

North Africa and Middle East Science centers network (NAMES). Networking for a Better Future

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ABSTRACT

The goal of NAMES is the democratization of science throughout the region by enhancing the public understanding and involvement in science among an increasingly diverse public by means of informal education. Vision: the purpose of creating NAMES is to foster cooperation between member science centers and museums with the aim of benefiting from the collective available resources and experiences within the region. Networking and collaboration within the region and with the rest of the world enhances the knowledge of the dynamic and ever-changing pace of science and technology necessary for achieving the common goal of science democratization. The network also aims to help establish new science centers and museums in all countries of the region.

Objectives - Long-Term Objectives (five to ten years):

1. Identifying the current situation, means and venues of science communication throughout the region.
2. Promoting best practices, supporting effective communication, and encouraging excellence and innovation in informal science learning.
3. Providing professional development for the science communication field in the region, collaborating to enhance the performance of those involved in the field, and making best use of all available resources within the region. Spreading the message of informal education and strengthening the position of science centers/museums within the community at large.
4. Emphasizing and popularizing the cultural and scientific heritage of the region.

Short-Term Objectives (two to three years):

1. Creation of common promotional and educational publications.
2. Collaboration in the fabrication of hands-on exhibits.
3. Creation of one or more traveling exhibitions.
4. Sharing in the production of planetarium shows and/or arabized versions of already existing shows.
5. Organizing and implementing collaborative training courses, seminars, and conferences.

Key words:

North Africa, Middle East, science center, science museum, space theater, informal education.

RIASSUNTO

Il Science centers network del Nord Africa e Medio Oriente (NAMES) per un futuro migliore.

L'obiettivo di NAMES è la diffusione della scienza nella regione attraverso la crescita del sapere pubblico e il coinvolgimento della scienza tra una crescente diversificazione del pubblico attraverso un'educazione non ufficiale. Lo scopo della nascita di NAMES è di favorire la cooperazione tra science centers e musei con lo scopo di beneficiare delle risorse collettive e esperienze della regione. La rete e la collaborazione tra la regione e il resto del mondo accresce la conoscenza della dinamica e dei cambiamenti della scienza e della tecnologia necessaria per raggiungere l'obiettivo comune di diffusione della scienza.

Gli obiettivi a lungo termine (5 anni) sono: identificare l'attuale situazione, ... comunicare la scienza nella regione, promuovere buone pratiche che supportino l'effettiva comunicazione e incoraggino l'eccellenza e l'innovazione nell'apprendimento informale della scienza; produrre sviluppo professionale per la comunicazione della scienza nella regione di quelli coinvolti in campo e facendo miglior uso possibile delle risorse disponibili nella regione, mettere in evidenza e popolarizzare il patrimonio culturale scientifico della regione. Gli obiettivi a breve termine (2-3 anni) sono: creazione di pubblicazioni promozionali e educative comuni; collaborazione nella realizzazione di mostre, realizzazione di mostre itineranti; distribuzione nella produzione di spettacoli da planetario e/o versioni arabe di spettacoli già disponibili; organizzazione e crescita collaborativa nella preparazione di corsi, seminari e conferenze.

Parole chiave:

Nord Africa, Medio Oriente, science centre, musei scientifici, spazi teatrali, educazione informale.

There is a worldwide consensus that a sustainable culture of innovation will depend on more young people being interested in the future of science and technology. This interest must be nurtured and developed at a very early age through formal education in schools as well as informal education exemplified in science centers, children's museums and science parks.

Science Centers and Museums are facilities dedicated to furthering the public awareness and understanding of science among increasingly diverse audiences; they encourage creativity and spark interest about the world around us.

For a science center to really achieve its goal of the democratization of science, it is obliged to follow the dynamic and ever-changing pace of science and technology. The most effective way to do so is through opening up to the fast developing world and cooperating with similar establishments regionally and internationally. It is for this reason that science centers networks were established all around the world; networks such as: ASTC, ECSITE, REDPOP, ASPAC, SAASTEC, NCSM, and China.

The World Congress of Science Centers (WCSC) takes place every three years and gathers representatives of science centers from around the world to share their achievements, highlight the problems they are facing, suggest solutions and create new policies and visions for science centers.

The next World Congress of Science Centers, the theme of which is "Science Centers as Agents of Change-locally, nationally and internationally", is the fifth and is to be hosted by the Ontario Science Center in Toronto, Canada, in June 2008.

In 2005, The Bibliotheca Alexandrina Planetarium Science Center (PSC) was selected by the International Program Committee (IPC) of the World Congress of Science Centers to become a member representing North Africa and the Middle East. The role of the IPC is to direct the development of the program for each World Congress and to advise the host institution on all related matters.

For the PSC to really have an active role in the IPC, it took the initiative towards creating a network that incorporates all science centers and museums in North Africa and the Middle East region.

The target of NAMES is to provide professional development for the science center field in the North Africa and Middle East region. NAMES aims to promote best practices, to support effective communication and to strengthen the position of science centers within the community at large. NAMES aspires to encourage excellence and innovation in informal science learning by serving and linking its members in the Middle East and North Africa Region and advancing their common goals.

On 30 January 2006, the BA organized a one-day closed meeting to lay the foundation for the new

network. The meeting included representatives from:

- The BA Planetarium Science Center
- Suzanne Mubarak Science Exploration Center
- Prince Salman Science Oasis (Saudi Arabia)
- The Scientific Center of Kuwait
- Tunis Science City
- Turkey Science Centers Foundation
- Sharjah Science Museum (United Arab Emirates)
- Deutsches Museum, guest
- Italian National Institute for Nuclear Physics, guest

After the deliberations that continued following the meeting of 30 January 2006, the decision was made to launch the NAMES network with four founding members:

- The Planetarium Science Center, Egypt
- Turkey Science Centers Foundation
- The Scientific Center of Kuwait
- Tunis Science City

The four founding members met in Tunis on 9 November 2006, and signed the Memorandum of Understanding, thus, officially launching the network. A fifth member, Sultan Bin AbdulAziz Science & Technology Center (SciTech), joined the Network during the same meeting. Now the Network has seven full members, including Dubai Children City and Sharjah Science Museum. The Network has one sustaining member, Fondation Sigma from Morocco.

The purpose of creating NAMES is to foster cooperation between member science centers and museums in North Africa and the Middle East with the aim of benefiting from all available resources and experiences within the region to further enhance the role of all member establishments. The network also aims to help establish new science centers and museums in all countries of the region.

The goal of NAMES is the popularization of science throughout the region by enhancing the public understanding and involvement in science and scientific culture among an increasingly diverse audience. The purpose of NAMES is to be achieved through excellence and innovation in informal education and by offering hands-on activities where the audience can indulge in participatory learning.

The members of NAMES all offer their respective audiences a large diversity of activities that revolve around the idea of creative science communication. Members of the Network feature on their premises areas dedicated to hands-on exhibitions and exhibits. Most members also host a planetarium and/or an IMAX theater. Furthermore, the Scientific Center of Kuwait features an aquarium, and Sultan Bin AbdulAziz Science and Technology Center (SciTech) features an observatory.

Many of the members' activities focus primarily on astronomy, followed by physics, then biology, and

finally chemistry and geology. Among these activities are planetarium and IMAX shows, workshops, observations, camps, lectures, seminars, conferences, in addition to a variety of programs and festivities. NAMES first General Assembly Meeting took place on 2-3 November 2008 at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, the initiating and hosting member of the Network. There were three Keynote Speakers: Dr. Ismail Serageldin, Director of Bibliotheca Alexandrina; Dr. Farouk Elbaz, Director of the Center for Remote Sensing at Boston University, USA; and Dr. Shirley Malcom, Head of the Education and Human Resources Programs at AAAS, USA. There were twenty three Session Speakers from seventeen different countries from all over the world, and thirteen exhibitors. The theme of the conference was "The Role of Science Centers in Establishing Knowledge-Based Societies in the Region". One of the keynote speakers was. Sub-themes that were tackled in parallel sessions were "Networking and Advocacy" and "Effective Non-Traditional Methods of Science Communication".

Following in the footsteps of leading international institutions and networks, the members of NAMES are currently working on joining their resources to create a traveling exhibition to share among themselves, and also to exchange with international institutions. The exhibition will not only aim to communicate science within the NAMES region but also to communicate the region's culture, heritage and achievements to the rest of the world. This project will reinforce the Network's goal of sharing and exchanging.

NAMES second General Assembly Meeting is scheduled to take place on 16-17 October 2010 and will be hosted by The Scientific Center of Kuwait (TSCK). The overarching theme is "Science + Knowledge = Prosperity" and there will be three sub-themes: New Technologies, Sustainable Development and Life Sciences. The conference website will be launched shortly; for updates, please visit the Network's website at www.namesnetwork.org.

Web Sites (accessed 1.10.2009)

www.namesnetwork.org