakeholder meeting and resulting plan was the engagement of actors typically uninvolved in archaeological projects, such as foreign governments, international organizations, regional tourism offices, and the State Governor's office (see below).

Table 8. Agenda of the stakeholder meeting

Day 1 (Friday, 12 February)	Day 2 (Saturday, 13 February)
• Arrival to Old Dongola • Friday prayer	7:00 am Breakfast
3:00 pm Lunch	8:00 am Session 2 • Presentations of the discussion results and action plan, led by Dr. Larsen
3:30 pm Site tour	9:30 am Coffee Break
5:30 pm Session 1 • Welcome and introduction of the project by Dr. Artur Obłuski and Mr. Salah Mousa • Introduction of the draft of the strategic plan and the Strategic Pillars by Dr. Peter Larsen • Group discussion about the action plans of the Strategic Pillars 1–6	10:00 am Session 2 (continued) • Presentations of the discussion results and action plans of the Strategic Pillars, Questions & Answers session 11:00 am Session 3 • Discussion and drafting of the Joint Action Plan 2021, led by Dr. Larsen
8:00 pm Dinner	12:30 pm Lunch
	2:00 pm Closing remarks and farewell

Table 9. List of participants in the stakeholder meeting in 2021 (titles held at the time of the meeting)

Institution	Participating representative(s)
Ministry of Higher Education and Science	• Prof. Intisar Soghyroun (Minister)
National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums (NCAM)	• Dr. Hatim el-Nour (Director) • Dr. Abdelhai Saeed (Head of the Field Projects) • Mr. Murtada Bushra Mohamed (Regional Director, Northern State) • Mr. Fakhri Hassan Abdallah (Inspector)
Qatar–Sudan Archaeological Project (QSAP)	• Dr. Salah Mohamed Ahmed (Coordinator)

12 *Nafir* is a Sudanese Arabic term that refers to cooperation to build something (often a house) together by individuals contributing to it by providing labor, food for workers, financial support, etc.

13 Translation by Ola Mamoun, see Larsen 2024.

Table 9. List of participants in the stakeholder meeting in 2021 (titles held at the time of the meeting), continued

Institution	Participating representative(s)
UNESCO Khartoum Office	• Dr. Pavel Kroupkine (Head) • Dr. Abderrhman Ali (Consultant)
European Union Delegation to Sudan	• Mr. Fabien Schaeffer
Northern State	• Mr. Zaki Abdelhai al-Thair (Governor's Office) • Mr. Ali Mohmaed Ali (Governor's Office) • Dr. Afraa Osman Hussein (General Director of Tourism Council) • Mr. Abdel Khalid Awad (Head of Tourism) • Mr. Abdellhai Mahmoud (Media Consultant) • Mr. Abdel Moneim (representative)
Goulid Locality	• Mr. Mohamed Ali (Director of the Goulid Locality) • Ms. Mona Hassan (Head of Tourism Office)
Local community	• Mr. Murtada Abdelhafiz Suleimam (Director of the Old Dongola Unit) • Mr. Ahmed Amin (Head of Tourist Police, Old Dongola Unit) • Mr. Mohamed Ibrahim (Deputy Head of Tourist Police, Old Dongola Unit) • Mr. Mohamed Hassan (Head of Police, Old Dongola Unit) • Ms. Abeer Babiker (Head of Tourism Office, Old Dongola Unit) • Ms. Nasra Hassan Ali (former Head of Women's Union) • Ms. Nahla Abdelgadir (former Head of Women's Union) • Mr. Salah Mousa (Head of the Revolutionary Council of Old Dongola) • Mr. Ayman Abubakr al Khalifa (Community Council of the Old Dongola site) • Mr. Mosaab Mohamed Ali (Community Council of the Old Dongola site) • Mr. Ibrahim Allah Jabo (Community Council of the Old Dongola site) • Sheikh Mohamed Sati Babiker (Community Council of the Old Dongola site) • Mr. Mohamed Ali al-Gadi (community representative)
Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw (PCMA UW)	• Dr. Artur Obłuski (Director of the PCMA and the Old Dongola mission) • Dr. Mahmoud El-Tayeb (Director of the PCMA Research Centre in Sudan) • Dr. Tomomi Fushiya (PCMA Research associate, the Dialogue project) • Dr. Peter Larsen (Consultant, the Dialogue project) • Dr. Baloula Mohamed al-Baloula (Consultant, the Dialogue project) • Mr. Zakieldeen Mahmoud (Archaeologist) • Mr. Mohamed Nasr ed-Deen (Archaeologist) • Mr. Tohamy Abugasim Khalifa al Tohamy (Archaeologist)

To promote community-based tourism development, the action plan included the creation of a visitor guideline or code of conduct for non-Sudanese visitors to local villages, an outline of local cultural practices, and the training of community members as local guides — the latter of which had already begun (Idriss and Siedahmed 2025, in this volume). As community surveys confirmed (Radziwiłko 2025, in this volume; Appendix), residents were generally eager to welcome tourists from diverse cultural backgrounds. However, both the community consultations and the stakeholder meeting revealed that this "welcome" was conditional. Community members emphasized the importance of creating the visitor guideline or code of conduct themselves. Such an approach would support sustainable tourism by reinforcing their cultural, human, and land rights, while promoting self-determination throughout the tourism development process (Holmes, Grimwood, and King 2016; also see the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples). Representatives of the Ghaddar community expressed a strong interest in creating guidelines that would ensure tourists would respect local traditions and customs. A guideline of this kind would help foster a sense of comfort and safety for both community members and tourists.

The community also viewed tourism as a means of promoting their heritage. A local guide system was seen as a way for community members to share historical, cultural, and spiritual knowledge about Old Dongola and its surroundings in their own voices. The local people have in-depth knowledge and first-hand experience of the area, so it is important to train community members to be visitor guides within the community. The system would also provide direct benefits through employment opportunities. For example, the director of the Polish mission proposed that all tour groups and visitors hire a local guide, granting them access to the Monastery of Saint Anthony (also known as the Monastery of the Holy Trinity), which preserves the best *in situ* Christian wall paintings in North Africa,[14] as a way to support this initiative. However, implementing such a system requires approval from NCAM, coordination with tour companies, and the training of English-speaking guides who are knowledgeable about the site's history, local heritage, and heritage protection. Good command of English remains limited among local youth,[15] making the establishment of a robust guiding system challenging. Addressing this issue would require long-term com-

14 The monastery is usually closed to visitors, except when a Polish archaeologist/conservator happens to be working on-site and can guide visitors. This is because a measure to protect the wall paintings is not in place yet and visitors should be instructed to pay careful attention to the vulnerable areas including narrow passages in the building.

15 Being aware of the English language status in tourism and the current lack of language educational/training tools, schools in Ghaddar asked for support in teaching English. Marcin Gostkowski, a Polish teacher and archaeologist who visited Old Dongola and the local schools in 2020, volunteered to raise funds in Poland to support the local school renovations and purchase audio-training devices. Classrooms were renovated thanks to the support of Niepubliczna Szkoła Podstawowa British International Academy Primary Warsaw (MyVinci school) in 2022.

mitment and funding for education and strategic tourism development, which is beyond the scope of this project. As an alternative, a training program began in 2023 to prepare recent graduates in archaeology and related fields to guide Sudanese visitors, including members of local communities, when a new project was funded by the ALIPH Foundation[16] (Idriss and Siedahmed 2025, in this volume). The aim was to train these guides to share the results of the archaeological research at Old Dongola and develop heritage workshops for local children and youth. Familiarizing the younger generation with the site and archaeology may encourage some of them to become tour guides for international tourists in the future. Having a group of trained engagement facilitators would also allow heritage workshops and site visits to continue during the archaeological team's nearly eight-month absence from the site each year.[17]

COMMUNITY-BASED BUSINESSES IN THE DIALOGUE PROJECT

The Dialogue project initiated two programs aimed at fostering community-based tourism. Among the six strategic pillars outlined in the sustainable development plan, the promotion of local entrepreneurship —particularly with a focus on job creation and women's empowerment— seemed, from the author's perspective, to hold the most promise. The author was already aware of existing local initiatives and skills in this area. The former Ghaddar Women's Union, for example, had brought together women engaged in handicraft production, selling their work in markets and cultural festivals and sharing their skills with other women (Fushiya and Radziwiłko 2019). The Union had been a well-organized and connected network of 96 local women and 17 men, committed to supporting families and children in the village. Beyond handicrafts, they had previously invested in soap production and a small shop, which, however, did not thrive. Their products were mostly sold locally, targeting Sudanese customers, and the profits were limited because of the small market among Sudanese communities — an audience familiar with, already owning, or capable of producing similar items.[18] The widespread willingness to support each other continued after the Union was formally dissolved following the fall of the government of President Omar Bashir and the establishment of a civilian–military interim government. Their awareness and capacity for running their projects and organizing networks both within and beyond the village were already evident during

16 See the project description at https://pcma.uw.edu.pl/en/2023/04/25/project-baraka/ (accessed: 02.04.2025).

17 Unexpectedly, this idea helped to continue the heritage workshop after the conflict outbreak (Idriss and Siedahmed 2025, in this volume).

18 In addition to the limited sales opportunities, it later turned out that the pricing of their products was also an issue — although attractive, the handicrafts were deemed pricey.

the first meeting held in February 2019 (Fushiya and Radziwiłko 2019). These local initiatives convinced the author that it would be more effective to collaborate with existing initiatives and interests in the community, rather than the project starting from drawing up a systematic plan — especially since the author lacked experience in community-based business development. In fact, the community had far more experience in this area. Thus, the author decided that the project should focus on identifying needs and interests, facilitating matchmaking with potential tourist markets, supporting start-up investments, and offering advice on what types of products might be suitable or preferred by international visitors. The project also encouraged the women by affirming the importance of their skills and the appeal of their traditional products to foreign visitors, helping them create products that are potentially attractive for international tourists and benefit their households economically. Many decisions about how to work, who should be involved, and the roles of individuals were intentionally left to the community itself.

COMMUNITY-OWNED VISITOR ACCOMMODATION: THE HOUSE OF GEILI

As mentioned above, even before the Dialogue project began, two families had already opened their homes to a small number of tourists based on personal contacts with tour guides. Several tour operators the author spoke to at Old Dongola noted the need for more accommodation. Through several meetings, discussions, and conversations with community members, the author identified a family in Ghaddar that owned an uninhabited house and expressed particular interest in hosting international visitors.

Two members of the family, Nasra Hassan Ali and Nahla Abdelgadir, were active local entrepreneurs who, as representatives of the Ghaddar Women's

Fig. 8. Meeting the family who owned the House of Geili, renovated to serve as tourist accommodation, 2021 (PCMA UW | photo T. Fushiya)

Fig. 9. Interior of the House of Geili after renovation, 2021 (PCMA UW | photo T. Fushiya)

Union, had already conducted initiatives supporting local women and children in need. Another member of this family, the late Ali Geili, had a strong personal interest in the heritage and history of Ghaddar and Nubia in general. He collected local oral histories and published a book, *al-Kushr* (2016). Inspired by the many stories shared by "uncle" Ali, the family was eager to engage visitors in conversations about local heritage. The family of Hassan Ali owned a large house complex in Ghaddar village, a 15-minute drive from the site entrance to Old Dongola. The property included two large buildings with 23 beds and a kitchen, a smaller building with toilets and showers, a water tank, and a large courtyard surrounded by palm groves and fruit gardens. They also owned another uninhabited house next door that could also be converted into tourist accommodation if the first venture proved successful.

In 2020, the project was invited by the family to a meeting to discuss the use of the house [*Fig. 8*]. Impressed by both the house and the owners' enthusiasm, the Polish mission offered financial support that covered a significant portion of the renovation costs [*Fig. 9*]. The family repainted the walls, repaired the windows, and decorated the house with local handicrafts. They set up a tea area in the courtyard with a table and seating under a large tree and hired local women for food preparation and cleaning. Finally, the family named the renovated house the "House of Geili". Thanks to the family's local networks and word-of-mouth among tour guides, following its opening in 2021 the house quickly became known to tour operators and frequently welcomed both individual travelers and tour groups.

In fact, the House of Geili was ready before the stakeholder meeting in mid-February 2021, and its availability as a newly established community-owned visitor accommodation drew the attention of the UNESCO Khartoum Office. In response to the evident need to build capacity among local communities, the Office added a workshop on community-based tourism and sustainable development to the action plan. At the time, the UNESCO Khartoum Office was already supporting cultural tourism initiatives in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Antiquities, and organizing similar workshops across Sudan. The timing of the stakeholder meeting, the initiative at Old Dongola, and the ongoing UNESCO program coincided, making it possible to deliver the workshop immediately after the stakeholder meeting.

The three-day workshop on community-based tourism was held in February 2021 at the House of Geili and a local school in Ghaddar.[19] It introduced participants, including those managing and working at the House of Geili, to a range of ideas for developing tourism-related businesses within the community [*Fig. 10*]. The workshop was led by instructors —Layla Osman and Gafar Osman— who had run other commu-

19 See also: https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/community-based-tourism-training-old-dongola-sudan (accessed: 06.11.2024).

nity-based tourism workshops organized by the UNESCO Khartoum Office, highly acclaimed by participants. Layla Osman made herself available for follow-up advice and support after the workshop. She also voiced a need for another workshop —this time devoted to sanitary conditions— intended for women interested in food preparation for tourists. As of October 2024, this workshop has not yet taken place. Nevertheless, post-workshop interactions with the instructors demonstrated that the community was highly motivated to acquire new skills and knowledge that would make visitors' stays more comfortable and enjoyable, establishing tourism as a viable business. This proactive engagement could serve as a solid foundation for attracting future support from national or international organizations.

The House of Geili opened to tourists in 2021. As it gradually became known to tour guides, over 180 tourists had stayed there by 2023. It created 16 jobs for community members, including positions as cook, driver, and cleaner.

BASKETRY FOR SOUVENIRS FROM OLD DONGOLA: MINI *TABAQ* AND BEYOND

Handicrafts in northern Sudan are made from readily available natural resources, with minimal need to purchase raw materials to produce utensils or furniture. Various traditional handicrafts continue to be produced in present-day Ghaddar. For instance, wooden furniture made

Fig. 10. Workshop on community-based tourism at Ghaddar, 2021 (PCMA UW | photos Zakieldeen Mahmoud)

with plant-fiber cordage, such as beds (*angareeb*) and low stools (*bamba*), are crafted by men, while basketry such as mats (*birsh*),[20] basket containers (*goffa*), and flat baskets (*tabaq*),[21] made of date and doum palm fronds, are produced by women [*Fig. 11*] (Fushiya 2021b). Basketry is primarily made for individual use, and only the surplus is offered for sale to neighbors or at a local *souq* (market). Both *angareeb* and basketry have a long history in Nubia. Wooden beds are attested in ancient burials in Nubia already in the Early and Middle Kerma periods (2500–1750 BCE) (Gratien 1978: 55, 167, cited in Lehmann 2023), and were a common feature of burials during the Classic Kerma period (1750–1500 BCE) (Lehmann 2023). More recently, wooden beds have been used for sitting, sleeping, and during weddings and funerals, and have constituted a common feature of domestic space. Although they have been gradually replaced with metal beds —and their plant-fiber cordage with plastic strings— ceremonies like funerals continue to use wooden beds to carry the deceased to a cemetery. Likewise, some well-preserved basketry objects have been excavated in tumuli and graves dated to the Classic Kerma period in Kerma (Reisner 1923: 317–318, Pl. 69). In Qasr Ibrim, a donkey saddle, various types of containers, and mats have been recovered; these are dated from the Meroitic (100–300 CE) through the Ottoman period (1560–1812 CE) (Wendrich 1999: 207–215; Driskell 2018). Even when organics are not preserved in archaeological contexts, the use of basketry can be confirmed based on its imprints on pottery —from as early as the 5th millennium BCE (Gatto 2019)— and on roofing materials found in the pharaonic colonial town at Amara West (1300–1100 BCE). A similar use of matting as roofing material is still seen in the nearby villages of Abri and Ernetta Island

Fig. 11. Handicrafts produced by members of the Women's Union at Ghaddar, 2019 (PCMA UW | photo T. Fushiya)

20 *Birsh* is made of several *dafir* (a band of flat basketry woven using the plaiting technique) sewn together, and is used for sitting, as a (personal) prayer mat, as floor covering in a prayer room in a mosque, as wedding decoration, and it can be (re-)used as roofing material. Depending on its function, the colors and shapes differ.

21 *Tabaq* is made using the coiling technique, in different sizes, made of date and doum palm fronds. *Tabaq* is used for food-covering to avoid dust and insects, cooling flatbread (*kisra*), and winnowing grains and seeds. Some food-covering *tabaq* are colorfully decorated.

(Vandenbeusch 2017). Containers, lids, matting, sandals, and other fragments of basketry have also been uncovered from domestic spaces dated to the Funj period (16th to 18th centuries CE) at Old Dongola (Warowna 2022a; 2022b). Today, *tabaq* and *birsh* are the two most common types of basketry used in everyday life in Sudanese Nubia. Both *angareeb* and basketry are household items that are considered "heritage" (*turath*) among Sudanese Nubian communities (Adams 1977: 48–50; Fushiya 2020: 185–187). The importance of basketry was recognized in 2022 when it was inscribed in the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity as "Date palm, knowledge, skills, traditions and practices", through a multinational nomination by 15 countries, including Sudan.[22]

These traditional and environmentally friendly handicrafts have been increasingly replaced with inexpensive materials such as plastic bags or containers, and a preference for new materials in northern Sudan was notable. As a result, their production has declined and the associated skills are at risk of being lost. The author observed the dire situation of these skills in different parts of Sudanese Nubia. For instance, most *angareeb* craftsmen were elderly, and it was difficult to find an active craftsman making them around Abri, though Manuela Lehmann (2021) found a skilled person further south near Dongola. Similarly, several women in Abri claimed to know how to weave basketry, but there was only one who actually produced *tabaq*. Philippa Ryan and her colleagues reported an account of a family from Ernetta Island near Abri, in which the women used to gather and make basketry together until the 1980s (Ryan et al. 2021). In Tombos, a woman showed the author well-made *tabaq*s and *birsh* [***Fig. 12***]. The *tabaq*s were decorated with colorful strips of textiles typical of Mahas and Sikoot Nubia (Ryan et al. 2021), as well as modern Egyptian Nubia (Wendrich 1999). Colored doum palm leaves were used to create argyle patterns on the *birsh*. The author later learned from a few basket producers in Ghaddar that this particular weaving pattern was made using a complex technique that many producers today find difficult to replicate. The woman in Tombos explained that she had stopped making basketry because no one was interested in purchasing or using it.

On the other hand, the Women's Union in Ghaddar at the time included an active handicraft group. The challenging situation of handicraft production, skill transfer, and customer interest in Ghaddar may differ little from that in other parts of Sudanese Nubia. Yet, the group continues to produce crafts, train anyone interested, and sells their products at various cultural festivals and markets in Sudan. Using traditional weaving skills, they make containers, bags, hats, small flat basketry objects used as fans, and other items fit for use in modern households. They also mentioned that a woman from another part of the re-

22 See the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage website: https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/date-palm-knowledge-skills-traditions-and-practices-01902 (accessed: 08.08.2024).

gion, who visits different villages to hold workshops for women, came to Ghaddar some years ago and taught them how to make paper crafts. The Ghaddar's women's group primarily produces and sells two types of items: basketry, which uses traditional skills of weaving palm fronds, and containers made from recycled paper and plastic.

Together with this local initiative, several other positive developments encouraged collaboration with women craft makers in Ghaddar. Firstly, some of the craft makers expressed interest in working with us on production, redesign, and sales for tourists during our first meeting with the Women's Union in 2019. The meeting also confirmed that the Union was a well-organized structure. Secondly, at the time, the Polish team was planning to construct a visitor center featuring a souvenir shop and a cafeteria to be operated by community members, allowing them to directly profit from tourism. The initial strategy of the handicraft program was to make full use of this new facility. Thirdly, year 2019 was an economically and socially challenging time in the country. The dire situation led to civilian protests that culminated in the fall of the 30-year regime of President Omar Bashir in April 2019. In such circumstances, the new collaboration should not be an additional burden on a community already facing hardship. Basketry production is not only ecological and sustainable but also requires minimal investment, as all necessary raw materials can be sourced locally; only the dyes and textiles for decoration need to be purchased at the market (Wendrich 1999: 397–405). Finally, a few local people occasionally visited the archaeologists' house offering their crafts for sale.

Fig. 12. Basketry (left: *birsh*, right: *tabaq*) made in Tombos, 2020 (Photos T. Fushiya)

The handicraft collaboration was launched in 2020 by the author and Mohamed Hassan Siedahmed.[23] At the time, neither had any experience in souvenir design or marketing. The project offered only advice on the women's proposals from a foreigner's perspective and provided a place to sell their products — to the team and the occasional tourists who visited the archaeological house. The two project members sold the handicrafts at prices suggested by the makers, without charging any commission, so the entire profit went to the individual craft makers. The project ended up working mainly with two groups of local women in Ghaddar. One comprised women living in different parts of the village, whose products were collected by the former head of the Women's Union, as she had always done in the past. The other group consisted of women living near the Polish archaeological team's house, who were also members of the Union. The project dealt with them directly and picked up their products. In addition, a few women and locally hired household staff occasionally brought some handicrafts to the archaeologists' house — just as they had done previously.

The first step of implementing the Dialogue project was to understand the process of basketry production and explore options for redesigning basketry to serve as souvenirs. For example, the *tabaq* made by the women of Ghaddar was appealing in itself, but its size —typically 40–50 cm in diameter— was too large to fit in a traveler's bag. Transforming the traditional *tabaq* into a "tourist-friendly" object (about 15 cm in diameter) did not require any major changes to the original style or decoration. A group of three craftswomen living near the Polish team's house were asked to make samples. After around 10 days, they produced 10 small *tabaqs*, while in the meantime, the head of the Union brought two bags and some other hand-crafted items [***Table 10***]. The palm fronds needed six to seven days to dry, while the actual weaving of a small *tabaq* could be completed by an experienced craftswoman in one day, if done during breaks in her housework. All pieces were unique: although more or less the same size (15 cm in diameter), each was woven in a different style and featured individual decorative patterns [***Fig. 13***]. The products were priced by each craft maker.

The second step was to find a souvenir shop in Khartoum interested in selling handicraft products from Ghaddar. By early 2020, it had become clear that the construction of the visitor center was indefinitely postponed, so the possibility of selling the products in the city, in addition to the local market, was seen as a way to boost sales. It was also important to gather feedback from professionals in the handicraft sector, who catered mostly to international tourists. Three areas in the Khartoum agglomeration were key to the crafts trade: Souq Omdurman — the oldest

23 Mohamed Hassan Siedahmed was an interpreter, translator, and engagement facilitator in the Dialogue project. He is the Director of the Information & Promotion Directorate at the Higher Council of Tourism and Antiquities, Northern State, Sudan, and teaches tourism at the University of Dongola.

market in Greater Khartoum, frequently visited by international tourists; a group of handicraft shops near Souq Arabi in Khartoum; and several art galleries in the upscale neighborhoods of Khartoum, which mostly catered to expats. There was also a small-scale vendor at the entrance of a hotel near Souq Arabi, where many international tourists, journalists, aid workers, and archaeologists stayed. The shop sold various handicrafts and jewelry, including basketry from Sudan and other countries such as Rwanda, but none of the products came from the northern part of the country. Before traveling to Old Dongola, the author approached this vendor and one of the art galleries. The shop owner was immediately interested in the handicrafts and said he would pay 75–100 SDG per piece, while the gallery owner, although curious, was more skeptical about their potential to sell at a good price. Once the basketry samples were ready, the au-

Fig. 13. Test products made by craftspeople in Ghaddar, 2020 (PCMA UW | photos T. Fushiya)

thor first returned to the vendor's shop before reaching out to other shops and galleries. The vendor instantly decided to buy all eight small and medium *tabaqs* and a bowl for 1000 SDG (the equivalent of 20 USD) and two bags for 500 SDG (10 USD)[24] and put them on display alongside other handicrafts. He found the basketry from Ghaddar to be well-made and asked for additional pieces and contact information to the producers. According to him, it is not easy to find good craft makers who could provide a steady supply of quality handicrafts.

This apparent success increased the craft makers' motivation. The news that all the products had been sold at once was, not surprisingly, well received. When the project team returned to the village the following year, three women were waiting for us with 35 small *tabaqs*, while others later brought a large and a small *birsh*, a medium-sized *tabaq* with textile decorations, small baskets, and a variety of bags [*Fig. 14*]. Additional basketry products were collected by the Women's Union. These were displayed in the Polish mission's house during the stakeholder meeting as samples

Fig. 14. Basketry made in Ghaddar, displayed during the stakeholder meeting, 2021 (PCMA UW | photo T. Fushiya)

24 The exchange rate as of 1 February 2020 (1 USD was worth 48.904 SDG), according to the Xe website (https://www.xe.com/currencytables/, accessed: 10.01.2024).

of local community handicrafts, successfully drawing the attention of attendees. A few items were purchased by participants, while the Northern State Tourism Office promised to build a new office at the site entrance, where local handicrafts could be displayed for sale.[25] The basketry was also sold to members of the Polish archaeological team and to a group of tourists who visited one craft maker's house in the village and —overwhelmed by the experience— paid more than the asking price (e.g., a tourist who was asked to pay 700 SDG instead gave 1000 SDG). As the archaeological team purchased many pieces, its members requested a special discount, which was approved by the craftswomen [*Table 11*]. By this time, different groups of women began spontaneously visiting the team's house with products to sell and with new business proposals to discuss. On one occasion, a group of women came seeking advice on new products and ways to improve their sales [*Fig. 15*]. Many of the handicrafts featured unique designs inspired by traditional styles and techniques. However, it became clear that there was a difference between how the project team and the local women understood the concept of a "local souvenir". The former envisioned it to be a unique handicraft produced locally, while some of the local women offered items made in other parts of Sudan and purchased from markets elsewhere. One woman saw tourism as a new business opportunity and attempted to sell soap labeled "made in China" to international tourists. The meaning of "local" and strategies for developing the handicraft business were discussed in several meetings, some of which were also attended by Sudanese archaeologists and Archaeology students participating in the Community Archaeology training course (Fushiya 2021c).

Fig. 15. Meeting with a group of women who brought new products and ideas, 2021 (PCMA UW | photos M. Rekłajtis (left), T. Fushiya (right))

25 Construction work began in 2022 but was interrupted by the change of Director in the Northern State Tourism Office and the uncertainty in the tourism industry due to the global pandemic.

Table 10. Types of products and their numbers produced and sold by individual craft makers in 2022–2023

	2022			2023		
	Types of products	**Products for sale**	**Products sold**	**Types of products**	**Products for sale**	**Products sold**
Craft maker 1	3 types (small *tabaq*, small and large *goffa*)	7	7	2 types (small and medium *tabaq*)	15	14
Craft maker 2	1 type (small *tabaq*)	6	6	2 types of basketry (small *tabaq* and *goffa*)	12	8
Craft maker 3	1 type (small *tabaq*)	4	0	–	–	–
Craft maker 4	1 type (small *tabaq*)	1	1	–	–	–
Craft maker 5	–	–	–	6 types of basketry (different sizes of *tabaq*, *birsh*, *goffa*)	37	25
Craft maker 6	–	–	–	2 types (small and medium *tabaq*)	15	4
Craft maker 7	–	–	–	9 types of basketry (small and medium *tabaq* with colored rims, large and extra-large basket box with cover, small and tiny bags, round and small square *birsh*)	28	17
	–	–	–	Non-basketry items (different sizes of metal containers, *garaa* (loofah fruit), *motabal* (kohl container), *gadas* (pottery), container, small charcoal holder)	19	4
Craft maker 8	–	–	–	1 type (*tabaq*)	1	1
Total basketry	–	**18**	**14**	**–**	**108**	**73**
Total products	–	**18**	**14**	**–**	**127**	**77**

Table 11. Prices of basketry and other items over the course of four years [Sudanese pounds]

Product type	2020	2021	2022	2023
Small *tabaq*	100	300 (for tourists); 200 (for the team)	3000 (for tourists); 2000 (for the team)	1500–2000
Medium *tabaq*	150	500–1500		2000–2500
Large *tabaq*				3000
Medium *tabaq* with handle		700		2000
Small *tabaq* with colored rim				2000
Medium *tabaq* with colored rim				2500–3000
Tabaq with cover				3000–5000
Small *goffa*			3000	
Medium *goffa*				3000
Large *goffa*			5000	5000
Basket bowl with colored rim				2500–3000
Extra small *birsh*				2500
Round *birsh*				2500
Extra small square *birsh*				3000
Large basket box with cover				20000
Extra-large basket box with cover				30000
Tiny basket bag				
Small basket bag				3000
Medium basket bag	250	2500		
Basket clutch bag		1500		
Perfume pot	100			
Ceramic ashtray	100			
Small metal container				1000
Medium metal container				1500
Large metal container				2000
*Garaa (*loofah)				500–1000
Motabal (kohl container)				6000
Antique *gadah* (wooden bowl)				20000
Pot				2000
Medium container				3000
Small charcoal holder				1000

The 2022 season brought little success, largely due to the pandemic. In accordance with local regulations, the archaeological team was quarantined in the expedition house for 10 days, and even after the quarantine period, the author chose to refrain from visiting members of the community. Nevertheless, a batch of basketry products was delivered by the same three women who lived near the

Polish house. Most of the items were sold to team members and a group of American tourists. As not all tourists had local currency, they paid a few dollars extra for each item as a "donation", amounting to around 20 USD in total. In sum, 14 basketry items were sold for 32000 SDG (approximately 73 USD) [see *Table 11*]. The three women continued to make small *tabaqs* along with a few other unique products, designed specifically to test their "salability". By the following year, it was clear that they had discussed their new business with friends and neighbors. As a result, in 2023, four additional women from the same neighborhood brought basketry and other handicrafts at the beginning of the season. The involvement of different craft makers meant a broader variety of products. Most of them were the same-style, well-made small *tabaqs*, although a few new items appeared as well, such as lidded containers, colored basketry, a large container, and a few other small objects [*Fig. 16*]. The new designs appealed yet again to members of the archaeological team, who saw the offer as an opportunity to purchase gifts for friends and family back home and a way to contribute to the local economy. The 2023 season saw the highest sales to date, mostly to members of the archaeological team and international visitors guided by team members. The sales reached 194500 SDG, equivalent to approximately 334 USD at the time.

Until the 2023 season, despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, the handicraft collaboration grew steadily. It had a positive impact both economically and socially — generating income for the participating craftswomen and contributing to their empowerment, while also supporting the preservation of traditional basketry skills. This success was partly due to the consistent presence of the archaeological team, which returned every year and purchased basketry items. This ensured a steady amount of income and encouraged the craft makers to continue producing basketry and experimenting with new designs and products. The craftswomen also appeared to be motivated by the relative freedom to design and manufacture the items — apart from the initial requirement regarding the size of the *tabaq*, all other aspects of production were left to their discretion. This aligns with the results of similar studies — for instance, a study on souvenirs

Fig. 16. Products made by Ghaddar craft makers, 2023 (PCMA UW | photos T. Fushiya)

and traditional handicrafts in Thailand shows that craft makers prefer designing their own items or drawing on their own ethnic group's traditions, rather than reproducing designs suggested by NGOs or national institutions keen to promote "traditional" or "authentic" crafts to tourists (Husa 2020). The craft makers in Ghaddar experimented with various styles and products and independently decided what to produce next. Such freedom of choice, as well as actual sales, must have been empowering. As such, the basketry making initiative created a unique opportunity for local craftswomen to manage their own businesses and freely express their understanding of heritage. This stands in contrast to handicrafts fashioned under the framework of the Authorized Heritage Discourse (Smith 2006) that advocates for the understanding of heritage as stipulated by national or international authorities (Varutti 2015).

CONCLUSIONS

This article presented two programs initiated by the Dialogue project in collaboration with local communities in Old Dongola, aimed at enhancing the growth of community-based tourism. The tourism industry in Sudan showed promising development, and, prior to the pandemic and the outbreak of conflict, Old Dongola was regularly visited by non-Sudanese tourists. Yet, even in 2019, when the number of non-Sudanese was at its highest, the overall visitor traffic remained very small compared to countries where tourism is a major economic driver, such as Egypt or Morocco. Being primarily an archaeological project, the Polish expedition was unlikely to dramatically boost the flow of international tourists, even with support from international sponsors or the national government. However, the two programs that focused on community-run entrepreneurship and the use of local resources and heritage showed that a positive impact on local household economies and heritage preservation was attainable. This could be achieved with limited input and relatively modest financial support for local initiatives. Rather than relying on step-by-step support, which risks creating a top-down dynamic in the so-called "collaboration", an international archaeological team can contribute to community-based initiatives by drawing the attention of other regional, national, and international stakeholders. If local needs align with the resources, interests, and goals of these stakeholders, they can offer further support to the community. Such was the case of the UNESCO Khartoum Office's training workshop for the community and the Northern State government's commitment to build a tourist office with a space for selling local handicrafts. In these cases, the international archaeological team acted as a facilitator, connecting international organizations and donors with the community (see also Burtenshaw et al. 2019).

These initiatives also illustrated how an archaeological team can contribute to the local economy and respond to community needs. Working closely with local communities could help lay the ground-

work for more structured and sustainable support. While the Dialogue project's initiatives were funded externally, the most important resource invested was time devoted to communicating with the community. One of the key insights gained was the recognition that archaeologists or other researchers can be among the most reliable customers supporting the local handicraft initiative. This highlights the vulnerability of the local tourism economy to external factors, such as political instability or global crises like the pandemic, both of which led to a significant decline in visitor numbers to Old Dongola and, generally, Sudan. Yet, the presence of reliable customers may have helped preserve the skills and knowledge of handicraft producers from oblivion and eventual loss of the handicraft know-how. These purchases might not have led to significant social and economic change within the community as a whole, but they demonstrated a clear potential to encourage handicraft production and help the community realize its economic potential in the future, once tourism resumes. It is essential for community-driven initiatives that the producers retain control over the commercialization of their cultural products. The next step would be to gradually reduce the project's role in sales and accounting, letting the craftswomen be more independent, perhaps by collaborating more closely with the local tourist office that would create a space for selling the handicrafts at the site entrance. The basketry initiative, in turn, could shift focus to promotional activity and attracting more potential customers.

Currently, the ongoing conflict in Sudan has brought tourism and archaeological research to a standstill. When this conflict will end is, at the time of writing, difficult to predict. However, cultural heritage and tourism are expected to play an important role in Sudan's post-conflict recovery (see Belotti 2024a). In that future context, the community-based initiatives developed through collaboration with the Dialogue project will have the potential, even if only to a limited extent, to contribute to the local economy. The development of the two community initiatives at Old Dongola has shown that the community possesses the skills, experience, and commitment necessary to work towards building community-based tourism.

Dr. Tomomi Fushiya
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0752-0386
University of Warsaw
Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology
t.fushiya@uw.edu.pl

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APPENDIX
METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS OF THE SECOND COMMUNITY SURVEY

METHODOLOGY

A structured questionnaire consisting of 43 questions was used for data collection in Ghaddar. Ghaddar is an administrative town in the Old Dongola Unit, Goulid Locality, Northern State of the Republic of Sudan, with a population around 6000. It is located immediately north of the archaeological site of Old Dongola. The survey aimed to understand the community's life, experiences, and perspectives on archaeology and heritage, their views on tourism and related development, and their evaluation of the community's experience with the engagement programs conducted at Old Dongola between 2019 and 2020. The single- or multiple-answer questions were divided into seven themes; (1) life in Ghaddar, (2) archaeological work in the area, (3) benefits of archaeological work in Old Dongola, (4) benefits from tourism development, (5) heritage and archaeology, (6) community engagement programs, and (7) demographic questions. The questions in themes (1) to (4) and (7) mirrored those of the first community survey, developed by Katarzyna Radziwiłko and Tomomi Fushiya in 2019 in English. The first survey questionnaire was translated into Arabic by Mohamed Hassan Siedahmed (see Radziwiłko 2025, in this volume, for the method of the first survey). The 2021 survey modified theme (5) and added theme (6). These changes and additions were translated into Arabic by Tohamy Abulghasim.

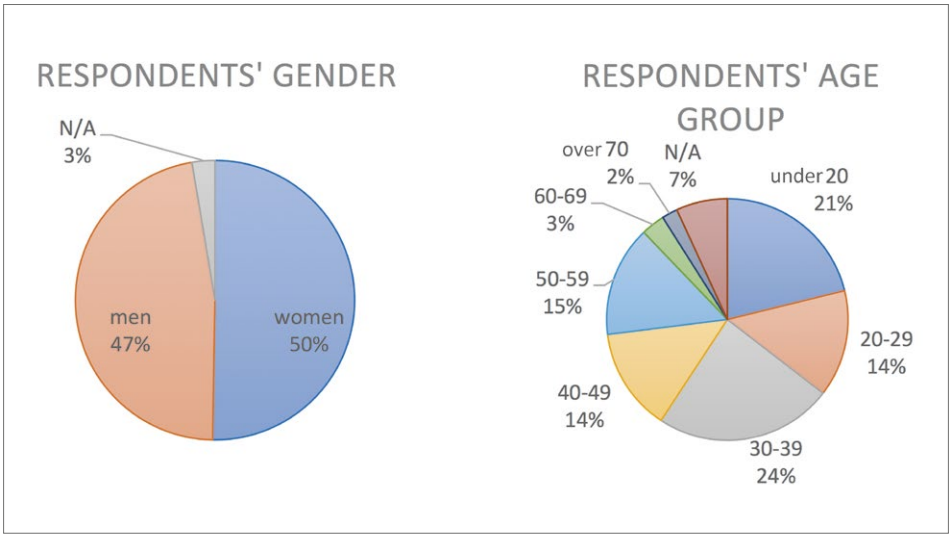

Fig. 17. Demography of the second community survey in 2021 (T. Fushiya)

A random sampling method was applied to collect data in Ghaddar. The collection of the data was carried out by three local recent graduates (Umm Salma Abu AlZine Mohamed, Manal Mohamed, and Wafa Ahmed), the Head of the Tourism Office (Abeer Babiker), and Tohamy Abulghasim, under the author's supervision, in five different areas of the village from 6 to 15 February 2021. A total of 195 respondents answered the questionnaire, but six questionnaires were excluded from analysis due to incompleteness, leaving 189 valid responses (women: 95; men: 89; no answer: 5 [*Fig. 17*]). The collected data were entered into SPSS by the author for frequency and tabulation analysis.

The collected data and the survey questionnaires in English and Arabic are available at DOI: 10.58132/IIQGBQ (Fushiya and Radziwiłko 2024).

RESULTS

Table 12 presents the results from the second survey relevant to this article. For the results of the evaluation of the engagement programs (theme 6), see Fushiya 2021a. The 2019 responses (Fushiya and Radziwiłko 2019; Radziwiłko 2025, in this volume) can be compared with those from the 2021 survey. However, it should be noted that the 2019 and 2021 respondent groups differed in occupation and the last completed education level. Furthermore, the 2021 data collection was conducted in different parts of Ghaddar by local interviewers, while the 2019 survey, conducted by Radziwiłko and Siedahmed, was limited to areas near the site and administrative buildings and schools. These differences in data collection method and respondent demography may have influenced some variation in the survey results.

Table 12. Results of the second community survey in 2021 (*n*=189)

1. Demography of the respondents	
Level of education completed	**%**
Elementary education not completed	21.2
Elementary school diploma	21.7
Secondary school or technical school diploma	31.7
Bachelor degree	20.6
Master degree	1.6
Other	1.6
No answer	1.6
Occupation	**%**
Homemaker	22.8
Daily worker	20.1
Teacher	19.0
Student	16.9
Farmer	4.8
Worker	2.6
Unemployed	2.1
Driver, lawyer	1.1 each
Nurse, agricultural engineer, excavation supervisor, medical lab specialist, registration assistant, self-employed, tourist guard, tourist police	0.5 each

Table 12. Results of the second community survey in 2021 (*n*=189), continued

2. Responses concerning tourism development	
Tourism development could be a potential consequence of archaeological excavations in your area	**%**
It is good news for me	91.5
It is bad news for me	3.2
I don't know	3.2
No answer	2.1
Tourism development will bring new jobs to my village and the area	**%**
I agree	96.8
I don't agree	2.6
No answer	0.5
Tourism development will lead the surrounding area to lose its unique character	**%**
I agree	53.4
I don't agree	42.9
I don't know	3.2
No answer	0.5
Tourism development will bring more people to our area who do not know our traditions or customs	**%**
I agree	94.7
I don't agree	3.2
I don't know	0.5
3. Responses concerning heritage	
Heritage is an important element of everyday life in Ghaddar	**%**
I agree	94.7
I don't agree	3.7
I don't know	1.1
No answer	0.5
More people forget about heritage that continues from our ancestors these days	**%**
I agree	91.0
I don't agree	7.4
No answer	1.6
It is important to preserve our heritage	**%**
I agree	97.4
I don't agree	0.5
I don't know	0.5
No answer	1.6