



**EUROPARC Federation
Report to Council
25th October 2015**

Title:
Working Groups Report 2015

Recommendations:
For information

Participation by members and experts in the EUROPARC Federation.

Discussion Paper

The EUROPARC Federation is a membership organisation. It exists to serve the needs of our members as they have identified them in the statutes of the organisation and it recently approved strategy.

However the services expected by the members may not always be able to be provided fully by a team of staff, further one might want to consider that as a membership organisation, the role of and functions of the members in running the organisation and delivering on its goals should form a part of the Federations governance and structure.

With that in mind the creation of the new strategy offers an opportunity for some renewed thinking on how members can have a role in the functions of EUROPARC.

IT may be useful to suspend the attachment to the current structure, or order to pause and consider what is needed and achievable. I would consider in most cases sections participation require a similar consideration to that proposed here.

The strategy was written with the then existing structure, this does not compel EUROPARC to retain that, as the delivery of the aims and action expressed, should in most cases, take precedence. Further, the need for change to the delivery structures was already indicated in the strategy.

This paper sets out to stimulate high level strategic thinking, to enable the EUROPARC council to consider some mechanism to deliver on the strategy through members and expert participation.

It may be pertinent to consider

Why EUROPARC needs or wants members to get involved.

Some possibilities may include:

- a. As EUROPARC is a member's organisation is it both democratic and a duty of membership to facilitate participation and involvement at every level. It was also expressed in the membership consultation of 2014 that more opportunities to participate are desirable
- b. Members could benefit both individually and as organisation from participation via VI... increase of knowledge and skills.
- c. What work is needed and which areas of work so we need support in,
- d. It may be that EUROPARC wishes to ensure representation from key sectors of the protected area community needed to provide crucial insight into its work. .
- e. That the work of EUROPARC is not always "visible" to the members and through increased direct participation there is greater potential to ensure support and expand the membership base
- f. That the EUROPARC organisation lacks specific knowledge, relationships, or experience needed to accomplish its goals
- g. And fundamentally we need participants to carry out some of the work if we are to succeed in delivering on the strategy
- h.other reasons....

Having considered why we need members involvement, we need to then think through;

“Who” needs to be involved (what kind of member) and how.

This requires too an analysis of what EUROPARC is seeking to achieve. Can everything be done on a voluntary capacity by members? what would the role of staff be? Etc....

Clarity of the functions of any roles for member will need to be carefully drawn up, both to manage expectations and to ensure the type of participation is adequately supported and managed to achieve the goals needed. There is a challenge to delegate sufficient responsibility to enable some of the benefits to be realised by both the participant and the federation, without compromising either the quality of service EUROPARC seeks to deliver, and indeed the reputational integrity of the Federation.

So we need to be sure of

- a) How might involving “non- members” in the form of “experts” enhance (or conflict) with our work?
- b) What potential barriers exist to member’s participation and what strategies can help overcome those barriers to their involvement?
- c) Why would you choose one or the other individual or organization? What additional resources would they bring to the initiative?
- d) What is the role of staff in developing/supporting/advising any members groups
- e) How many members do you want involved? Should there be a membership target?
- f) Is there anyone that the group would turn away if they wanted to be involved, and why?

Beyond communication, consultation and recognition (all of which we seek to do within the membership of EUROPARC), participation comes in varying degrees from Passive to Active , such as attending conference, voting, taking part in workshops, leading and delivering workshops, taking part in “working groups “ and email /online fora. Various events and groups were mirrored in some sections.

Considering the more “active participation” (often through “working groups”)and to some extent what EUROPARC seeks to achieve, has been described in the strategy. Creating a structure, fit for purpose, to deliver that through member’s participation is the next step.

Participation structures

Traditionally EUROPARC has relied on working groups to deliver some aspects of its works. The strong expectation is that these groups would meet once or twice a year, funded by the Federation and deliver reports to the council. Guidelines for the creation and management of EUROPARC working groups was approved by the general assembly in 2010. At that time, a working group’s mandate came from the EUROPARC Council through the agreement of a remit and work plan, linked to the EUROPARC strategy. Terms of reference would be agreed with each group.

Working Groups of the EUROPARC Federation are set up to serve a theme or topic of interest to members of the Federation and as indicated it was that existing structure that was used in the new strategy.

The functions of the working groups would meet some or all of the following:

- to address a given theme of interest to protected areas of Europe,
- to provide analysis of a theme or topic,
- to propose and develop policy,
- to develop projects that deliver outputs of relevance to protected areas,
- to investigate and develop funding streams to resource projects.

Additionally EUROPARC maintains two verification groups. These “standing committees” currently assess the Transboundary and Charter for Sustainable Tourism verifications. They are not considered working groups per se, but technical groups. They have an ongoing remit but with guidelines to ensure the development of the committees themselves.

In order to deliver more membership participation and gain technical and advisory expertise for the work of EUROPARC then it may be that new structure need to be found. These could take the form of

- a) small technical groups ,
- b) online discussion fora,
- c) advisory panels,
- d) ...others....

Considering the pro and cons we have the advantages of bringing people together yet the difficulties of financing meeting. The capacity of staff to support meeting against the length of time needed to get work from voluntary effort is as another consideration.

What we may in fact need are smaller, self- functioning types of groups could be formed to deliver more specific functions rather than the previous broader remit. Much of which could be done using online tools.

Is the current status quo and structure working and is it what we need for the future? Further EUROPARC does need to address the balance between servicing existing programmes, charter transboundary etc. and yet leaving capacity to engage in new areas of work.

Given the advent of technology and a broader range of the work that is to be achieved, it may be that new types of member’s participation structures can be considered, and that the working group model, topics and guidelines should be urgently refreshed.

Aligning the themes of the strategy and then prioritising the actions derived from them and deciding how that could be delivered through members participation is a crucial and important analysis that the council needs to undertake, before creating new groups. I believe in so doing will bring clarity and purpose to the work being undertaken by members.

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