Soil Soul Guide

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Creative Citizen Action for Living Soil

SoilTribes

SOILSOUL

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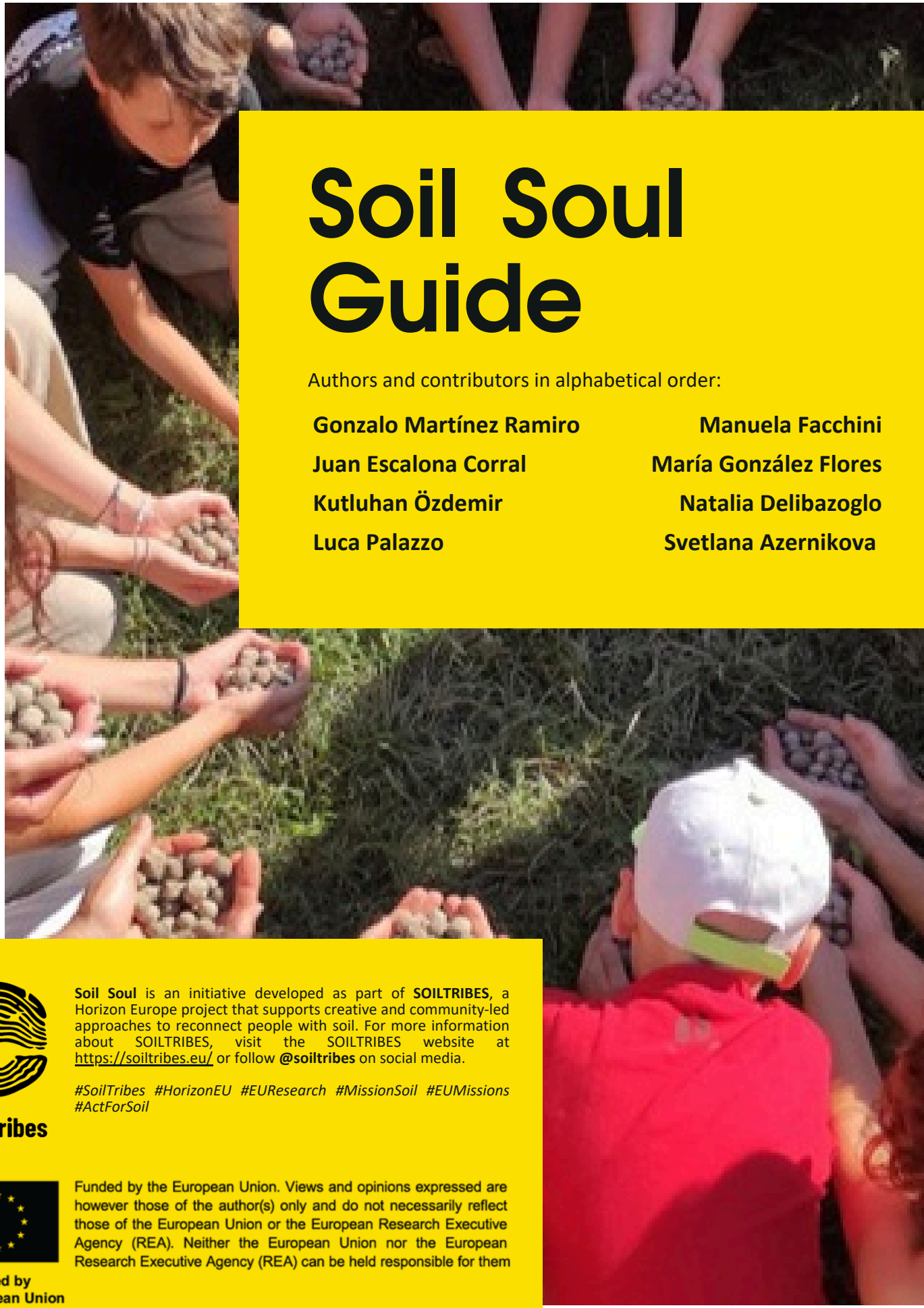
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Soil Soul Guide

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SoilTribes

Soil Soul is an initiative developed as part of **SOILTRIBES**, a Horizon Europe project that supports creative and community-led approaches to reconnect people with soil. For more information about SOILTRIBES, visit the SOILTRIBES website at https://soiltribes.eu/ or follow **@soiltribes** on social media.

#SoilTribes #HorizonEU #EUResearch #MissionSoil #EUMissions #ActForSoil

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Opening the ground



SOILSOUL – Creative Citizen Action for Living Soil is one of thirty winning projects of the European Union's SOILTRIBES Open Call (HORIZON.2.6 – Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Environment) to contribute to the mission A Soil Deal for Europe.

Across Europe, soil degradation threatens food systems, biodiversity, and community well-being. Erosion, loss of organic matter, and pollution are visible symptoms of a deeper cultural disconnection. People no longer see soil as a living partner but as a resource to be exploited. The Soil Deal for Europe calls for restoring this relationship by promoting soil literacy and collective responsibility.



By bridging soil science and creative culture, SOILSOUL embodied the spirit of the EU Soil Mission, transforming awareness into collective care and showing that the path to regeneration begins with the hands, hearts, and imagination of citizens.

From February to October 2026, three organisations – Natural Farming Center APS (Italy), the leading partner; ARTE.M (Portugal); and FOCO (Spain) – have joined forces to explore new ways to reconnect people with soil through ecology, creativity and community.

IN SOILSOUL, ART IS NOT DECORATION; IT IS A METHOD OF LISTENING, EXPRESSING, AND REGENERATING.

We are a small European consortium dedicated to awakening both the soil beneath our feet and the soul within each human being, letting art be the dancing breath. Because soil is more than a resource: it is a living body that sustains food, climate, and culture. Indeed, Natural Farming Center APS is an NGO dedicated to natural farming, soil regeneration, and community learning, with a practical farming hub in central Italy; ARTE.M is a cultural association promoting artistic and cultural practices rooted in place, and FOCO is an NGO specialized in EU-funded cultural projects, theatrical methodologies, and social communication.

The project treated the soil as both a physical and symbolic canvas where communities rediscovered their connection with the Earth. Artistic and creative processes were woven into every stage: from community storytelling to visual documentation, from participatory installations to digital narratives.





At Natural Farm Shizen, creativity was blended with practice: collective seed-ball making, garden design, and reforestation were experienced as acts of communal creation — a choreography of hands, seeds, and care. Reflection circles and intercultural evenings connected art with daily life, allowing participants to express themselves through writing, performance, and dialogue. Under the guidance of ARTE.M, artistic practice became a catalyst for soil literacy: through Creative Soil Labs in Portugal, participants explored clay, pigments, and organic materials to create sculptures, handmade works, and visual stories that embody the textures and cycles of living soil. These activities merged sensory experience with ecological understanding, turning science into tangible beauty. FOCO translated these artistic expressions into an European communications campaign, using storytelling to amplify community voices and show how art can convey the fragility and resilience of the soil to broader audiences.

This SoilSoul Guide: Creative Citizen Action for Living Soil that you are browsing is our final joint publication to help you participate firsthand in the change we have started to bring about. It is a practical and reflective toolkit, containing some of our activities implemented during these months: small, replicable ecological interventions such as seed-ball reforestation, community gardens, humus-generation practices, art installations, community digital storytelling, etc. The SoilSoul Guide wants to be, above all, an invitation to replicate our actions, to find your own way to awaken both your soul and the soil beneath your feet, and to reconnect with Mother Earth.



In the following chapters, you will have the opportunity to feel and understand the soil that silently welcomes you step by step on your life journey. You will also learn the simple, effective, and fun technique of regenerating soil through the creation of Fukuoka seed balls, our first Soil Soul Action, which inspired all the others.

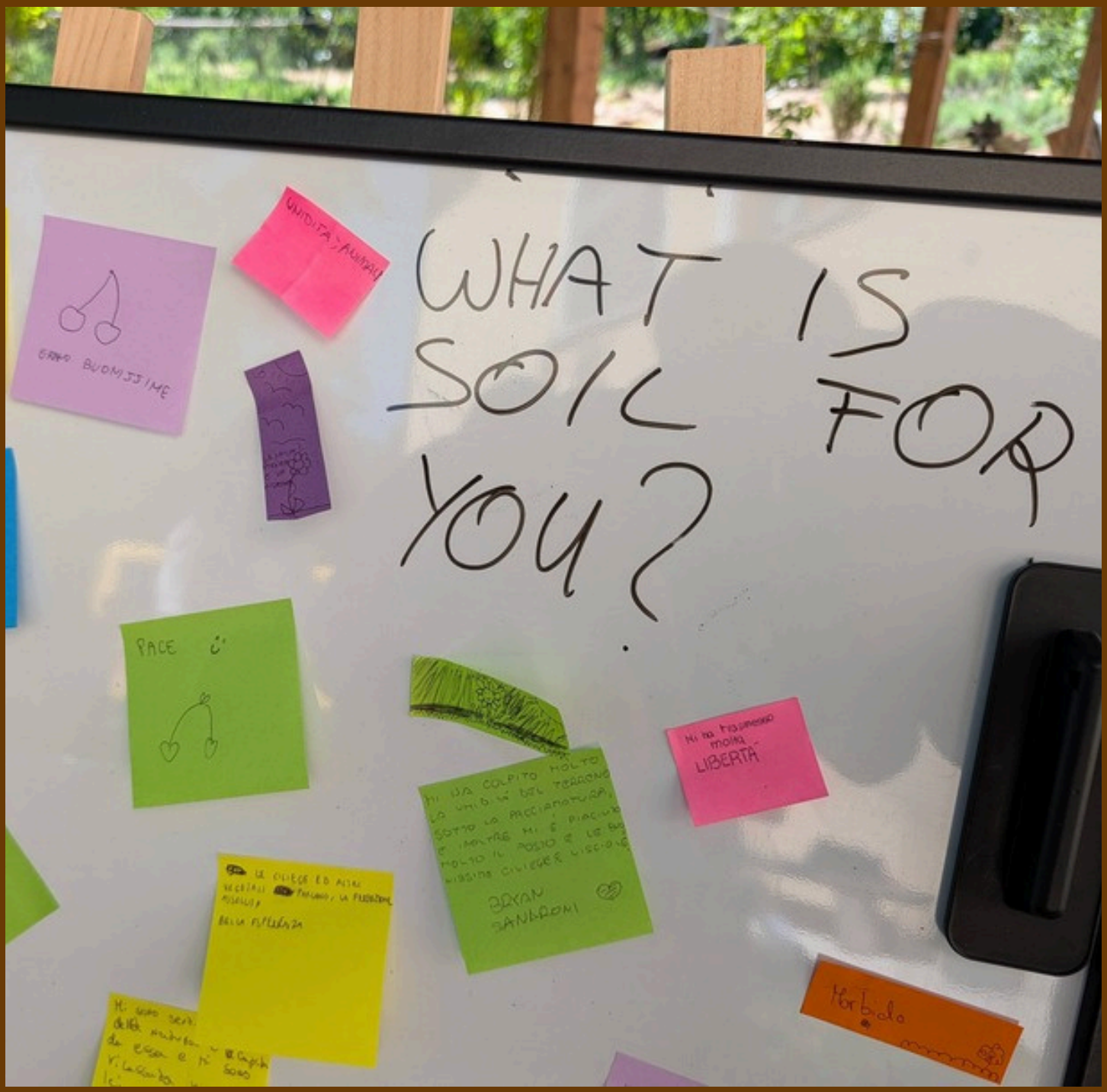
The guide will then open the doors to your creativity, thanks to the other Soil Soul Actions—each with a different practical and creative approach—that you can experiment with and share with anyone you like.

Finally, you will join us in a circle to share the journey of inner awakening, aware that SoilSoul is only the first seed of a long and fertile sowing.

***"THE HEALING OF THE LAND AND THE PURIFICATION OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT IS THE SAME PROCESS"* — MASANOBU FUKUOKA**

Soil as living practice

BY NATURAL FARMING SHIZEN



Masanobu Fukuoka, pioneer of Natural Farming, believed that the most fertile landscapes emerge when humans learn to cooperate with nature rather than control it. His work was not simply an agricultural method, but an invitation to rediscover the intelligence already present in soils, plants, animals, and ecosystems.

Natural Farming begins with a simple observation: life knows how to create life. When the living relationships within the soil are protected and allowed to flourish, fertility, biodiversity, and food production become part of the same cycle of regeneration.



HEALTHY SOIL IS NOT BUILT.
IT IS AWAKENED.

A living soil is more than a growing medium. It is a vibrant community of roots, fungi, bacteria, insects, and countless organisms working together to create fertility. This invisible network continuously transforms minerals, organic matter, water, and sunlight into the conditions that sustain life.

Natural Farming teaches that fertility does not come from outside inputs. It emerges from relationships. Our role is not to manufacture abundance, but to create the conditions that allow it to unfold.



“THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF FARMING IS NOT THE GROWING OF CROPS, BUT THE CULTIVATION AND PERFECTION OF HUMAN BEINGS.” **— MASANOBU FUKUOKA**



Modern agriculture often responds to problems with more interventions: more chemicals, more machinery, more complexity. Natural Farming proposes a different direction. Instead of adding more, it asks what can be removed.

Fukuoka described this journey as a movement toward the centre of a spiral. Every step that restores biodiversity, protects soil life, saves seeds, or reduces disturbance brings us closer to the natural processes that have sustained ecosystems for millions of years.

Seedballs are simple spheres made of clay, seeds, and organic matter. Originally popularised by Fukuoka, they protect seeds until rain and soil conditions are favourable for germination.

More than a planting technique, seedballs are a symbol of collective action. Anyone can make them. Children, farmers, neighbours, students, and citizens can all participate in restoring biodiversity and revegetating degraded landscapes. Every seedball carries a simple message: regeneration begins with participation.



A SEEDBALL IS A SMALL ACT OF CARE WITH THE POTENTIAL TO TRANSFORM ENTIRE LANDSCAPES.



Beneath every healthy landscape lies an extraordinary community. Millions of organisms—roots, fungi, bacteria, insects, and earthworms—cooperate continuously, exchanging nutrients, information, and energy. No single organism creates fertility alone. It emerges from countless relationships working together over time.



Human communities thrive in much the same way. Regeneration is not the result of isolated actions, but of collaboration, trust, and shared responsibility. Farmers, gardeners, researchers, educators, citizens, and local authorities all have a role to play in restoring the health of our soils and ecosystems. Each contribution may seem small, yet together they create conditions for lasting change.

Natural Farming reminds us that caring for the land is also an act of caring for one another. When people gather to save seeds, make seedballs, plant trees, restore habitats, or simply spend time learning from nature, they strengthen the social bonds that make resilient communities possible.

HEALTHY SOILS ARE BUILT THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS. HEALTHY COMMUNITIES ARE TOO.



The regeneration of soil and the regeneration of society are deeply connected. As biodiversity returns to the land, opportunities for cooperation, learning, and stewardship grow within communities. In this way, restoration becomes more than an environmental goal—it becomes a shared cultural journey toward a more connected and hopeful future.

Across Europe and around the world, soils are facing unprecedented pressures. Erosion, biodiversity loss, pollution, and climate change threaten the foundations of our food systems and ecosystems. Yet beneath these challenges lies a powerful opportunity: the possibility of regeneration.

Natural Farming offers a hopeful vision of the future. It invites us to see the soil not as a resource to be exploited, but as a living partner. By working with natural processes rather than against them, we can restore fertility, increase biodiversity, strengthen ecosystem resilience, and produce food in ways that enrich both people and landscapes.





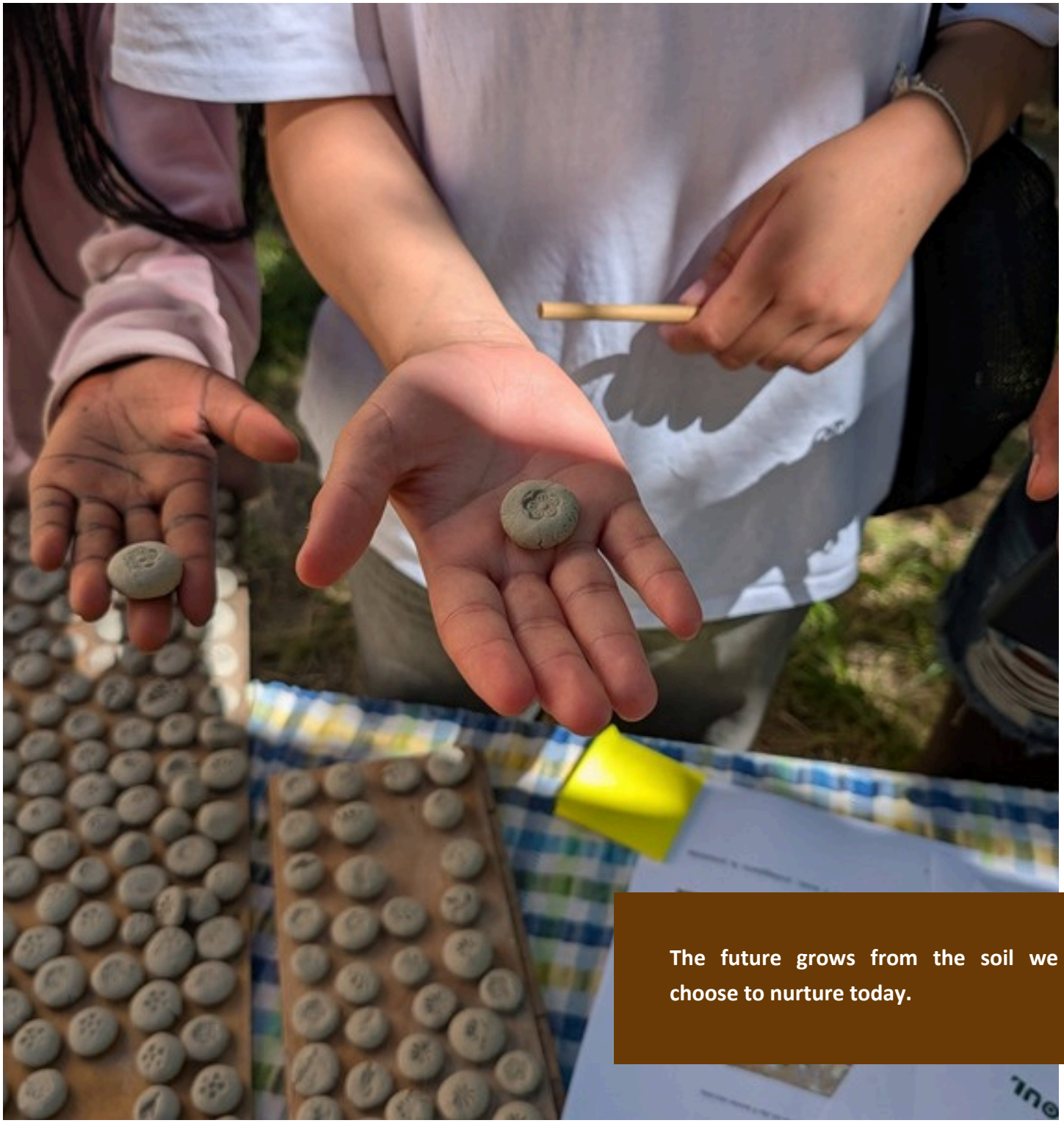




This transformation does not depend on complex technologies or large-scale interventions alone. It begins with a shift in perspective. Every seed saved, every patch of soil protected, every tree planted, every act of observation and care contributes to a larger movement of renewal. Small actions, multiplied across communities and generations, can reshape entire landscapes.

The future envisioned by Fukuoka is not a return to the past. It is a future in which human knowledge and ecological wisdom come together to support thriving ecosystems and thriving communities. A future where agriculture becomes a force for regeneration rather than degradation.

The journey begins beneath our feet. Within every handful of living soil lies the potential for abundance, resilience, and renewal. By awakening that potential, we participate in one of the most profound acts of care: creating fertile ground for generations yet to come.



The future grows from the soil we choose to nurture today.

Seedballs and soil

BY NATURAL FARMING CENTER APS



Seedballs are a simple yet powerful tool for soil regeneration and ecological restoration. Inspired by the pioneering work of Masanobu Fukuoka and strengthened by grassroots movements such as AMMA's Green Friends, seedballs allow us to protect seeds and restore degraded land with minimal intervention and maximum respect for natural processes. Encasing native seeds in small balls of clay and compost shields them from birds, weather, and erosion until the right moment for germination, mimicking the resilience and wisdom of nature itself.



The act of making seedballs goes beyond environmental repair. It is a gesture of hope, responsibility, and connection. As we shape these small spheres with our hands, we reconnect with the living soil beneath our feet and participate in the cycles that sustain life—nourishing the earth, supporting biodiversity, and rekindling our sense of belonging within nature's web. This creative, community-based practice is both science and art: a bridge between ecological knowledge and the imagination, between individual action and collective regeneration.

By spreading seedballs, we invite seeds to find their own path to growth. In doing so, we not only help restore soils and landscapes but also nurture a culture of care, participation, and respect for the living world.



About the land

The land must be legally available to the promoters (private property, loan for use, etc.) for at least five years following the first throwing of the seed balls. Its size should preferably not be too large — between 1,000 and 5,000 m² — to make care and management easier.



About the seeds

Seeds may be collected from local forests or through home collection of natural seeds. Alternatively, organic seeds from certified nurseries may be purchased. In this case, seeds intended for animal forage may also be bought instead of those sold specifically as green manure, since they cost less and work just as well. It is preferable not to use fruit and legume seeds purchased from supermarkets; however, in the absence of alternatives, these may also be used (preferably organic).



SEEDS SHOULD ALWAYS BE FROM NATIVE TREES AND SHRUBS TYPICAL OF THE AREA, ENSURING A MIX WITH A WIDE VARIETY OF PLANTS. AVOID SEEDS OF PINE, TREE OF HEAVEN (AILANTHUS), BLACK LOCUST (ROBINIA), AND EUCALYPTUS.



Families of seeds

- Grass family: rye, barley, wheat, sorghum, millet, emmer, any local grains from your region...

- Nitrogen fixing family: alfa alfa, clover (in all its variants), vetch, honeysuckle, sainfoin, bird's-foot trefoil...

- Brassica family: mustard, radish, horse radish, daikon, rocket, oilseed rape…

Dosage

SEEDS AND CLAY SHOULD BE MIXED IN A VOLUME RATIO OF 1:30 (IF USING DUG OR BLOCK CLAY) OR 1:10 (IF USING POWDERED CLAY). THEREFORE, FOR EACH BOWL OF SEEDS, USE ABOUT 30 BOWLS OF CLAY (10 IF POWDERED CLAY IS USED). FOR A REFORESTATION DAY, IT IS RECOMMENDED TO OBTAIN APPROXIMATELY 1 KG OF CLAY PER PARTICIPANT.





Autumn sowing

One part consisting of a mix of fruit tree seeds and other trees and shrubs (acacia, ornamental and medicinal plants from the area), plus three parts of a green manure seed mix composed of legumes (chickpeas, peas, broad beans, lentils, alfalfa in mild climates, clover, etc.), herbaceous plants that survive winter (arugula, borage), cereals (sesame, barley, rye, spelt), and tubers (fodder beet, daikon).

Spring sowing

A green manure mix composed of vetch, clover, alfalfa, greater scabious, bird's-foot trefoil, summer vegetables, barley, rye, spelt, buckwheat, beans, flowers, fodder beet, and daikon.

Procedure



1 Gradually moisten the clay with a small amount of water until it becomes moldable. Then add the small seeds and finely chopped straw. Spread the mixture onto a sheet and knead it with your feet, giving that fertile preparation all the energy you have.





2 Shape the clay by hand into balls approximately the size of hazelnuts. Seeds larger than a hazelnut shell (e.g., many tree seeds) should be kneaded separately and shaped into clay cylinders approximately twice the size of the seeds rather than balls. It is important that all seeds, large and small, are completely covered with clay.





3 Randomly throw the balls onto the portion of land to be revegetated. If desired, cylinders containing tree seeds may be placed in specific spots, marking these points with a cane to avoid cutting young trees during mowing of spontaneous vegetation.





4 Cover the land with about 5 cm of organic material, preferably hay (ideally composed of various plant species), possibly mixed with straw. If there are very tall spontaneous grasses, they should be laid down—bent under the mulch. The decomposition of the mulch will help nourish the soil.



5 Celebrate the sowing by sharing food, conversation, music, songs, and dances





Note: Steps 3 and 4 may be reversed. In that case, the balls will be thrown onto the mulch already laid out.

Timing

Just before the beginning of the autumn rainy season — therefore between September and November depending on the climate. Tree seed balls (and cylinders) only need to be thrown once a year, as they will germinate after winter. Seed balls containing green manure plants, however, may be thrown at up to three different times during the same period (e.g., September, October, and November) if there is uncertainty about the best sowing time in that area.



Care and management

It often happens that after throwing the seed balls and mulching the land, one asks: “Now what should I do?” Natural farming turns the question around and transforms it into: “What can I avoid doing?”

The perspective of natural farming is precisely to recreate the conditions that centuries of human intervention have taken away from nature, allowing it to regenerate on its own. This involves gradually abandoning human actions in favor of the natural balance of the ecosystem. The first throwing of seed balls should be considered the first step in the wonderful journey toward “non-doing.”

After the throwing, one only needs to wait for rain for a few days, avoiding stepping on the sowed area. About two weeks after rainfall, the seeds inside the balls will begin to germinate, and it will even be possible to walk on the sprouts without damaging them, as they will be strong enough to recover.

At this point, mowing tall spontaneous grasses—if present—can be done to give growth priority to the sprouts by exposing them to more sunlight.

Both the throwing of seed balls and mowing should be repeated in the same way in the following years. Eventually, the land will present such a variety of species that no further intervention will be necessary, as the ecosystem will be able to regenerate itself.

Soil as narrative

BY FOCO



Soil is often described through scientific language: fertility, productivity, erosion, nutrients, carbon capture. While these perspectives are important, they are not neutral. The way societies speak about soil also shapes how territories are governed, how landscapes are transformed, and how communities relate to the ground beneath them.

For centuries, dominant political and economic systems have framed soil as a resource to be extracted, controlled, measured, and optimized. Colonial expansion, plantation agriculture, industrial farming, and contemporary forms of green capitalism have all depended on narratives that separate *humans* from *ecosystems.* and reduce land to property or productivity. But soil must be undertstood beyond the mere material realm.

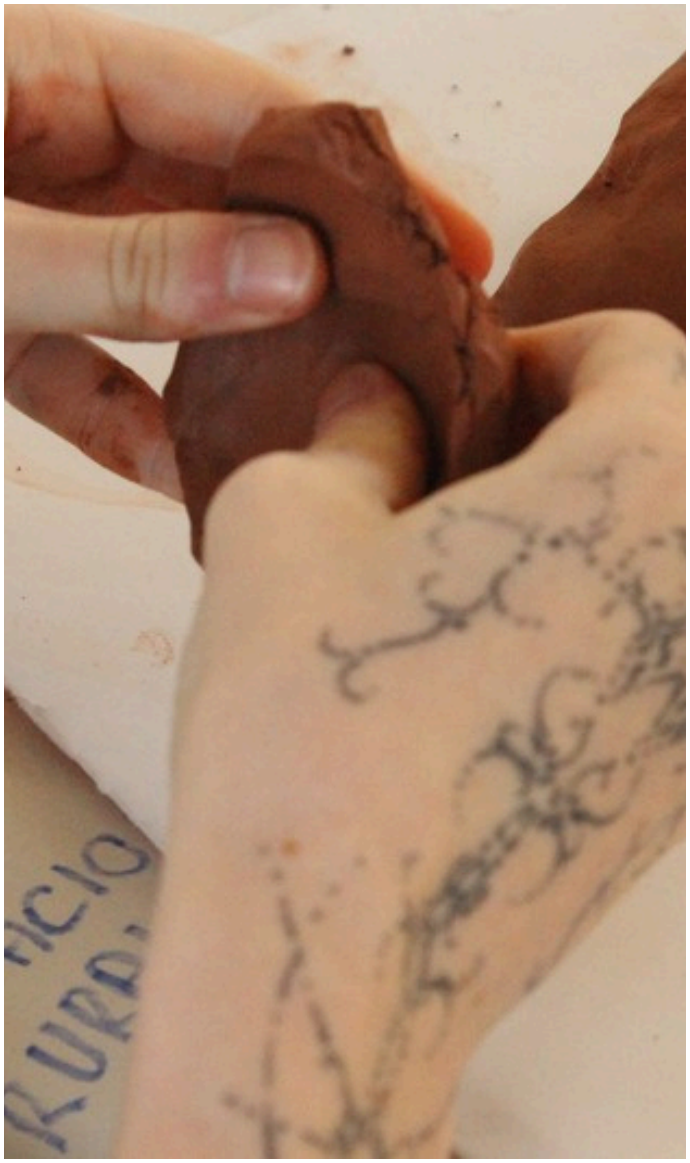
This chapter explores how we narrate soil and ecological practices beyond extractivist, colonial, and saviourist frameworks. Rather than proposing communication as “branding” or “environmental marketing”, we approach storytelling as a form of ecological responsibility.

The narratives we create matter because they shape who and what is seen, who is erased, and who is allowed to speak. How do we decide which futures become imaginable?





***YOU MUST LOVE THE CLAY IN YOUR HANDS, YOU MUST LOVE ITS SAND TO THE POINT OF MADNESS, AND IF YOU DON'T, DON'T EVEN TRY, FOR IT WILL BE IN VAIN. ONLY LOVE ILLUMINATES WHAT ENDURES, ONLY LOVE TRANSFORMS CLAY INTO A MIRACLE* – SILVIO RODRÍGUEZ**







Modern industrial societies often describe soil through the language of efficiency and production. Agricultural land becomes “yield,” territory becomes “resource,” and ecosystems become “services.” In these frameworks, soil is treated as passive matter waiting to be managed. Ecofeminist philosophers, political ecologists and environmental humanities scholars have shown that this understanding is deeply connected to colonial and capitalist histories. Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies or Yayo Herrero have explored those intrincate connections between patriarchy, capital, colonization and soil exploitation. Plantation agriculture, land enclosure, extractive economies, and settler colonial projects transformed living ecosystems into commodities through both material violence and storytelling.

Soil is, therefore, materially marked by centuries of colonial capitalism, patriarchy, slavery, and dispossession. Soil degradation is then not simply environmental decline; it is also the consequence of political systems that separate extraction from responsibility.
The concept of "soil extractivism" describes how contemporary agricultural systems erase multispecies relations and normalize destruction through institutional frameworks. In this model, soil becomes valuable only insofar as it can produce economic output.

These narratives continue today, even within supposedly sustainable transitions. Green technologies, carbon offsetting, and market-driven sustainability initiatives often reproduce forms of "green extractivism" that maintain unequal power relations while appearing environmentally progressive.



***"NEITHER THE LAND NOR WOMEN ARE TERRITORY TO BE CONQUERED" (NI LA TIERRA NI LAS MUJERES SON TERRITORIO DE CONQUISTA)* – ZAPATIST SAYING**



When land is represented as empty, degraded, or underused, intervention becomes morally justified.

Colonial agriculture historically relied on this logic, portraying territories as spaces waiting to be improved by external expertise.



Settler “organic farming” narratives in the West Bank mobilize manufactured ideas of authenticity, roots, and care for the soil while simultaneously masking territorial dispossession. Ecological language becomes a tool for legitimizing occupation. Similarly, settler descendants in Argentina narrate “finding the soil” and becoming the “first onsite,” naturalizing Indigenous displacement through stories of labour, sacrifice, and belonging. This reflects a narrative of “deserving” the soil over indigenous populations.



Every landscape contains traces of what has happened there: cultivation, extraction, migration, contamination, resistance, abandonment, regeneration. Soil accumulates histories. Environmental scholars increasingly describe soil as archive, a living material that stores ecological and social memory. This understanding transforms the way we approach environmental storytelling. Instead of presenting landscapes as neutral scenery, we begin to recognize that territories contain layered histories that shape present ecological realities.

In many communities, cultivating land becomes inseparable from repairing relationships fragmented by colonialism, racism, industrialization, and displacement.

This perspective is especially important because mainstream environmental communication often erases these histories. Climate narratives frequently universalize responsibility through concepts like “humanity” or “the Anthropocene,” obscuring the unequal structures that produce ecological crisis.





“Humans are the problem” discourse can reproduce colonial logics, by treating environmental destruction as a collective human problem rather than acknowledging specific responsibilities linked to empire, extraction, and racial capitalism.

Decolonial environmental thinkers instead insist that ecological crisis cannot be separated from histories of colonization and inequality.

Anticolonial thinkers such as Amílcar Cabral, Aimé Césaire, Walter Rodney, or Eric Williams show how soil degradation has long been connected to racial capitalism and imperial exploitation. For these thinkers, environmental care was never only about conservation. It was also about liberation. Cabral’s writings on land and agriculture linked resistance to colonial domination with ethical relationships to soil and collective survival.

To narrate soil ethically therefore requires acknowledging both damage and resistance, it means recognizing that environmental repair is inseparable from social justice.





***"ECOLOGY WITHOUT CLASS STRUGGLE IS JUST GARDENING."* – CHICO MENDES**







Environmental storytelling often reproduces subtle forms of hierarchy. Many contemporary sustainability campaigns rely on images of rescue, intervention, expertise, and transformation. Communities are portrayed as passive, recipients of external solutions. Landscapes are represented as degraded spaces waiting to be fixed. These narratives may appear positive, but they frequently reproduce colonial relationships between those who "save" and those who are "saved."

Within environmental communication, this logic can take many forms, like presenting communities as voiceless victims; aestheticizing poverty or environmental damage; simplifying complex ecological realities into heroic success stories; treating local territories as visual backdrops for institutional legitimacy; or privileging Northern expertise over situated knowledge.

Decolonial scholars have increasingly challenged these forms of environmental communication.

We must center voices from the Global South not as symbolic examples, but as epistemic sources capable of generating alternative planetary futures. We must problematize the dominant figure of the white, propertied man who is imagined as separate from nature and entitled to control land.



NARRATIVES OF ECOLOGICAL CARE CANNOT SIMPLY REPRODUCE THE SAME HIERARCHIES UNDER GREENER LANGUAGE.



An anti-extractivist approach to storytelling requires humility. It requires understanding communication not as representation from above, but as participation, listening, and shared process. This also changes visual practices.



Instead of prioritizing spectacular imagery or dramatic before-and-after transformations, ecological storytelling can focus on things like gestures of care, collective practices, textures and processes, conversations, uncertainty and experimentation, ordinary relationships with land...

The goal is not to produce perfect environmental narratives, is to cultivate more honest and situated ones. For instance, indigenous and collective ecological practices often involve forms of knowledge grounded in observation, reciprocity, seasonality, memory, and long-term relationships with territory.

If extractivist storytelling is based on extraction of images, stories, emotions, and territories, anti-extractivist communication begins with listening. Several decolonial and environmental scholars describe the importance of “deep listening” as an ethical and methodological practice. It means slowing down enough to recognize that knowledge already exists within communities, ecosystems, and everyday practices. This perspective challenges the idea that environmental expertise only belongs to institutions, researchers, or technical professionals.



Storytelling should not flatten complexity into simple educational messages. Ecological narratives can leave space for contradiction, ambiguity, silence, and unfinished processes.







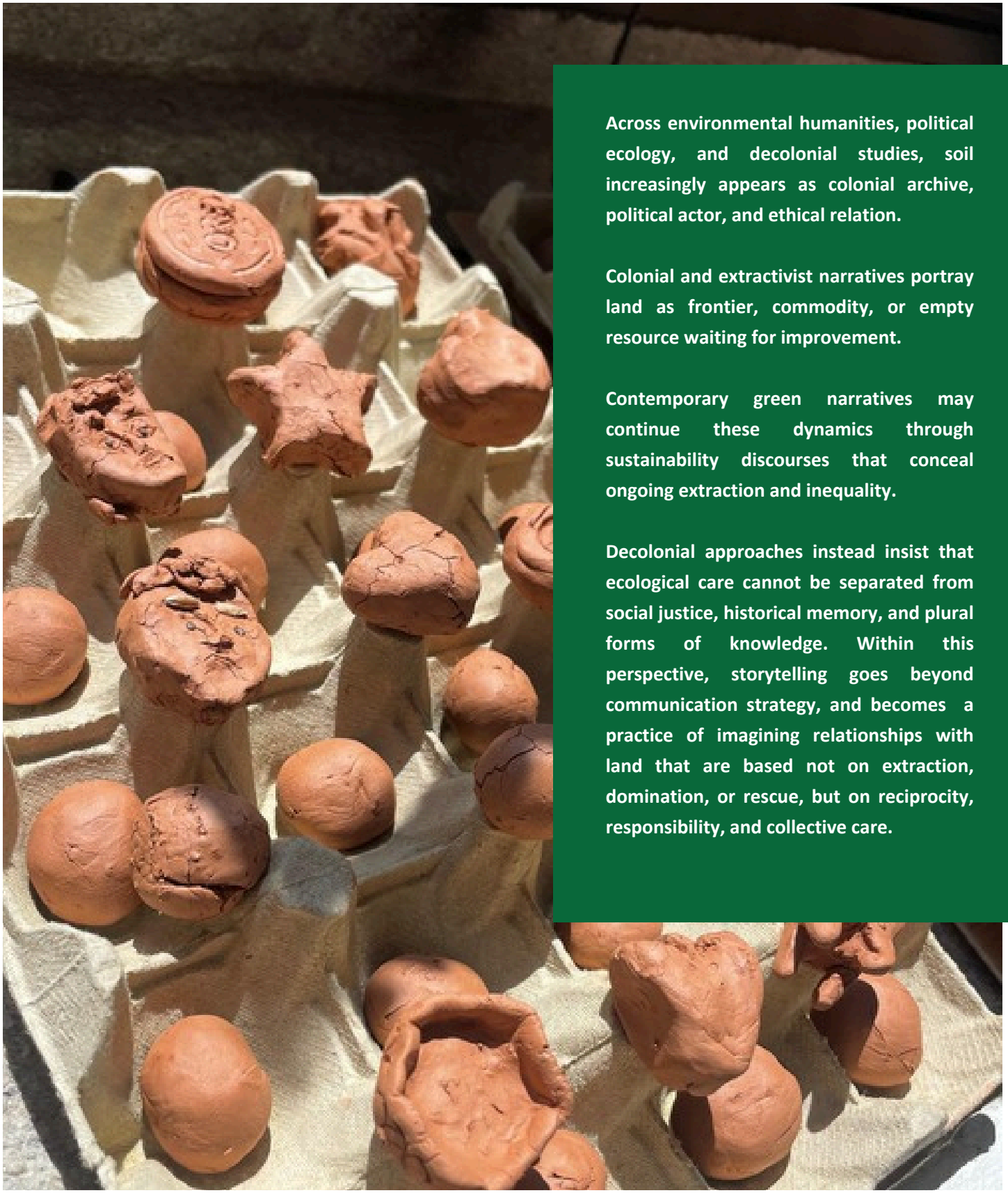




Listening also means recognizing that not all relationships with land are based on closeness or harmony. Dominant environmental narratives often rely on universal solutions, standardized metrics, and technological optimism. Decolonial scholars argue that these frameworks frequently reproduce Northern worldviews while marginalizing other ways of understanding ecological life.

This means moving beyond simplified “healthy soil” narratives that ignore political and historical realities.
Plural ecological storytelling recognizes that there is no single correct narrative about land. Different communities relate to soil through spirituality, agriculture, memory, migration, labour, ritual, grief, resistance, contamination, or survival. Environmental communication should therefore create space for multiple epistemologies and lived experiences. Rather than speaking for communities, storytelling can become a platform for coexistence between perspectives.

This approach also resists the tendency to aestheticize sustainability. Too often, green communication transforms ecological crisis into clean visual branding detached from real social and material conditions. An anti-extractivist narrative practice instead embraces imperfection, situated knowledge, and lived contradiction, values process over spectacle.



Across environmental humanities, political ecology, and decolonial studies, soil increasingly appears as colonial archive, political actor, and ethical relation.

Colonial and extractivist narratives portray land as frontier, commodity, or empty resource waiting for improvement.

Contemporary green narratives may continue these dynamics through sustainability discourses that conceal ongoing extraction and inequality.

Decolonial approaches instead insist that ecological care cannot be separated from social justice, historical memory, and plural forms of knowledge. Within this perspective, storytelling goes beyond communication strategy, and becomes a practice of imagining relationships with land that are based not on extraction, domination, or rescue, but on reciprocity, responsibility, and collective care.

Soil as art

BY ARTE.M



Before working with the soil itself, we wanted participants to slow down, reconnect with the landscape, and experience the process in a more holistic and sensory way.

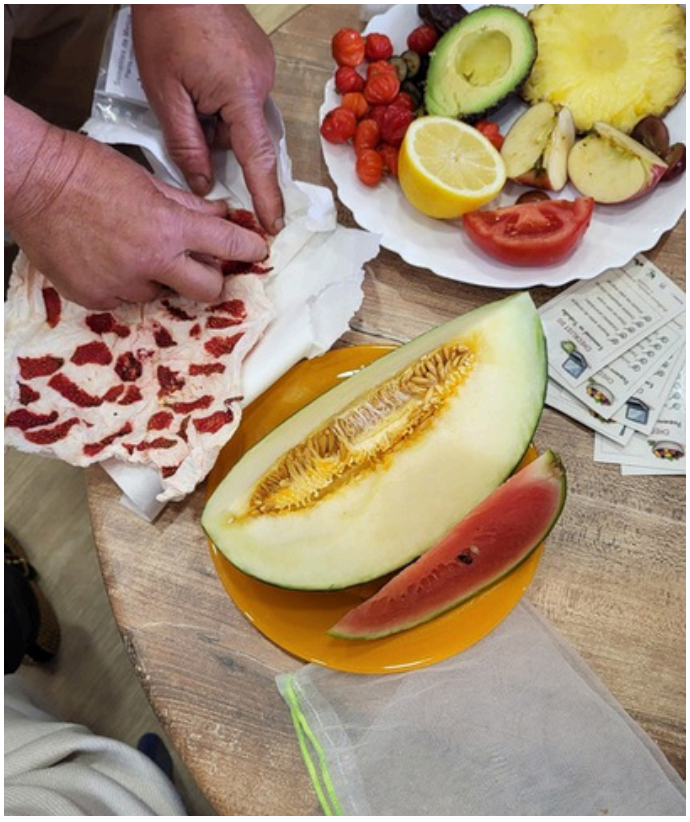
ART AS SLOW PRACTICE: SEEDS & SOIL

Together with seniors from community centres and children, we created a series of community workshops combining natural seed harvesting, vegan food practices, meditative music.

collective creativity, and temporary artistic interventions inspired by Madeira's environment. Participants learned how to collect and preserve seeds from fruits and vegetables, prepared plant-based food together, created seed balls, and transformed shared spaces into small living environments for reflection, creativity, and ecological awareness.

Blending sustainability with artistic practice, the workshops became not only educational activities, but also moments of intergenerational exchange







EVEN SIMPLE ACTIONS — LIKE LEARNING HOW TO EXTRACT SEEDS FROM A TOMATO — BECAME PART OF A LARGER REFLECTION ON SUSTAINABILITY, PATIENCE, AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PEOPLE, FOOD, AND THE EARTH.





SEED BALLS AS ARTISTIC PRACTICE







Inside the gallery space, we transformed the simple act of creating seed balls into a collective artistic and ecological ritual.

Working with soil, clay, seeds, touch, and repetition, participants slowly shaped small spheres filled with the potential for future growth. What may first appear as a simple ecological activity gradually became something more reflective and symbolic — an invitation to think about care, patience, regeneration, and the invisible cycles connecting people with the environment around them.

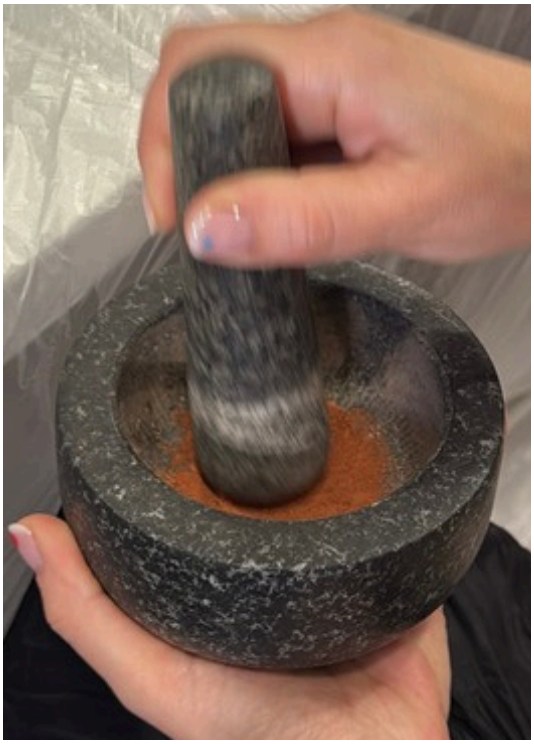
By bringing seed ball making into the context of an art gallery, we wanted to challenge the idea that sustainability belongs only to environmental activism or agriculture. Instead, the process became part of a sensory and participatory artistic experience, where ecological awareness emerged through collective action, material contact, conversation, and shared presence.

The workshops welcomed children, seniors, local communities, artists, and visitors into the same creative process, allowing the gallery to temporarily function not only as an exhibition space, but also as a living environment for exchange, slowness, and collaborative ecological imagination.

Each seed ball carried a small gesture of future possibility — something temporary in the hand, but potentially lasting within the landscape.







PAINTING WITH THE LANDSCAPE

In another series of workshops, participants explored drawing and painting using natural pigments extracted directly from Madeira's landscapes — soil, volcanic stones, sand, plants, ashes, and other organic materials collected across the island.

Rather than using industrial paints, the process invited participants to search, crush, mix, and experiment with colours hidden within the natural environment itself. Each pigment carried traces of place, texture, and geological memory, transforming the act of painting into a deeper sensory dialogue with the island.



THE WORKSHOPS ENCOURAGED SLOW OBSERVATION AND MATERIAL AWARENESS, ALLOWING PARTICIPANTS TO REDISCOVER NATURE NOT ONLY AS SCENERY, BUT ALSO AS A SOURCE OF ARTISTIC LANGUAGE AND CREATIVE EXPRESSION.

Through touch, experimentation, and collective creation, the activities became a reflection on sustainability, local materials, and the possibility of creating art with what already exists around us.

BOTANICAL DYEING & FLORAL PIGMENTS

Another part of the project explored the practice of botanical dyeing through workshops focused on natural pigments extracted from flowers, plants, leaves, and organic materials collected across Madeira.

Participants were introduced to the slow and experimental process of discovering colour hidden inside local vegetation — learning how different flowers, roots, and plants release unexpected tones through boiling, soaking, crushing, and natural extraction methods.





The workshops also explored traditional natural fixing techniques, using ingredients such as vinegar, salt, and other organic mordants to help colours bind to fabric and paper. Rather than aiming for industrial precision, the process embraced unpredictability, subtle variations, and the beauty of imperfect natural colour.

By working only with locally found botanical materials, participants began to see Madeira's landscape differently — not only as scenery, but as a living palette capable of carrying memory, seasonality, and ecological knowledge through artistic practice.

The workshops became both creative and sensory experiences, encouraging slower ways of making, observing, and reconnecting with the rhythms of nature through colour, touch, and experimentation.







DRAWING WITH SAND AND SOIL







Working with sand and soil became one of the most tactile and meditative parts of the project.

Before beginning the creative process, participants were invited to slow down, observe textures, touch materials collected from different parts of Madeira, and experience the physical presence of the landscape through their hands. The workshops focused not only on the final image, but on the sensory journey behind its creation.

Using sand, volcanic soil, earth pigments, stones, and natural particles gathered across the island, participants created temporary drawings and abstract compositions directly connected to the colours and textures of Madeira itself.

The process encouraged experimentation, silence, repetition, and collective reflection. Unlike permanent artworks, many of the creations remained intentionally fragile and temporary — echoing natural cycles of erosion, transformation, and impermanence.

More than drawing workshops, the sessions became holistic artistic practices where touch, movement, material exploration, and ecological awareness merged into a shared experience of connection with the earth and with one another.







ECOLOGY IN ACTION: FROM BEACH CLEAN-UP TO ART INSTALLATION

The process began outside the gallery walls.

Participants first joined collective environmental actions, including beach clean-ups and ecological walks across Madeira, where local communities, children, artists, and volunteers gathered discarded materials carried by the ocean and left within the landscape — fragments of plastic, ropes, fishing materials, glass, worn textures, and unexpected objects shaped by time and water.

Rather than seeing these materials only as waste, the project invited participants to look at them differently: as traces of human presence, consumption, environmental impact, and possible transformation.



Back inside the art space, the collected objects became part of a series of immersive artistic installations exploring ecology not as an abstract concept, but as something physical, emotional, and directly connected to everyday life.

The installations combined recycled materials with soil works, natural pigments, sand drawings, seed balls, sound, light, and temporary sculptural forms, transforming the gallery into a sensory environment shaped by both nature and human intervention



By turning ecological action into collective artistic practice, the project encouraged participants to rethink their relationship with waste, landscape, and sustainability — showing how creative processes can become tools for reflection, awareness, and community dialogue.

COLLECTIVE INSTALLATIONS: SEEDS AS FUTURE LANDSCAPES



One of the final stages of the project became the creation of collaborative art installations built from the seed balls produced during previous workshops and ecological activities.

Artists, participants, children, seniors, and local communities contributed to the process, transforming hundreds of handmade seed balls into temporary sculptural environments and immersive spatial interventions inside the gallery space.

The installations combined organic forms, soil-based materials, botanical elements, recycled objects collected during environmental actions, and collaborative artistic contributions from different creators involved in the project.



Rather than presenting sustainability only through information, the installations invited visitors to physically move through spaces shaped by ideas of regeneration, fragility, growth, and collective ecological imagination.

Each seed ball carried a double meaning — both an artistic object and a potential future plant — allowing the installations to exist between art practice, environmental action, and symbolic gesture.

The collaborative nature of the process was central to the project. Different artistic approaches, materials, and perspectives merged into one shared environment, reflecting the idea that ecological awareness is not created individually, but collectively, through participation, care, and shared creative experience.





COMPOST AS COLLECTIVE PRACTICE

As part of the project, we wanted to move beyond the gallery space and reconnect artistic practice with direct physical experience of the landscape.

Together with children, seniors, and local communities, we travelled to Parque Ecológico do Funchal, where participants collectively created a large compost structure that will remain in the park as a long-term ecological intervention and living installation.

The process itself became deeply symbolic. Through touching soil, carrying organic materials, building layers together, and physically working with the earth, participants experienced a slower and more grounded form of interaction — something increasingly rare in contemporary urban life.

For many children, it became not only an environmental activity, but also an introduction to a different relationship with nature: learning how to listen to the rhythms of the earth, understand transformation, and see care for the environment as something tangible and shared.



The compost structure was approached not simply as a technical ecological task, but as a collective gesture of regeneration, connection, and future-oriented thinking — where art, sustainability, education, and community action naturally merged together through touch, participation, and shared responsibility.



Shared Soil

BY ALL PARTNERS

SOILSOUL brought together three organisations from Italy, Portugal, and Spain, each approaching soil from a different but complementary perspective: natural farming, artistic practice, and critical communication. Throughout the project, these perspectives became part of a shared exploration of how ecological awareness can grow through participation, creativity, and care.

Working with soil is more than an environmental activity: making seed balls, creating with natural materials, experimenting with pigments, building compost, documenting experiences, and reflecting on the stories we tell about land shows us that regeneration is both ecological and social. Healthy soil depends on relationships; and so do healthy communities.

The project also reminded us that there is no single way to connect with the land. Soil can be understood through science, farming, art, memory, culture, lived experience... Bringing these perspectives together allows us to question extractive ways of relating to nature and to imagine more reciprocal and participatory ones.

The actions gathered in this guide invite everyone to adapt, experiment, create, and share. Every small act of care can become part of a larger process of regeneration.

The soil is shared... and so is the responsibility to care for it.

About Natural Farming Center APS



Natural Farming Center APS is a non-profit association inspired by the philosophy of Masanobu Fukuoka and dedicated to promoting Natural Farming both as a practical agricultural method and as a path of inner awareness. By combining ecological practices with educational and social initiatives, the Center contributes to environmental regeneration, youth empowerment, and international cooperation.

NFC APS TEAM



Kutluhan Özdemir – President & Legal Representative

Master's degree in Mathematics

Inspired by Masanobu Fukuoka's The One-Straw Revolution, he dedicated himself to Natural Farming, organizing workshops and spreading the vision of farming in harmony with nature and oneself.
In 2020, he founded the Natural Farming Center Association. He has organized international workshops, led reforestation projects, developed food sovereignty initiatives in Africa, and built a strong network across Europe, Japan, Africa, India, and the Americas to make Natural Farming training accessible to as many people as possible. In Italy, he runs a natural farm that also hosts youth and social inclusion projects. Kutluhan is also author of the books: L'agricoltura naturale e l'arte del non fare (Terra Nuova Edizioni), La lezione della Rugiada (Terra Nuova Edizioni) and Natural farming en de kunst van het nietsdoen (Samsara Uitgeverij B.V.)



Manuela Facchini – Project Coordinator & Contact Person

M.Sc. in Stochastics and Financial Mathematics

After working in the renewable energy sector, Manuela Facchini dedicated herself to natural farming and to developing social projects for young people in vulnerable situations. She is co-founder of Natural Farming Center APS, where she combines her passion for sustainability with a strong commitment to community building and youth empowerment.
Over the years, through a variety of initiatives, she has acquired solid expertise in project coordination and management, the welcoming and coordination of volunteers and visitors, the organization of international workshops, and the automatization of workflows for the association's operational management.



Luca Palazzo – Community & Development Engagement Lead

Master's degree in law

Luca Palazzo has more than 25 years of professional experience, 15 of which in Change and Project Management across HR, Community Building, Child Protection, Livelihood, IDPs, Women Empowerment, Cultural and Tourism initiatives, Art, Business Process Improvement, Administration, M&E, Recruitment, Logistics, ICT, Biodiversity, Permaculture, and Natural Farming. He has managed projects for UNGSC, UN Peacekeeping and Political Missions, social associations, and private firms, collaborating with donors, institutions, stakeholders, beneficiaries, and military forces.

He holds a Master's degree in Law, the Attorney-at-law qualification, post-diploma courses in European Law & Economics and International Marketing & Foreign Trade, a short Master in European Design, and trainings in Theory of Change, Permaculture, Natural Farming, Communication, Business Analysis, Web Development, and BPM.

Luca supports international organizations in process, HR, and ICT optimization and helps communities implement bottom-up cultural, social, and development initiatives. He can lead and coordinate projects end-to-end, from needs assessment to monitoring and dissemination, combining creativity, ethics, diplomacy, and results-oriented problem-solving.



WWW.NATURALFARMSHIZEN.ORG

About FOCO

We are an association focused on the use of culture for social transformation. We work for and from Baixo Miño (we act locally), towards the rest of the world (we think globally).

We use theatrical and creative methodologies and non-formal education tools to facilitate access to culture, participation and training for the youth and the neighborhood of the region. All our projects are designed to promote active learning, reflection and community connections.

We seek to promote social inclusion, creativity, the arts, cultural exchange, equality, cultural rights, active citizenship, respect for diversity and the values of social justice. We cooperate with European entities and the rest of the Spanish State to develop projects with real local impact, always prioritizing the quality, relevance, usefulness and dynamism of the projects.



FOCO TEAM



María González Flores

Project Officer

Facilitator, researcher, teacher and activist. With experience as a researcher at the intersections between activism and academia, María is committed to the production of politically situated and ethically committed knowledge. She has lived in countries such as Iran, Egypt, Palestine and Lebanon, where she has combined academic research with personal and grassroots engagement with different organizations.

As a facilitator, she has worked in non-formal education contexts, focusing on participatory methodologies, social justice and critical pedagogies. Her practice is deeply informed by feminist, decolonial and subaltern perspectives, which she integrates as central elements of her praxis.



Juan Escalona Corral

Pedagogical and artistic coordinator

Juan has extensive experience in the field of non-formal education. He started working as a theatre facilitator in 2012 and in 2015 he started working internationally in the non-profit sector. He has led groups of young people and youth workers in more than 15 mobility projects in Spain, Ireland, Greece and Germany, coordinated European volunteers from 2017 to 2019 and has been involved as a trainer, researcher, technician and coordinator in 10 KA2 projects.

He has specific training and experience in the fields of culture and the arts, gender diversity and identity, human rights education, environmental education, youth, participation, inclusion, skills development and entrepreneurship. In addition, he is certified in environmental program design and has a degree in direction and dramaturgy from ESAD in Galicia.



Gonzalo Martínez Ramiro

Project Coordinator and Researcher

Academically, Gonzalo holds a degree in History specializing in contemporary history, democratic institutions, historical and collective memory, and gender. He also has great coordination and management skills and experience. He worked in general administration in the private sector before starting his career in the field of non-formal education, where he collaborated in the development of mobility and innovation projects within the Erasmus+ program since 2018, including his volunteer stay in Ireland as part of the ESC program.

He is currently in charge of managing the European projects that FOCO coordinates or participates in, in addition to managing the day-to-day management of the organization and contact and communication with partner entities.



WWW.FOCOEUROPA.COM

About ARTE.M

ARTE.M – Cultural and Artistic Association is a non-profit organisation based on Madeira Island, Portugal, working at the intersection of art, education and sustainability. Since 2018, we have developed international initiatives that use creativity as a practical tool for learning, wellbeing and environmental awareness. In 2023, we opened International ARTHub Madeira — a collaborative space for artists, educators and cultural innovators.

Today, ARTE.M coordinates and participates in numerous EU projects exploring sustainable art practices, contemporary craft, environmental education, mental wellbeing and community engagement. Our work has received several Erasmus+ Best Practice Awards, reflecting our commitment to innovative, high-quality non-formal education through art.

We believe creativity is not only a form of expression but also a practical tool for building stronger communities and more sustainable ways of living.



ARTE.M TEAM



Svetlana Azernikova (Yurzditskaya)

Founder & President

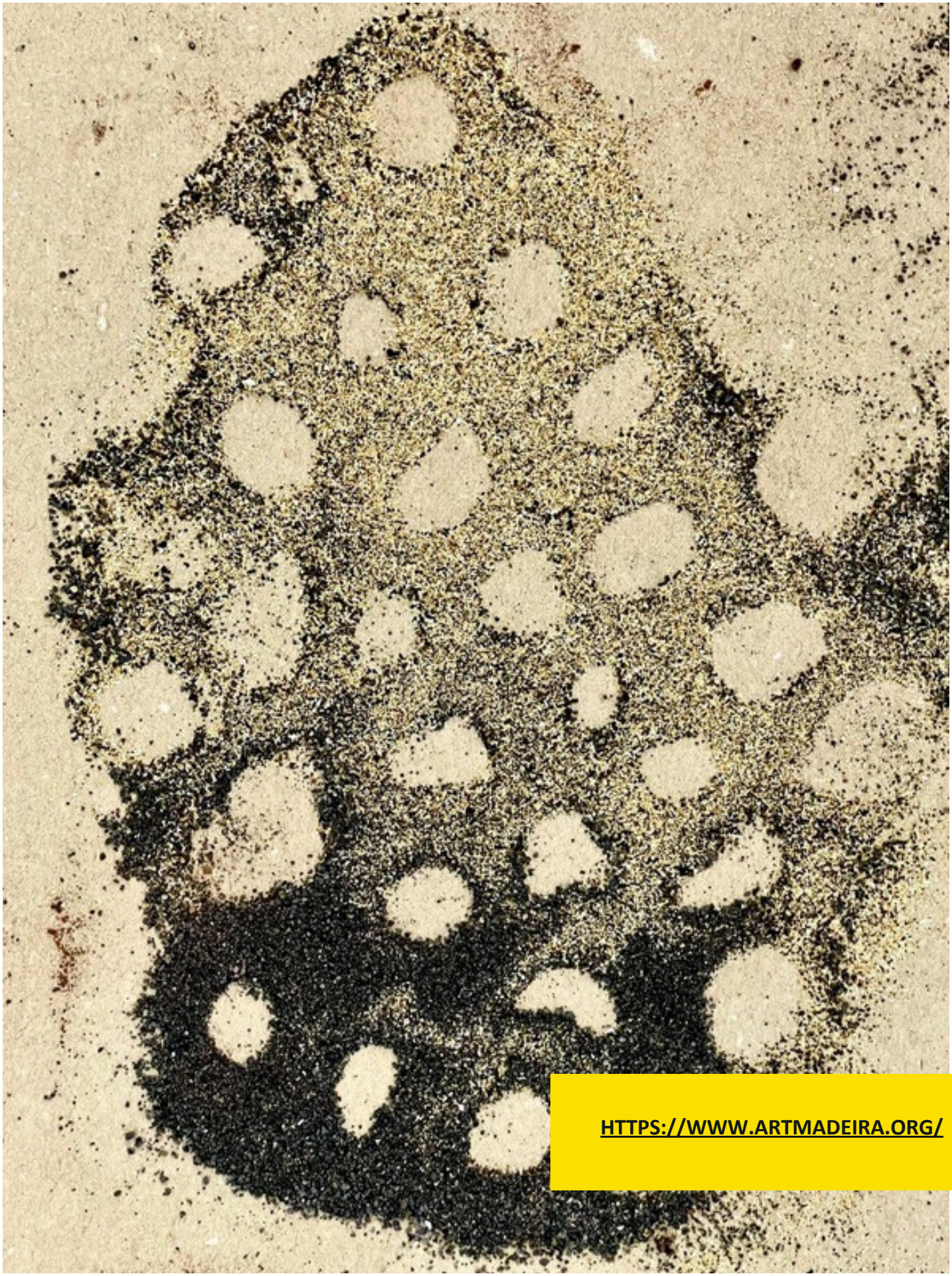
Art curator, cultural manager and Erasmus+ project designer with over 15 years of experience in journalism, public relations and cultural management. As President of ARTE.M Cultural and Artistic Association is and Art Director of Art Center Caravel, she develops international projects connecting art, sustainability, community engagement and non-formal education. She has curated more than 50 international art exhibitions and coordinated dozens of EU initiatives.



Natalia Delibazoglo

Clinical Psychologist, Craft Facilitator & Art Therapy Trainer

Certified Gestalt therapist, craft facilitator and experienced Erasmus+ trainer specialising in art therapy, creative craft practices, mental wellbeing and non-formal education. Natalia has facilitated more than 20 international training courses and workshops, combining psychology, arts and hands-on craft techniques to support resilience, self-expression, wellbeing and personal development.



HTTPS://WWW.ARTMADEIRA.ORG/

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SOILSOUL