
Plural values associated with soil biodiversity among farmers in Europe

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Abstract

Soils provide a wide range of ecological, economic, social functions, and many of them depend on soil biota. Human activities, such as agriculture, take profit from these functions, hence considered as ecosystem services, but some cultural practices widely spread threaten soil biodiversity.

In the context of the Biodiversa program "SoilMan", we investigated to what extent and how farmers include biodiversity into their soil management, comparing five European countries. Following the environmental pragmatism theory developed by John Dewey we investigated farmer's values associated to soil biodiversity by analyzing the arguments for their management decisions. Using the concept of plural values, we then assigned values to various categories besides instrumental values.

We used existing literature, in order to get first insights in values underlying farmers' management decisions. We conducted five focus groups, one in each country, and exploratory interviews to investigate soil biodiversity values within the variety of expressed values.

According to the traditional literature on farmers' behavior, we have found that instrumental values are of main importance in their management strategy. However, depending on their cultural background, our results suggest that other valuation processes can also play a role in farmers' management choices. Farmers can for example favor their well-being, try to get independent from advisory institutions or protect biodiversity for itself.

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