

The Effects of World Wide Museums in Improving Social Awareness and Protecting Environment

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Abstract. The present article is an attempt to create a proper background for the scientific flowering of research through the establishment of cultural relations and reactivation of research activities, all of which can lead to a better protection of the environment. An issue which has raised serious concern in the contemporary era is the destroying relation of man and his environment. Nature which acts as a cradle to man has now strangely lost its spiritual value. Museums are scientific, cultural, and educational institutes which present world heritage. Wildlife museums are of special importance in this regard. Given the approach of different sciences and scientific literatures to the environment and stable development, this article, entitled “The Effects of World Wide Museums in Improving Social Awareness and Protecting Environment”, seems to highly contribute to the enrichment of respect to the environment and to the creation of a natural basis for the improvement of the public awareness to the future and coming generations. The Shiraz University Museum has been studied in this article to analyze the role of wildlife museums in improving the environmental knowledge of visitors. As a whole, the conclusions of this study show that visiting a museum can improve the environmental awareness of visitors.

Keywords: Wildlife, Environment, Education, Life diversity, Museum

1. Introduction

The protection of the environment is one of the most strategic approaches of the modern business, one of clients’ needs, competitive forces, and environmental resources opportunities today.

Under the obligations of joining the Environmental Convention, the Organization for the Protection of the Environment in Iran was made responsible for the compilation of the strategies and the national practical program for the protection of the diversity of life in the country.

The suggestions and the practical program for the realization of the protection of the diversity of life:

- Strategy No. 1: Improving the public awareness of life diversity and initiating public contributions
- Strategy No. 2: Establishment of informational and research systems on life diversity
- Strategy No. 3: Stable mobilization of life diversity resources
- Strategy No. 4: Establishment of a systematic management for the protection of life diversity

The most important strategy in this plan is the improvement of the public awareness.

This article aims to study the effectiveness of education through visiting wildlife museums in the improvement of public knowledge and awareness.

The understanding of cultural notions on issues such as “the elements of which the world is made and the way these elements are related to each other” is the first step towards the exploration of the natural environment. Although differences exist between the understanding of the public and that of scientific forums of nature, relations of the society with the nature does not follow a particular culture. In fact, the relation of nature and society depends on the way the society approaches the nature. Therefore, it is essential

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to know the approach of the society before making any decision and taking any measure about the diversity of life.

2. The Role of the Society

The wildlife and human life are two inseparable interrelated phenomena. In order to protect the wildlife, it is first necessary to protect the environment of the wildlife. And the protection of the wildlife environment has clear criteria and standards. Nowadays, according to scientific reports, most countries of the world are subject to numerous environmental risks, among which the most important are the high speed of soil erosion, loss of soil upper layers², and land sinking³, the change of the use of forest and pasture lands, the intense decrease of forest coverage, gradual drying up of some large and small swamps, increasing desertification, increasing dust, more violent storms, distribution of dust particles, increasing air pollutions in metropolitans, pollution of soils, pollution of some areas and rivers around cities, and distribution of plastic garbage in the environment.

The crisis caused by the environmental risks seriously threatens the future of the human life on the earth. It is why some pioneering countries have thought of timed solutions to environmental crises. However, the prerequisite for fronting any environmental risk in any part of the country is increasing public knowledge and awareness as well as improving national cohesion and team work spirits.

Any increase of the knowledge of the society needs different tools. Traditionally, this has been done through the scientific-improving relation of specialists with the public through the publication of natural science public books on animals and plants, environment guidance books, and public environment journals, and through the use of radio and television. Holding permanent exhibitions on nature, establishment of natural history museums, zoos, and small and large botanic gardens are among the most important scientific approaches for the exchange of information among the public and specialists.

In developed countries, attention to the scientific and practical capacities of such establishments is given a priority when aiming the improvement of the environmental knowledge of the public. For example, botanic gardens in most European countries act as scientific gardens where people enter and walk freely and search replies to their questions.

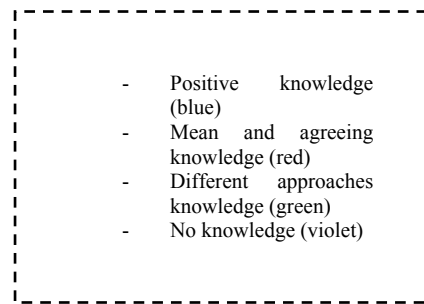
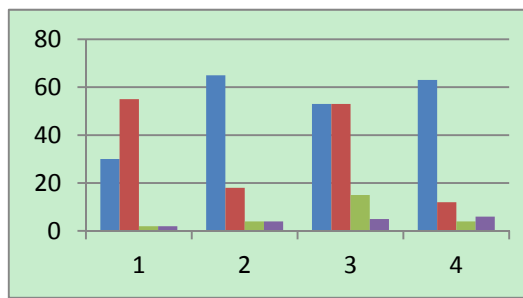
Natural history and wildlife museums are of remarkable importance as well. They can act as very efficient relation devices between the public and specialists. These museums play an important role in the improvement of the public knowledge on nature, creation, value of animals, plants, minerals, and fossils in the human life and environment. They also lead to a better understanding of the power of The Creator and improve the education in zoology, botany, and geology.

3. Research Method

Case study based on a limited opinion poll has been used as research method in this study. Therefore, the process of the research has been planned in a way to evaluate the mental effects and motivations caused in the society through visiting museums, with the use of a conceptual objective questionnaire, and to obtain relevant conclusions for making decisions and adopting proper educational methods for the protection of the environment. The questionnaire was distributed among the visitors of the Natural History Museum of the University of Shiraz.

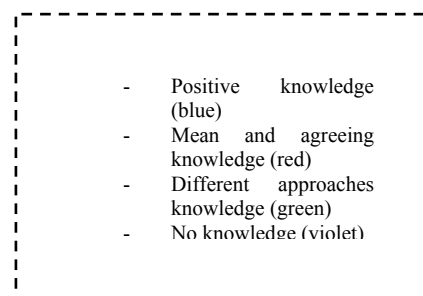
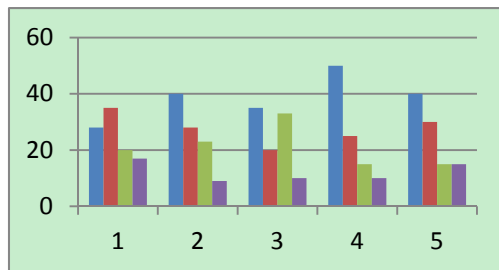
Questions were multiple choice ones which evaluated the motivation of visitors and the changes made in their views and their familiarity with the museum. Once the questionnaires were collected and data was analyzed, conclusions were classified in two domains. The conclusions of the first domain are provided in terms of diagrams as follows and those of the second domain are presented in terms of a summary.

4. Knowledge of Visitors of the Relation of Man and Environment



- 1: Relation of man and environment
- 2: Inspiration from natural laws
- 3: Relation of natural factors and man comfort
- 4: Relation of man and environment destruction

5. Knowledge of Visitors of the Importance of Life Diversity Resources in the national Economy



- 1: Determination of the capacity of stable mobilization of aquatic animals and plants and wildlife resources
- 2: The degree of life diversity and natural species and the evaluation of the elements of life diversity
- 3: Actual and potential roles of life diversity resources in economy
- 4: Protecting measures in a successful environment protection
- 5: Counter effects of climatic changes and life diversity

6. Some of the Conclusions of the Questionnaire

- 1- Most visitors were students who visited the museum in terms of school tours.
- 2- Most visitors of the museum had an average knowledge of the wildlife. Therefore, it was possible to improve their knowledge within their visit to the museum through holding educational programs, showing movies, and handing out brochures.
- 3- Visitors were mostly interested in the esthetic aspects of the museum, given the fact that most species found in the museum were taxidermy cases and their beauty attracted more attention than their behavior. Showing documentaries to visitors within their visit to museums improved their knowledge of the behavioral aspects of animals. However, 3% of visitors were indifferent to this question.
- 4- Visitors were more interested in birds than in mammals. They even visited reptiles and amphibians less.
- 5- 80% of visitors said their main objective of the visit was to gather information.
- 6- 65% of visitors believed that the staff of the museum could play a more effective role in establishing mutual relations and transferring information. Therefore, it could be very useful to hire specialized staff.
- 7- Most visitors believed that museums changed the views of visitors on the values of the wildlife and the protection of different species.

The following conclusions may be obtained through the analysis of the questionnaire:

- 1- Most visitors emphasized on the relation of man, environment pollution, and protection of wildlife species. This shows the effects of mass media. However, few visitors were aware of the esthetic, economic, cultural, and social values of species. On the other hand, reliable journals have been available in the libraries of universities, in which articles and issues can be found on these issues. Therefore, we can conclude that visitors were familiar to some extent with the problems, but they had not done studies and had not navigated internet sites on the wildlife.
- 2- All visitors were aware of the important role of the nature in inspiring man and its relation with the human life. However, they were unaware of life diversity and natural species and their role in the economy and of the different methods of education, programs, and environment protection measures, although they showed a positive approach to these issues.

7. Suggestions and Strategies

The establishment of wildlife museums and compilation of practical measures would hopefully lead to the improvement of the public culture in view of life diversity and the importance of its protection. We also hope that proper backgrounds are produced for the realization of the conclusions of other related educational activities.

We also suggest in this study to design spaces for the completion of the following research activities:

- 1- Gathering and completing the information published about species
- 2- Gathering, exploring, and keeping species
- 3- Providing reference collections
- 4- Establishing a data bank of species and publishing their list
- 5- Suggesting research topics to researchers and interested people and providing facilities for doing the researches
- 6- Publishing scientific reports and articles
- 7- Establishing relations with other museums and related scientific centers and exchanging specialists, samples, and information
- 8- Holding conferences, seminars, symposiums, and meetings on the activities of museums

We also suggest the design of places for the performance of the following educational activities:

- 1- Constructing halls for exhibiting species
- 2- Providing photos, films, slides, and microscopic sections and providing facilities for exhibiting them
- 3- Publishing books, articles, pamphlets, brochures, bulletins, and other educational publications
- 4- Holding educational classes for teachers and students of different levels and other interested people
- 5- Holding short-term practical courses
- 6- Holding lectures by domestic and foreign researchers and specialists
- 7- Cooperating for the provision of laboratory samples to use in different educational laboratories
- 8- Holding different courses on taxidermy and skeleton making
- 9- Providing films, brochures, posters, reports, translations, and so on, in order to improve the public knowledge about the protection of the life diversity
- 10- Supporting the publication of newspapers and journals, and hiring artists, writers, and film producers for the production of related cultural programs in order to improve the public knowledge with regard to the diversity of life
- 11- Holding competitions, festivals, and so on for showing the importance of life diversity

8. Contributions

The world needs public participation for reaching human ideals and preserving facilities and resources for the coming generations. This requires laws, approaches, and educational activities in all different levels of the society on a permanent and long-term basis. It is obvious that such educational courses will take a deeper and more specialized form in cultural and research spaces and places by other specialists and researchers.

Studies and analyses showed that the society is familiar with notions such as world heritage, life diversity, and so on, to some extent, but does not have a deep knowledge of and has not received practical education on the protection of the environment.

The compilation and performance of non-official educational programs for the protection of the life diversity will improve the public knowledge of the life diversity among different levels of addressees and the priority of these addressees should be taken into consideration while providing programs. Performing these programs and reaching intended objectives will improve the public awareness and will provide the bases for cooperation and stable use and optimal management of life diversity resources.

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