



The Aquarium Helgoland – a connecting link between science and the public: The first evaluation of its visitor and exhibition structure to improve the sustainable public outreach

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The Aquarium Helgoland, located on a rocky island in the North Sea, operates as a research, teaching and display aquarium. It belongs to the island's biological research station and has a long tradition linking science and the public. In 2010, in cooperation with the University of Flensburg, the first evaluation of the aquarium and its visitor profile was undertaken in order to enhance the attractiveness of the aquarium, improve its exhibitions, and increase sustainable public outreach.

Three data collection methods were used:

1. A survey collected information about the personal motivation of visitors and their impressions.
2. Temporary video cameras monitored the movement of guests in the exhibition and the time spent in front of the tanks, to establish their attractiveness.
3. The relationship between exhibition design and increase in personal knowledge was assessed.

Results showed that 75.2% of guests had visited the aquarium for the first time. 52.7% visited in order to increase knowledge. 45.1% reported that they had a special interest in marine biological topics. Most visitors were older than 45 years. The evaluation showed that further efforts are needed to satisfy the public interest and to ensure sustainable public outreach.