

Experiences on plants, Experiences with plants. An anthropological approach to the Hortus Botanicus of Leiden

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The escalating climate crisis compels an urgent examination of the potential for reestablishing a harmonious coexistence between the natural environment and human societies. Starting from this question, this study embarks on a five-month ethnographic research to investigate the contemporary anthropological meaning of the relationship between humans and plants, focusing on the unique setting of the Hortus Botanicus in Leiden, Netherlands. Due to its deeply immersive, phenomenological, and interpretative methods, it proved effective to employ the ethnographic approach of contemporary social anthropology, in order to interrogate the significance of the actions and interpretations that humans apply to what they consider “natural”. While engaging in dialogical interactions with visitors and staff, participating in activities and events at the botanical garden, and observing both daily operations and the institution's self-representation strategies, I was able to outline a framework that highlights the ways and meanings of human interacting with plants. The Hortus Botanicus, as a museum institution, emerges as a hybrid context where the concept of nature is both questioned and enriched with new possibilities for encounters and expressive modes. It reveals itself as a venue where scientific research blends with intimate and personal involvement. The opening of new interpretative approaches to the relationship between humans and the plant world prompted innovative reflections on the current role of the Hortus Botanicus of Leiden. The integration of diverse perspectives on nature within the institution underscores its influence in cultivating new forms of active engagement. These practices allow for the reimagining of experiences not only *on* plants but also *with* plants, extending both within and beyond the botanical garden's boundaries.