

Comment

Education, facilitation and inclusion - The tunisian experience

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Introduction

Being aware of the fact that science is a decisive factor for development and individual well being and a citizen's right, no less important than all his other rights, Tunisia's new-Era initiated its Science City on 10 April, 1992. The purpose of such an institution is to disseminate science throughout the whole of Tunisia for the different categories of citizens and to help, in the context of dovetailing with the educational sector, youngsters get, from their earliest years, interested in science and its use.

A supporter of a new science education

As a supporter of a new science education, the Tunis Science City offers school children a new and quite original approach to learn about science, different of that of schools. It consists in helping them get taste for science through fun and play by putting at their disposal a wide array of hands-on exhibitions and shows. If science at school tends to be theoretical, within the Tunis Science City it is rather practical, palpable and easily accessible. It is worth noting that even though the Tunis Science City's approach is quite different from that of school, its activity programme and scientific content go hand in hand with the primary and secondary school curriculum. All year round and especially during school holidays, scientific activities programmes are carefully prepared for schoolchildren including biology, geology, mathematics, physics, astronomy, computer and multimedia workshops, exposés, showings of scientific documentary films, astronomical eves and so on...Those activities resound success with children and teachers alike brimming with enthusiasm and eager to learn more about the mystery of science and keeping to their own pace as actors rather than spectators, helped, if they so wish, by a team of demonstrators.

It is worth noting that the scientific activity programmes are also run outside the Tunis Science City's walls. Thanks to "Al Katira", the Tunis Science City bus, hands-on exhibitions and labs tour all around Tunisia offering rich programmes to children, with the aim of making science close and accessible even to those who are unable to get to its headquarters.

An agora for public debates

The Tunis Science City is also a place where science is explained and shared. It is actually a creative nucleus for the benefit of all, children but also adults from different social, intellectual and professional categories. It runs discussion forums on issues of contemporary sciences and on matters of topical interest. A series of conferences is held all year round dealing with preoccupying questions such as AIDS, avian influenza, energy issues, spatial exploration, Global warming and so on...The objective is not only help the large public get insight in major advances in science and technology but also raise their scientific standards and allow them to participate in the key debates of our time. Through these actions, the scientific spirit, which is, in its very essence, opposing fixed ideas, could be enshrined within citizens and consequently enable them to become more aware of relativity. By offering a forum where citizens, scientists, industrialists and politicians can compare their points of view, the Tunis Science City is progressively narrowing the gap between science and society.

A facilitator of social and professional inclusions

The Tunis Science City is actually a facilitator of social and professional inclusions by offering schoolchildren, students as well as teachers and state employees training sessions relating to computer, multimedia, astronomy, physics and so on.... Thanks to the Information Access Centre incorporated in the Tunis Science City's Congress Centre, newly graduates are offered training sessions in computer and multimedia. Youth club demonstrators and elementary schoolteachers receive, too, training sessions especially in astronomy so as to be able to serve as monitors or consultants with trainee teachers by modelling, demonstrating good teaching practices and conducting workshops and thus, assessing instruction. Thanks to these training sessions, people are given opportunities to acquire new knowledge and then to be better integrated professionally.

Least but not last, the Tunis Science City, in partnership with Ministries, state institutions, civil society associations in charge of youth affairs such as scout organisation and even international associations and networks such as that of the Universe Awareness international programme, organizes events and scientific activity programmes exclusively addressed to children. These programmes offer a wide range of fun suitable for kids of all ages, from 4 years old to teens. The goal of such programmes is to awaken for ever their interest in science and to help them enrich their knowledge in areas like mathematics, science or astronomy, but also stimulate their curiosity and creativity as well as increase their confidence through self-discovery and hands-on learning and thus, prepare them for a better social integration.

Conclusion

By making science understandable to a broad people, the Tunis Science City has so far played an important role in the dialogue between science and society. It has succeeded in offering every category of the population: children, adults and even the elderly an evolutionary vision of life and the world. To conclude, it enables citizens to get a better grasp on the ideas of scales of time and space and then to be tolerant, open-minded and ready to build the knowledge society of tomorrow.

Author

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