



Soil Icon – International Decade of Soils (2015-2024)

Aware of the profound importance of soil for human life and nature conservancy, like children who love the soil, we present our idea for a Soil Icon for the International Decade of Soils.

The main inspiration for our icon is the trajectory of human formation and development, where the child is both the origin and the destination. We envisioned an image that is simple – like a drawing of a child –, yet conceptually complex enough to symbolize the multiple functions and services provided by the soil. A childish drawing can be seen as an universal language that has a strong emotional appeal. As such, the Soil Icon that we created likely has the potential to captivate all peoples and thus facilitate the comprehension of the message that it embeds. This is specially important for school age children, who should be the main focus of soil education activities during the International Decade of Soils.

The complexity of the theme – the soil and the crucial role it plays in most aspects of our lives – is symbolized by exploring different shapes and colors. These were chosen in an attempt to establish a link with aesthetic and spiritual elements of peoples cultures.

The circular outer shape of the Soil Icon symbolizes the Earth. The circle, symbol of divinity and perfection for many peoples, also symbolizes the human alliance and commitment to care for the soil. Through aesthetic and spiritual harmony, the circle should convey the idea of a renewed relationship between mankind and the soil and the Earth as its habitat.

The brown color, being a neutral color, was chosen to symbolize the solid terrain on which humanity treads its particular path, walks continuously and leaves its marks, its historical records. The barefoot marks on solid ground are the footprints of a mother or a father who rehearses with a child its first steps – the origin –, the next steps of mankind – the destination. Together, the footprints on the solid ground symbolize unity, friendship, and mutual respect, all too necessary to make all peoples aware of the importance of the soil and the urgent need for its preservation.

The brown color also symbolizes the soil, a fertile soil, key for food production in a sustainable manner. The necessary fertile soil to guarantee food security and promote poverty alleviation. Also, the brown color of the soil as a major carbon pool, rich in organic matter, crucial for climate change mitigation by acting as a sink of atmospheric carbon.

All other four colors – green, blue, red, and yellow, so common in children's drawings – symbolize the multiple functions and services provided by the soil. The green footprint symbolizes the flora and the atmosphere, the connections of the soil with the vegetable life and the quality of the air that we breathe. The red footprint, red as the color of blood and love, the vital flame, symbolizes the fauna. Together, the green and the red footprints symbolize the connection between the soil and the biosphere, the soil as a source of food, reservoir of biodiversity, the basis for all forms of terrestrial life. The yellow footprint symbolizes the many riches provided by soil, the minerals and nutrients, the antibiotics for human health, the medium for production of materials (wood and fiber) and energy. The blue footprint symbolizes the water, the soil and its connection with the hydrosphere, the soil as a filter and supplier of water for plants, animals and mankind.

The assignment of colors to the footprints is based on the feeling they convey. The adult footprints, in the green and blue colors, both cool colors, convey the sense of calmness, clarity, confidence, credibility, characteristics of the experienced human, of ancestry. Meanwhile, the child's footprints are colored with warm colors, as a symbol of raw wisdom, vital drive, energy, strength, courage, curiosity. Past and present generations using their wisdom to support the first steps of future generations, helping them to decide what footprints, what historical records they want to leave behind them.

Finally, the elements of the Soil Icon were only partially filled with colors to symbolize the fluidity and dynamics of the soil, the complex fabric of the environmental processes in which the soil participates, and their consequent fragility in case of misuse and poor management.

After all, who teaches and who learns? Who drives the walk, adults or children? From balance and firmness, to curious and amusing spontaneity, we believe that we all learn together different knowledges, hopeful that the rhythmic communion of the steps, the united hands rehearsed in this Soil Icon, will lead us to healthy paths of harmonious coexistence, and to the rescue of the understanding that the soil is also part of us.

The authors

This Soil Icon is the fruit of the joyful partnership between Monique Lima de Oliveira and Alessandro Samuel-Rosa. Monique was born and raised on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro. An assiduous visitor to the Atlantic Forest, Monique soon learned about the importance of soil for the nature conservancy. Monique studied Journalism and Social Sciences, and today is a Ph.D. student in Sociology at Unicamp in Brazil. Alessandro was born and raised in a family farm in South Brazil, where he soon learned about the importance of soil to produce food and biomass. Alessandro studied Agronomy and Soil Science, and today teaches Soil Science at the Federal University of Technology in Brazil.