

Suggestions on how to deal with co-authorship divergences in sPlot publications driven by international conflicts

by the sPlot Steering Committee
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International scientific collaboration has catalysed big developments in vegetation science in the last decades. This was especially boosted by the creation of collaborative databases like the European Vegetation Archive (EVA) and sPlot, the global vegetation plot database. By March 2026, sPlot contains data from 299 datasets and integrates 387 researchers into an international scientific consortium. Since its start, sPlot has led to fruitful collaborations resulting in 17 multi-authored papers that helped us to better understand plant ecology at the global scale.


In the recent years, however, we have witnessed some changes in international politics that resulted in the escalation of armed conflicts worldwide. In addition to all the humanitarian crises these conflicts usually trigger, international aggressions might also exert an influence on international scientific collaborations like the ones promoted by sPlot. We see this situation as very unfortunate because we believe science is an inherent collective endeavour that should thrive without discrimination of any form, including a researchers' country or their place of origin. Therefore, sPlot doesn't support the removal (or request to remove) of co-authors from sPlot papers based on their national origin, citizenship, country of residence, organizational affiliation, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, creed, religion, race, age, economic status, or disability.

In the context of sPlot publications, nevertheless, it might happen that some authors manifest their disagreement about being co-authors with colleagues affiliated to institutions that openly declared support to international aggressions – thus declaring they would drop-out the paper if such affiliations are kept. Although this doesn't violate the policy of non-discrimination of individual scientists stated before, it does create a sensitive situation the leading authors need to conciliate.

The sPlot Steering Committee had then drafted this document, aiming to provide suggestions on how project leaders could deal with such situations. Because we would like to keep promoting meaningful collaborations and avoid having any co-author out of the publication, we suggest the leading authors to contact the co-authors associated to such institutions and politely ask if it would be possible for them to publish without their institutional affiliation. We hope this will be feasible in most cases, thus solving the issue with the inclusion of all co-authors.

If publishing without institution affiliations is not feasible, participation of all co-authors might become irreconcilable. We then suggest the project leaders to decide on which co-authors to keep according to the importance of data used in the project and/or to the intellectual contributions they made to the



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manuscript. This might, in turn, result in the excluded contributors demanding their data not to be used in the project, a request the leading authors must then respect.

We are aware this is not the optimal solution because it might give priority to people contributing a particular set of data and sPlot certainly doesn't value the importance of a data contribution based on its size or origin. But we do believe such conflicts should be solved using scientific criteria instead of political motivations. We see sPlot as platform to facilitate data exchange between researchers and data providers, which are individuals and not representatives of institutions or governments. We hope despite all geopolitical issues, sPlot will continue to act as a hub for collaborations and the development of vegetation science across borders.