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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Boissiera : mémoires de botanique systématique**

Band (Jahr): **47 (1993)**

PDF erstellt am: **21.06.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-895436>

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175^e anniversaire du Jardin botanique de Genève
Colloque international sur le thème
Nature et Jardins botaniques au XXI^e siècle
Genève — 2-4 juin 1993

Hortus Haren: a profitable enterprise

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ABSTRACT

REINHARD, J. L. (1993). Hortus Haren: a profitable enterprise. Comptes-rendus du colloque "Nature et Jardins botaniques au XXI^e siècle", Genève, 2-4 juin 1993. *Boissiera* 47: 74-80.

Hortus Haren was founded in 1642 as a university garden, originally owned by a bankrupt pharmacist dealing in tulips, in the northern part of Holland. At the beginning of this century it became necessary to find a new location outside the city of Groningen where further growth could be possible. On an estate of 21 ha in the nearby village of Haren new gardens were laid out and in 1968 a 2000 m² glasshouse was opened. Up till then botanical research at the State University of Groningen flourished and although open to the public the gardens were mainly used for scientific purposes. Exploitation was nearly fully paid out of university funds.

In 1982 however the Dutch ministry of education decided that universities had to reduce expenses and one of the measures was that all plant taxonomy departments had to be closed except for Leiden and Utrecht. This left the State University of Groningen with only one option: the botanical garden, mainly used by plant taxonomy, had to be closed also. This was unacceptable for the community and led by the major of Haren a foundation was formed to keep the garden open.

In 1988 a Master plan was published laying out a new future for Hortus Haren. The only chance for survival was leaving the traditional way of keeping a botanical garden and transforming into a modern tourist attraction around the theme nature and environment. This could be done without losing the scientific value of the collection. Innovations had to be paid by bank loans or to be sponsored. The only source of structural income would be the entrance fee. With 150.000 visitors/year paying Hfl 10.- the exploitation could be secure. Compared with the 60.000 visitors in 1986, paying only Hfl 0.25 this was a tremendous challenge. Renewal could be successful with a restructuring at the management level. Two private partnerships were formed, one dealing with the estate and one for the exploitation. Also a reorganisation of the staff would be necessary, a business manager at the top, an additional Public Relations & Marketing division and a professional approach at all other divisions.

This meant a mental change from a plant oriented approach towards a client based attitude. For the indispensable growth of the amount of visitors the garden had to offer more, not only to the botanically interested visitor but also to the general public of all age levels.

Renovation started with back maintenance of the wild-, the rock- and the herb garden and transforming the neglected systematic section towards a beautiful triangle with thematic gardens lined by canals. Very much appreciated by the visitors, but also a good source of extra income, was the new catering pavilion, not only for coffee and small meals but also for parties and receptions. Also, a well stocked gift shop offered books, seeds, bulbs but also souvenirs.

With these innovations and also extra events such as green markets, an exotic festival and bride fashion shows, the amount of visitors started to increase. In 1990 for the first time the magic line of 100.000 visitors was passed. New additions followed such as an Insectarium with living spiders and insects, a bee house and an agricultural garden. In 1992, our 350th jubilee year, Hortus Haren started spring with the Tulpenhof, an 8-week show with at least 3.5 million flowering bulbs varying between tulips and daffodils representing a marvellous botanical collection. Summertime transformed the flower beds into a carpet of annuals. This attracted at least 40.000 visitors more, bringing the annual score to nearly 150.000. Even more profitable will be the plan for a China Park, surrounded by a Bamboo Forest in co-operation with the cities of Shanghai and Groningen. But before this will be laid out, Hortus Haren will have reopened a selection of the most beautiful gardens of the International Horticultural Exhibition Floriade 1992 such as the British, the Belgian and the Italian Garden.

For the first time in Holland a botanical garden is becoming a regional, national and international tourist attraction. With its continuing effort Hortus Haren will become a profitable enterprise.

I hope we shall meet all of you in our flowering Hortus Haren.

RÉSUMÉ

REINHARD, J. L. (1993). Hortus Haren: une entreprise lucrative.
Comptes-rendus du colloque "Nature et Jardins botaniques au XXI^e siècle", Genève, 2-4 juin 1993.
Boissiera 47: 74-80.

Hortus Haren a été fondé en 1642 comme jardin universitaire, qui appartenait à l'origine à un pharmacien s'occupant de tulipes au nord de la Hollande, qui avait fait faillite. Au début du siècle, il devint nécessaire de trouver un nouvel emplacement en dehors de la ville de Groningen, où on pouvait compter sur une expansion. Sur un site de 21 hectares, à proximité du village de Haren, de nouveaux jardins furent établis et en 1968 a été ouverte une verrière de 2000 m². Jusqu'à cette date, la recherche botanique à l'Université d'Etat de Groningen s'est épanouie et bien qu'ouvert au public les jardins étaient principalement utilisés à des fins scientifiques. L'exploitation des jardins était essentiellement dérivée de fonds de soutien universitaires.

En 1982, toutefois, le Ministère de l'Education Néerlandais a décidé que les Universités devaient réduire leurs dépenses et l'une des mesures prises a consisté à fermer tous les départements de taxonomie des plantes, à l'exception de ceux de Leiden et d'Utrecht. Cette situation n'a laissé à l'Université de Groningen qu'un seul choix, celui de fermer également le jardin botanique utilisé pour la taxonomie des plantes. Bien entendu, une telle décision était jugée inacceptable par la communauté et sous la conduite du Maire de Haren, une Fondation a été organisée afin de laisser le jardin ouvert.

En 1988, un plan directeur a été publié, présentant une nouvelle disposition du jardin de Hortus Haren. La seule chance de survie consistait à abandonner la façon traditionnelle d'entretenir un jardin botanique pour le transformer en un centre d'attraction touristique sur le thème de la nature et de l'environnement. Ainsi pourrait être préservée la valeur scientifique de la collection. Toutes ces innovations ont été financées par des prêts bancaires ou des dons de sponsors. La seule source de revenus consistait de droits d'entrée. Moyennant 150.000 visiteurs par an, s'acquittant d'un droit d'entrée de 10 florins, l'exploitation dégage suffisamment de revenus. En comparaison des 60.000 visiteurs en 1986, qui s'acquittaient d'un droit d'entrée de seulement 0.25 florins, il a fallu relever un véritable défi. La rénovation a été un succès grâce à une restructuration de la gestion administrative. C'est ainsi que 2 entités distinctes ont été créées, l'une responsable pour la propriété et l'autre pour son exploitation. Par ailleurs une réorganisation du personnel s'est avérée nécessaire, avec un Directeur Général, une Division supplémentaire chargée des Relations Publiques et du Marketing, et la poursuite d'une approche professionnelle dans toutes les autres divisions.

Pour ce faire, il a fallu changer l'attitude mentale tournée vers les plantes, en une attitude orientée vers le client. Afin d'augmenter le nombre de visiteurs, le jardin devait offrir beaucoup plus, non seulement aux visiteurs intéressés par la botanique, mais également à l'ensemble du public, tous âges confondus.

La rénovation s'est d'abord fixée sur la remise en condition des parties sauvages, de rocailles et du jardin herboriste, et la transformation de la section systématique négligée en un joli triangle doté de jardins à thème, que bordent des canaux. Très apprécié également des visiteurs et une bonne source de revenus supplémentaire, le buffet non seulement sert du café et des repas légers, mais également fonctionne comme traiteur lors de banquets ou de réceptions. Par ailleurs, une boutique de souvenirs offre des livres, des graines, des bulbes et des cadeaux.

Ainsi, grâce à ces innovations et l'organisation d'événements tels des "marchés de plantes", un festival exotique, une présentation de mode de mariée, le nombre de visiteurs a commencé à augmenter. En 1990, pour la première fois le seuil magique de 100.000 visiteurs a été franchi. De nouvelles installations ont suivi, tel la création d'un Insectarium avec des araignées et des insectes vivants, une ruche d'abeille, et un jardin agricole. En 1992, à l'occasion de notre 350^e année de jubilé, Hortus Haren a commencé la saison de printemps avec Tulpenhof, une exposition s'étalant sur 8 semaines avec au moins 3.5 millions de bulbes de fleurs se différenciant des tulipes aux jonquilles et représentant une collection botanique merveilleuse. L'été, les parterres sont recouverts de plantes annuelles. Tous ces efforts ont permis d'augmenter le nombre des visiteurs d'au moins 40.000 et d'atteindre le record annuel de près de 150.000 visiteurs. Le projet de créer un Parc Chinois, entouré de forêts de bambou, au travers d'une coopération entre la ville de Groningen et de Shanghai devrait être encore plus rentable. Mais avant que ce projet soit mis en œuvre, Hortus Haren aura réouvert une partie des plus beaux jardins de l'Exposition Internationale d'Horticulture de Fleurs 1992, comme les jardins Anglais, Belge et Italien.

Pour la première fois en Hollande, un jardin botanique est en passe de devenir une attraction touristique régionale, nationale et internationale. En poursuivant ses efforts, Hortus Haren deviendra une entreprise profitable.

J'espère que nous aurons le plaisir de tous vous accueillir dans Hortus Haren en fleurs.

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

What could be the reason why people in the year 2000 would be visiting our charming botanical garden?

Hortus Haren, founded in 1642, has been committed to science for three and a half century.

Botanists and gardeners came and went, there has been sowed, planted, pruned and raised. Thousands of letters have been written to other botanical gardens, seedlists have been sent and received and seeds, cuttings and plants were exchanged.

For this reason Hortus Haren differed every year although still in the same everlasting pattern: from the flowering of the witch hazel to the autumn crocus, from the botanical tulips to the winter jasmine.

Every spring the subtropical plants leave the Orangery, every spring the Victoria waterlily is flowering.

Not only in catalogue and scientific treatments, but also in diaries, letters and travel stories we can trace the history of Hortus Haren.

Old greenhouses, water basins, cold frames and statues are the silent witnesses of a time gone by. At the same time they keep the memory alive by their presence. How many people have been enjoying the beauty of this garden, on sunny or rainy days, in the green and lush spring or in the autumn with its tremendous display of colour?

But also in the present time the botanical garden is a continuing source of joy for those living now: the gardeners, the students spending their free time, teachers preparing lessons, prospective

scientist thinking about their thesis. Mothers with small children, elderly people enjoying their abundant time, cheerful and noisy pupils or foreign guests guided around. But also people in love, fiancées or bridal couples having their photos taken.

A visit to Hortus Haren is just like a short vacation: a trip to exotic places, a quick glance in the rainforest. For those having lived in the tropics it is a memory to their own past, for those preparing their journey it is a first encounter.

Although annually about 450.000 people are visiting the eight Dutch botanical gardens, 150.000 of them are counted in Hortus Haren, only a few can tell they have seen them all. And that is a pity because it is really justified to call them the green treasures of Holland.

I even dare to state that a walk through these gardens is equal to a trip around the world. It is here that through the centuries plants from all directions were brought together, ordered systematically and presented in an attractive way.

Collected from all over the world and a taxonomical ordering are the two main conceptions of botanical collections. Also at the State University of Groningen fundamental research became applied research.

Originally research was focused on medicinal plants but after several years the university garden widened its scope to all other aspects of botany.

Added to the medicinal use of plants was the scientific interest in knowledge through collecting, describing, ordering, theorizing, experimenting and cultivation. Much work has been done but this study never ends.

However, in the last decades botanists shifted mostly from taxonomy to plant ecology and plant physiology. Due to the fact that botanical gardens were primarily used for taxonomical research this academical change had a negative influence on the Dutch botanical gardens. To keep the gates open it became important to enhance the public function. But also changes in society, such as an increasing interest and awareness in our environment and a tremendous growth in spare time, led to other aims of a botanical garden. Aspects as education, recreation and conservation were defined.

Botanical gardens with their joint plant collections got the following aims:

- First of all they offer service to scientific education and research. Knowledge of plurality and relations between plants and their environment, but also their possible human use are still important.
- Botanical gardens can play an important role in safeguarding biological diversity of indigenous and exotic plants. Programs on conservation have been started in many gardens.
- The plant collection offers possibilities for professional nurseries but also to amateur growers to obtain reference material or new species for horticultural, forestry or ornamental use.
- The esthetical function is becoming very important. It is the responsibility of botanical gardens to give their visitors access to facilities offering knowledge, discernment and understanding of nature and environment.

This leads to the following functions:

- The garden as a living plant museum for the general public but also for academical research and education.

The recreative function is created by an attractive lay-out with a much varied offer to the visitors. Annually botanical gardens attract an enormous amount of visitors just to enjoy plants and their surroundings. Beside this the gardens could offer an excellent place for presentation of cultural events, directly or indirectly connected to the aims of the garden, and promotional activities of universities and companies.

The garden as a focal point for environmental education. Sustainable use of our environment and natural resources is the key word for our future. Botanical gardens can show the importance of plants for life on earth.

Hortus Haren is well prepared for this new challenge. After becoming independent of the State University of Groningen in 1988 a concept has been developed to transfer Hortus Haren to a unique tourist attraction around the theme nature and environment.

The Masterplan "Hortus Haren — New Style" offers an elaborate scheme for the proposed changes in its product formula. In this Masterplan a new physical structure of our parc was presented: a concept that is mainly determined by defined locations of main functions and perceptive lines. One of the main buildings is a pavilion along a boulevard. From this pavilion three diverging lines are projected to give the arriving visitor directly a good impression of the extensiveness and the lay-out of the 21 hectares large parc.

The perceptive lines are not by all means paths or roads. The head line, from the entrance building diagonally through the parc, consists of water for more than half of its length.

The tapering shape enhances the perspective view. All other paths are curved and bended but also crossing the perspective lines offering unexpected windows to other parts of the parc. As mentioned, all lines end in the pavillion, a perfect place for buying a drink, obtaining information or just for a rest.

Through these lines the whole area is divided in several zones. The lay-out of these zones is derived from the central theme: nature and environment. An exotic climate zone, a cultivated and a natural zone were defined. The first zone is situated in our 2200 square meters large greenhouse. It houses a tropical-, a subtropical-, a desert-, a monsoon- and a tropical mountain section. New additions are the tropical crops section, the Victoria waterlily greenhouse and the Insectarium.

The middle part of Hortus Haren is devoted to the cultivated zone with thematic- and country gardens. Especially the water garden with its continuing noise of streaming water attracts visitors like a magnet.

In the southern part the visitors find 9 hectares of wild garden, the natural zone. Surrounded by an arboretum several habitats were created for common but also rare western european plants. Finally a commercial zone is recognised in which a giftshop and the catering facilities are situated.

When Hortus Haren became independent it also had to find other financial sources. Up till 1992 the University donated Hfl 500.000.— annually, in 1993 this will be Hfl 200.000.—. Therefore income has to be obtained from entrance fees, catering yields and shop sales.

With an exploitation account of around two million guilders it was the first task to raise the amount of visitors from 60.000 in 1986, paying an entrance fee of Hfl 0,25 to 150.000 visitors paying Hfl 10.—. In 1992 this was nearly realised. In 1993 the entrance fee is Hfl 11.— and we hope to receive 170.000 visitors.

This growth in amount of visitors can only be realised by:

- A continuing improvement of our parc. Examples are the already mentioned Masterplan worked out between 1988 and 1992 but also the take-over of twelve of the most beautiful gardens of the International Horticultural Exhibition Floriade 1992. Seven nursery presentations, extended with three new gardens, and five country gardens are or will be opened in 1993. Especially the British, the Belgian, the Hungarian, the Italian and the Bengal garden open a total new world for our guests. These gardens offer also tremendous possibilities for commercial presentations. The last example is the China Parc, a joint project between the cities of Groningen and Shanghai and Hortus Haren. Construction of this project will start in the autumn of this year and the opening is planned in 1994.
- Organisation of events and festivals. In the last years Hortus Haren became well known for the "Tulpenhof", an 8-week show with at least 3.5 million flowering bulbs, but also as show garden for modern art. Its decorated Christmas trees attract visitors in the december month when other gardens are desolated places.
- Joint promotion with local shop keepers attracted this year new groups of visitors. During our tulip show twenty shops of the largest Dutch supermarket chain offered their customers a way to save up for free tickets and around Whitsunday fifteen furniture shops are starting with a comparable campaign. Their benefit is to attract more customers, our benefit is selling more tickets.

The catering activities were set up as service for our visitors. But after they discovered the beautiful setting of the pavilion in our garden we were questioned about possibilities for parties and receptions. In three years the turnover was raised from Hfl 300.000.— to more than one million guilders.

An extra addition are the British, Hungarian and Italian garden which could offer a marvellous scenery for special parties. Finally also wedded couples and commercial enterprises find their way to our facilities.

We expect a growth of the turnover to Hfl 2.5 million, only for our catering department! This is mainly due to a professional advertisement campaign in newspapers and on radio and television.

The giftshop was started by amateurs and had an annual turnover of only Hfl 10.000.—. Now the two shops have a total sale of Hfl 150.000.— annually. Recently it was decided to start flower shops in our three neighbouring hospitals. Also a bouquet service for companies and a rental department for large decorative plants will be started. Import of new articles and acting as wholesale dealer, sale of garden plants and production of books will raise our turnover next year above one million guilders.

By its image and new profile Hortus Haren is interesting for sponsors. In our jubilee year, 1992, we received a total of Hfl 450.000.— from different sponsors. Annually we receive Hfl 100.000.— in money or goods just by sponsorships.

All these activities can only be successful on a strict commercial base with a sound company plan and a good intensive public relations and marketing policy. But most important is a team of professional workers aimed at making Hortus Haren a profitable enterprise.

Hortus Haren offers now an inspiring and stimulating scene. Hortus Haren has the experience and organisation necessary for a commercially successful exploitation. The educational department, the public relations and marketing department and the scientific staff guarantee a creative force combined with knowledgeable expertise.

Hortus Haren is nationally well known as showroom for science and commerce, as environmental museum and centre of botanical knowledge. It is a suitable place for agricultural and horticultural presentations as well as an excellent place for entertainment. At the same time it is a window to the world.

A combination of higher and scientific education in the northern part of Holland will increase the educational possibilities of Hortus Haren.

In cooperation with commercial enterprises dynamic high-tec presentations will be developed using the most advanced audio visual- and computer techniques.

Hortus Haren will enter well prepared the twenty-first century. A different strategy and different means but the same aim: offering a permanent share in safeguarding biodiversity.