

Minutes of the ALTER-Net Management Board Meeting

Trondheim, NINA-huset, 19-20 March 2013

Participants: Allan Watt, Andy Sier, Ben Delbaere, Jiska van Dijk, Riku Lumiaro, Taru Peltola, Michael Mirtl (via Skype), Frauke Ecke, Leon Braat (chair), Sanna-Riikka Saarela (secretary, minutes)

Absent with notice: Robert Kanka, Geert de Blust

1. OPENING

Norunn Myklebust, NINA director, welcomed the MB to Trondheim and to NINA.

Ivar Myklebust, director of the Norwegian Biodiversity Information Centre, gave a presentation about aims and activities of the Centre.

Leon opened the meeting. The agenda was approved with few changes.

2. MINUTES OF HELSINKI MB MEETING (March 2013), BERLIN COUNCIL MEETING (June 2013) AND THE SKYPE COUNCIL MEETING (September 2013)

Minutes and actions were gone through. Only points which were not listed as separate agenda points were discussed.

MB meeting in Helsinki

- Status of the former MB member Simron Singh: Simron has moved to Waterloo, Canada. IFF will nominate a new Council representative.
- The memo on ALTER-Net's, prepared by Leon and MB, was not discussed extensively in the Council meeting.

Council meeting in Berlin

- MB will remind Maurice to prepare a short document on lessons learned from organizing the ALTER-Net conference, and will ask INBO if they requested any feedback from the participants
- MB was asked to pick challenging and interesting research ideas from the conference recommendations. This task was now seen as a challenging one and partly overlapping with the AHIA proposal, for example.
- Not all ALTER-Net partners have reported their in-kind contributions to the secretary. This should be discussed by the Council when planning ALTER-Net III.
- It was discussed that ALTER-Net should improve internal communication so that more people are involved in ALTER-Net activities in member institutes. This relates also to the question of how ALTER-Net is using its resources.
- At the meeting seven ALTER-Net activities were listed. These activities will be used as basis for the planning ALTER-Net III
 - MB proposes that each of these activities should have a group of responsible persons in the Council and a responsible person in the MB
- ALTER-Net III will be planned for the next three years (2014-2017). A lot of preparatory activities were planned to be done by the Council members.

All the issues discussed at the Skype Council meeting were handled separately in this MB meeting.

ACTIONS:

- Sanna-Riikka to contact Maurice/Tessa about lessons learned from the conference preparation and feedback

3. STATE OF AFFAIRS FINANCES & COUNCIL DECISIONS

Sanna-Riikka presented briefly the April 2013- March 2014 budget approved by the Council in June 2013, and the status of the cash contributions. Almost all expected invoices have been invoiced by SYKE. Sanna-Riikka will write a short memo to the Council including the:

- Actualized budget 2012-2013
- Budget and activities for 2013-2014
- Cash and in kind contributions 2013-2014

The memo will be circulated to the Council as part of the January meeting documents.

MB's conclusions related to the finances include:

- There is no concern over the income as there are still non-allocated funds in this year's budget but there is a concern that there are severe problems in activating ALTER-Net people to engage with ALTER-Net activities.

ACTIONS:

- Sanna-Riikka to make a memo on financial issues to the Council

4. COMMUNICATION & OUTREACH, INCLUDING FUNDRAISING

Discussion points include:

- Webpages are working fine (thanks to Andy and some other active ALTER-Net people!)
- There are more than 850 people in the ALTER-Net LinkedIn group
- The 'glorified ALTER-Net PPT', screened at the conference, will be made available on the webpage (Andy)
- The main concern relating to communication is that planned ALTER-Net activities should be communicated to Andy as early as possible. That is the only way to ensure proper communication related to different events and activities. Furthermore, all items that are meant to be public should be communicated to Andy.
- ALTER-Net members are encouraged to send interesting items/announcements to be published on the web and in that way get more visibility also for the member organizations.
- Andy could explore the possibility of adding Tweet accounts to the webpage (now done)
- ALTER-Net newsletter needs to be discussed, because not many newsletters have been sent out lately
- Andy, Ben and Riku will meet (via Skype or physically) and write a memo about the communication concerns and recommendations (e.g. how to improve the communication, what is needed from the partners and from the Council, resources needed, etc.). A short summary of this memo will be added to the preparatory document that will be circulated to the Council.
- 2014 will be ALTER-Net's 10th anniversary, which should be used as a communication opportunity. This will be included in the communication plan.

ACTIONS:

- Andy will put the glorified PPT on the ALTER-Net webpage
- Communication team will meet and write a plan for communication during ALTER-Net III

5. SCIENCE-POLICY INTERFACE

Allan introduced a few projects/proposals that are relevant for ALTER-Net's science-policy activities now and in the future:

BiodiversityKnowledge Network of Knowledge project (<http://www.biodiversityknowledge.eu/project>)

- The project is to develop a recommended design for a scientific biodiversity Network of Knowledge (NoK) to inform policy-makers and other societal actors.
- The project has written and published a white paper on the concrete concept for the NoK
- The project organized a meeting in September in Berlin, where 11 networks were presented. ALTER-Net was represented by Jiska.

SPIRAL (www.spiral-project.eu)

- SPIRAL Handbook with a title 'SPIRAL handbook on effective interfaces between science, policy and society in research projects launched' has been published recently, but due to some errors an updated version will be published in the near future. The Handbook is relevant reading for all ALTER-Net researchers
- SPIRAL was also represented by Allan in the DG RTD meeting last week

UFZ contract with DG ENV

- UFZ has a contract with DG ENV about a support mechanism for EU policy
- This links to the Horizon2020 call on support mechanisms for evidence-based policy (SC5-10b)

Plans for the Horizon2020 call on science-policy support mechanisms on biodiversity and ecosystem services (SC5-10b)

- Call will be launched on 11 December, but the deadline for proposals is not until the beginning of 2015
- Planning of governance of the support system and support process is essential
- CEH (on behalf of ALTER-Net?), SYKE (on behalf of PEER?), EPBRs and UFZ (on behalf of KNEU?), MarBEF, EPBRs (Jurgen Tack on behalf of) have started to draft a proposal on the support system. It has been discussed that ALTER-Net is one of the important networks involved in the system.
- It was agreed to inform all ALTER-Net partners of these ongoing discussions in order to prevent surprises in the process of consortium-building.
- In order for the support system to work, the networks/organisations need to benefit from it
- This science-policy support system will, if realized, affect remarkably the future activities of ALTER-Net as well.

6. TRAINING & SUMMER SCHOOL

Summer school

- Sanna-Riikka presented the final budget figures of this year's summer school: summer school expenses were around 31 000 euros (vs. 35 000 euros budgeted).
- This year less people applied for and attended the Summer School. Some reasons for this were suggested, e.g. that this year there were plenty of other winter/spring/summer schools on the same topic and/or that it was a consequence of economic recession
- ALTER-Net should advertise the Summer School more broadly in order to get both junior and senior staff to apply.
 - It would also be good to advertise the Summer School to the Member State level policy makers, and to the Commission and the EEA
 - Effective promotion of the Summer School needs to be planned, as part of the Summer School 2014 planning process
- Summer school team could also think about how to brand/profile the Summer School better
- Sanna-Riikka will confirm dates for 2014 Summer School to the Peyresq foundation (FYI: done already)
- Organizing team will include Allan Watt, Steve Redpath (Univ. of Aberdeen) and Taru Peltola (as conveners) and Sanna-Riikka Saarela (as secretary)
- Organizing team will write a proposal for the Council for the Summer School in general during ALTER-Net III and a plan for Summer School 2014 (including ideas of the content, communication, budget and a proposal of tutor team (the possibility to include more tutors from the ALTER-Net partners should be considered as it was suggested by the Council))
- OpenNESS and OPERAs will contribute to the summer school by sending speakers. The same counts for BESAFE and POLICYMIX
 - An advisor from each of the projects will be asked to join the process: Jiska on behalf of OpenNESS and Wolfgang Cramer on behalf of OPERAs. Jiska will also get in contact with the summer school conveners and the coordinators of BESAFE/POLICYMIX to include these.

- Michael proposed that we could consider of inviting speakers from the U.S. Michael will provide appropriate contact details for people he has in mind.

Training activity

- Leon is not planning to organize a Green economy course for ALTER-Net with VU-IVM
- Instead Leon proposes that some training material from the OpenNESS project could be used (perhaps with some revision) → Leon/MB to discuss this further with OpenNESS WP4 – David Barton (NINA) and Erik Gomez (UAB)

MarieCurie ITN application

- The call will open December 11 2013 and will close on April 8 2014.
- Frauke will take a look at the call and make a one-page proposal to the MB. Frauke will also book a day for a proposal planning meeting. Council has allocated 5000 euros for a preparatory meeting.

ACTIONS:

- Sanna-Riikka will confirm the dates of Summer School 2014 to the Peyresq foundation
- Summer School organization team will sum up the Summer School 2013 and write a plan for Summer School 2014 and for the ALTER-Net III
- Michael will send contact details of possible speakers
- Leon will discuss with OpenNESS WP4 about training material
- Frauke will take a lead on the ITN proposal and keep the MB updated

7. MULTI-SITE EXPERIMENT

- Only one proposal was submitted from INBO (on dung beetles). It was mentioned that the proposal is quite sophisticated and comprehensive.
- Council members have raised some critical questions related to its science-policy relevance and the ecological outcome of the experiment. MB members felt that the criteria for evaluation should not be changed during the process.
- MB proposes to send comments to INBO and invite them to submit a revised version of the proposal; MB members are invited to send additional comments to Frauke and Frauke will communicate with Maurice
- Leon will clarify with Eeva the MB's role in planning the MSE.
- In future, it might be useful to contact other networks/organizations carrying out multiple site experiments to get their advice and support e.g. in evaluating the MSE proposals, such as INTERACT.

ACTIONS:

- Frauke will progress with INBO's proposal

8. BACK TO THE FUTURE

Andy introduced the project plan (the plan was circulated to the MB prior the meeting)

- The proposal includes four sub-projects in four different countries. The project will guarantee some seed money for each of the sub-projects.
- MB sees this project as a good example of using ALTER-Net money, and of collaboration between ALTER-Net partners and with organizations related to ALTER-Net.
- Michael would like the 'Back to the future' project (and probably the MSE as well) to be presented at the LTER conference in Rome.

9. INFRASTRUCTURE / LTER-EUROPE

ALTER-Net activities vs. LTER-Europe

- EC is having internal discussion on European Biodiversity and Ecosystem Infrastructure.
- LTER is mentioned explicitly in the current version of the EC infrastructure call.
- There is a plan to focus on the needs of the EC at the LTER conference where a lot of ALTER-Net and other research organizations will present their research and projects.
- As soon as Michael has received relevant information he can contact the ALTER-Net Council group on research infrastructure and they can meet and advance the planning of the ALTER-Net III activity.
- It was agreed that the Council Infrastructure working group will write a short memo (based on the work done for other purposes) to the Council related to the European research infrastructure and to keep MB updated. Michael will also discuss the item at the LTER conference in Rome.

LTER Sites Proposal

- Michael introduced the proposal (which was circulated to the MB prior the meeting) which is related to the metadata update of the LTER sites. The estimated costs of the activity are €15 800, from which €10 000 would be covered by ALTER-Net and the rest as UBA's in-kind contribution.
- MB advises the Council to approve the proposal. Sanna-Riikka will forward this to Eeva for further process within council.

Other issues:

- Michael announced that 28 organizations have just submitted a COST proposal on strengthening the LTSER network.
- Michael asked for MB's advice on how to build a consortium for the infrastructure call including the entire ALTER-Net as an entity, but it was stated that this is beyond the competence of the MB.

ACTIONS:

- Michael will discuss with the Council representatives about the research infrastructure and write a plan for ALTER-Net III

10. ALTER-NET IN EU RESEARCH PROJECTS

List of current involvements

- It is important to know which FP7 projects continue during ALTER-Net III.
- There are also projects funded by other instruments (e.g. DG ENV, EEA, Life).
- It was decided that Sanna-Riikka and Jiska will produce a matrix of ALTER-Net partners and projects.

Horizon2020 interests

- 14 partners answered to the questionnaire circulated among Council.
- In order to build successful ALTER-Net III, rules on how transparent ALTER-Net would be in the future should be made.
- It was discussed how the MB/secretariat could encourage partners to proceed with the calls (because at the previous Council meeting it was decided that ALTER-Net will not facilitate networking related to the consortium building for calls any longer).
- Sanna-Riikka will circulate the Horizon2020 interests table again and encourage people to circulate the table inside the institutes.

ACTIONS:

- Sanna-Riikka and Jiska will make a table on ALTER-Net partners in EU projects
- Sanna-Riikka will circulate the Horizon2020 interest to the Council and MB

WEDNESDAY 20 NOVEMBER 9.00-13.00

11. ALTER-NET III (APRIL 2014-APRIL 2017)

Tour de table: Leon asked for everybody's thoughts about ALTER-Net III.

Several issues were raised, including:

ALTER-Net III in general

- ALTER-Net is good at creating ideas, but to get the people committed to implement the decisions and ideas is very challenging
 - o A challenge is to encourage more people to become actively involved in ALTER-Net activities.
- The risk if we continue like this, is that we will lose the interest of our directors and outside actors
- ALTER-Net processes:
 - o Some of our processes are too loose
 - o Processes should be professional in order to get more commitment on-board
 - o The role of different ALTER-Net actors should be clarified (especially Chair, Council, MB and secretariat)
 - o There is a need to re-consider the processes and mandate of the Council and the MB
- It would be useful to write an annual letter to the directors and show what the network has done and how the institutes have contributed to different activities (to be prepared by MB and signed by the Council chair)
 - o It is difficult to communicate in large institutions and convince the directors that they should allocate money to ALTER-Net. One solution to this might be to be in contact e.g. with faculty level.
- Interaction between ALTER-Net institutes has often nothing to do with ALTER-Net, because there are so many researchers at the institutes
- More emphasis should be put on the relationship of ALTER-Net activities and person's portfolio and enthusiasm
- We need to be realistic in planning ALTER-Net III and allocate the ALTER-Net resources wisely
 - o Realism is probably the most important issue, because ALTER-Net will never be the first priority for the member institutes, which means that not too many resources can be used for ALTER-Net activities
- ALTER-Net III needs only few key activities → prioritization of the ALTER-Net activities
- Networking and training (incl. conferences) activities are crucial for ALTER-Net
 - o Summer School is a great ALTER-Net activity, but we should show at the ALTER-Net webpage how e.g. the summer school students have benefited from the networking possibilities provided by ALTER-Net and what they have done after the summer school
- Science-policy activities are also important: Should ALTER-Net take lead of some SPI event?
- It was mentioned that ALTER-net should not put resources on ALTER-Net research
 - o But on the other hand there is still a gap in biodiversity knowledge. ALTER-Net should be active in raising this issue and encourage good disciplinary science. What is the knowledge input we still strongly need?
 - o Responsibility in terms of conveying a broad and inclusive picture of biodiversity and ecosystem research. In terms of this responsibility: basic science/research/monitoring and their requirements were not much considered in ALTER-Net II: equipment/sites, baseline data: huge gaps in knowledge base (European scale BD monitoring), including work on innovative technologies to close these gaps (e.g. efforts to check potential use of remote sensing for BD monitoring, disciplinary flagship projects)
 - o ALTER-Net (MB) could also ask from the researchers what would they need (from ALTER-Net) in order to do great science
- ALTER-Net should communicate better the variety of activities and projects the member institutes are doing inside the ALTER-Net and to the outside world
 - o Keeping the network visible is very important: to show that ALTER-Net is doing something good and useful in the field of BD and ES research and awareness
 - o ALTER-Net should learn more from the projects ALTER-Net partners are involved: at the moment we lack a mechanism to spread that information inside the network
 - o Utilization of and communication about Twitter accounts by people from ALTER-Net institutes
- It was felt that there is still a need to bridge the gaps between:
 - o Natural and social sciences (reducing the pseudo-polarity between basic research (disciplinarity) and integrative/transdisciplinary approaches) → interaction

- Science and policy → from science to policy
- Science and management → from science to management
- Could we utilize the LTSER platform to bring together natural and social sciences?
 - LTSER-Europe as a such (targeting at integrating both approaches at the network level) and specifically LTSER platforms could work as good laboratories for testing how to overcome this and make social and natural scientists to work together at a regional scale: the art of giving disciplinary research it's niches and integrate
 - Not each and every excellent disciplinary scientist needs to speak the "IDR slang"
 - LTSER platform is created by social sciences so there is a great potential in bridging the gap between natural and social sciences
 - it is more important to have mechanisms to optimize/harmonize what's being done in the individual niches in order to make products most useful for all the others
 - New roles: in all these interactions there are new job profiles ("translators of disciplinary knowledge and terminology" for different target groups, integrative science management, large scale/ highly instrumented in-situ infrastructures managers, e.g. TERENO in Germany)

Membership

- ALTER-Net should consider extension of the network
- Some research fields/disciplines and countries are missing from ALTER-Net (e.g. marine issues have become more and more important in Brussels)
- MB will make a memo to the Council on advantages and challenges of adding new members or of not doing so

Tour de table:

- ALTER-Net could also think about other than research institutes: consider where lack expertise and think about attracting organizations that possess that expertise
- We should consider how the members are benefiting from ALTER-Net
 - different institutes have different motivations to be involved in ALTER-Net: this was asked in the questionnaire in Spring 2013
- We should be clear about the definitions of partners and members
- The more partners ALTER-Net has, the lower the membership fee can be
- Enthusiastic organizations/persons would greatly benefit ALTER-Net
- ALTER-Net should be stricter in how it deals with inactive members (at the moment there are many such inactive members, particularly in Southern and Eastern Europe)
 - Does ALTER-Net want more members onboard? ALTER-Net III should be an active network, which does not need a large number of inactive members. Instead of that it would be good to tempt active and enthusiastic members onboard.

Financial basis

- Many small institutes or small groups inside big institutes cannot contribute much with cash. The ALTER-Net membership fee structure should be re-considered.
- If we are to expand the network to marine institutions/small groups/small institutions, the minimum membership fee should be reduced as well
- If only a small group from within a larger institute constitutes the ALTER-Net partner paying the membership fee, then it should be only the team getting the benefit that is referred to as the ALTER-Net partner. Also only their name should be mentioned being partner and not the name of the larger institute they belong to.

Tasks MB 2014-2017

- MB proposes eight key activities for ALTER-Net III (the Council proposed seven activities – see 2.a-h below). Each activity should be represented in the MB.
- The eighth activity would be 'An annual ALTER-Net event' (responsible person at the MB, rotating organization responsibility over ALTER-Net partners)
- Roles and responsibilities of the MB will be described in the Council document

Composition of MB 2014-2017

- MB should be a body working together
- MB composition will be decided at the Council meeting in Aix en Provence
- Council should ask for MB nominations (to be done before the next meeting in Aix-en-Provence. S-R will discuss with Eeva)
- The following current MB members indicated that they are willing to continue serving on the MB: Andy, Ben, Allan, Jiska, Riku, Frauke, Taru (possibly), Michael
 - o Geert and Robert will be asked as well
- MB secretary will depend on the chair of the ALTER-Net Council
- Double roles (being a MB and Council member at the same time) should be avoided

Responsibilities and tasks of the MB (versus the Council)

- From MB's perspective it is important to have a clear role and responsibility for MB and for MB members as well as clear procedures for the Council and MB (a yearly plan)
- Leon will discuss this with Eeva before the Council meeting

The MoU

- Jiska and Leon have started to revise the MoU, Alison Hester (JHI) has also looked at the MoU and made suggestions on how to make the MoU acceptable for the partners
- MoU amendments were checked and complemented by MB and Jiska included the suggestions straight into the document
- Work will continue (Jiska, Alison, Philip Roche, Leon) and proposal will be circulated to the Council at the beginning of January

Documents to be prepared for the Council (by the MB):

The MB will prepare a set of documents for the Council. The documents will be prepared and finalized in December 2013 and circulated (by the secretary, together with the meeting agenda) to the Council at the beginning of January 2014. This will allow enough time for the member institutes to consider their willingness to continue in ALTER-Net III. The Council meeting will take place January 28-29, 2014, in Aix-en-Provence.

Documents of the current activities

- Minutes from the previous meetings (Sanna-Riikka)
- Actualized budget for 2012-2013 (Sanna-Riikka)
- Budget and activities for 2013-2014 (Sanna-Riikka)
- Summary from the Summer School 2013 and the proposal for 2014 (Taru)
- Any other?

Documents for planning ALTER-Net III

1. **Revised MoU** (Jiska)
2. **Proposal for alternative action plan based on the eight activities (each group to write ½-1 page plan including the general idea, budget estimate and specific activities in order to be an effective and professional network)**

Introduction to the document: three year action plan (different options for ALTER-Net III with different ambition levels) (Leon)

- a. Summer School: How Summer school will continue for the next three years (Taru)
- b. Communication (Andy, Riku, Ben)
- c. Research projects (including MSE and Marie Curie) (Frauke)
- d. Science policy: focus should be on policy support mechanism and its implications to ALTER-Net (Allan)
- e. Horizon2020: MB proposes that Council nominates one person to have responsibility for this. The process is already on its way and the calls will open soon.
- f. High impact action: Could Geert take responsibility over this in the MB (make a half page summary of Maurice's document)?
- g. Research infrastructure (Michael with the group from the Council)

h. Annual ALTER-Net event: MB proposal, budget, topics: ALTER-Net meets practitioners, ALTER-Net projects, rotating organization, plenary + workshop/training (Sanna-Riikka)

3. Governance and management of ALTER-Net III (Leon)

- Tasks and responsibilities of MB and the Council
- Tasks and responsibilities of the ALTER-Net chair and the secretariat
- Finances: MB proposes to decrease the minimum cash contribution and a budget indication
- In-kind contribution: suggestion (how to encourage institutions/people to become members)
- Membership: Benefits and potential of adding extra members

12. CHECK ON ACTIONS &END