Documenting, Maintaining and Demonstrating Heritage Plants in Museum Gardens

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Project Goals

The Heritage Plants in Museum Gardens project (2009-2012) aims to combine diverse, biological, cultural, and local knowledge related to plant genetic resources, especially horticultural old historic varieties and landraces.

In three pilot museums in the south western Finland, we gather novel knowledge on how to value, document, interpret, demonstrate and maintain living heritage plants in museum environment.

We are especially interested in social and cultural values and meanings anchored to plant genetic resources: how they can be identified, what contexts they stem from, and how this understanding of values and meanings can be translated to the use of demonstrating and preservation processes.

Heritage Plant (or heirloom plant) can be an old variety or a landrace which has been introduced and locally cultivated at least more than 50 years. It is specifically adapted to the local environmental conditions and is closely associated with uses, knowledge, habits, dialects and celebrations of the people who grow them.

Documenting Heritage Plants

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Since the material is vegetal, the preservation of the heritage plant and the garden surrounding it requires a long-term maintenance plan.

In the pilot museum gardens we have evaluated the condition of a single heritage plant and made maintenance plans.

Plants are not commonly presented to visitors in museums. In many cases, there is not much knowledge on the plants.

In pilot museum gardens we have utilized plant based knowledge in designing demonstration material for presenting heritage plants, their histories and their potential for present and future use. Demonstration material includes exhibitions, thematic and drama guidance, www-pages, brochures, maps and plant signs.

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We used DNA-fingerprinting method for variety identification.

Historical data of ‘Huvitus’ were gathered from old maps, pomological literature and archive documents.

Contacts to local people have been very essential. We have collected indigenous knowledge of ‘Huvitus’ by interviewing local informants and studying old photos.

Maintaining and Demonstrating Heritage Plants

This local, genetic and historic knowledge of heritage plants have been utilized for maintaining and demonstrating them in museum garden.

Continuous maintenance of heritage plants is of great importance.

Heritage plants maintained and demonstrated in museum gardens enable to mediate information of plant genetic resources to visitors through different senses: touching, tasting, smelling and with visual perception. Information received from different angles and with concrete ways may help visitors to better understand the value of plant genetic resources. The abstract concept of agro-biodiversity can become more tangible to laypersons.

Values of genetic resources, Helsinki 17th November 2011

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