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Comments

The impact of Covid-19 crisis on Plant Taxonomy: will we be able to approach to plant taxonomy as in the past?

There is no doubt that the current global crisis due to Covid-19 is changing our lives and our future habits, but we must hope that the situation will slowly get better.

Nonetheless, we should all reflect more on our future, including our personal life and professional work, considering that the effects of the current pandemic will also significantly affect the research activity of plant taxonomists in the coming times.

One of the aspects that will be most affected will be field research, starting from its logistic organization up to authorization by the competent territorial authorities, especially in tropical areas. Hopefully, expeditions will not be impossible in the future, but we can surely expect additional complications that will slow down experimental research in the field and possible also simple travelling, collecting activities and field courses.

We are currently witnessing a complete stalemate in field research and may expect slow-down and restrictions at least for some time to come due to limitations in travelling, especially overseas travelling. Already, field research is per se limited in time by seasonality and the best time to collect the study material, be it plant or animal.

Visits to herbaria will also be affected, due to the necessary procedures that are being adopted to guarantee sanitary security and to avoid infection through the handling of herbarium collections. The current reasonably large availability of digitized information has become really crucial in this situation. Nonetheless, we know that interpretation of digital images cannot always substitute direct examination of specimens and that the majority of the World's herbarium collections are not yet digitalized. We also know that visiting a herbarium does not only consist of studying its collections, including associated libraries. It represents an occasion to meet and exchange information with colleagues: an opportunity of professional empathy.

Another consequence may be seen in a foreseeable further reduction of the funding of plant taxonomic research. Funding of plant taxonomy is already inadequate, and there is a real danger that even launched projects cannot be completed on time and may therefore run out of funds. We must not forget that these difficulties encountered by senior scientists, will also influence the thesis activities of under- and post-graduate students, who risks seeing their study schedule compromised, with consequences for family budgets or even their future careers.

Recurring conferences, symposia, celebrations will not take place now, and probably they will not do so for a long time. It is true that many scholars –including some plant taxonomists – who regard travelling for many hours by plane as a cause of severe ecological damage, would rather opt for events to be held remotely whenever possible. However, I cannot feel happy to miss at least some personal contacts with colleagues if I have to avoid all travels for scientific meetings!

Let's be realistic! At present, we can only wait with wise patience for the end of this nightmare that is gripping the whole world and also our community of plant taxonomists. In the meantime, we must concentrate on guaranteeing the transmission of our discipline by remote teaching, and devote time to completing and

publishing, wherever possible, our current investigations. We must try to maintain and amplify our contacts and collaborations with a perspective on the future. In particular, as teachers in Plant Taxonomy, we must not lose contact with your students and especially with those who demonstrate a genuine and concrete interest in our discipline.

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