



University of  
**Leicester**



**BGCI**

*Plants for the Planet*

# Let's Talk

**A Case Study:  
Change growth impact**

*Botanic Gardens Conservation International  
breaking new ground with the  
School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester*





“BGCi benefitted enormously from working with RCMG. Their expertise and insight enabled us to clearly understand the barriers facing botanic gardens in developing their social role as well as the opportunities. RCMG’s knowledge and experience are invaluable and, through our collaboration, we now feel confident and able to grow the project with other botanic gardens beyond the pilot phase.”

**Julia Willison, Director of Education, Botanic Gardens Conservation International**

## Redefining Botanic Gardens

In 2009, **Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCi)** approached the **University of Leicester’s School of Museum Studies** and the School’s **Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG)** for help with a groundbreaking research project. They commissioned the Centre to carry out the work based on its 10-year pedigree in the research and evaluation of the relationship between museums, galleries and their audiences.

## Engaging people

The research project, funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the very first of its kind, set out to investigate how contemporary botanic gardens in the UK might:

- be less introspective, broaden their social role and become more relevant in the modern world;
- tap into their people potential, increase their audiences and engage with their local communities; and
- address environmental challenges such as biodiversity loss and climate change through wider public engagement.

## Research points the way

The project carried out by the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries was greatly valued by Botanic Gardens Conservation International for its innovative, highly focused approach. Specifically, the RCMG’s study:

- encompassed an in-depth understanding of the work of botanic gardens in the UK, recommending a process of change and a blueprint for action to expand the social and environmental role of botanic gardens;

- affirmed that botanic gardens are uniquely placed to showcase the inter-connectedness of people and plants and suggested how they might achieve far greater impact in this area;
- advocated the importance of income generation in meeting social and environmental agendas and recommended a way forward in communicating the value of botanic gardens to potential funders;
- led to an increased international profile for BGCi by demonstrating the beneficial influence of botanic gardens, drawing on experience from gardens in the United States, Australia and England;
- resulted in the development of two projects in the UK to further understand the social role of botanic gardens and which put into practice the research findings.

For the University of Leicester’s RCMG the benefits have been mutual. The project:

- increased the Centre’s understanding of the needs of an organisation outside the museum world and offered a unique opportunity to apply a decade of experience addressing questions of social inclusion and responsibility in the cultural sector;
- included valuable in-depth research and interpretive experience working alongside an organisation who were highly receptive to dialogue, advice and change;
- resulted in additional work through the development and evaluation of individual projects based on the findings of the initial research;
- developed the Centre’s portfolio of clients through collaboration with an organisation wishing to be more socially relevant, work with their communities and address contemporary concerns like climate change.

## Growing the social role

The dialogue between Botanic Gardens Conservation International and the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries yielded the benefits described and culminated in two novel projects at gardens in Birmingham and Liverpool.

These pioneered and tested a range of challenging ideas developed in the research study and showed that botanic gardens do have the potential:

- to significantly impact on the health and social wellbeing of local communities;
- to engage with non-traditional audiences; and
- to address complex environmental issues such as biodiversity loss and climate change.

The next phase of the collaboration will work with four more UK botanic gardens to specifically develop their social role, pilot their own projects and share in building a global community of gardens by disseminating their experiences as widely as possible.

### Global impact

Created in 1987 and with over 500 members drawn from 120 countries, **Botanic Gardens Conservation International** is the largest global network of botanic gardens working collectively for plant conservation and environmental education. From influencing government policies to promoting grassroots action, BGCI is in the vanguard of species protection. Its global reach and expertise enables it to achieve real conservation milestones and secure plant diversity for the well-being of both people and the planet.

### Leaders in innovation

For over 40 years, the University of Leicester's leading **School of Museum Studies** and the **Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG)** have pioneered thinking and creative practice in the museum industry, internationally. The only University department in the UK solely dedicated to the study of museums and galleries, the School and its Centre widely inspire innovation and experimentation.

“Working with BGCI gave RCMG access to a new sector but, more importantly, it increased the Centre’s understanding of the impact of climate change, the challenges to biodiversity and the implications these have for museums and everyone’s lives. And, critically, it increased our confidence that our work, the processes and values that we see as important, are just as relevant in a different context.”

Jocelyn Dodd,  
Director, Research Centre for Museums and Galleries  
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“Mutual benefit and collaboration are at the heart of the partnerships the University of Leicester has with external organisations. We greatly value the opportunity to work with a wide range of organisations and to build partnerships based on trust and understanding.”

### Lisa Stocks

Head of Business Services and Collaboration



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