

Bridging herbaria cultural heritage and digital art – Immaterial herbaria

Rhinaixa V. Duque-Thüs¹, Helmut Dalitz², Philipp M. Schlüter³ and María Beatriz Egli-Yáñez⁴

Migratory movement changes the way in which people perceive and feel their nations. Art allows us to enquire about the way members of diasporas are stimulated and confronted with a plethora of feelings as loss and grief, empathy, hope and joy when they see familiar plants collected from their countries of origin among herbarium samples. In the case of the Venezuelan diaspora, nostalgia for a recent past and memories of the homeland configure the imagined Venezuelan nation now that people living abroad („diasporic subjects” in the sense of Martínez Parra 2020). Some Venezuelans take plants from their gardens with them when they leave their country. Many of these people take orchids with them, that remind them of their origin and which they nurture in their new countries.

Cattleya mossiae C. Parker ex Hook (Orchidaceae), the national flower of Venezuela is a particularly valued species and often seen in the homes of Venezuelans in their new countries of residence. This plant is widely cultivated in Venezuela, and this is the main reason why, for many Venezuelans, orchids in general are a symbol of resiliency. An epiphytic lifestyle, with roots not in soil, is reminiscent to the life situation of human migrants, who have had to „move” their cultural roots, and settle in a new region, where it is often difficult to make new roots, forcing them to rely on their resilience also in a cultural context. In a changing environment even some terrestrial orchids in Europe, like *Himantoglossum hircinum* (L.) Sprengel, are showing more resilience than previously expected and under a warming climate, they start to expand into new territories (van der Meer et al. 2016).

This inspired María Beatriz Egli-Yáñez, the Swiss-Venezuelan visual artist, to merge the botanical background information about various species of orchids with her vision for their artistic representation. She combined photographic details of *Himantoglossum hircinum* (L.) Spreng and *H. adriaticum* H. Baumann in her artwork together with other structures of the plants, which for laymen, represent characteristic features of orchids (e.g., flowers).

Herbarium specimens are established aids in documenting e.g., climate and environmental changes or in population studies. As the information on the sheets is digitized and enters the public realm, an increased awareness for the importance of herbarium specimens is generated and spread, not only among scientists but also to artists (Brueggemeier 2017). The aim of this project is to show the development of „immaterial herbaria”, based on the idea of Egli-Yáñez, of creating several art works su-

Keywords

Cultural heritage, Digital art, Herbarium digitisation

Addresses of the authors

¹ Rhinaixa V. Duque-Thüs, University of Hohenheim, Institute of Biology, Herbarium HOH, Garbenstrasse 30, 70599 Stuttgart / Germany

² Helmut Dalitz, University of Hohenheim, Hohenheim Botanic Garden / Germany

³ Philipp M. Schlüter, University of Hohenheim, Institute of Biology, Plant Evolutionary Biology / Germany

⁴ María Beatriz Egli-Yáñez, Tüscherz-Alfermée / Switzerland

Contact

r.duquethues@uni-hohenheim.de

Accepted

28. 3. 2023

DOI

<https://doi.org/10.12685/bauhinia.1361>



Fig. 1. Digitally superposed images of specimens of *Himantoglossum hircinum* (L.) Spreng and *H. adriaticum* H. Baumann (Orchidaceae)

perposing digitised images of different species of Orchidaceae. This recreates the sensation of looking at superposed old family slides, where individuals look slightly different, although they belong to the same family.

Herbarium specimens were selected from HOH historical collections. Part of the images were generated with the help of IRIS Book 5, a lightweight portable scanner and with a Nikon DF camera and subsequently superposed (Fig. 1). The specimens were taxonomically updated, catalogued, and included in the database. The result of this work creates a bridge between the public and science through art, exemplified by the artistically constructed image of resilience and migration in species of Orchidaceae. The artist sees the way orchids use their roots as holdfasts as a trait that corresponds to the feelings of many migrants, who settle in new countries and cultures, carrying their own roots for holding themselves to a substrate where they will be able to thrive and bloom again. This artistic project leverages the metaphor of „being uprooted“ which applies to immigrants or members of Diasporas as well as to orchids. Both travel either with the migrating human communities or expand their distributional range by themselves following changes in the climatic framework of previously uninhabitable areas. The narrative of being uprooted reformulates a subjective diaspora members' experience of belonging to both the nation they currently live in and the country of origin, in a constant dialogue between feelings of belonging and uprootedness.

References

- Brueggemeier J (2017) Art and Herbarium. Art and Herbarium. Online issue <https://unlikely.net.au/issues/issue-04>
- Martinez Parra N (2020) Remembering and Feeling the Nation: Circulations of Emotions of the Imagined Community in the Contemporary Venezuelan Diaspora. Thesis, Georgia State University. doi: <https://doi.org/10.57709/19101667>
- van der Meer S, Jacquemyn H, Carey PD & Jongejans E (2016) Recent range expansion of a terrestrial orchid corresponds with climate-driven variation in its population dynamics. *Oecologia*. 181(2): 435–448. doi: 10.1007/s00442-016-3592-7. Epub 2016 Mar 1. PMID: 26932468