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SoilSparks Co-Creation Report

1. Co-creation Process

The SoilSparks Educational Campaign is co-designed with young people from the EUROPARC Youth Network. It included the following stages:

1. Initial consultation with the EUROPARC Youth Council (10 individuals)
2. 4-week online summer school to upskill co-creators on soil science (30 individuals)
3. An online consultation for young people's knowledge and needs (81 individuals)
4. A Co-creation Camp, exploring soil through art (27 individuals)
5. A post-camp Youth Panel to continue to guide the design process (20 active participants)

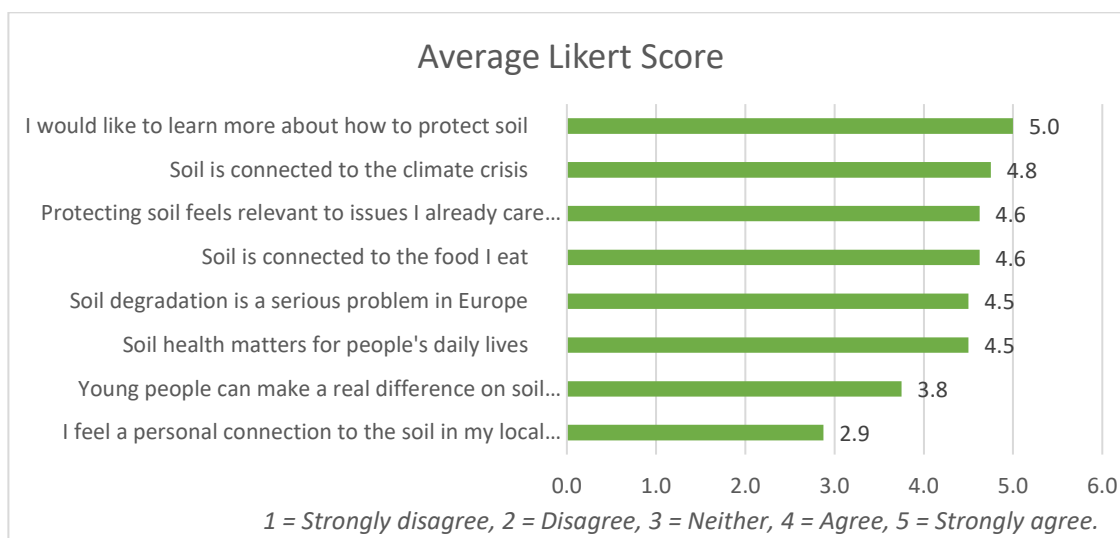
A cohort of about 30 young people have been active and continuously engaging in the project through the summer school, the co-creation camp (although not all were able to attend) and the youth panel. These young people will be referred to as SoilSparkers as they will be catalysts to reaching broader audiences and driving engagement and excitement around the campaign.

2. Initial Consultation

This survey was sent to the EUROPARC Youth Council, a group of 10 young people (18 – 30 years old) who are active in Protected Areas and nature conservation as volunteers, students or young professionals. The aim of this survey was to see the interest and knowledge levels of young people in the EUROPARC youth network who would be likely to become co-creators, or engage with our educational campaign. It was completed in March 2026 as the project began.

The findings showed that:

- 63% (5) had a reasonable understanding of why soil matters
- 25% (2) had heard about soil issues but did not know much detail
- 12% (1) knew quite a lot about soil science and soil threats



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Additionally, a series of questions were asked about activities for the co-creation camp, including types of activities that would make the time enjoyable, which soil topics they would like to explore during the camp and expectations for the outcomes of the camp.

One example of a response to the question “What would make the camp a genuinely excellent experience for you?”: *“Having a diversity of activities that focus not just on learning but developing a skill or experiencing the thing we’re learning about: if it is storytelling, then having a practical session about it, if soil organisms, then doing some sampling.”* EUROPARC Youth Council Member

Requests included:

- Small group discussions
- Fun activities
- More group work than individual work
- No, or limited, classroom-style lectures
- Time spent outdoors

Wished for outcomes included:

- Contributions to content that would be helpful
- New knowledge
- A sense of purpose and agency around soil
- Creative skills
- Connections to other young people

We also asked them to select their favourite slogan from a selection, with multiple answers possible. The winning answer was “Protect what is under your feet!”

Not all responses will be shown here. Many of these were incorporated into the broader consultation, which was circulated in May. This smaller consultation was intended to test whether the language was clear, the format easy to understand, and the framing effective in generating a diverse range of responses.

3. Summer School

The Summer School was a 4-week programme that included a series of self-paced learning modules, a weekly online session with an expert and challenges to engage in active learning.

Self-paced learning modules

There were 8 self-paced learning modules that were based on the EU Mission Soil points, including an additional element on co-creation processes. The modules were built on scientific information from the University of Hohenheim and adapted for the Learncast learning platform, which is a microlearning platform that transforms existing training content into short, engaging, mobile-friendly learning experiences with built-in assessment to demonstrate what learners have actually understood. Each module went through two reviews, one for content and a second for functionalities.



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The modules were:

1. [Co-creative Design](#)
2. [Soil Basics](#)
3. [Soil Carbon Storage](#)
4. [Soil Biodiversity](#)
5. [Soil Erosion, Desertification and Sealing](#)
6. [Soil Pollution and Global Soil Footprint](#)
7. [Outlook, Innovations and Conservation](#)
8. [Science Communication](#)

Live sessions

The online live sessions were supplementary to the self-paced learning and contributed to 'going deeper' into soil topics from a mixture of scientific experts and expert practitioners. Each session included a segment in which the expert presented their topic and answered questions, followed by small-group discussions where participants could get to know one another, reflect on what they had learned, and share their perspectives.

The live sessions were:

1. Why soil is so important – Dr Tessa Camenzind (University of Hohenheim, Germany)
2. The impact of war on soil – Dr Hussam al Najjar (Islamic University of Gaza, Palestine)
3. Soil restoration post wildfires - João Cardoso de Melo (Cascais Ambiente, Portugal)
4. Permaculture & design thinking - Joana Bojczewsk (Permaculture Teacher, Poland)
5. Archaeology and Soil - Henriette Storbækken (Valdres Nature Park, Norway)

Hands on learning through challenges

The participants were given small and large challenges through which to explore soil. These included more factual challenges (e.g. to go outside and take a photo of soil erosion) and more fun challenges (e.g. create a dating profile for a soil organism). These were optional, allowing us to gather data on how many young people would choose to complete the challenges voluntarily. This would help inform which challenges were included in the final design.

Some examples of challenges:

Find a local case. Research one example of erosion, desertification or sealing, ideally in your country or region - an event, an ongoing process, a land use conflict. Post what is happening, what is driving it and whether there is any policy response.	The Breakfast Autopsy Photograph one meal and then label each item with its likely soil-origin - labelled like a crime-scene diagram. Write the one-line caption you would post with the photo to try and make someone look twice - don't forget to post it to Padlet!	Food Art Make an edible creation showcasing biodiversity in soil! Take a photo and share it with us!
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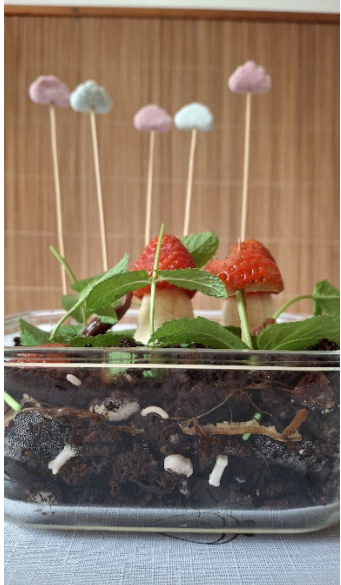
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M5 task 1  car park Soil sealing right outside my building due to car parking spots. 99% of the time, 2/3 of the spots is not in use here. It's always very hot there when I walk home from the bus stop. Every municipality in the Netherlands has strict rules for how many additional parking spots should be constructed when new houses are build, even when there is a call for less car-friendly cities that are more adjusted to bikes and public transport. Total surface of car parking spots is estimated to be around 400 square kilometers in the Netherlands.	How many different soils are on your breakfast plate? (Module 6. Task 2)  Crime scene autopsy 1) Carrot bread roll (<i>spelt, barley, rye, wheat, soybean</i>) The grains are typically grown in Germany and neighbouring European countries such as France, Poland, Austria and the Czech Republic. Kamut is usually imported from Canada, while soy is often sourced from Italy, Austria, France or outside Europe. 2) "Schusterjunge" bread roll (<i>spelt, durum wheat, barley, wheat, rye, oat, kamut</i>) Like the carrot roll, the grains usually come from Germany or neighbouring EU countries. Kamut is typically imported from Canada.	
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4. Youth Consultation

The consultation was open for two months, from mid-May to mid-July, and was promoted through the EUROPARC Youth Community, EUROPARC's youth social media channels, and the wider network of youth stakeholders identified through the stakeholder mapping exercise. Below you can see some information from the demographics, opinions and feedback from the young people.

Demographics

Due to data protection of minors, it was requested that only young people over the age of 16 participate in the consultation.

The consultation received 81 responses of which 38% (31) were between 16 – 21 years old, 35% (28) were between 22 and 25 years old, and 27% (22) were between 26 – 30 years old. These participants resided in 18 countries of which 17 were within Europe.

Of them 66% (53) were women, 27% (22) were men, 6% (5) were non-binary and 1% (1) chose not to answer.

The graph below also shows their backgrounds and how they are engaged in environmental topics. The Junior Ranger is a teenage non-formal education programme, the Youth+ groups are self-led youth engagement in protected areas, and the EUROPARC Youth Council is a group of youth-selected representatives within the EUROPARC ecosystem.



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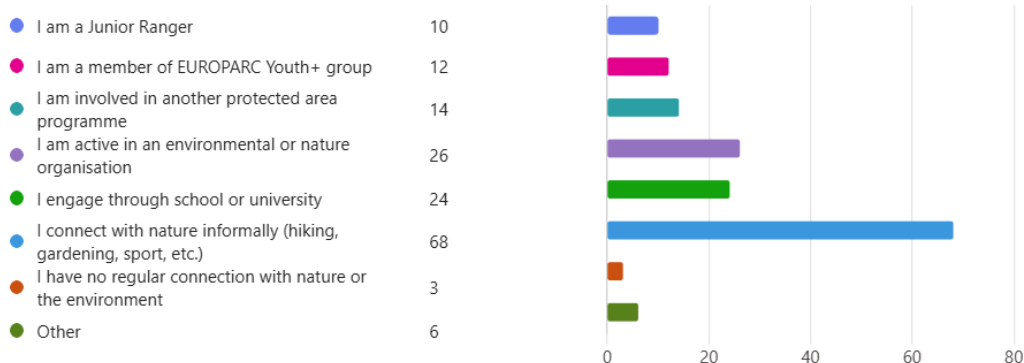


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3. How do you currently connect with nature or the environment?

[More details](#)



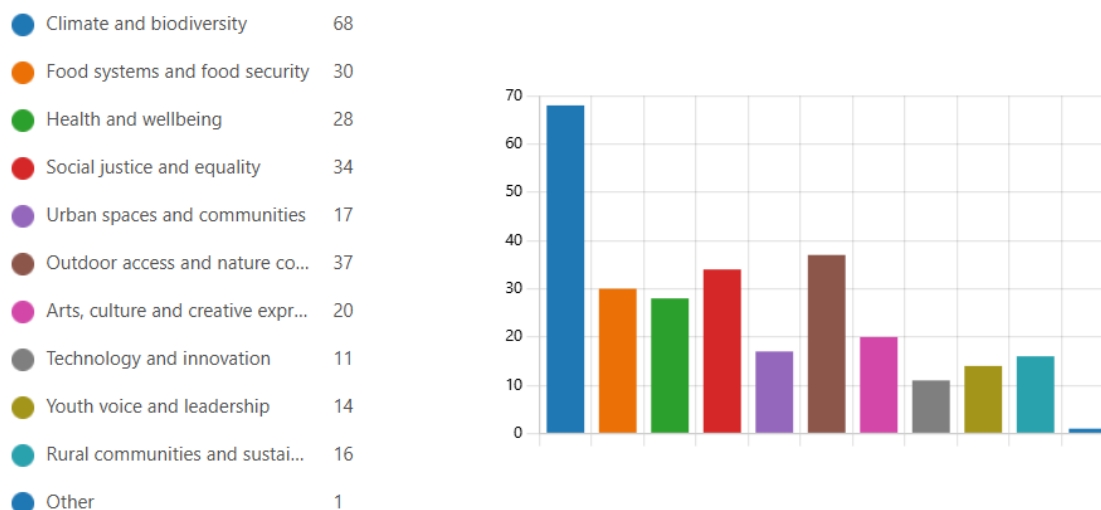
Opinions

When asked what comes to mind with the word “soil”, 26% (21) chose to answer with “Life”



When asked which topics were most relevant to them personally, climate and biodiversity received the highest ratings. While this may not be representative of young people more broadly, these respondents are likely to reflect the audiences most readily reached and engaged through the campaign.

10. What issues matter most to you personally?



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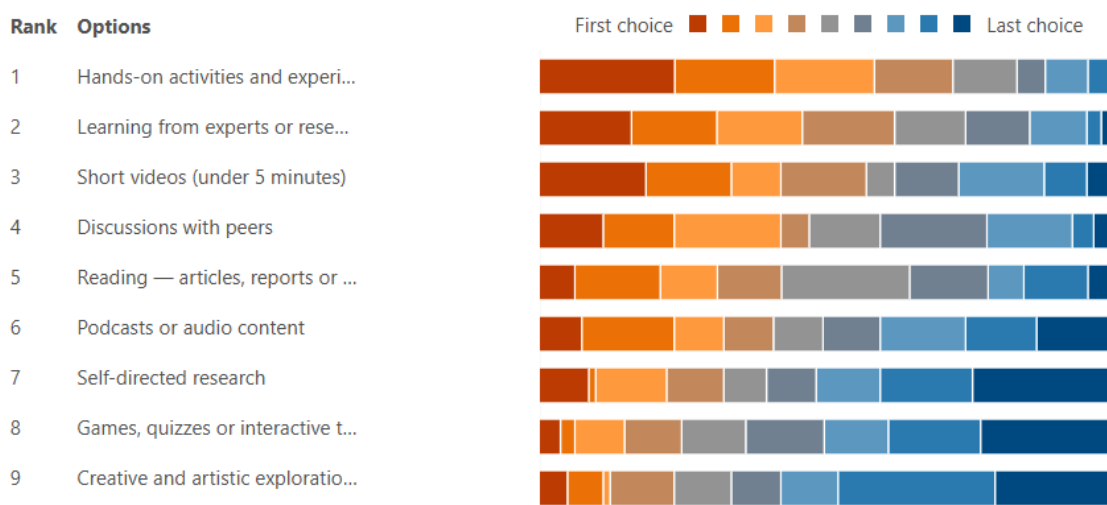
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Campaign Feedback

The participants were asked about their learning methods, their willingness to engage and their online activity for building a campaign that is useful, engaging and will reach this audience.

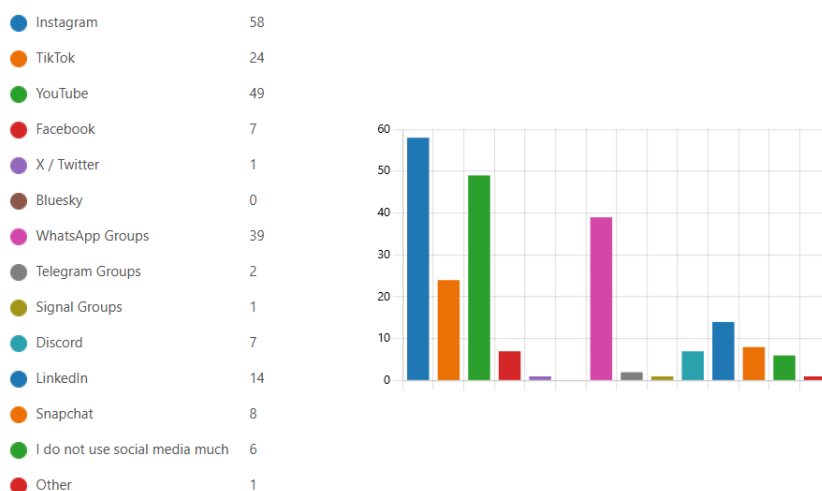
16. How do you prefer to learn about new topics?



The results about learning method preferences were both validating and surprising. We planned to build hands-on learning into the campaign with our focus on micro challenges. However, we thought there would be much more willingness to learn through games, quizzes and other interactive tools. One reason for them not prioritising the game and quiz learning methods may be that the primary aim of games is having fun and the primary aim of quizzes may be testing oneself against peers.

When assessing activity on social media it was validating so see that the three highest respondent groups were ones we are already using: Instagram (@europarc.youth), YouTube (@europarc) and Whatsapp Groups (Youth+ Community)

18. Where do you spend most of your time online?



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The consultation ended with open ended questions and space to dream. For example, a participant responded to the question “Is there anything about soil, the environment or youth action that you wish more people understood?” with: *“I wish people understood how much humans rely on soil and the environment, not just for cropland, but for the luxuries we have in life. I also wish to instil a mindset in people, where they are willing to protect nature spaces for appreciation and the sake of their existence without having to justify a monetary or specific personal gain.”* – Youth respondent

5. Co-Creation Camp

The International SoilSparks Camp (July 2026) was a 4-day intensive residential, bringing together youth representatives from across Europe. Young people learnt about the soil in the local protected area (Montagne de Reims, France), reflected on what they had learnt about the challenges that soil is facing across Europe, and in a series of participatory workshops involving artistic expression and collaborative design, developed a series of challenges to inspire more young people to act and engage with the topic of soil protection.

Participants

Facilitators & Experts

- Elin McCallum – Bantani Education
- Maria Kazarez – Bantani Education
- Pamela Pokorny – EIT Foods
- Jessica Micklem-Kolenić – The EUROPARC Federation

Youth Worker Participants

- Nicole Erbser – Nationale Naturlandschaften
- Andreas Mäder – Swiss Rangers
- Lucia Cusinir – EcoEdu Natura
- Henriette Storbækken - Valdres Nature Park

Youth Participants

- 27 young people attended the camp

Programme

THURSDAY — Arrival day

Settle in, meet the group, set the mission

- Intro to SoilSparks
- Campaign Charter & Code of Conduct

FRIDAY — EXPERIENCE

Get into the soil — field trip day

- Visit to Parc Naturel Régional de la Montagne de Reims
- Practical workshop: Dog vs Soil



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SATURDAY — VISUALISE

Turn ideas into creative campaign material

- Zine-making with artist Pauline
- Shaping a campaign session
- Campaign messaging
- Tour of Reims

SUNDAY — DESIGN

Build the campaign — from message to action

- From ideas to campaign
- Improv theatre & drawing workshops
- Dance & art workshops
- Writing & origami workshops
- Building micro-challenges building
- Camp reflection

MONDAY — Departure Day

Breakfast, checkout and safe travels

See the photo album of the events and activities here: [MyAlbum](#)

Soil Science

The co-creation camp included a fieldtrip to the regional nature park Montagne de Reims, where Emmanuelle Deon, Zoé Siegel, Robin Comito and Cyprien Voisvenel guided the participants through a soil exploration. The activities included evaluating and identifying soil, as well as a consideration of the geography of the area and how that impacts soil and vice versa.



Artistic Expression

A workshop with local artist Pauline de Cabarrus explored the junction of soil and art, from



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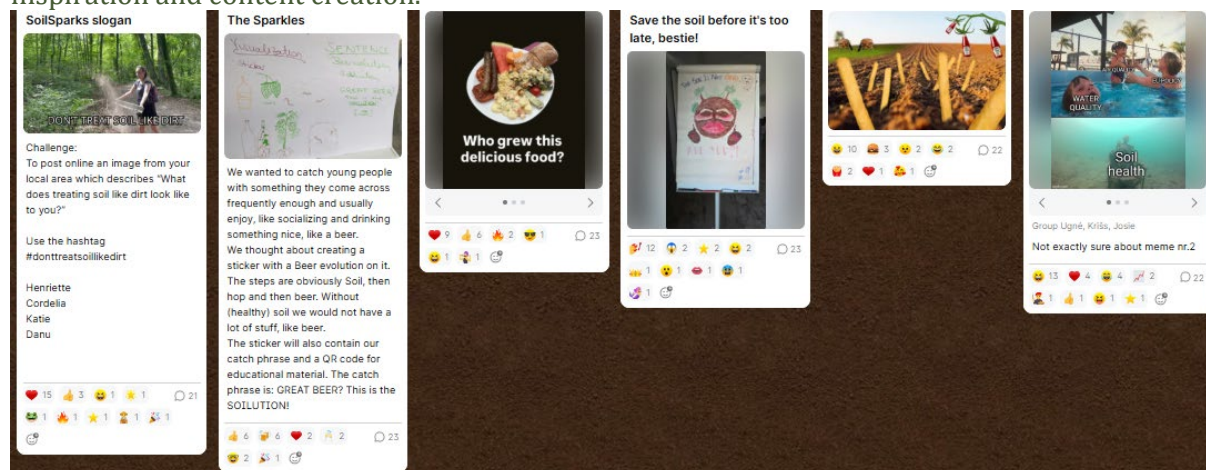
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exploring the world of soil with art, to using soil as a medium and inspiration for art. The workshop included zine making, with many pages of activities that each SoilSparkers was able to take home and continue to explore with.



Campaign Design

The SoilSparkers spent time co-designing challenges for the campaign, as well as exploring personas that the campaign would target and developing communication methods for promoting the campaign. All these creations were saved in the SoilSparks Padlet for future inspiration and content creation.



6. Youth Panel

All the SoilSparkers are in a social media group and are invited to each session of the Youth Panel. Additionally, people are invited to complete homework and provide feedback outside of the online sessions to ensure all who would like to continue to engage, can engage.

The sessions of the Youth Panel already include:

- Game Jam: brainstorming games to learn more about soil
- Checking Out Challenges: refining and brainstorming challenges
- Memes for SoilSparks: creating communication to launch the SoilSparks educational



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campaign

- *More will be planned as the need arises.*

7. Participant Diversity

The following statistics showcase the diversity of the 30 SoilSparkers. The application process accepted all who met the requirements: between the ages of 18 and 30 years old and residing in Europe.

Additional selection for the attendance at the co-creation camp was done based on nationality and gender; any imbalance reflected imbalance in the applications.

The SoilSparkers represented 19 nationalities and were residing in 16 European countries.

SoilSparkers are between 18 – 30 years of age:

- 37 % (11) were between 18 – 21 years old
- 33% (10) were between 22 – 25 years old
- 30% (9) were between 26 – 30 years old

The gender balance of SoilSparkers was skewed towards woman:

- 67% (20) women
- 27% (8) men
- 7% (2) non-binary

General diversity markers included:

- 13% (4) had a disability
- 10% (3) were ethnic minorities within Europe
- 23% (7) were queer
- 27% (8) were neurodivergent
- 48% (13) had no diversity marker

Note the plurality of participants, many of whom may have more than one diversity marker, hence the percentages do not add up to 100%.

The following shows the diversity in current occupations:

- 7% (2) currently in secondary education
- 7% (2) currently in apprenticeships or technical training
- 27% (8) currently bachelor students
- 23% (7) currently post-graduate students (masters and doctorates)
- 17% (5) currently jobseekers or gap year
- 20% (6) are early career professionals

The SoilSpark project focuses on an educational campaign that brings together youth work, science, art and communication. The SoilSparkers all had some experience with these topics:

- 67% (20) had some environmental training
- 63% (19) had experience in communication work
- 47% (14) had experience with creative/artistic work
- 83% (25) had experience with youth work

The SoilSparkers were connected to 24 youth organisations, of which:



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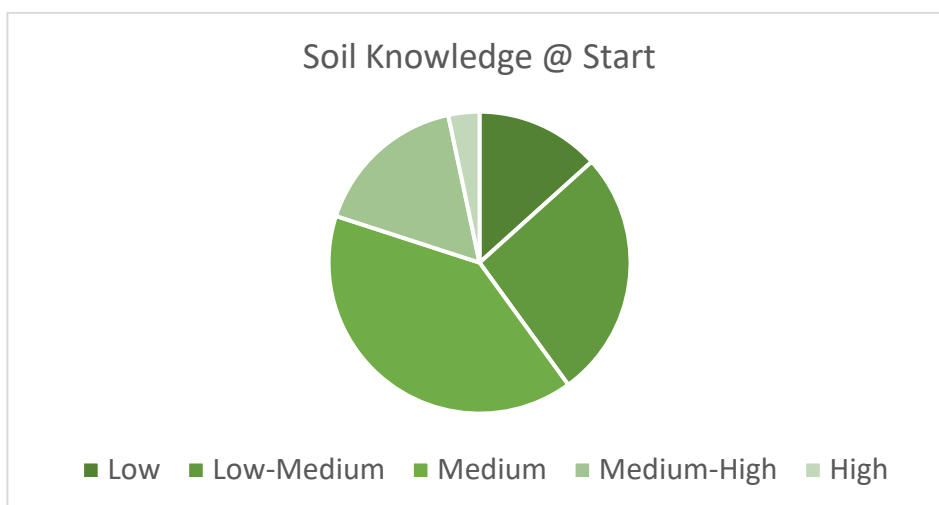
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- 2 were groups under 18 who are active in nature conservation
- 12 were groups of young adults active in nature conservation
- 6 were university student groups focusing on environmental topics



8. Feedback:

At the camp, participants were invited to provide open feedback on both the camp and the summer school. By this stage, they had built strong connections and developed a sense of openness and equality, with participants recognising that their views were as valid and valued as those of the facilitators and others involved.

Feedback to the e-learning modules:

- Found them good and accessible
- Occasional text blocks were too long – would be nice to split them
- Likes the prompts to do something interactive – write something, video message (as long as it didn't take you out of the app)
- Quiz formats – the longer answer tended to be the correct one
- Some confusion about challenges to do in Padlet and which ones to do for live sessions
- An indicator on how long each module could take you would be nice
- When having to stop in the middle and go back – had to go through all the old slides again (no save progress option)
- Not everyone did them all – busy lives

Feedback for live sessions:

- Great selection of speakers
- Request for another session with Henriette (request fulfilled)
- Complemented already known knowledge
- Was able to remember content from live sessions much better than from e-learning
- Make learning from the live sessions into guest presentations!

One third of participants said they would have completed the self-paced learning even without the live sessions. Two thirds felt that the learning experience was better when combined with



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live sessions, while one third said they would not have completed the self-paced learning at all without them. The main reason given was the importance of connecting with other learners and feeling part of a shared learning experience.

Co-creation camp feedback: On a scale of 1 to 10 on overall impression of the camp, there resulted a bell-curve across 5-10.

Positive aspects	Negative aspects
- Good content	- Very intense with too few breaks
- Excellent fieldtrip	- Chaotic time management
- Great co-design workshops	- Unfinished code-of-conduct session
- Respect for youth and one another	- Better food with labels
- All ideas were welcomed	- Art included a lot of drawing

For future youth camps, it was requests to use more days and have less intense days. For example, a full week with some free afternoons.

Most interesting things learnt over the whole process:

- Some soils benefit from wildfires
- The full impact of soil sealing
- The largest organism in the world is a fungus
- How to restore soil
- That we are not doomed
- How long it takes for soil to build itself
- Soil footprint and soil policy
- That an environmentally friendly label can help
- How much CO₂ is in the soil and how it affects the earth
- The effect of war on soil

Most important things to communicate in the campaign:

- The consequence of human actions (e.g. soil sealing, farming on soil loss)
- Soil is non-renewable at our lifetime scale and we need to protect it now!
- How much life is in soil and how much we depend on it as a society.
- Often there is no straightforward answer and solutions have trade-offs

Suggested changes moving forward:

- More defined explanations for the “hard words”
- Some examples from different countries of farming payouts /schemes for environmentally friendly farming practices that are good for soil
- More diverse policy responses not just from farming but also from urban development, water and waste sector and how they interact and are perhaps at conflict
- Bringing in more experts to learn from
- Ban generative AI tools from the challenges
- More information on how different soils are formed – link to soil profile for Aha! Moment
- Under pollution – case study on the impact of car breaks and tire rub off on soil and pollution
- Under erosion – case study on erosion of footpaths and why to stay on a designated path



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Below you can see the summary of responses when asked what made the young people care about soil as well as what they would want to share with others.



What made you care?



What do you share?



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9. Conclusion:

The SoilSparks project has actively involved 30 young people as co-creators, supplemented by a broader consultation through their youth organisations. The campaign design developed from a starting point rooted in science to a youth-friendly learning process, which will develop further into a fun, hands-on micro-learning journey for other young people.

The process highlighted the value of involving young people throughout, creating opportunities for peer connection and combining live, practical and creative activities with self-paced learning. It also reinforced the importance of flexibility, clear guidance and ensuring that young people can see how their ideas shape the final campaign.



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