

Jeffery, S. *et al.* (eds): **European Atlas of Soil Biodiversity**. European Commission, Publication Office of the European Union, Luxemburg. 2010.

The Joint Research Centre of the European Commission published a new soil atlas at the end of 2010. This is the third in the atlas series launched six years ago with the Soil Atlas of Europe (2005) and continued with the Soil Atlas of the Northern Circumpolar Region (2010). United Nations has declared 2010 to be the International Year of Biodiversity. On this occasion Joint Research Centre of the European Commission (JRC) and Directorate-General for the Environment of the European Commission (DG Environment) have produced the first ever a comprehensive atlas at European scale. More than 60 specialists of the JRC and the world leading experts in soil biodiversity were involved into the edition of this tome.

The Atlas of the Soil Biodiversity is not a conventional atlas than it rather is an encyclopaedia. It is designed to be a reference guide to life of soil, so it can be a useful tool for soil scientists and for higher education. The soil atlas is divided into two parts. Section one covers a wide range of topics related to soil biodiversity. Fundamentals of the soil environment, ecosystems and biomes, soil functions, threats to soil biodiversity, soil ecology, and the methodology are introduced from the perspectives of soil ecology and microbiology. The policies and the role of education are discussed by another chapter. Although the atlas officially focuses on Europe, the majority of the chapters have a wider scope.

The conventional atlas appears in the 6th chapter: "Distribution of Soil Organisms within Europe". Section two is a taxonomical handbook of the soil organisms. This section contains up-to-date and more comprehensive knowledge than several available books in the field of soil ecology. Each section works independently of all other sections, to make

information readily accessible. For this reason some data are being shown recurrently. Some of the topics are more theoretical and abstract than the other ones, however, the extent of the chapters are balanced. Where the subject is complex and abstract, simple analogies and explanations appear in supplementary textboxes.

The language is easily accessible, but some terms can be unknown for the new reader. For this reason a glossary can be found at the back of the volume. The atlas is richly illustrated with figures and photos, and comprises one A/2, three A/3 and 13 A/4 sized map plates.

The European Atlas of Soil Biodiversity is freely available online at http://eusoils.jrc.ec.europa.eu/library/maps/biodiversity_atlas/

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