

Education

for the future

by Henning Julin, MSc

Chairman, WAZA Education Committee & Executive Director, Aalborg Zoo.



“WHAT, a marketing person as Chair of the Education Committee?”

That’s just one of the remarks I heard and feelings I sensed when I was appointed as the Chair of the Education Committee of the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA). And, for those who know me only superficially, this may be an understandable remark.

The truth is, that in my many years as a manager, even during my time with the Scandinavian Airline (SAS), I have been someone who has struggled to strengthen recognition of the need for education at large. For ten years I was Chairman of the Business School of Aalborg’s Education Committee, and for the past four years, I have also been a member of the Council of the same Business School.

To my mind, no one ever becomes too old to learn new things and I am, to some extent, the living proof of this statement. For this right I’ll fight to the end, and do my best to spread this happy news to those who - ultimately - hold the purse strings, namely, the Directors of the zoos and aquariums of the world.

But enough of this smalltalk.

In Costa Rica, November 2003, I was approached by the President of WAZA, Ed McAlistier, telling me that he wanted the Education Committee upgraded, a move backed fully by Council, with the Chairman becoming a member of WAZA Council. This decision was made not only to improve communication between the Council and the International Association of Zoo Educators (IZE), but also to signal the need for strengthening education throughout the zoo and aquarium world.

This should bring maximum power to educators, and make sure that you are given the means of continuing the great job that you now already do.

Then Ed asked me if I’d chair the Committee. I was surprised and humbled by this suggestion, but only hesitated a few seconds before I accepted the challenge - not only to be the person who’d be there for you, but also to do whatever it takes to make sure, that Directors at large get the same idea.

In many, many institutions, education is an important and valuable force that has a life, fully integrated in the zoo or aquarium as a whole.

Unfortunately this is not the case in all institutions and, together, we’re going to rectify this situation. And we’re going to do this by expanding

the questionnaire that has been circulating in Europe for some time, asking questions that will make Directors think of the way they run their businesses. Hopefully, this questionnaire will be approved by the EAZA Education Committee for us to use.

With the information we can gather this way, we can take an academic view on how this can be used to get the education community a better workspace.

Initially, the WAZA Education Committee consisted of IZE Council members, but I will look for more involvement from other zoo Directors, and hope to have a more wide-ranging committee at work at the Taipei meeting later this year.

Reverting to the education versus marketing issue, let me just remind some of you that in many institutions, this work is done under the same management, whereas others have chosen a biologist/curator to be in charge of education. Some institutions, like my own, are managed solely by trained educators (from Denmark’s public school system) - in my view, a professional management that I can recommend.

But education is a more diversified job than just that. Again, to use my own institution as an example, the education department is a fully integrated part of the daily work of the institution, and should be so generally - in planning exhibits, in planning public statements, in the production of signs with information and so on. We even go so far as involving educators in fact-finding missions prior to the building of new exhibits.

This article must only be an introduction to my standpoint, so it will be kept short. This does not, in any way, constitute lack of opinion. Au contraire! I expect to have the chance to expand on my views in later issues of this magazine, and I’ll be happy to correspond on all issues with anyone by e-mail.

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