



MINISTRY OF TOURISM
& ANTIQUITIES



SUPREME COUNCIL
OF ANTIQUITIES



ALEXANDRIA
NATIONAL MUSEUM



ICOM
COMMS
AWARDS
2026

SECRETS OF THE SUNKEN CITY

BRINGING EGYPT'S
UNDERWATER HERITAGE
TO LIFE



ICOM COMMS AWARDS 2026

CATEGORIES APPLIED FOR:



BEST AUDIENCE
ENGAGEMENT
INITIATIVE



BEST
STORYTELLING
PROJECT



BEST
WITH LESS





Executive Summary

Museums have a unique responsibility to connect people with their cultural heritage. Yet one of Egypt's most extraordinary archaeological resources—its underwater cultural heritage—remains largely inaccessible to the public, hidden beneath the waters of the Mediterranean Sea.

To address this communication challenge, Alexandria National Museum developed *Secrets of the Sunken City: Bringing Egypt's Underwater Heritage to Life*, a communication-led project designed to transform complex archaeological research into meaningful public engagement.

Rather than relying on a traditional exhibition alone, the project combined storytelling, education, strategic partnerships, media outreach, accessibility initiatives, and the inauguration of a new public library to create multiple ways for audiences to discover, understand, and connect with Egypt's submerged heritage.

Developed with limited financial resources and supported through strong institutional and community partnerships, the project demonstrated how museums can achieve significant communication impact by mobilizing expertise, collaboration, and creativity instead of large budgets.

The project resulted in the successful launch of a temporary exhibition, the opening of the museum's public library featuring Egypt's first specialized museum collection on underwater cultural heritage, extensive educational programming, wide national and international media coverage, and the extension of the exhibition for an additional six months due to continued public interest.

This submission presents how Alexandria National Museum addressed a communication challenge through innovation, collaboration, and community engagement, demonstrating that meaningful communication is not defined by available resources, but by the ability to inspire people to value and protect their shared heritage.



The Problem

Making Egypt's Underwater Heritage Visible

Egypt's underwater cultural heritage is among the most significant in the world. The submerged cities of Thonis-Heracleion, Canopus, and the underwater remains of ancient Alexandria preserve exceptional archaeological evidence of Egypt's maritime history and its cultural connections across the Mediterranean.

Despite their international archaeological importance, these sites remain inaccessible to almost everyone. Unlike monuments on land, underwater archaeological sites cannot be visited by school groups, families, most tourists, or the wider public.

As a result, many people know little about this extraordinary part of Egypt's heritage, and opportunities to build awareness and appreciation remain limited.

For Alexandria National Museum, this represented not simply an archaeological challenge, but a communication challenge.

How can museums help people value a heritage they cannot see?

How can archaeological research become meaningful to audiences with no prior knowledge of underwater archaeology?

The museum recognised that displaying archaeological objects alone would not answer these questions.

A different communication approach was needed—one that would connect people emotionally and intellectually with a hidden heritage, transforming scientific knowledge into accessible stories and meaningful experiences.



Transforming inaccessible underwater heritage into an accessible public experience".

The Solution

A Communication Strategy, Not Just an Exhibition

Alexandria National Museum responded to this communication challenge by developing an integrated communication strategy rather than organising a traditional temporary exhibition.

The exhibition became the starting point—not the final objective.

The project was designed to create multiple opportunities for people to discover, understand, discuss, and remember Egypt's underwater cultural heritage through a combination of communication tools that complemented one another.

Instead of asking a single question—"How can we display these objects?"—the museum asked a different question:

"How can we create meaningful connections between people and a heritage they cannot experience directly"?

This question shaped every aspect of the project.

- ✚ Scientific research was translated into engaging stories.
- ✚ Museum interpretation became accessible to non-specialists.
- ✚ Educational activities encouraged participation instead of passive observation.
- ✚ Community partnerships expanded the project's reach.
- ✚ Media communication extended the museum's voice beyond its walls.
- ✚ The public library ensured that communication would continue after visitors left the exhibition.
- ✚ Accessibility initiatives enabled more people to participate regardless of physical ability.

Rather than functioning as separate activities, these elements formed one integrated communication strategy with a single objective:

To bring Egypt's underwater heritage closer to people.



Communication Tool 1

Storytelling: Transforming Artifacts into Stories

The exhibition was not designed to present archaeological objects as isolated museum pieces. Instead, every object was interpreted as part of a wider story about people, places, beliefs, trade, and everyday life in Egypt's ancient submerged cities.

Rather than asking visitors to admire artefacts for their artistic or historical value alone, the project encouraged them to understand the human stories behind them.

Interpretive texts were carefully developed to translate archaeological research into clear and engaging narratives, making specialised knowledge accessible to audiences of different ages and educational backgrounds.

This storytelling approach transformed underwater archaeology from a highly specialised academic subject into an experience that visitors could understand, remember, and share.

By focusing on stories instead of objects alone, the museum created an emotional connection between visitors and a heritage they could never physically visit beneath the sea.



Communication Tool 2

Education: From Visitors to Active Participants

Education was one of the project's most effective communication tools.

Alexandria National Museum developed a programme of educational activities that encouraged visitors to engage actively with underwater cultural heritage rather than simply observe it.

The museum's Education Department organised guided tours, interactive workshops, discussions, and heritage-based learning activities designed for children, students, families, and organised groups.

These activities translated archaeological knowledge into memorable learning experiences, encouraging curiosity, participation, and dialogue.

Instead of delivering information in one direction, the project created opportunities for visitors to ask questions, share ideas, and build their own understanding of Egypt's underwater heritage.

Communication therefore became an ongoing conversation rather than a one-way presentation.



Communication Tool 3

Partnerships: Building a Shared Voice for Underwater Heritage

Successful museum communication cannot rely on museums alone. It grows stronger when institutions, experts, and communities work together to deliver a shared message.

From the beginning, Secrets of the Sunken City was developed as a collaborative communication project rather than an internally managed exhibition.

Scientific credibility was ensured through the partnership between Alexandria National Museum, the General Administration of Underwater Antiquities, and the European Institute for Underwater Archaeology (IEASM).

These partnerships enabled the museum to communicate archaeological knowledge with both scientific accuracy and public accessibility.

At the same time, community partnerships expanded the project's reach far beyond the museum.

The museum's public library was created entirely through donations from individuals and partner organisations.

The Rotary Alexandria Peace Committee donated the furniture and equipment.

Dr. Mohamed Mostafa Abdel Meguid, former Director of the General Administration of Underwater Antiquities, donated more than 200 specialised books.

The European Institute for Underwater Archaeology donated an additional specialised collection.

The Alexandria and Mediterranean Research Center further enriched the library through its own contribution.

These partnerships were not simply financial or logistical support.

They represented a shared belief that Egypt's underwater cultural heritage should be accessible to everyone.

Every partner became an advocate for the project's message, significantly expanding its communication impact.



Communication Tool 4

The Museum Library: Extending Communication beyond the Exhibition

Effective communication should not end when visitors leave an exhibition.

To ensure the project's long-term impact, Alexandria National Museum inaugurated its new public library immediately following the official opening of Secrets of the Sunken City.

The timing was intentional. The library was conceived as a permanent communication platform, allowing visitors to continue exploring Egypt's underwater cultural heritage long after their museum visit.

A dedicated section on underwater cultural heritage—the first of its kind within an Egyptian museum—was established to support researchers, students, museum professionals, and anyone interested in Egypt's maritime past.

The library itself became an example of community-powered communication.

Its furniture and equipment were donated by the Rotary Alexandria Peace Committee, while its specialised collection was built through contributions from leading experts and partner institutions.

By transforming a temporary exhibition into a permanent learning resource, the museum ensured that communication would continue through reading, research, and education.

The library remains one of the project's most enduring legacies, demonstrating how museums can sustain public engagement beyond the lifespan of a temporary exhibition.



Communication Tool 5

Accessibility: Making Heritage Available to Everyone

Inclusive communication was a fundamental principle of the project.

Alexandria National Museum recognised that meaningful public engagement requires removing barriers that prevent people from accessing knowledge.

During the opening of the museum library, a volunteer introduced an assistive digital reading programme designed to enable visitors with visual impairments to access the library's resources independently.

The programme was generously donated to the museum free of charge and demonstrated during the official inauguration in the presence of the Minister of Tourism and Antiquities.

This initiative reflected the project's commitment to ensuring that cultural heritage is accessible to all members of society.

By integrating accessibility into the communication strategy, the museum reinforced the principle that inclusion is not an additional service but an essential element of effective museum communication.

Communication Tool 6

Media and Public Relations: Taking the Story Beyond the Museum

Communication was never intended to stop at the museum entrance.

From the outset, Alexandria National Museum developed a proactive media and public relations strategy to extend the project's message far beyond its physical space, introducing Egypt's underwater cultural heritage to local, regional, and international audiences.

Working closely with journalists, broadcasters, and digital media platforms, the museum communicated not only the exhibition itself, but also the broader importance of protecting underwater cultural heritage and making archaeological knowledge accessible to the public.

The project received extensive coverage across major international, regional, and Egyptian media outlets, including The Guardian, CNN Arabic, Al Arabiya, in addition to numerous Egyptian newspapers, television channels, news websites, and cultural platforms.

This media attention significantly expanded the project's reach, allowing thousands of people who were unable to visit the museum to engage with its message.

The official inauguration by the Minister of Tourism and Antiquities, together with the Secretary-General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities and the Governor of Alexandria, further strengthened the project's visibility and credibility.

Rather than functioning as publicity alone, media coverage became an educational communication tool that introduced new audiences to Egypt's underwater cultural heritage and encouraged wider public appreciation of its significance.

Selected Media Coverage

The Guardian

CNN Arabic

Al Arabiya

Egyptian national television coverage

National newspapers

Online news platforms

Museum and institutional digital channels

A complete list of media coverage, publications, broadcasts, and web links is provided in the Supporting Evidence app



Links

International coverage

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/aug/21/egypt-retrieves-parts-of-2000-year-old-sunken-city-canopus-off-coast-of-alexandria?utm_source=chatgpt.com

The Guardian

https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/ruins-alexandria-egypt-3zrl8fz0l?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Times UK

https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/etimes/trending/2000-year-old-sunken-citys-treasure-discovered-in-egypt-secrets-revealed/articleshow/123468216.cms?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Times India

<https://www.thenationalnews.com/arts-culture/art-design/2025/08/21/what-are-the-sunken-antiquities-recovered-from-abu-qir-bay-in-alexandria/>

National UAE

https://www.app.com.pk/global/egypt-opens-submerged-antiquities-exhibition-in-port-city-alexandria/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

APP Associated Press of Pakistan

https://www.gettyimages.dk/detail/news-photo/people-visit-the-secrets-of-the-sunken-city-exhibition-at-news-photo/2230442757?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Anadolu

National Coverage

<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1HSuVwLfYC/>

Link to the publication on the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities' page

https://arabic.cnn.com/travel/article/2025/08/22/secrets-sunken-city-alexandria-egypt?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Link to the publication on the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities' page

<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/19rbHML9Tb/>

Official Page for Alexandria governorate

<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1NMGVA4Ks2/>

Egyptian television coverage of the exhibition's opening

https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/50/1207/551923/AlAhram-Weekly/Heritage/Sunken-city-exhibition-opens-in-Alexandria.aspx?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Al-Ahram Weekly (English)

<https://www.facebook.com/share/1LvXNRWmzN/>

El Masry Elyoum

<https://www.facebook.com/share/1LvXNRWmzN/>

Masrawy News

https://youtu.be/tNTvVWlIKAY?si=r052tn_P1Cp9rpmx

Al-Youm Al-Sabaa newspaper's coverage of the exhibition Statements by the Minister of Tourism and Antiquities to Extra News channel

https://youtu.be/RAeC_seEzIY?si=ma2SX8LNW9e3wMnX

Sada Elbalad Channel Coverage

https://youtu.be/nnMFd_xZ68w?si=kn0GZH15R9Fp3TI2

Speech by Professor Dr. Former Secretary General

<https://youtube.com/shorts/sSk1BJGNcy8?si=Viayos1A1kETwf1p>

Al Jazeera Egypt coverage

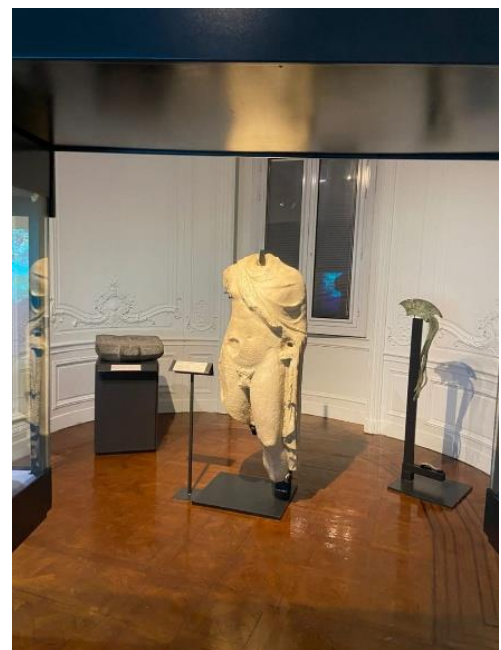
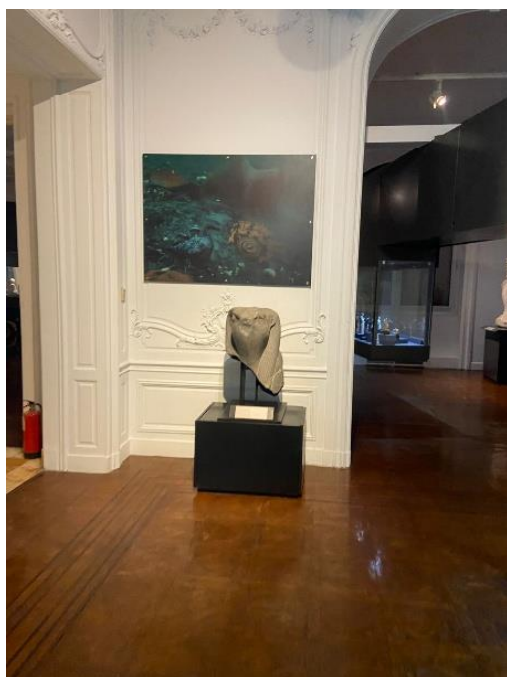
<https://youtu.be/YGGknDYy3qA?si=wzCvLOzQhlUj3aYt>

Sout Elmajala TV

https://arabic.cnn.com/travel/article/2025/08/22/secrets-sunken-city-alexandria-egypt?utm_source=chatgpt.com

CNN Arabia

Artifacts in the exhibition



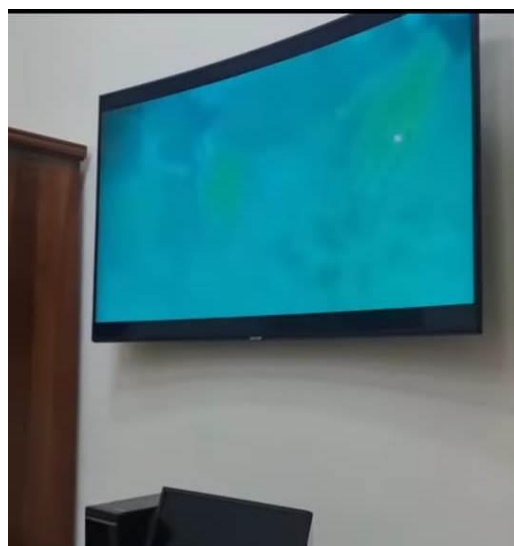
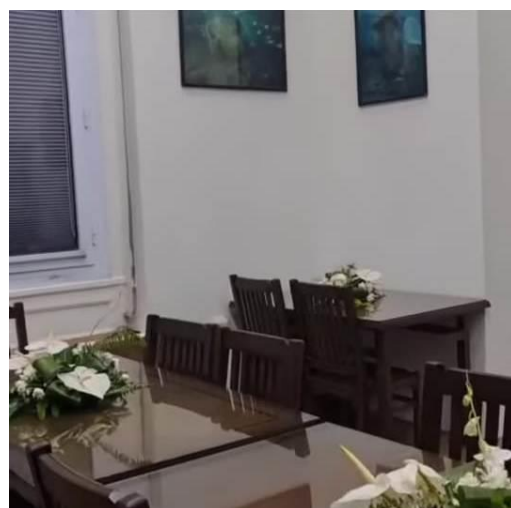
Exhibition opening and activities



Visitors of the exhibition



Museum Library and Accessibility



The Results

Measuring Communication Impact

The success of Secrets of the Sunken City: Bringing Egypt's Underwater Heritage to Life was measured not only by attendance, but by the quality, reach, and sustainability of its communication outcomes.

The project achieved results across multiple communication channels, demonstrating that a museum can create significant public impact through collaboration, creativity, and strategic communication, even with limited resources.

Key Results

A successful temporary exhibition the project transformed underwater archaeological research into an accessible public experience, introducing visitors to Egypt's submerged heritage through interpretation, storytelling, and educational engagement.

A permanent educational legacy the museum inaugurated its new public library on the same day as the exhibition, creating a lasting communication platform that continues to serve researchers, students, and the public.

Egypt's first specialised museum collection on underwater cultural heritage a dedicated reference section was established within the library, providing permanent public access to specialised publications on underwater archaeology.

Extended public engagement originally planned as a six-month exhibition, the project was extended for an additional six months due to continued public interest.

National and international media recognition the project attracted widespread media attention across television, newspapers, online platforms, and international news organisations, significantly expanding its communication reach.

Inclusive communication Accessibility initiatives enabled visitors with visual impairments to access the museum library through assistive technology donated specifically for the project.

Alignment with the ICOM COMMS Award Categories

Although submitted in three categories, the project was developed as one integrated communication initiative. Each element was designed to support the museum's central objective: making Egypt's underwater cultural heritage accessible, relevant, and engaging for diverse audiences.

Best Storytelling Project

The project transformed complex archaeological research into compelling public narratives, enabling visitors to understand the history, people, and significance of Egypt's submerged cities through accessible interpretation, exhibition design, and educational storytelling.

Best Audience Engagement Initiative

Audience engagement extended far beyond exhibition visits through educational programmes, interactive activities, the museum library, accessibility initiatives, community partnerships, and continuous dialogue with diverse audiences.

Best with Less

The project demonstrates how meaningful communication can be achieved through collaboration rather than large budgets. Partnerships, donations, volunteer contributions, and the commitment of the museum's multidisciplinary team enabled the project to achieve a lasting public impact with limited resources.

Together, these elements formed one communication strategy that continues to inspire public appreciation for Egypt's underwater cultural heritage.

Legacy and Future Impact

Building a Sustainable Model for Museum Communication

Secrets of the Sunken City were conceived as more than a temporary exhibition. It became a model for how museums can communicate complex heritage through collaboration, storytelling, education, and community participation.

The project demonstrated that effective museum communication is not measured by the duration of an exhibition, but by the lasting relationships it creates between museums, people, and cultural heritage.

Several elements of the project continue to generate impact beyond the exhibition itself:

The museum's public library remains open as a permanent learning resource.

The specialised underwater cultural heritage collection continues to support researchers and students.

Educational programmes have strengthened the museum's relationship with schools, universities, and families.

Partnerships established through the project continue to support future initiatives.

Media coverage created a permanent digital record that continues to introduce new audiences to Egypt's underwater cultural heritage.

The experience gained through this project has also influenced the museum's approach to future communication initiatives, reinforcing the importance of accessibility, community engagement, interdisciplinary collaboration, and storytelling as essential components of museum practice.

Ultimately, Secrets of the Sunken City demonstrates that museums can transform hidden heritage into shared public knowledge, ensuring that even the most inaccessible archaeological sites become part of society's collective memory.



**Museums do not only preserve heritage—they create meaningful
".connections between heritage and people**