

# ENSA - European network on soil awareness

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## Abstract

A European network on soil awareness was established in 2009. The goal of the network is to bring together soil scientists with non-scientists working on soils in Europe to enlarge the group of people interested in soil awareness in one or the other way. This group includes administrators, consultants, scientists, and colleagues working in education, or for non-governmental organizations, and who are interested in working on outreach and/or education on soils and in exchanging their knowledge with colleagues within Europe. The network on raising soil awareness in Europe ENSA will help the public to become more familiar with soil and soil protection.

## Key Words

Soil awareness, European network, outreach, education.

## Introduction

The discussion on a European Network on Soil Awareness was initiated as part of the “Education in Soil Science and Raising Public Awareness” symposium at the Eurosoil Conference in Vienna in August 2008. 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 USA and Canada attended the discussion. The group discussed how soils can be more successfully presented to the public and emphasized the need for a common European approach to enhance awareness of soil issues additional to national and international approaches. Moreover, national activities like the “Soil of the Year” approach were presented.

## Results

- The objective of the European Network on Soil Awareness ENSA is to bring together all people working on soils or being interested in soils and related activities that may increase soil awareness in the public in Europe. This group includes administrators, consultants, scientists, and colleagues working in education, or for non-governmental organizations, and who are interested in working on outreach and/or education on soils and in exchanging their knowledge with colleagues within Europe.
- In Europe strong activities on local and regional scales are needed in close cooperation with target groups such as teachers, but the European Network does not want to compete with national activities. The network would like to help in those countries where national activities in raising soil awareness are still lacking like in many Eastern European countries. At national and international scales, we will share ideas how to bring forward soil protection in Europe through soil awareness. A strong cooperation with national ministries and other organisations is intended. One significant step forward could be for group members to cooperate with experts in marketing and public relations.
- The International Union of Soil Science has been involved in the establishment of ENSA and supports a network on soil awareness which would help to strengthen communication on soils.
- The EU encourages a European platform to raise soil awareness, which has already high priority within the EU soil activities (<http://eussoils.jrc.ec.europa.eu/Awareness>). Numerous activities have been started already from the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission in Ispra, Italy to make soil and related problems accessible to the public (<http://eussoils.jrc.ec.europa.eu/Awareness/Methods.html>). A network would help to ease the realization. Thus, the ENSA activities are carried out in close cooperation with the EU, especially with the members of the recently established Working Group “Soil Awareness and Education” of the European Soil Bureau Network ESNB. Overlapping activities to raise awareness on soils within the EU will be avoided.
- The Eurosoil conferences can be used to organise special symposiums and meetings of the people involved in outreach and education activities. Moreover, national meetings and meetings at the IUSS conferences could provide opportunities to exchange ideas.
- An internet platform run by ELSA (European Land and Soil Alliance, [www.soil-alliance.org](http://www.soil-alliance.org)), located in Osnabrueck, Germany, will be established which can be used for exchange of information and can act as

“umbrella” for national websites on soil awareness. ELSA relies on memberships of communities or other administrative districts to finance outreach activities. Members of the ENSA network could help to motivate more communities of their own country to join ELSA. This would help to run the website even better and would thus help making ENSA and ELSA successful.

- In September 2009 the first ENSA Conference took place in Osnabrueck, Germany in the “Museum am Schölerberg” with a permanent interactive soil exhibition and an “underground zoo” exhibiting various living soil organisms in their “natural” habitat. The conference was organized by the European Land & Soil Alliance ([www.soil-alliance.org](http://www.soil-alliance.org)), the German Soil Association ([www.bvboden.de](http://www.bvboden.de)) and the European Commission. Colleagues from 14 different European countries (Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland, The Netherlands, United Kingdom) and the USA attended the conference. In the final discussion a broad agreement on a European Network on Soil Awareness became apparent.
- Moreover, the discussion showed that interdisciplinary cooperation is absolutely necessary to raise awareness on soils. Soil scientists should cooperate with colleagues from related fields, with geologists in Geoparks or with biologists in nature reserves. Meanwhile, members of the European Geoparks Network already cooperate with ENSA.

### Conclusion

A close cooperation between the European Network on Soil Awareness ENSA with the International Union of Soil Science and other organizations would help to spread ideas on raising soil awareness worldwide and would motivate soil scientists to work together with parties other than scientists in the field of outreach and education.

