

IN MEMORIAM

DR. NIKOLA DIKLIĆ  
(1925-2008)

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A scientific adviser and museum consultant, Dr. Nikola Diklić passed away on Sunday, 16th November 2008.

One of the greatest Serbian botanists, N. Diklić was born in the village of Kupusina near Sombor, Serbia on 19th December 1925. Soon after graduation from Belgrade University's Faculty of Science in 1953, he came to the Natural History Museum in Belgrade, where he remained for all 37 years of his active working life.

In the first years of his work, he devoted a great deal of time to identification, and botanical and technical sorting of the herbarium specimens that were collected for years by his predecessors. The result was a real museum scientific collection that in the following decades became the indispensable base for preparing the publications *Flora SR Srbije/Flora Srbije* and *Vegetacija SR Srbije/Vegetacija Srbije*. He also collected over 200,000 specimens out of the about half a million that the General Herbarium of the Balkan Peninsula in the Natural History Museum in Belgrade now includes.

Nikola Diklić was an ideal combination of museum curator and research scientist, and collecting and processing of botanical material was for him just the beginning of a further procedure that as a rule ended in the publication of new data and analyses.

His retirement did not stop N. Diklić from studying the flora of Serbia and also never kept him far away from the Museum, where he continued to work on an informal basis.

The contribution of N. Diklić to knowledge of the floristic diversity of Serbia lay in the discovery of a total of 310 taxa that were not known for this area before, as well as 14 taxa and six communities that were previously unknown to science. The flora of Serbia was already fairly well researched, and such an important contribution was the result of extensive and persistent research in the field and critical analysis of existing taxa. His findings were published in 564 papers, book chapters, and presentations at several dozen national and international scientific meetings. His papers contain scientific material whose importance surpasses national boundaries, as it also represents a significant contribution to knowledge of the biodiversity,



dynamics, and history of the flora of both the Balkan Peninsula and the Mediterranean area in general. He used phytogeographic data to expand and increase knowledge of the total distribution of many taxa having a part of their range in Serbia and on the territory of former Yugoslavia. His taxonomic revisions, which he always made on the basis of comparison with specimens originating from areas outside of the Serbian and Yugoslavian parts of their range, enabled N. Diklić to achieve results far beyond local significance. None of the databases on the flora of the Balkan Peninsula, Europe, or the Mediterranean area should be considered complete or competent without the data

included in the publication *Flora SR Srbije/Flora Srbije*, numerous papers, and the General Herbarium of the Balkan Peninsula, on which N. Diklić worked for more than half a century.

As a member of the COMMITTEE ON THE FLORA AND VEGETATION OF THE SERBIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND ARTS since its beginnings in 1965, he was actively involved in all phases of preparation and printing of the 10-volume publication *Flora SR Srbije*. Out of about 4000 species, he personally processed 772. However, owing to his extraordinary knowledge of the flora of Serbia and his great experience in the use of taxonomic principles, as well as through expert revision and editing of texts written by other authors, he greatly improved the quality of the whole publication. Also, he was the author of two chapters of the publication *Vegetacija SR Srbije* and the chapter on the shrubby vegetation, which due to the specificity and complexity of that vegetation type is of the great importance.

Nikola Diklić was the editor of several books, as well as the scientific journal *Glasnik Prirodnjačkog muzeja u Beogradu* ser. B, while his knowledge and experience were priceless in activities of the editorial boards of many other publications of which he was a long-term member.

His work and knowledge also had important influence on the valorization of fundamental botanical research in Serbia. Nikola Diklić achieved brilliant results in floristic and taxonomic studies just at a time when these disciplines were considered passé and unfashionable, preference being given to phytocenology as more modern. He clearly demonstrated that results of phytocenological studies cannot be considered credible without

being based on reliable floristic and taxonomical data.

By working unobtrusively but persistently and always using only provable arguments, he attracted and gathered around him a significant number of young botanists. Although he was never formally included in the educational process, he transferred his knowledge and experience to his younger colleagues with great pedagogical skill, through personal contacts, working together on projects, or as an advisor or member of numerous committees for Master and Doctor of Science degrees. Many of us, and not only botanists, consider him their unofficial but true teacher, one who never spared the time and effort needed to share his knowledge and experience with us without reserve.

As a man of broad interests, he did not limit himself to the area of his main activity, and he often accepted cooperation and offered valuable assistance to colleagues working in applied or borderline disciplines in botany.

He actively participated in activities of all biological scientific societies of Serbia and Yugoslavia, and he served as a vice-president or member of the executive board of many of them. However, the most suitable association for him, considering the scientific field he was active in and the geographic area where he worked, was the Organization for Phyto-Taxonomic Investigation of the Mediterranean area (OPTIMA), whose member he became in 1977. He was a member of that organization's international board from 1983 on of its executive council from 1989 to 2007. During of the period 1989-1995, he was a

vice-president of OPTIMA, and he served as a member of its commission for collections and herbaria from 1983 to 1989.

Very modest and primarily dedicated to his work, Nikola Diklić never expected official awards. He believed that the greatest recognition is when scientific results find their own place within the overall mosaic of knowledge, which invariably happened in his case.

Nevertheless, the results of his work brought him six important awards. He was especially fond of two international awards, not because they came from abroad, but because they were awarded by fellow botanists. The Silver Plaque awarded in Palermo in 2001 by *Fondazione internazionale pro Herbario Mediterraneo* clearly indicates that botanists outside of Serbia also recognized his key role in preparing important publications treating the flora of Serbia. The prestigious award OPTIMA Gold Medal, awarded to Diklić in 2004, testifies to the high scientific value of results that he achieved in research on the flora of Serbia and former Yugoslavia; the contributions he made to knowledge of the flora of the Balkan Peninsula and the Mediterranean area in general; the influence he had on maintaining high criteria in floristic and taxonomic studies in Serbia; the part he played in the education of young researchers; and his active involvement in OPTIMA over almost three decades.

Olja Vasić