



Soil paints as a tool to increase soil awareness among different publics

Cristine C. Muggler

Museu de Ciências da Terra Alexis Dorofeef, Universidade Federal de Viçosa, Brasil

The Earth Sciences Museum Alexis Dorofeef at the Soil Department of the Federal University of Viçosa (UFV), Minas Gerais, Brazil, was opened in 1993 with a goal to sensitize its public about soils, besides the usual geological approach. Since its opening, many of the guided visits include an activity of painting or modelling with soil materials. Such activities have the aim to familiarize people about the properties of soils, in special, colours, consistencies and textures in a joyful way. The tropical soils of the region offer a wide diversity of colours and textures that wonders and intrigues people in general. With time, some of the visitors as well as the museum team started to make trials how it would be to paint walls with the soil paints. It became a project to develop a social technology since the soil paints could be easily prepared and used at much lower cost than industrial paints. Additionally, to have the house painted offers populations living in the peripheral areas of the town of Viçosa the possibility to increase their quality of life by embellishing the surroundings where they live. After the basic know how was developed, the Museum and other extension groups of UFV started to train people in doing it. A brochure was published and the technique spread rapidly in the region and to other parts of the state and country as well. The workshops on soil paint preparation and use, offered by the Museum are open to a much diversified public: school children, professional painters, farmers of the landless movement, etc. The workshops have been taken as an opportunity to approach soils and its importance to life and environment. They start with questions about how people consider and see soils. From this starting point, soil formation processes and soil properties are introduced and discussed with the group. This is followed by the discussion of landscapes and where the soil materials can be collected and what are the differences to be expected between different soil types. Also, how these differences would influence the paint, as for instance, if the soils are coarse textured they will not suit to prepare a paint. With this the participants start to prepare the paints and learn how to apply them. The workshops last from two to three hours. In case the group has enough available time also the field collection of soils and the wall painting are done, taking five to eight hours. In 2012, the Museum realized 69 workshops that reached directly 2500 people. The workshops have been a very successful way to approach different publics and to increase the awareness about soils among them.