



Cultural Patterns of Soil Understanding in Organic Agriculture

Nikola Patzel

Chair of IUSS Div4 working group on "Cultural Patterns of Soil Understanding"; Germany
(patzel@bodenkommunikation.info)

Different branches of modern agriculture rely on different cultural patterns of soil understanding; and they are supported by different schools of thought in soil science with their specific values and perspectives. For example, the European branch of organic agriculture, as it developed mainly in the 20th Century, is rooted in specific cultural concepts and was supported by associated minorities, or rather marginalised tendencies, within the soil science community.

Some cases: It is about the transformations of living or organic matter, linked with debates on “microbes” and “life particles”, “tissues” and macromolecules in the humus-sphere. It is about the “industrialised economical-technical paradigm” versus an “organic” or “ecological paradigm” – whatever both may be. It is about the relevance respectively of the “duties” of control by power, or by relatedness and “intercourse” in agricultural human-nature interaction. It is about the male and female qualities of effective God-images – both in their “religious” as well as their “secular” representations in individuals’ and society’s relation with nature and when dealing with soil.

In today’s conceptual and strategic debates and power struggles over how to sustainably feed from the land, we see patterns similar to those from the 19th and 20th Centuries in action. But the threats they pose are not yet sufficiently realised; the opportunities they offer are not yet sufficiently fulfilled. In this presentation, using the example of cultural patterns inside organic agriculture in Europe, some cultural problems and tasks will be highlighted, to which geosciences are of course confronted, being part of human society.