



The History of Soil Mapping and Classification in Europe: The role of the European Commission

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Early systematic soil mapping in Europe dates back to the early times of soil science in the 19th Century and was developed at National scales mostly for taxation purposes. National soil classification systems emerged out of the various scientific communities active at that time in leading countries like Germany, Austria, France, Belgium, United Kingdom and many others. Different scientific communities were leading in the various countries, in some cases stemming from geological sciences, in others as a branch of agricultural sciences. Soil classification for the purpose of ranking soils for their capacity to be agriculturally productive emerged as the main priority, allowing in some countries for very detailed and accurate soil maps at 1:5,000 scale and larger. Detailed mapping was mainly driven by taxation purposes in the early times but evolved in several countries also as a planning and management tool for farms and local administrations. The need for pan-European soil mapping and classification efforts emerged only after World War II in the early 1950's under the auspices of FAO with the aim to compile a common European soil map as a contribution to the global soil mapping efforts of FAO at that time. These efforts evolved over the next decades, with the support of the European Commission, towards the establishment of a permanent network of National soil survey institutions (the European Soil Bureau Network). With the introduction of digital soil mapping technologies, the new European Soil Information System (EUSIS) was established, incorporating data at multiple scales for the EU member states and bordering countries. In more recent years, the formal establishment of the European Soil Data Centre (ESDAC) hosted by the European Commission, together with a formal legal framework for soil mapping and soil classification provided by the INSPIRE directive and the related standardization and harmonization efforts, has led to the operational development of advanced digital soil mapping techniques supporting the contribution of Europe to a common global soil information system under the coordination of the Global Soil Partnership (GSP) of FAO.

Further information: <http://eusoils.jrc.ec.europa.eu/>

References:

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