

Preface

Ethnobotany is a multi-, inter-, and transdisciplinary research field concerned with the study of interactions between people and plants throughout time and different cultural and ecological contexts. Such apparently simple concept involves a number of questions related with complex processes that require a broad spectrum of methods to be understood. Also, the solution of questions and hypotheses of such processes demands the participation of scientists and specialists in biology, agronomy, and anthropology, among other disciplines, and, particularly importantly, local people sharing their knowledge. Ethnobotany may be a science documenting what people know and do, but also it may be part of an interacting dialogue contributing to problem solutions and protecting intellectual and material property rights.

Ethnobotany has evolved from descriptive inventories of useful plants to the understanding of processes of domestication, the socio-ecological bases of sustainable management, as well as conservation and recovering of species and geographic areas. It has transited from questions about what species are used and how these are used to examine questions about why some plant resources are particularly important, how and why these are domesticated, as well as how and why humans have impacted their evolution and evolution of landscapes those plant species occur.

Sources of information feeding ethnobotany cover archaeological records, ethnographic approaches about the role of plants among human groups, molecular ecology, and evolution. Qualitative and quantitative approaches, descriptive, observational as well as experimenting and hypothesis-testing approaches are all important for constructing the emergent science field of ethnobotany. Dialogue and participation involved in transdisciplinary approaches are also crucial in validation and social construction of ethnobotanical knowledge.

The Mesoamerican and Aridamerican regions of Mexico are highly rich in biological and human cultural elements, which have been a great source of ethnobotanical knowledge and therefore a primary setting of ethnobotany's arising as empirical practice and evolution as modern scientific approach. We are therefore conscious that editing a book on Mexican ethnobotany is an ambitious task. It would require for sure several volumes and reflections along with the participation of numerous other scholars. This book, however, may be a first modest step of such a

necessary ambitious project. It is an attempt of summarizing a general panorama of the history and current research perspectives and challenges of ethnobotany in Mexico. Additionally, it is a tribute to the work of different generations of ethnobotanists and an attempt to design a future perspective of this research field.

Certainly this compilation is incomplete, but surely it would inspire other colleagues to complement the panorama of the interactions between Mexican people and plants. And, more importantly, this work may contribute to enhance the design of new research for facing the contemporary problems, particularly the construction of sustainability science based on both, local and modern scientific knowledge.

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Ethnobotany of Mexico

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