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Masters in Sustainable Heritage

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Heritage Intervention Project

# From Reality to Myth

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**Inspiring Interspecies Empathy  
through Migrant Identity Narratives**



Greenhouse, Botanical Garden Aarhus

Photographer: Kasper Hornbæk, Science Museums

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## 1. Why should we care/ Heritage Frame\_\_\_\_\_New forms of heritage

This work aims to redefine our relationship with nature by fostering kinship with plants, emphasizing not just their preservation but transforming our connection to nurture respect and acknowledge their agency in the ecological community. This inclusive approach considers non-human actors and broader ecological systems, as highlighted by scholars like Myers (2013, 2017), Daniel & Burford (2023), Convery (2016), Pepperell (2003), and Shepherd (2023). In the climate crisis within the Anthropocene, this theme is crucial. Myers (2017) introduces "Planthropocene" to advocate for recognizing our interconnectedness with plants. This holistic view is essential for rethinking heritage, which requires sustainable practices including plant life protection (Shepherd, 2023). Vital for biodiversity and the long-term sustainability of heritage sites, involving conservation methods mindful of environmental impacts and prioritizing plant ecosystem health. Recognizing plants' importance challenges "plant blindness" (Daniel & Burford, 2023). Key projects include "City of Species," where human participants act as ambassadors for chosen species, and Amalie Nielsen's houseplant lending library at Dokk1, which aims to reshape people's relationships with houseplants. However, issues arise when plants, often native to foreign places, predominantly, Africa, die, raising questions about fetishizing rare, exotic plants. Are botanical gardens becoming akin to national museums, showcasing treasures from foreign lands? After all one can travel the world without leaving the garden (Science Museerne, n.d.).

**Given the project's extensive research and time requirements, I opted to present a sample of the final product for one species. I chose the "Strawberry Tree" (Arbutus Unedo), a Mediterranean tree that exists in my home country, symbolizing my immigrant identity. The research project involves selecting a plant from the USEUM app and adding interactive functions to enhance engagement.**

### Sample \_\_\_\_\_ Strawberry Tree, Arbutus Unedo

The application details the plant's origin from the Mediterranean, Western Europe, and Ireland, and explains the name's meaning—"I only ate once." It mentions the plant's uses, such as making 'aguardente' in Portugal and producing delicacy honey. An interactive storytelling

experience will be added, where visitors can scan QR codes to learn mythological stories about the plants. These codes, placed next to the plants, create a treasure hunt experience, drawing attention to overlooked plants. Scanning a QR code displays the plant's information in a passport format, narrates a myth, and asks a question to collect a key. Collecting all stories unlocks access to the gardens of Babylon, where visitors can explore, participate in plant care, or reflect on their immigrant experiences in Denmark. Two reflection booths will be set up outside. The positive booth allows people to share thoughts on social media, comment on the plants, share memories, stories, or critical opinions. It fosters connection and community, moderated by a content controller. The rage booth provides a private space for venting strong negative emotions, with access to support contacts like police, mental health services, and emergency contacts. Together, these booths offer balanced emotional expression and connection outlets.

## 2. Critical Curating/Aarhus Botanical Garden\_\_\_\_Target audience/ social media/ Participatory processes

With an art history background, I view curation as creating a visual narrative that considers space, composition, and color to immerse viewers in the artist's world. Ideally, it incorporates both the curator's and artist's perspectives. The distinction between curatorship and art is controversial, with Fraser and Jim (2018) noting that critical curation requires awareness of broader issues. Elitza Dulguerova highlights curators like Michael Fehr and Véronique Ross, who challenge conventional practices to disrupt the fetishization of artworks. Menking (2009) describes curating as a multifaceted practice that engages and educates diverse audiences. Kelly Gellatly emphasizes that exhibitions should evoke a visceral response before an intellectual one (Fairley, 2020). The proposed exhibition at the Botanical Garden aims to connect with migrant people by highlighting plant narratives and untold stories, drawing a parallel between their experiences and those of plants. According to the Science Museums (2024), the Botanical Garden hosts over 2,000 plant species from around the world. The plan includes starting with one plant from each continent and eventually including one from each country, with visitors engaging with plants from their chosen continent. Promotion will leverage social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and Reddit. Interactive elements include engaging with stories and taking home a plant through Dokk1's project. Key

stakeholders include Dokk1, Den Grønne Ungdomsbevægelse, Aarhus Municipality, and Aarhus University.

#### 4.Sustainability\_\_\_\_\_Life on land; Peace Justice and Strong institutions; Climate Action; Reduced Inequalities

When curating plants, sustainability can be challenging, as relocating plants from their original habitats can turn them into invasive species. Proper plant care knowledge is essential, and engaging visitors to learn about these plants first could be effective. This project aligns with four United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), demonstrating its relevance to stakeholders. Firstly, "Life on Land" emphasizes rethinking our connection to plants to prevent biodiversity loss. The Botanical Garden can serve as a species reservoir, ensuring their preservation. Secondly, "Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions" extends rights and justice to nature, advocating for plant rights. Thirdly, "Climate Action" focuses on protecting ecosystems and establishing a sustainable relationship with nature. Lastly, "Reduce Inequalities" suggests adding "biological privilege" to the list, as SDGs often overlook the broader climate crisis, disproportionately affecting the Global South. This highlights the importance of posthumanism and more-than-human theory. Heritage studies can promote critical thinking about human-environment relationships, mobilize communities, and inspire climate action (United Nations, n.d.). Integrating natural heritage into societal and environmental processes enhances the adaptive capacities of both natural and social systems (Berdoulay & Soubeyran, 2013). In conclusion, curating plants in botanical gardens involves complex environmental, educational, and ethical considerations. Aligning the project with SDGs such as "Life on Land," "Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions," "Climate Action," and "Reduce Inequalities" highlights the benefits of rethinking our relationship with nature. This approach emphasizes empathetic engagement with plants, recognition of their rights, and sustainable practices. Incorporating heritage studies into this framework enhances climate resilience and adaptation, fostering a deeper understanding and proactive response to environmental challenges. This strategy underscores the importance of posthumanism and more-than-human theory, advocating for a more inclusive and sustainable future for humans and natural systems.

### 3. Broader Conceptual Landscape\_\_\_\_\_

Impact on native ecosystems/ role in biodiversity/ uses/ cultural significance/ policies and management practices surrounding their introduction and control

Established in 1873, the Aarhus Botanical Garden is significant in both biodiversity conservation and Denmark's cultural heritage. As a living museum, it intertwines environmental stewardship with educational and cultural roles, reflecting a rich history of botanical exploration and public engagement. Plants and fungi are crucial for environmental sustainability, and botanical gardens like Aarhus are essential in conserving these organisms. Plants, as primary producers, convert sunlight into energy through photosynthesis, producing oxygen vital for aerobic organisms and sequestering carbon dioxide, thus mitigating climate change (Raven et al., 2005; IPCC, 2014). Aarhus Botanical Garden serves as an ex-situ conservation site, preserving diverse plant species and supporting rare and endangered plants through cultivation and research (Alta Vista Botanical Gardens, 2023). The garden enhances genetic diversity and supports species recovery programs, while also playing a vital role in public education about plant diversity and conservation (ScienceMuseerne, 2024). Culturally, the garden's historical roots as an experimental site for fruit trees and useful plants highlight its longstanding significance. It serves as a repository of botanical knowledge and plant material for local gardens, reflecting Denmark's agricultural heritage. Including medicinal plants and traditional Danish flora links to the region's cultural practices and natural history (VisitAarhus, 2024). This contrasts with the inclusion of plants from around the world. Integrating traditional ecological knowledge with modern scientific research enhances sustainable practices, as indigenous practices often emphasize harmony with nature (Berkes, 2012). The Useum app provides economic profiles for each plant, detailing their uses.

### **Final Conclusions**

This project redefines our relationship with nature by fostering kinship with plants and recognizing their agency in the ecological community. Emphasizing a holistic understanding of ecological systems, it aligns with the "Planthropocene" concept, highlighting our interdependence with plants in the face of the climate crisis. By addressing "plant blindness" and decolonizing plant perception, the project advocates for recognizing the intrinsic value of

plants beyond human utility and dismantling colonial frameworks that have marginalized non-human life. Innovative projects like "City of Species" and Amalie Nielsen's houseplant lending library demonstrate sustainable engagement with plants, while the "Strawberry Tree" storytelling experience enhances visitor appreciation through QR code-based mythological storytelling. Aligning with United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, the project emphasizes empathetic engagement with plants, recognizing their rights, and promoting sustainable practices. By incorporating heritage studies, it enhances climate resilience and advocates for a more inclusive and sustainable future for both human and natural systems. Ultimately, the project aims to transform our connection with nature, fostering respect for plants, and integrating these perspectives into heritage and sustainability practices.

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