

The European Network on Soil Awareness (ENSA)

– a veritable option to bundle common tasks

A European Network on Soil Awareness (ENSA) has been established in September 2009 in Osnabrück, Germany. The goal of the network is to bring together soil scientists with other experts working on soils in Europe to enlarge the group of people interested in soil awareness in one or the other way. The European Network on Soil Awareness, kindly supported by the European Land & Soil Alliance (ELSA) and the European Commission, will help the public to become more familiar with soil and soil protection.

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The inspiration for ENSA at the Eurosoil conference in Vienna

The first intention to create a European Network on Soil Awareness was initiated as part of the symposium “Education in Soil Science and Raising Public Awareness” at the Eurosoil conference in August 2008 in Vienna. Colleagues from many European countries (Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Slovenia, Switzerland, The Netherlands, United Kingdom) as well as from the United States of America and Canada attended the discussion.

Participants agreed to a European Network on Soil Awareness with the aim of bringing people together who work on soil awareness. This would include for example administrators, consultants, scientists, people working in education for non-governmental organizations who are interested in working on outreach and/or education on soils and in sharing their knowledge with colleagues within Europe.

The European Network also requires national activities. The results of the discussion at Eurosoil have shown, that we need strong activities at all scales, at local and regional scales working together with target groups like teachers, for example. At national and international scales we could exchange ideas on how to promote soil awareness thus improving soil protection in Europe. Close cooperation with the EU and the IUSS (International Union of Soil Sciences; the global union of soil scientists) as well as with ministries and other national organizations has been intended.

European Commission activities on soil awareness

Soil awareness activities of the European Commission are mainly provided by the EU Working Group on Soil Awareness and Education of the European Soil Bureau Network (ESBN) (see the article by Creamer & Towers, p. 22f), which is located at the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission in Ispra, Italy or directly at the soils bureau of the JRC.

In May 2009 ESBN has organized the kick-off meeting of the international working group of experts on soil awareness and soil education. One task of the working group is “to establish an action plan for the development of measures, programmes, initiatives to raise awareness of the importance of soil across European society (i.e. policy makers, general public, universities, schools, industry, etc.)”.

Soil awareness and education are strongly related to the European Soil Thematic Strategy communication 2006 and to the European Soil Directive proposal 2006: “Member States shall take appropriate measures to raise awareness about importance of soil for human and ecosystem survival, and promote the transfer of knowledge and experience for a sustainable use of soil.”

In this context, the members of the EU Working Group have accepted a mandate of action, which has influenced also the tasks of ENSA: “for example through communication and workshops with other networks (e.g. ENSA) and societies (National Soil Science Societies and Education Forums)”.

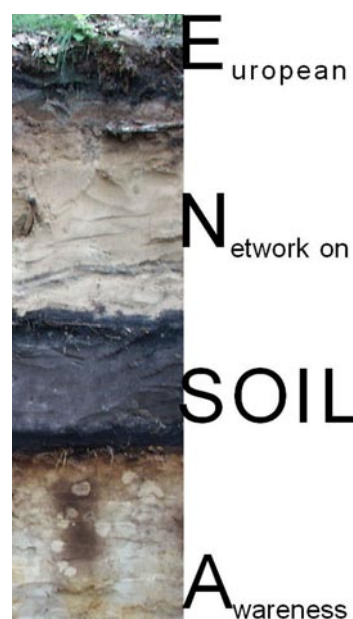


Fig. 1: Logo of the ENSA

The foundation of ENSA at the Soil Museum am Schölerberg in Osnabrück

In September 2009 the first ENSA Conference took place in the „Museum am Schölerberg“ in Osnabrück, Germany. The museum presents a permanent interactive soil exhibition. In addition, visitors may watch living soil organisms in their “natural” habitat in an “underground zoo”. The museum was chosen because it is the largest soil museum in Europe frequented by about 25.000 visitors per year. Moreover, Osnabrück with the office of the European Land & Soil Alliance (ELSA e.V.) and soil education and research at the University of Applied Sciences as well as the University of Osnabrück offers broad competences for soil and education. The ENSA conference was organized by the European Land & Soil Alliance (www.soil-alliance.org), the German Soil Association (www.bvboden.de) and the EU. Colleagues from 14 different countries attended the conference. In the final discussion a broad agreement on a European Network on Soil Awareness became apparent. During the conference the award-winning American movie “Dirt” was presented by Gene Rosow first time in Europe (see box).

Dirt! The Movie

Directed and produced by Gene Rosow & Bill Benson DIRT! The Movie takes you inside the wonders of the soil. It tells the story of Earth’s most valuable and underappreciated source of fertility – from its miraculous beginning to its crippling degradation.

The opening scenes of the film dive into the fascination of soil, made from the same elements as the stars, plants and animals, and all human beings: “*Dirt is very much alive.*” Though, in modern industrial pursuits and clamor for both profit and natural resources, our human connection to and respect for soil has been disrupted. “*Drought, climate change, even war are all directly related to the way we are treating dirt.*” – DIRT! the Movie brings to life the environmental, economic, social and political impact that the soil has. It shares the stories of experts from all over the world who study and are able to harness the beauty and power of a respectful and mutually beneficial relationship with soil. Please find more information about this most impressive film: www.dirtthemovie.org.

ENSA task and activities to raise soil awareness in different European countries

Presentations at the ENSA conference included a wide range of activities to raise soil awareness in Europe. Target groups like children of different age and adults from different professions were considered. Additionally, courses, methods, tools etc. to raise awareness on soils in the public and in schools were offered. The task of ENSA will be to gather all the different offers from the European countries, to provide an internet platform for communication within the network and to discuss the material and the activities on workshops and conferences.



Fig. 2: Special guests at first ENSA conference at the Soil Museum am Schölerberg in Osnabrück 2009 (from left to right): Karl Friedrich Falkenberg (EU), Christian Steiner (ELSA), Gene Rosow (film director), Prof. Stephen Nortcliff (IUSS), Prof. Gabriele Broll (BVB), Detlef Gerdtz (ELSA), Prof. Werner Wahnhoff (DBU), Burghard Jasper (Mayor of Osnabrück).

ENSA platform and communication

ENSA will be able to provide opportunities to exchange ideas. An internet platform run by ELSA (www.soil-alliance.org) located in Osnabrück, will be used for information exchange and can act as an umbrella for any national and non-governmental websites of partner institutions. ELSA is dependent on memberships of communities or other administrative districts to finance outreach activities. Members of the ENSA network could also help to motivate more communities and institutions of their own country to become member of ELSA. This would help to run the ENSA internet platform even better and would also help ELSA in a win-win situation.

Outlook

New information on ENSA including the presentations of the first ENSA conference in Osnabrück will be provided in summer 2010 (<http://www.eu-ensa.org>). It is planned to present the movie “Dirt” in different European towns. Actually it is being translated into various languages. The second ENSA conference will take place in Vienna 2011. A preparatory meeting will be organized also in Vienna in May 2010. ■

References

- Creamer, R.; Towers, W. (2010): Raising soil awareness across Europe; European Soil Bureau Network Group 4; local land & soil news 32/33; p. 24–25.

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