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# The Educational Role of the Zoo: from Laws, Strategies, and Standards

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**Abstract:** In recent years, education, especially conservation education has become a crucial part of zoo laws, standards, and strategies, showing the importance of the educational role of zoos and aquariums. Whilst several articles have analyzed the international regulatory framework and national legislation of zoos in some countries, no studies have been found that focus on regulations concerning education. This paper is a literature review that mainly compares and discusses the definitions and descriptions of 'zoo', 'education', and 'conservation education' given by the following four typical laws, strategies, and standards that mention the educational role of zoos and aquariums: *Social Change for Conservation: EU Zoos Directive (1999), South Korea: Act on the Management of Zoos and Aquariums (2016), The World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Education Strategy (2020), EAZA Conservation Education Standards (2023).* As the result shows, although most of the zoo licensing laws seemed to put more emphasis on physical requirements for zoos, the educational role of zoos and aquariums is addressed by zoo associations with scientific strategies, effective approaches, and good practice examples provided. Besides, zoos are considered to be one variety of museums in Japan, the American Alliance of Museums (AAM), and the International Council of Museums (ICOM), which is discussed in Chapter 3, also suggests that education is one of the most important roles of zoos.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Education is considered one of the most important roles of zoos and aquariums today. According to the World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Education Strategy established by the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) and the International Zoo Educators Association (IZE), zoos and aquariums have four pillars of operation: conservation, welfare, sustainability, and conservation education. Having over 200 million visitors every year all over the world, zoos and aquariums have the potential to provide environmental education, raise awareness about biodiversity conservation issues, and foster positive attitudes and behaviors toward wildlife and nature.

In recent years, the legal regulation of zoos has become well-established in many countries, especially in Europe and North America. Standards made by governments and zoo associations always carry a supplemental role for legislation to comprise requirements for the management of a zoo and the care of its animal, or instead the role of laws in countries or areas where zoo legislation does not exist. In addition,

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some international zoo associations established strategies providing guidelines and recommendations for zoos' better performance. Education, especially conservation education has become a crucial part of these laws, standards, and strategies, showing the importance of the educational role of zoos and aquariums. Whilst several articles have analyzed the international regulatory framework and national legislation of zoos in some countries, such as Cooper (2003), Hosey, Melfi & Pankhurst (2013), and Tyson (2021), no studies have been found that focus on regulations concerning education.

This paper is a literature review that mainly compares and discusses the definitions and descriptions of 'zoo', 'education', and 'conservation education' given by four typical laws, strategies, and standards that mention the educational role of zoos and aquariums. Besides, zoos are considered to be one variety of museums in Japan, the American Alliance of Museums (AAM), and the International Council of Museums (ICOM), which is discussed in Chapter 3, also show that education is one of the most important roles of zoos.

The following part of this chapter gives a brief introduction to the four typical laws, strategies, and standards that mention the educational role of zoos and aquariums: *Social Change for Conservation: EU Zoos Directive (1999), South Korea: Act on the Management of Zoos and Aquariums (2016), The World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Education Strategy (2020), EAZA Conservation Education Standards (2023).*

*South Korea: Act on the Management of Zoos and Aquariums (2016)*

In South Korea, the Act on the Management of Zoos and Aquariums is the most essential law that stipulates the definitions and purposes of zoos and aquariums. Enacted in 2016, the purpose of this Act is to conserve and research wildlife in zoos and aquariums, to provide citizens with correct information on the ecology and habits of wildlife, and to contribute to conserving biodiversity, by prescribing matters necessary for registering and managing zoos and aquariums. Criticized for allowing zoos to operate without specific restrictions and raising concerns regarding animal welfare, a revision of the Act which will implement a permit system to weed out underqualified zoos and prohibit dolphin shows is stipulated to take effect on Dec 14, 2023.

*EU Zoos Directive (1999) and Good Practice Document (2015)*

Aimed to protect wild animals and strengthen the role of zoos in the conservation of biodiversity, the Zoos Directive (Council Directive 1999/22/EC) was adopted by the EU Member States in 1999. Before the adoption of the Directive, specific legislation regulating zoos existed in 5 out of the then 12 Member States, and only a few zoos broadly met the standards required by international guidelines of modern zoo practice in the areas of animal husbandry, species conservation, and public education. The Directive requires Member States to adopt measures for the licensing and inspection of zoos and to ensure that zoos respect certain conservation and protection standards (European Union, 2015). According to the directive, zoos must promote public education and awareness concerning the conservation of biodiversity to obtain an operating license, particularly by providing information about the species exhibited and their natural habitats. The Directive also stipulated a provision of partial closure of a zoo in the event of failure to comply with the conditions imposed in its license, which adds some flexibility in that a licensing authority can close an unacceptable exhibit without halting the general operation of the zoo (Cooper, 2003). In addition, a document named the Good Practices Document was published in 2015 to help EU countries

achieve the objective of the Directive.

Between 2015 and 2018, the European Commission carried out an evaluation of the Directive to assess its impact from its adoption until 2016. The evaluation results showed that the specific objective of ensuring that zoos promote public education and awareness concerning the conservation of biodiversity had been reached. The results also suggested the Directive had helped increase awareness among the public of the role played by zoos in biodiversity conservation.

*Social Change for Conservation: The World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Education Strategy (2020)*

Aimed to address that zoos and aquariums play a critical role in building diverse and sustainable futures for people and nature, Social Change for Conservation: The World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Education Strategy (WZACES) was developed in 2020 by the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA) and the International Zoo Educators Association (IZE). WAZA is an international association of zoos and aquariums that has guided, encouraged and supported the zoos and aquariums in animal care and welfare, environmental education, and global conservation since 1935. On the other hand, IZE is an association founded in 1972 dedicated to expanding the educational impact of zoos and aquariums worldwide.

The WZACES provides recommendations that guide zoos and aquariums to achieve educational and social outcomes crucial to their organizational mission. As the first unified global strategy for conservation education, the WZACES carries a lot of clout with the development of some regional zoo associations` standards and educational performances of zoos and aquariums all over the world.

*EAZA Conservation Education Standards (2023)*

As the Directive mentioned in the Preamble, organizations such as EAZA (European Association of Zoos and Aquariums) also play an important role in producing guidelines, standards, training programs, workshops, and activities to raise public awareness. Formed in 1992, EAZA is a Membership organization that sets the standard for progressive zoos and aquariums and other partners across Europe, Western Asia, and beyond, including Members in 25 of the 27 EU Member States. Reviewed by the EAZA Conservation Education Committee every five years in line with the EAZA strategic plan, the EAZA Conservation Education Standards is a document aimed to help guide, inform, and provide a coordinated approach to the practice of conservation education in zoos and aquariums. In the Standards approved in 2023, EAZA took some updates directly from the WZACES. The new Standards addressed the zoo`s important role not only in protecting nature and wildlife both at zoos and in the wild, but also in communicating this role through conservation education.

## 2 ZOO EDUCATION DEFINITION IN LAWS, STRATEGIES, AND STANDARDS

The meaning of the terms ‘zoo’ and ‘education’ are always clarified in the first part of laws, strategies, and standards of zoos and aquariums, showing the policymakers’ basic ideas towards zoos and aquariums to a great extent. This chapter discusses the educational role of zoos from definitions and descriptions of ‘zoo’, ‘education’, and ‘conservation education’ given by the four laws, standards, and strategies introduced in the first section.

*Zoo Definition*

As Table 1 shows, there are no typical descriptions and requirements found in the definition or terminology of zoos in the Standards and Strategies established by WAZA, IZE, or EAZA. Whereas the Zoo Directive and the Act on the Management of Zoos and Aquariums have some necessary conditions for zoos and aquariums in their definitions. In the Directive, the word 'zoo' means all permanent establishments where animals of wild species are kept for exhibition to the public for 7 or more days a year. Circuses, pet shops, and establishments are exempted from the Directive's requirements because they do not exhibit a significant number of animals or species to the public. And to the South Korean Act, a zoo or an aquarium should provide various kinds of information on wild animals and marine organisms to citizens through exhibition and education programs, by conserving and proliferating them or investigating and researching their ecology and habits. That is to say, the educational role of zoos and aquariums is stipulated in South Korean legislation.

*Definition/Description of Zoo Education*

As Table 2 shows, the WZACES has precise definitions of zoo education and conservation education, and EAZA took the two definitions from it directly. In the WZACES and the EAZA Standards (2023). education means education and learning in the broadest sense, encompassing all learning opportunities (formal, informal, and non-formal), experiences, and activities for all ages and diversities of audiences. Conservation education is defined as the process of influencing people's attitudes, emotions, knowledge, and behaviors about biodiversity conservation. On the other hand, zoo education is described in general terms as organized and sustained communication designed to bring about learning in the EU Directive. There is not any specific description that can be found in the South Korean Act. Compared to the physical requirements and welfare conditions of keeping animals, the laws seemed to put less emphasis on the educational role of zoos.

**TABLE 1 Definition of Zoos and Aquariums**

| Association/ Country | Law/Standards/Strategy | Definition of Zoos and Aquariums |
|---|---|---|
| WAZA IZE | The World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Education Strategy | all zoos and aquariums, including safari and wildlife parks, nature reserves, and other members of national and regional zoo and aquarium associations |
| EAZA | EAZA Conservation Education Standards (2023) | any EAZA Member institution, including zoos, aquariums, safari parks, bird parks and wildlife centers |
| EU | EU Zoo Directive / Good Practice Document | all permanent establishments where animals of wild species are kept for exhibition to the public for 7 or more days a year, with the exception of circuses, pet shops, and establishments which Member States exempt from the requirements of this Directive on the grounds that they do not exhibit a significant number of animals or species to the public |
| South Korea | Act on the Management of Zoos and Aquariums | a facility that provides various kinds of information on wild animals, marine organisms, limnobios, etc. to citizens through exhibition and education programs, by conserving and proliferating them or investigating and researching the ecology and habits thereof[1] |

1 Translated by Korea Law Translation Center. https://elaw.klri.re.kr/eng_mobile/viewer.do?hseq=51821&type=sogan&key=16 (Accessed on 31 October 2023)

**TABLE 2 Definition/Description of Zoo Education/Conservation Education**

| Association/ Country | Law/Standards/Strategy | Definition/Description of Zoo Education/Conservation Education |
|---|---|---|
| WAZA<br>IZE<br>EAZA | The World Zoo and Aquarium Conservation Education Strategy<br><br>EAZA Conservation Education Standards (2023) | **Education**<br>Education and learning in the broadest sense, encompassing all learning opportunities (formal, informal, and non-formal), experiences, and activities for all ages and diversities of audiences<br><br>**Conservation Education**<br>The process of influencing people's attitudes, emotions, knowledge, and behaviors about biodiversity conservation. |
| EU | EU Zoo Directive / Good Practice Document | Organized and sustained communication designed to bring about learning. |
| South Korea | Act on the Management of Zoos and Aquariums | No specific description |

It is worth noting that the WZACES not only provides precise definitions of education and conservation education, but also explains the importance of building a conservation education culture in zoos and aquariums. In the WZACES, zoos are called on to implement several requirements to contribute to social changes for conservation, such as creating strategic plans with measurable learning outcomes for diverse audiences, and optimizing conservation education training and professional development opportunities for staff, volunteers, and audiences.

On the other hand, the EAZA Standards (2023) give further descriptions of conservation education which address conservation education in zoos should aim to: Build knowledge and understanding about species, the natural world, and zoo and aquarium contributions to conservation; foster positive connections, emotions, attitudes, values, and empathy toward species, the natural world, and zoos and aquariums; promote awe, wonder, enjoyment, creativity, and inspiration about species and the natural world; motivate pro-environmental behaviors, actions, and advocacy toward species and the natural world; develop scientific, technical, and personal skills connected to zoos, aquariums, and biodiversity conservation (EAZA, 2023, p4).

Furthermore, according to Article 3 of the EU Zoo Directive, 'Promoting public education and awareness in relation to the conservation of biodiversity, particularly by providing information about the species exhibited and their natural habitats' is stipulated as one of the conservation measures that should be implemented in all the Member States. In addition, specific explanations about how zoos promote public education, zoo education methodologies, different types of education, and good practice examples are provided in the Good Practices Document. Specifically, educational activities that a zoo should be involved in are as follows: undertaking public education programs directly related to conservation of biodiversity issues; promoting the environmental, economic, cultural and intrinsic values of biodiversity; promoting awareness of the impact of everyday habits on the conservation of biodiversity; educating the public on "the steps they can take to conserve and use [biodiversity] sustainably"; educating the public on adopting appropriate types of behavior towards wildlife to contribute to the conservation of biodiversity (EU Commission, 2015, p.29).

## 3 THE EDUCATIONAL ROLE OF THE ZOO AS A MUSEUM

Besides the zoo legislation and regulatory framework, zoos and aquariums are defined as natural science museums in some countries, such as Japan. According to the Museum Act, which was adopted in 1951 in Japan, zoos and aquariums are considered a variety of museums and social education institutions, which have the purpose of education and recreation.

In addition, zoos and aquariums can also receive membership in some international associations of museums, such as the International Council of Museums (ICOM) and the American Alliance of Museums (AAM).

ICOM is the only global organization in the museum field, which is committed to the research, conservation, continuation, and communication to society of the world's natural and cultural heritage, present and future, tangible and intangible[2]. When ICOM was established in 1946, it defined a museum as follows:

> The word museum' includes all collections, open to the public, of artistic, technical, scientific, historical or archaeological material, including zoos and botanical gardens, but excluding libraries, except in so far as they maintain permanent exhibition rooms (Lehmannová, 2020, p.2).

From the definitions above, the word 'zoo' was written into the definition of a museum at the time of ICOM's founding, and it was explicitly stated in the Statutes that zoos were included in museums. However, after several revisions, the word 'zoo' has been eliminated from the definition of a museum and no longer appears in the text that would seem to correspond to a zoo in the current 2023 Statutes.

On the other hand, in the United States, the American Association of Museums (AAM) provides an Accreditation Program for its member institutions to grant public recognition to institutions that meet higher standards and assure public credibility. The AAM represents the entire scope of the American museum field, from art and history museums to science centers and zoos, although zoological parks and aquariums are less than 1% of the AAM-accredited museums[3].

## 4 CONCLUSION

In the past years, non-domesticated animals, exhibited in enclosures, and public viewing have been considered to be the three main components of the nature of a zoo (Cooper, 2003). However, education has become more and more important nowadays, which can be found in the laws, strategies, and standards made for zoos and aquariums. Although most of the zoo licensing laws seemed to put more emphasis on physical requirements for zoos, the educational role of zoos and aquariums is addressed by zoo associations with scientific strategies, effective approaches, and good practice examples provided. Besides, zoos and aquariums are also considered to be natural science museums, which have the main purpose of education.

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2 *Mission and Objectives*. ICOM. https://icom.museum/en/about-us/missions-and-objectives/ (Accessed on 31 October 2023)

3 According to the search results conducted on 10 October 2023, there are 1107 accredited museums total, but only 4 zoos (San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance, San Diego Zoo Safari Park, Indianapolis Zoo and White River Gardens, Oklahoma City Zoo and Botanical Garden) and 2 aquariums (National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium, New England Aquarium) have been granted the accreditations. The latest accreditation museums list can be found on the AAM Homepage (http://ww2.aam-us.org/resources/assessment-programs/accreditation/accredited-museums).

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