

Public Collections: Plants between Entertainment, Education, Research and Conservation

Urs Eggli

Sukkulenten-Sammlung Zürich, Mythenquai 88, CH-8002 Zürich, Switzerland

urs.eggli@zurich.ch

Public collections have varied duties to fulfil. The daily challenges can be grouped into four fields: Entertainment, education, research, and conservation. Each of these four fields poses different challenges as to what plants should be displayed, how these plants should be displayed, and with regard to corollary services (from playground and restaurant to “breeding for conservation”, library, and herbarium). The “currency” to pay for all efforts is greenhouse space and working time. The competition of demands makes it necessary to set priorities for the best-possible allocation of both space and time. Demands and constraints associated with each of the four fields are discussed and evaluated. Main areas of conflict are the priority of space allocation, the priority of display value, and the priority of work time allocation. Excellence of information management is identified to be of primary importance to enhance the value of the “plants for entertainment / education” so that they concurrently serve for research and conservation. Research activities enhance the value of “plants for education” by acquiring, generating and disseminating scientific information. The living plant collection is the indispensable centre of all operations, and the plants cultivated in a collection are ideally “multi-purpose”-plants that simultaneously serve all fields of interest.