

Summary of sPlot meeting

Thursday, 30 June 2022

64th Annual Symposium of the International Association for Vegetation Science

Madrid, Spain



The meeting happened during the IAVS Annual Symposium in Madrid

Participants

The meeting was programmed as an in-person event, but we also tried to include online participants who could not attend the IAVS Symposium. In total we had 28 attendees: 25 in person and three online participations. Most of attendees were already members of the consortium (n = 18, 64%), but we also counted with the participation of researchers interested to be part of sPlot (n = 10, 36%). Despite the predominance of participants from the Global North (n = 21, 75%), participants from the Global South also joined the meeting (n = 7, 25%).

Discussion

The meeting started with some general announcements made by Gabriella Damasceno, the new sPlot coordinator. She informed the resumption of activities after a hiatus caused by the coordination transition from Francesco Sabatini to her. She also advertised the new release, sPlot 4.0, planned for the beginning of next year. She explained that the call for this release is an attempt to promote the participation of researchers from the Global South while also asking for time-series data, which will be the main novelty of sPlot 4.0. After the announcements, she opened the discussion for questions and suggestions about the consortium.

Questions arose mainly from non-members, who would like to better understand how the consortium operates: what the requirements for contributing data are, how authorships are attributed and how to use sPlot data. Gabriella, together with the members of the sPlot Steering Committee (Borja, Helge, Milan, and Susan) explained about the rules governing sPlot and the specific procedures to become a member and use data. We also discussed about the incorporation of time-series: it will happen throughout the European Vegetation Archive for plots located inside Europe and directly into sPlot database for non-European databases.

The discussion was fruitful in collecting suggestions for the future development of sPlot, specifically regarding the inclusion of researchers from the Global South. As a common ground, many contributions mentioned the creation of informative material that could be locally spread by sPlot members inside their collaborative networks. This is the case, for example, with the recording of the talk given by Gabriella, leaflets about the project and tutorials on how to contribute and use sPlot data, preferentially also produced in other languages in addition to English. Participants suggested also to increase the visibility of sPlot by advertising it in local conferences and by facilitating online meetings to clarify doubts.

Suggestions for actions to be taken at the institutional level included teaming up with other biodiversity databases and with the African and the Latin America and the Caribbean regional sections of IAVS. It was also suggested that increasing the partnership with IAVS could lead to future opportunities for retrieving information from gray literature in underrepresented areas. Finally, institutional actions for increasing the number of members from the Global South included the encouragement of projects led by Global South researchers as well as the fostering of internships for their students within European groups.