**WANTED: VIRTUAL OR LIVE! LICHENOLOGISTS, SCIENCE COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL DISTANCING**

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New ways of networking and public engagement developed as a consequence of the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Scientists and communicators, as well as people interested in learning about science, have had to resort to virtual events, with a subsequent proliferation of webinars, online meetings, and digital resources. Is it possible to measure the impact of these activities? Using the activities of the Italian Lichen Society (SLI) as a case study, Google Trends and colleagues’ contributions, we evaluated the performances and impacts of virtual tools on lichenological literacy. We estimated and compared the relative success of virtual and in-person events and the effort required; we evaluated followers’ appreciation of various categories of posts on SLI Facebook page; and designed a questionnaire to collate information on individual experiences of in-person and virtual events linked to lichens. As expected, online events generally required less effort than in-person events and engaged more people, especially when recorded and made available online for long time. Using culturomics tools like online searches for the word “lichens” we found an association with dissemination events; and showed how a larger participation notably increased the memberships of SLI. Without excluding the positive and unique effects of in-person experiences, we believe that online events offer a powerful tool to help increase interest in, and knowledge about lichens. This interest may help to mitigate the impact of anthropogenic activities on this sensitive component of the ecosystem and help human-lichen relationships. Funding: Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia (FCT) project grant UID/BIA/00329/2020.