

General Assembly Documents

Joint Paper – EUROPARC and Eurosite

22nd September 2011



Introduction

The purpose of this joint paper is to provide feedback about the work of the Joint Committee established and mandated in 2010 by both organisations to develop collaboration between Eurosite and EUROPARC. The Joint Committee identified that there are basically two options:

1. To continue collaboration as presently, on an informal, but more product defined and outcome oriented basis;
2. To build on collaboration and seek to create one organisation.

In preparation for the general assemblies of both organisations in September 2011, these options were discussed at the joint meeting of the EUROPARC Council and the Eurosite Board in Schwerin, on 16th June. Given that growing collaboration is a primary goal, both the Eurosite Board and EUROPARC Council jointly agreed that it would clearly be more efficient and in the best interests of both Eurosite and EUROPARC members to form one network organisation, which could represent the interests and needs of a combined membership, and seek to achieve this by 2013. Therefore, subject to the views of members of both networks, the joint recommendation of the Eurosite Board and the EUROPARC Council is to approve option 2.

Background

In September 2010, at the AGM of Eurosite and General Assembly of EUROPARC, members of both organisations mandated the establishment of a Joint Committee. The remit of the Joint Committee was to develop initial steps involved in growing collaboration between the two networks: this included consideration of how joint working is functioning currently, possible future direction and research into what options could better meet the needs of members of both networks. The main results of the Joint Committee's findings are available on the EUROPARC website

1. Discussion document for meeting of Joint Committee, 1 April 2011 : <http://www.europarc.org/uploaded/documents/754.pdf>
2. Draft for proposed Joint Communication: <http://www.europarc.org/uploaded/documents/755.pdf>
3. Summary note of the Eurosite & EUROPARC Joint Committee 2nd meeting: 1 April 2011, Den Bosch: <http://www.europarc.org/uploaded/documents/756.pdf>
4. Draft Discussion Paper for 16th June 2011: <http://www.europarc.org/uploaded/documents/757.pdf>

Analysis of the work of Eurosite and EUROPARC reveals that the activities of both organisations are remarkably similar. Eurosite and EUROPARC both have their own identities, cultures and rich, historical legacies of delivering actions for Europe's nature. Each network has and currently continues to pursue its own specialisms and areas of priority determined by members: this is a legally binding obligation, determined by the existing statutes of each network. However, Europe's nature and the landscape of organisations with management responsibilities for nature conservation are changing: at EU level, the policy framework within which members work is expected to alter significantly in the coming years in respect of, for example, Natura 2000, CAP, Fisheries and Marine. Furthermore, key EU funding mechanisms

are currently being redefined, in particular LIFE, whilst national structures and civic society are constantly developing. Within the memberships of both networks, there are also significant changes either currently taking place or likely to occur. The operational context of organisations with responsibilities for nature protection are changing: budgets for nature conservation organisations across Europe are likely to continue to be under increasing pressure in the next few years and mergers are likely to become more frequent. The challenge for all organisations will be to deliver quality services with fewer resources.

Given this context, there is a need to look critically at what Eurosite and EUROPARC do now and build on that basis for a more sustainable future. For members of both Eurosite and EUROPARC, it will be necessary to consider alternative ways of working to deliver activities as efficiently as possible and maximise opportunities. Also, to ensure continuing focus on practical and integrated protected area management, it is entirely logical that members and their network organisations work to re-think their services and how best together they can add value for members.

Benefits, risks and opportunities of the two options

At the joint meeting on 16th June, the Eurosite Board and EUROPARC Council jointly carried out a risks and benefits analysis of the two options – the main points are summarised here:

The risks of staying two independent organisations:

- Continuing competition for funding
- Not being able to maximise benefits for members
- Loss of members
- Loss of opportunity and force in presenting common positions at EU level
- Lack of capacity to respond adequately to changing operating circumstances
- Greater vulnerability and continuing (unsustainable) operational and financial burden of running two organisations

The risks of forming one organisation:

- A reduced budget from membership fees
- Loss of strong brands
- Loss of membership (could be minimised by obtaining consensus on the process)
- Limited financial and human capacity to undertake merger
- Loss of staff and associated experience

The benefits and opportunities of forming one organisation:

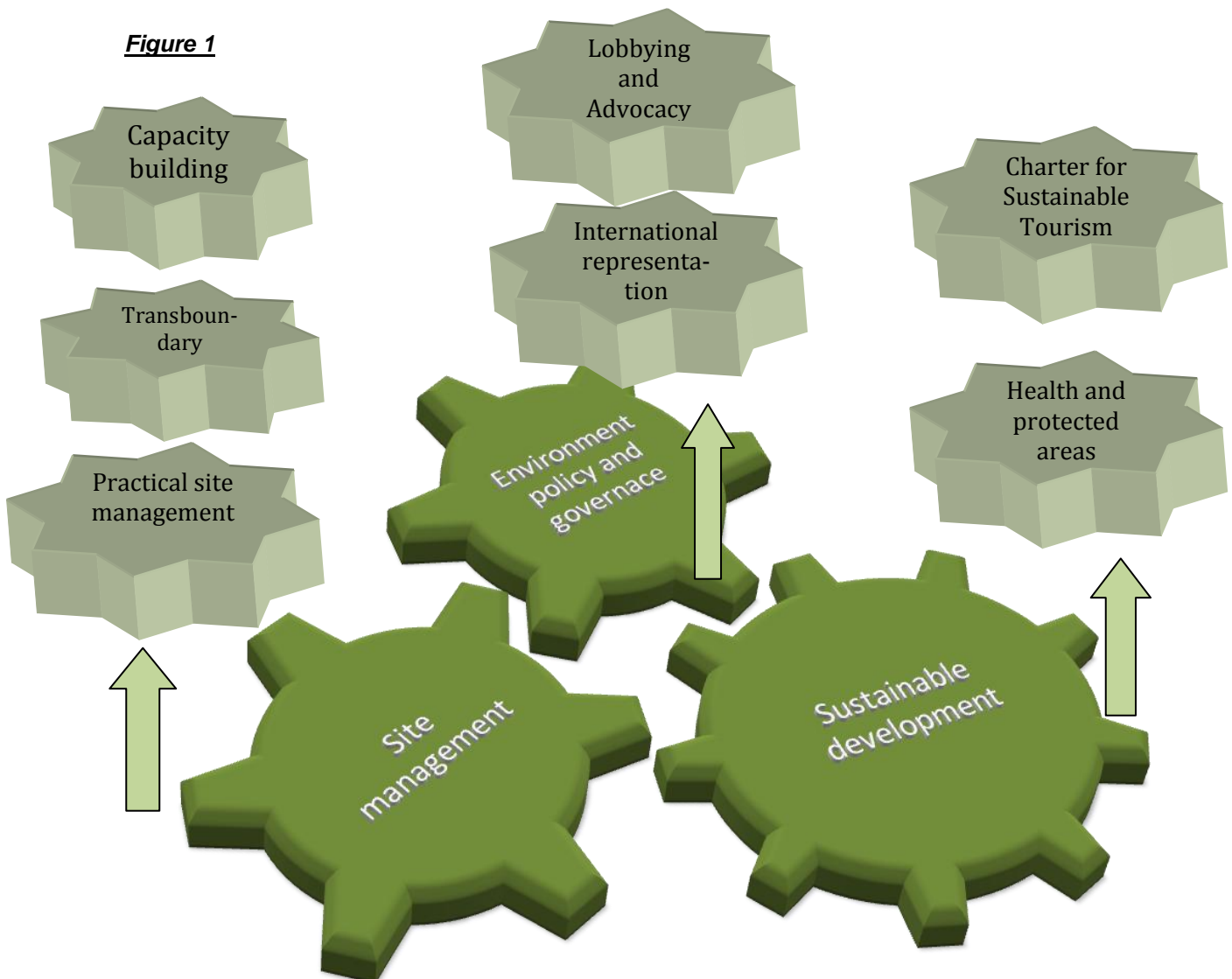
- Possible EU or other funding for the merger
- Greater added value – the sum of the whole is greater than the sum of the parts
- One stronger and united voice, essential at EU level, enabling a more powerful lobbying position
- Greater opportunities to develop more ambitious, new brands
- A fresh start resulting in increased motivation, new spirit and more energy
- Better access and increased opportunities to realise new financial resources

- More efficient contributions from members as they support just one organisation
- Increased efficiency, effectiveness and lower operational costs
- More knowledge and experience because of a bigger network
- Easier and clearer communication
- Removal of competition for membership and project funds
- Fewer meetings
- Improved support from one coordinated network Secretariat

Both the EUROPARC Council and Eurosite Board are acutely aware of the sensitivity with which discussions should be developed. At an early stage, both EUROPARC and Eurosite stated their current positions: for EUROPARC, the dissolution of the existing organisation was not an option, analysis of the financial and legal risks being deemed unacceptable: equally, for Eurosite the option of unilaterally merging with the existing EUROPARC was also not a viable option. However, both organisations acknowledge that continuing independence is a barrier to further collaboration and limits how both networks are able to act in the best interests of members. Also, maintaining two networks is less and less sustainable: it is not pragmatic and risks missing out on significant opportunities to better meet the needs and interests of members.

There are three main pillars of work, which currently overlap, being addressed to lesser or greater degrees by both networks. Figure 1 below sets out the three pillars of work, which could form the foundation of a New European Protected Area organisation, with the building blocks being existing areas of operation:

Figure 1



Clearly, combining the technical, practice-based expertise of Eurosite with the socio-economic and sustainable development expertise of EUROPARC within one new organisation, would be very significant in terms of representation for joint interests in Europe. Most importantly, members' priority needs are clearly identifiable here – their purpose and expectations of joining a European network organisation are still maintained. Furthermore, there is a clear opportunity to build on a combination of specialisms, which will enable the needs of members to be more efficiently realised.

Preliminary Conclusions

To bring together two organisations and develop a new, shared culture will always be complex. However, both the EUROPARC Council and Eurosite Board agree that there is a need to change – standing still is not an option. Most importantly, at network level, there are significant opportunities, which cannot be fully realised if Eurosite and EUROPARC are to continue as two independent legal entities. Furthermore, given the express desire of both networks to collaborate, as well as the growing overlap in what members in both networks do, there is an important opportunity to build on the strengths and eliminate (inherent) weaknesses in both networks.

Therefore, it is proposed to realise one organisation, which is fit for purpose and better able to meet the needs of all members in future. In attaching the purposefully ambitious timeline of achieving this by 2013, sufficient time is built-in to consult with and secure inputs from members of both organisations. Also, sufficient time is required to work out the associated technicalities and to develop a viable model for presentation at the General Assemblies in 2012, taking into account the various options and operational issues which will need to be addressed, such as staffing matters, governance models and possible options for location. The agreed main priority is to develop and improve combined delivery of networking services, and define the most efficient mechanism to better realise opportunities and benefits for the members of the new, joint network.

Joint Recommendation to the EUROPARC General Assembly and Eurosite Annual General Meeting.

Following the deliberations of the Joint Committee, the EUROPARC Council and Eurosite Board jointly recommend that their respective memberships approve option 2: to build on collaboration and, by 2013, create one network organisation.

Furthermore, if option 2 is approved, to mandate the EUROPARC Council and Eurosite Board to continue working with the Joint Committee to define the process, structure and governance of the proposed network organisation and to report back to the respective assemblies in 2012.