

Scientific policy and challenges for building a new research group

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Keywords: connections, facilities, funding, research group

Research at botanic gardens has changed considerably in the past centuries. Growing from initial studies of medicinal plants to systematic work and now connecting to many areas in biology. However, gardens have been struggling with reduced funding, expanding regulations and the declining valuation of natural history collections. These societal changes have necessitated botanic gardens to adapt their strategies and focus. In the Netherlands, several botanic gardens were separated from their universities and had to persevere with the help of volunteers, municipalities and other foundations. At the Hortus Botanicus Leiden, we now endeavour to maintain/strengthen bonds with our University and aim to start a new research group. In the last 30 years, the garden has been separated from the National herbarium and the Biology department which have moved to the edge of town. While our university ties are still strong, the research branch is quite small. Looking towards 2030, we aim to expand our scientific endeavours. With a new scientific strategy and formal research group, the Hortus wants to forge its own identity among the many university departments. The scientific strategy presented, is focused on three main branches: Evolution of Biodiversity, Collection-based Research and Nature & Society. Future activities will focus on new opportunities for (inter-disciplinary) collaboration, both within the local Leiden community as in the wider European and global botanic garden and university networks. Over the past few years, the garden has had some success finding new funding opportunities and access to laboratory facilities, but we wish to grow these temporary collaborations into long-lasting relations. In this talk, we highlight the above process and the challenges involved.