

# The International Union of Soil Sciences Cultural Patterns Working Group: A New Means to Explore Links between Soils and Society

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## Introduction

- A new working group on Cultural Patterns of Soil Understanding has been formed in the International Union of Soil Sciences Division 4
- This working group seeks to identify some basic human patterns in understanding soil
- For that, soil science has to open itself for perspectives offered by the humanities and social sciences, by fine arts and psychology
- Combining approaches from fields long viewed as disconnected and unrelated can in fact lead to advances through transdisciplinary studies

## Materials and Methods

- Emails were circulated to people who might be interested in this new working group in 2016 and based on responses a list of interested people was assembled
- These people were sent a questionnaire to survey which topics the group felt were most important and were interested in pursuing
- The group started with 36 founding members and now has about 50 members.
- Interest in contributing to a book on cultural patterns of soil understanding was also evaluated

## Results

- The survey identified the following seven areas to expand on (alphabetical order):
  - 1) EMBEDDED SOIL – how is soil part of broader concepts of nature?
  - 2) REFLECTION OF SCIENCE – investigating soil science as a cultural phenomenon, such as how we frame the value we attach to soil
  - 3) RELIGIONS AND SOIL – religious and spiritual traditions and experiences and their implications for soil understanding
  - 4) SOIL ART – including historical and contemporary portrayal of soils in art as well as the use of soil and/or soil materials to create art
  - 5) SOIL CULTURE ARCHAEOLOGY/ETHNOPEDOLOGY – the importance of soil to indigenous people
  - 6) SOIL EDUCATION – the function of soil education to foster or change cultural understanding of soil
  - 7) SOIL PSYCHOLOGY – analytic investigations into what drives our understanding of soil, on both the individual and cultural level

## Next Steps

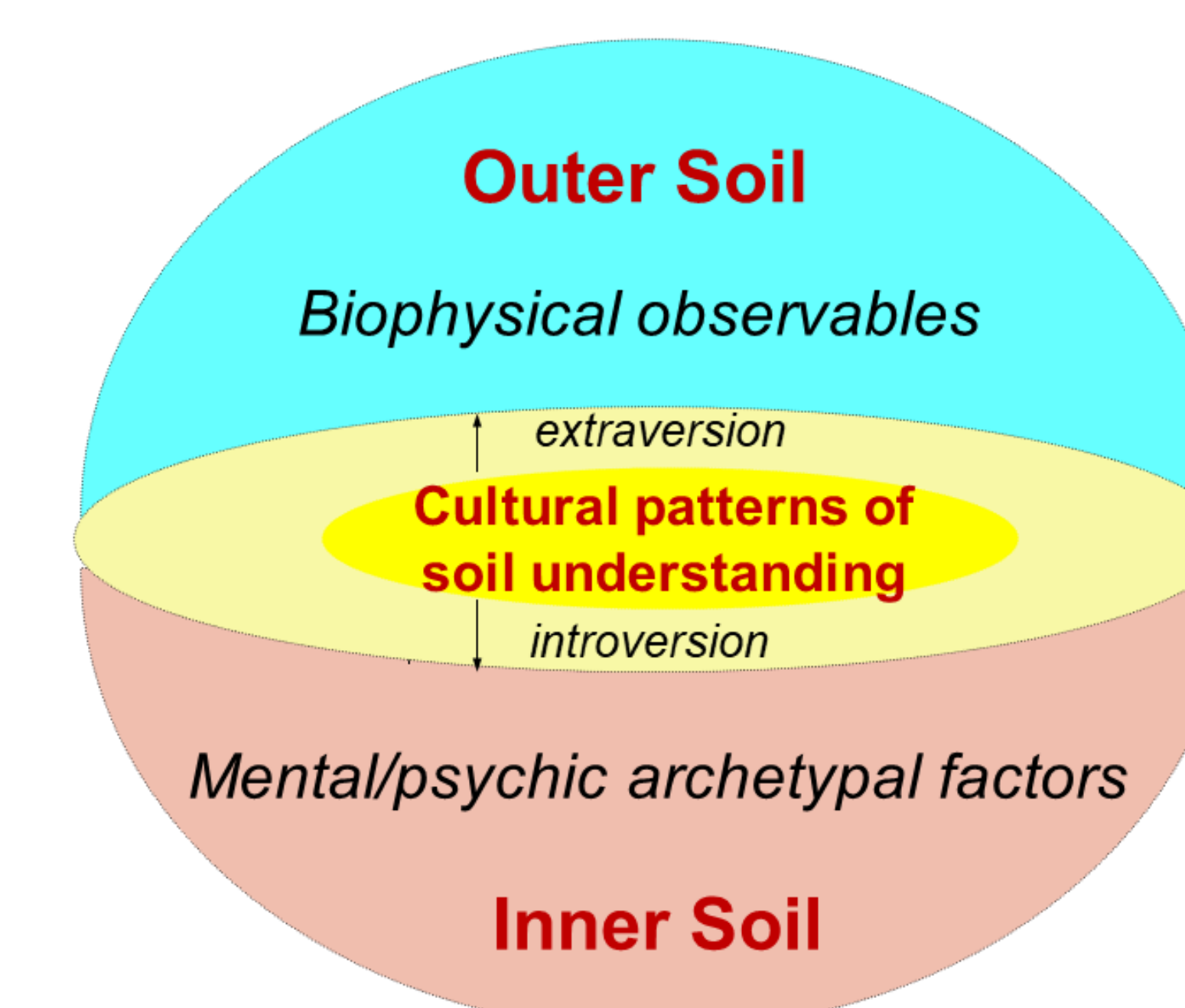
- We are still interested in identifying additional people with an interest to engage in this area
- Several sessions are being organized at the 2018 World Congress of Soil Science in Rio de Janeiro, visit <https://www.21wcscs.org/?secao=abstract+topic&div=4> and scroll down to “Working Groups” for more information
- A book on cultural patterns of soil understanding is planned as part of the IUSS book series to be released in 2019
- For more information on the Cultural Patterns of Soil Understanding Working Group or to take part in our activities, contact the officers:
  - Nikola Patzel, Chair – [patzel@bodenkommunikation.info](mailto:patzel@bodenkommunikation.info)
  - Eric Brevik, Vice Chair – [Eric.Brevik@dickinsonstate.edu](mailto:Eric.Brevik@dickinsonstate.edu)

**Image credits:** Nikola Patzel (soil window and inner/outer soil), Eric Brevik (graveyard, school children 1,2), French Nat. Lib.: Cérès sowing the field (1400 AD)

*Patrones culturales que inciden en la comprensión del suelo*  
*Padrões culturais presentes na compreensão sobre o solo*  
*Modèles culturels de la compréhension du sol*  
*Культурные традиции для понимания почв*  
*Kulturelle Muster im Bodenverständnis*  
*Cultural patterns of soil understanding*  
*土壤理解の文化的パターン*  
*الگوهای فرهنگی برای درک خاک*  
*토양의 문화적 이해*  
*النمط الثقافي لفهم التربة*



Culture influences the way we view soil.



“Inner soil” and “outer soil” are key factors driving individual and social construction of soil understanding.



Many religions and religious practices have aspects that intersect with soil.



Left: Soil can be used to create art and has been depicted in art. This piece also shows a female spiritual quality often linked to soil and life.

Below: Education is an important part of forming a positive social image of soil.

