



Proposal for a new IUSS working group:

Cultural Patterns of Soil Understanding

1. Responsible for the application

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2. Rationale and objective

Living soil supports all terrestrial ecosystems. The only global threat to earth's soils comes from land use of human societies and resource consuming activities. Soil perception and understanding by soil scientists are mainly drawn from biophysical parameters and found within Cartesian rationality (focus on the 'outer' soil), and not, or much less consciously from its rather intangible cultural dimension (the 'inner' soil). But nevertheless, **human soil perception, soil awareness, and soil relation are cultural phenomena, too.**

Aiming at soil awareness and education, it is of first order importance for the soil science community and the IUSS to study, discuss and communicate also about the cultural perceptions and representations of soil. That needs an interdisciplinary as well as a trans-disciplinary approach. In this perspective we could also speak of **intangible roots of soil perception and representation**, which need to be acknowledged and carefully addressed.

For any society, cultural patterns in their relation to soil encompass: (i) **General culturally underlying structures** like (religious or 'secular') myths and belief systems, framing society's effective "value landscape" and the central values therein.

(ii) The personal, **individual relation** to/with and behaviour towards soil. This includes implicit concepts of soil being part of integral concepts of landscape, as well as of primary economy. The large majority of humans does not consider soil as a distinct object.

This working group should also provide a forum to specific cultural expressions with regard to soil: as soil representation includes also all kinds of creative work as visual **art**, land art and performances, movies, literature and poetry etc. Many artists are mediators of soil awareness and different soil values to general public.

The objective of this working group would be to make evident the importance of cultural patterns and psychic (that is psychological) background concerning soil, by case studies and overviews on different cultural areas.

3. Outcomes and targets

As soil, its preservation and its sustainable and meaningful cultivation are of existential relevance for human societies, this WG aims not only at studying our field of interest, but also to address and to touch hearts and minds of people by appropriate means.

Outcomes we would like to see:

- Stimulating/ Motivating our soil scientist colleagues to **ask new questions** and to seriously integrate the cultural dimension into their research and project designs;
- for general public, to **engage into processes** towards enhanced valuing of soil within their cultural framing, or towards developing their cultural framework to achieve a more respectful nature (and soil) relation.

Specific target groups for dialogue are:

- Our own soil science community (research and teaching),
- the educational domain (soil awareness raising for teachers, primary and secondary schools etc.),
- development project advisers and managers in the agricultural sector which are looking for cultural skills,
- farmers and farmer's associations which are in search for new alliances with societal actors for achieving a multidimensional sustainable.

4. Linkage with IUSS and Div4 activities

This new working group (WG) is proposed to be linked to Div4 to **complement** the activities of the commissions 4 "Soil Education and Public Awareness", and 5 "History, Philosophy, and Sociology of Soil Science". This WG may foster the role of societies in sustaining soils, as well as the other way round.

The proposal to establish such a WG will be discussed at the IUSS Inter-Congress meeting in RIO in November 2018 during the Division day meeting.

The WG may participate to IUSS in organizing sessions for 2018 World Congress of Soil Science (as already submitted), as well as other seminars, workshops etc., which may contribute to preparing an IUSS booklet on its topic later on.