

Eden Project, facilitating change

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Abstract

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The 21st Century will be a time of radical change for society. Rising energy costs, changing demographics, escalating extinctions, global economic shifts, pandemics – all represent major challenges and are all set against a background of climate change that may be the greatest threat of all. Eden's aim is to present, to the widest possible public audience, the need for environmental care through celebrating what nature gives to us. Eden provides a stage on which to illustrate the choices we can make to foster a better world.

Introduction

Eden Project was conceived in 1994 and built in a former Cornish clay pit in the South West of the United Kingdom costing so far £135 million (Figure 1). Eden's Visitor Centre opened to the public in May 2000 and the full site opened in March 2001. Eden is a not-for-profit Charitable Trust. Its mission is to promote the understanding and responsible management of the vital relationship between plants, people and resources leading towards a sustainable future for all. Five years after opening, Eden has contributed £700 million to the local economy; it is amongst the top five paid-for visitor attractions in the UK, and since opening has hosted eight million visitors. Eden Project provides a 'Living Theatre' where examples of positive initiatives from around the world are displayed, explained and supported. Eden communicates its story through various media using a backdrop of great architecture and 1,000,000 plants representing 5,000 species from many of the climatic zones of the world. Many of these can grow in the mild conditions of Cornwall, others need greenhouses or Eden's two gigantic Biomes - the biggest conservatories in the world. These Biomes feature plants, crops and landscapes from the humid tropics and warm temperate regions and act as a backdrop to the outdoor temperate landscape which mirrors our UK environment.

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Figure 1: Left: Photograph taken in 1995 of the former Cornish china clay pit Right: Photograph taken in 2001 of the Eden Project with the two biomes the larger being the Rainforest Biome, the smaller, the Warm Temperate Biome.

Eden uses exhibitions, art, storytelling, workshops, retail, lectures and events to explore themes and topics with the public, professionals and formal education groups. This education programme comprises major themes of great significance such as climate change and energy, food, nutrition, health and well-being, biodiversity and sustainable use of natural resources. This presentation aims to provide an insight into how the Eden Project has explored and began to successfully facilitate change in the world.

Finally this presentation will discuss a future development of the Eden Project called The Edge. The Edge has its roots in our original ambition to have a Biome that focused on the desert regions of the world. This building will be a landmark construction and complement the existing Eden Project, it will focus on the challenges of water use and water security, energy use and energy security and climate change. Together these issues will lead to pivotal social challenges affecting us all in the next two decades, with impacts on individuals and communities that will be arguably as significant as the great transformations of history – settled agriculture, the reformation, the enlightenment and the industrial revolution. The Edge aims to raise the following questions: How do the choices we make affect our collective futures? Are we in shape for the 21st century? And how well are we equipping our children for the world ahead of them?