

Natural History Museums As a Source of Environmental Communication and Public Awareness

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Abstract: *There are a number of activities which a Museum performs for the society, but we focus our attention on how important is the role of Museum communication. The definition of the Museum by ICOM defines "Museum is an institution in the service of the society and its development and communication is one of its basic and primary functions. It is a media through which a museum connects to public as every object or exhibit says something and communication success depends on how well the public understand its meanings. The role of Natural History Museums as a communication is greatly varied as it includes communicating information in different way for the understanding of visitors of different age groups. An every day new information about environment is generated through different media and tries to prove a continuous challenge for museum to communicate it to the people in an interesting and performing way which results in action. Museum communications provide a free choice learning environment for visitors hence creating a greater after effect in public. This paper emphasize on the role of Natural History Museums as a source of communication tool for generating public awareness and describes the importance of a museum in creating environmental awareness and to provide environmental education.*

Keywords: Natural History Museums, Communication, ICOM

I. INTRODUCTION

Well into the 21st century, it becomes more and more apparent that the current local and global environmental problems indicate that different priorities are needed on a worldwide level. Environmental concern is now global in character and influences all spheres of the human vital activity. The relations between human society and nature enclose problems and contradictions as well as developmental prospects; humankind and nature are subject to common laws whose violation can lead to man-made ecological disasters. It is only now that we recognize how our misuse of natural resources has resulted in changes of climate and desertification, while due to the vicissitudes of anthropocentric culture and the lacking of a reasonable cultural mode guiding the environmental management, we realize that the reconstruction of environmental culture has been an important challenge we have to face. The word "Museum" literally reflects on the collection, preservation and display of the objects, they may be of historical, archaeological, scientific, artistic and environmental importance. Museum is a house where history becomes alive, the future becomes present and the visitor becomes a part of its environment. "Museum are admirably equipped, through their diverse collection, their expertise in display, their long experience in conservation, and their vast clientele, to play an important role in making the public aware of environmental problems. According to ICOM museum is "a non-profit making permanent institution, in the service of the society and its development and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, communicates and exhibits, researches for the purpose of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of man and his environment."

UNESCO in 1978 Declaration, states that the goal of any environmental education process will lead to some form of action, from simple behavioural changes in our daily lives to active participation in a field wide effort to make museum

more sustainable institutions. Museums are admirably equipped, through their diverse collection, their expertise in display, their long experience in conservation, and their vast clientele, to play an important role in making the public awareness of environmental problems.

II. OBJECTIVE

This paper study the social impact of a number of Natural History Museums using examples of environmental awareness and public participation in the surrounding zone as a result of museum activities.

2.1 Museum as a Non Formal Education Centre

The importance of encouraging relationship between formal and non formal education, Non-formal institutions can contribute significantly to education and to the development of a wider environmental approach in particular, as they allow for relatively simple transfer to real-world experiences through engaging educational activities. Natural History Museums and Science Centres are expected to play a more active role in addressing global and local environmental issues, through the provision of enhanced formal and non-formal learning opportunities to all target groups that may be interested in exploring their scientific content. Taking advantage of enhanced opportunities to interact with scientific content, including constant technological advancements set in service of education, all learners such as students of all ages, teachers of all levels, researchers in the various sciences and culture fields, as well as the general public can achieve effective experiences through their interaction with natural sciences resources, comprehend the significance of sustainable development, and hopefully become more oriented towards a more profound environmental culture. One of the fundamental objectives of the museum is to educate and it is only museum that has the capacity and the ability to impart cultural as well as environmental education effectively in an entertaining as well as educative format.

2.2 Museums: From Preserver of Objects to Incubator of Social Development and Environmental safeguard

Museums can use their programs to demonstrate social and cultural values to their local communities. They also have a vital role in raising awareness about the importance of protecting nature and preserving the natural environment. Museums become a place where the past and the future live side by side as museums engage with the issues of the day.

2.3 Museums as a approach of Sustainable Development

One of the requirements for the museums is that they should contribute to the sustainable development of a region through the cultural, social and economic benefits they can generate. On the other hand, by adopting an open system, the cultural institutions have to seek their own sustainability, namely to have sufficient resource to maintain its existence, and fulfil their objective, into future.

2.4 Museum Helps in Getting a Sustainable Environment

One of the basic functions of a museum is to preserve the cultural resources of a community not only for the current generation, but also for the future generations. The function of museum is the conservation and preservation of the patrimony in time, museums contribute to assuring the sustainability of both the cultural and the natural environments.

2.5 Role of Museum

Natural history Museum plays an important role for the children and youth's education. Most of the Museums have started imparting education through extracurricular activities, like T.V. programmes, Tour outside the museum, Video films, Educational games, Art competition and other environmental awareness activities.

2.6 Environmental Communication through Museum

Children may observe the feeling of love, concern and responsibility towards nature. Natural Museums are engaged in different hands on activities in which they contribute in saving the Environment. Nature walk and observation of

things in their local surrounding is an important component. Children learn different things about Environment and suggest ways of protecting the Environment. Children do planting and understand the importance of growing plants around us. They are also engaged in the activities of cleaning their surroundings.

2.7 Environmental Communication and Public Awareness through National Museum of Natural History

National Museum of Natural History plays an important role in the promotion of sustainable development. NMNH have to be a driving force in the protection of local biodiversity because museum not only conserves specimens of extinct animal, but it is also a guardian of the biological and cultural diversity of living creatures. Through the exhibitions they organize, museums can promote and attract attention on the vital importance of harmony between humanity and its natural environment.

National Museums Natural History are expected to play a more active role in addressing global and local environmental issues, through the provision of enhanced formal and non formal learning opportunities to all target groups that may be interested in exploring their scientific content.



Figure 1: Various environmental awareness programs through Rajiv Gandhi Regional Museum of Natural History Museum Sawai Madhopur, Rajasthan for the children

2.8 Participatory Exhibits for Children

A child's ability to grasp information from an exhibit is dependent upon how he correlates the object on a situation with his personal experience. Participatory exhibits includes, where the visitor walk into an exhibit like a walk through diorama of a forest. Working models which can be activated by the visitors, exhibits that are to be manipulated to find answers to questions like quiz, discovery boxes, etc. Most of the Science Museums have a large number of such participatory exhibits

2.9 Special Educational Programmes for Differently Abled Person

Museums should have a special room where they can show a limited number of objects, which will enable the mentally challenged visitors to have a close understanding of the objects. They can receive training with the use of replicas and enlarged photographs, audio-visual media, preferably in local languages will be effective use as it combines the two sensory impressions for all the physically challenged, except the visually impaired and to a certain extent deaf.



Figure 2: Rajiv Gandhi Regional Museum of Natural History Museum Sawai Madhopur, Rajasthan Organised Special Programmes for Differently abled Children

2.10 Educational Activities through Electronic Technology

Apart from daily film shows and slide projections, museums around the world are increasingly using modern electronic equipment and techniques in their exhibitions and interpretation. For example, the sequential lighting with commentaries and guide phones are used to depict the story of "Evolution of Earth". Similarly the 'Theory of origin of Earth' is also explained to the visitors with the help of sequential lighting and commentary. Animation techniques are used in communicating various ecological concepts, such as bio-geochemical cycles, photosynthesis, soil erosion etc.

2.11 Significance of Museum Education

Museum education is a specialised field devoted to developing and strengthening the education role of non formal education spaces and institution such as Museum. Its main objective is to engage visitors in learning experience to enhance their curiosity and interest on their object and collection. Museum education provides a unique interactive experience of getting up close to thing we usually only see in books, newspapers, Internet or on the TV.



Figure 3: Rajiv Gandhi Regional Museum of Natural History Museum Sawai Madhopur, Rajasthan organised Capacity Building Workshop for Teachers

III. CONCLUSION

Museum as an institution tells the story of the man, the world over and how humanity has survived in its environment over the years. Through the museum education and communication people share and alter the key elements of culture that shape the quality and experience of life. Thus we can say that museums are the places where non formal learning takes place. The visitors who are of different age , class, interest and from different social, culture and educational background come by choice and learn according to their own will in a barrier free environment.

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