



The World Soil Museum: education and advocacy on soils of the world

Stephan Mantel and Hiske Land

ISRIC-World Soil Information, Wageningen (Building 116), Netherlands (stephan.mantel@wur.nl, +31 (0)317 471 700)

The World Soil Museum (WSM) in Wageningen, is part of ISRIC World Soil Information and was founded in 1966 on request of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Soil Science Society. The World Soil Museum has a collection of over 1100 soil profiles from more than 70 countries. This soil profiles are vertical sections and show the composition, layering and structure of the soil. The collection is unique in the world and includes a significant number of soil profiles from the Netherlands. The Dutch soil collection is important for serving broader visitor groups, as some visitors, such as secondary school classes, are specifically interested in the Dutch landscape and soils.

Broadly speaking, the World Soil Museum has five functions: (i) education and courses, (ii) research, (iii) information and edutainment, (iv) social function, and (v) a real museum function (Art). The World Soil Museum (World Soil Museum) is well known in national and international circles soil and the English name has almost 1,000 references on the Internet.

The World Soil Museum is visited by about 1000 people a year, mainly university and college students from Western Europe. Other visitor groups that have found their way to the museum are students from disciplines broader than soil science, such as geography and rural development. Secondary school classes visit the museum for geography classes.

The uniqueness and the value of the collection of soil profiles (soil monoliths) and associated collections, such as soil samples, hand pieces, thin sections, slides, is emphasized by the fact ISRIC is the only World Data Centre for Soils (WDC-Soils) within the World Data System of the International Council of Science (ICSU). The collection provides an insight in and overview of the diversity of soils in the world, their properties and their limitations and possibilities for use.

A new building is under construction for the WSM, which is expected to be ready mid-2013. The location is appropriately placed on the Wageningen University Campus, close to the students and research centres of the University. The new exposition space will provide new opportunities for serving different visitor groups. The selection of about 80 soil monoliths representing the world's soils will be maintained in the new exposition. In addition, interactive displays will support education. A circular, interactive map of the world will be placed centrally in the exposition and will serve as a portal to the soil information. The map data refer to the monoliths on the walls and vice versa. Around the central map six theme stations communicate current topics that show the relevance of soil in different fields. For the general public it will explain the principles of soil formation and it will show the relevance to actual issues like food production and climate change. High school students in their final years can come here for work assignments and orientation days. Academic students and scientists, from both the Netherlands and other (mainly) northern European countries can continue to come to the WSM for education, study and research.