

ILMI Project and MISK Foundation Overview

The ILMI Project



Artist's rendering of the upcoming ilmi Science Discovery & Innovation Center in Riyadh, featuring a distinctive spherical structure and landscaped surroundings (conceptual design). The ilmi center is envisioned as a fully accessible hub for science, technology, reading, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STREAM) learning, aimed at igniting curiosity and creativity among youth.

ilmi (meaning “my knowledge” in Arabic) is a new science discovery and innovation center launched as a **philanthropic initiative** by **HRH Princess Sara bint Mashhour bin Abdulaziz Al Saud** (wife of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman) in May 2023 ¹. It is being developed as a **flagship STREAM learning destination** to inspire and empower young people across Saudi Arabia through hands-on exploration, creativity, and problem-solving ². The project is **incubated and supported by the Mohammed bin Salman Foundation (MISK)** – in fact, ilmi is one of MISK’s subsidiary initiatives – and it will operate in partnership with the Prince Mohammed Bin Salman Nonprofit City in Riyadh ². As Princess Sara stated at the launch, “ilmi will be a beacon of creativity, learning and accessibility,” offering Saudi Arabia’s young (and lifelong) learners a place to realize their potential, advance the Kingdom, and help shape the future ³ ⁴.

Technical Aspects

- **Location:** The ilmi center is **located in Prince Mohammed Bin Salman Nonprofit City in Riyadh**, the world’s first nonprofit city ². It enjoys a prime site with direct access from Riyadh’s Western Ring Road and proximity to MISK’s headquarters and the city’s vibrant “Al Mishraq” zone ⁵. This location within the nonprofit city aligns ilmi with a larger ecosystem of educational and cultural developments.
- **Opening Date:** The center is **scheduled to open in 2025** ⁶. Ahead of the physical opening, ilmi has begun rolling out online platforms and pop-up learning experiences to engage the public and build excitement. For example, **digital “STREAM” challenges** and live activations are

launching to get youth, families and educators involved in creative science learning before the doors open ⁷.

- **Scale and Design:** ilmi will **span ~27,000 square meters** of built-up space ⁶, set on a larger 38,000 m² site of cultural experiences ⁸. The architectural design is striking – a **modern landmark featuring a dramatic spherical structure** surrounded by landscaped terraces and integrated into the natural terrain



. The design reflects the city's goals of **creativity and sustainability**, incorporating the local environment with extensive green landscaping and abundant use of natural light ⁹. This fully accessible facility is being constructed to the highest standards: a ~SR1.8 billion (\$480 million) construction contract was awarded in 2024 to an international firm, underscoring the significant investment in the project ¹⁰.

- **Exhibits and Programs:** Inside, ilmi will house **interactive galleries and educational experiences** built around three core themes – “Our World,” “Our Selves,” and “Our Inventions.” These permanent exhibit areas will cover topics from energy and ecosystems to the human body, technology, space, and artificial intelligence ¹¹. The exhibits are designed to **surprise and engage visitors** of all ages, using hands-on experimentation and storytelling relevant to daily life ¹² ¹³. A co-creation approach is central to ilmi’s content development: young audiences, educators, scientists, and creators are actively involved in shaping and refreshing the programming to keep it relevant as needs evolve ¹⁴. In addition to the galleries, the center plans to host various **installations, events, talks, performances, and learning programs** to cultivate a new STREAM community in Saudi Arabia ¹⁵.

Sponsorship and Public Positioning

ilmi is positioned as a **national landmark project** in Saudi Arabia’s push toward a knowledge economy. It is a **non-governmental, non-profit initiative** backed by the Mohammed bin Salman (MiSK) Foundation and championed by Princess Sara ². This sponsorship by MiSK – a foundation known for empowering youth – signals that ilmi is not a commercial venture but rather a **philanthropic investment in education and innovation**. The **public messaging** around ilmi emphasizes **inclusivity and accessibility for all** learners (including those with different abilities) and the goal of **sparking a lifelong passion for science and creativity** in the next generation ² ³. In terms of outreach, ilmi’s strategy goes beyond the center’s walls: it includes an **integrated digital platform and nationwide pop-up experiences** to engage students and families across the country, building momentum and awareness even before the center opens ⁷. By doing so, ilmi aims to foster a broad community of young innovators and STREAM enthusiasts.

While specific visitor projections for ilmi have not been publicly released, it is expected to be a major attraction for both local and international visitors interested in science and technology. The nonprofit city in which it resides is planned to **attract around 8 million visitors annually by 2030** as a whole¹⁶, and ilmi will undoubtedly contribute significantly to that footfall as a key cultural destination. In its public positioning, ilmi is often described as "*a leading science discovery and innovation center, accessible to all*" – a place where families and friends can convene to explore and learn together¹⁷. By aligning with Saudi Arabia's **Vision 2030** objectives for youth empowerment and a knowledge-based society, ilmi presents itself as both an educational resource and a symbol of the country's innovative future.

The MISK Foundation

The **Mohammed bin Salman Foundation (MiSK)** is a **non-profit foundation** established in 2011 by **Prince Mohammed bin Salman** (now Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia)¹⁸. Often referred to simply as the **MiSK Foundation**, its name "MiSK" means "musk" – a symbol of generosity in Arabic – reflecting the foundation's charitable ethos¹⁹. MiSK's **core purpose** is to **cultivate learning, leadership, and talent development among Saudi youth** as part of building a knowledge-based economy for the Kingdom's future¹⁸²⁰. From its inception, MiSK has focused on empowering young people through education, entrepreneurship, culture, and technology programs. It invests in a wide array of initiatives – establishing schools, museums, forums, and incubators – to provide the country's youth with opportunities to **develop skills, creative talents, and leadership abilities** in an enabling environment²¹²². The foundation pursues these goals both by designing its own programs and by partnering with local and global organizations, all aimed at unlocking youth potential and contributing to Saudi Arabia's development²⁰.

Over the past decade, the MiSK Foundation has grown into a **key driver of youth development and innovation** in Saudi Arabia. It has launched or overseen numerous flagship entities and projects, including **educational institutions** (such as MiSK Schools and Riyadh Schools), **cultural and creative hubs** (like the MiSK Art Institute and Manga Productions), and **events platforms** (for example, the annual MiSK Global Forum for young leaders)²³. These diverse endeavors all tie back to MiSK's central mission of empowering young Saudis. The foundation's initiatives range from **scholarship and fellowship programs, entrepreneurship incubators, and leadership training**, to establishing physical spaces like museums and centers that inspire learning. Notably, MiSK's approach aligns closely with the Saudi Vision 2030's emphasis on youth, education, and a diversified economy – MiSK acts as a catalyst in these areas by leveraging philanthropic capital to complement government efforts²⁴²⁵. Prince Mohammed bin Salman, as MiSK's founder and chairman, has articulated that the foundation's higher goal is "*developing the human mind*" and fostering a new generation prepared to lead and create in the future²⁶²⁷.

Relationship Between MiSK and the ilmi Initiative

The **ilmi Center** is a direct product of MiSK's vision and falls under the foundation's umbrella of projects. In fact, ilmi is officially one of MiSK Foundation's **subsidiary initiatives**, reflecting MiSK's commitment to science and technology education²⁸. The development of ilmi is **led by Princess Sara bint Mashhour** in her capacity as a patron within the MiSK family, and it exemplifies how MiSK supports initiatives championed by members of the Saudi royal family to advance shared philanthropic goals²⁹. MiSK has provided **incubation, funding, and strategic support** to ilmi from the outset²⁸. By situating ilmi in the Prince Mohammed Bin Salman Nonprofit City (a MiSK-developed project) and integrating it with MiSK's network, the foundation ensures that ilmi benefits from and contributes to a larger ecosystem of innovation and learning.

Importantly, the ilmi project aligns perfectly with MiSK's **focus on youth empowerment in STREAM fields**. It serves as a tangible extension of MiSK's mission: where MiSK's programs often train and mentor youth, **ilmi provides a physical center for experiential learning and public engagement in science and technology**. MiSK's Science & Technology focus area envisions creating new opportunities and sparking economic growth through innovation ³⁰, and ilmi is poised to be a cornerstone for that – a place to inspire future scientists, engineers, and creatives who will drive Saudi Arabia's knowledge economy forward. In summary, the relationship is one of **parent and project**: MiSK Foundation is the driving force and supporter behind ilmi, and ilmi is a signature initiative that embodies MiSK's values and objectives in action ². The two are deeply intertwined, with ilmi's success expected to be a proud achievement for the MiSK Foundation and a model for how philanthropic ventures can transform the educational landscape in line with national goals.

Sources: Press Release – Misk Foundation (20 May 2023) ² ⁹; Arab News (21 May 2023) ⁶ ³¹; Saudi Gazette / SPA (20 May 2023) ³²; Misk Foundation Official Website ³³ ²⁰; Arab Urban Institute – Nonprofit City Profile ¹⁶.

¹ ² ³ ⁹ ¹⁴ ²⁸ HRH Princess Sara Bint Mashhour Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, wife of HRH Crown Prince, Launches New Science and Technology Initiative "ilmi" to Ignite Scientific Curiosity and Develop Skills in Saudi Arabia - Misk Foundation
<https://misk.org.sa/en/launch-new-science-and-technology-initiative-ilmi-to-ignite-scientific-curiosity-and-develop-skills-in-saudi-arabia-en/>

⁴ ³² Crown Prince's wife created STREAM initiative ilmi launched in Saudi Arabia | Saudi Gazette
<https://cdn.saudigazette.com.sa/article/632603/SAUDI-ARABIA/Crown-Princes-wife-created-STREAM-initiative-ilmi-launched-in-Saudi-Arabia>

⁵ ⁸ ¹² ¹³ ¹⁷ Center - ilmi Center - A Destination for All
<https://ilmi.sa/en/center/>

⁶ ⁷ ¹¹ ¹⁵ ³¹ Princess Sara, wife of Saudi crown prince, launches new science and technology initiative | Arab News
<https://www.arabnews.com/node/2306996/saudi-arabia>

¹⁰ ²⁹ CONSTRUCTION WORKS PROGRESS ON MISK ILMI CENTRE
<https://www.ice.it/it/news/notizie-dal-mondo/270253>

¹⁶ Projects – Arab Urban Development Institute
<https://araburban.org/en/infohub/projects/?id=6676>

¹⁸ ²⁰ ²¹ ²² ²⁴ ²⁵ ²⁶ ²⁷ ³⁰ ³³ About Misk - Misk Foundation
<https://misk.org.sa/en/about-misk/>

¹⁹ ²³ Misk Foundation - Wikipedia
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Misk_Foundation