Cultural Patterns of Soil Understanding

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Abstract
Living soil supports all terrestrial ecosystems. The only global threat to earth's soils comes from human societies' land use and resource consuming activities. Soil perception and understanding by soil scientists are mainly drawn from biophysical parameters and found within Cartesian rationality, and not, or much less consciously from its rather intangible cultural dimension. But nevertheless, human soil perception, soil awareness, and soil relation are a cultural phenomenon, 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.

For any society, cultural patterns in their relation to soil encompass:

(i) General culturally underlying structures like (religious or 'secular') myths and belief systems.

(ii) The personal, individual relation to/with and behaviour towards soil. This includes implicit concepts of soil being part integral concepts of landscape because the large majority of humans don't see soil as a distinct object.

This communication would be to make evident: (i) the importance of cultural patterns and psychic/psychological background concerning soil, by case studies and overviews on different cultural areas, (ii) the necessity to develop reflections on this topic as well to communicate about soil with large public, as to raise awareness soil scientists to the cultural dimension of soils. A working group was recently founded at IUSS (Division 4) on this topic.