



## Minutes: Alternet MB Meeting 2023

**Venue:** Online

**Date:** 17 NOV 2023, 13-17h30

**Present:** Jiska van Dijk (MB Chair); Allan Watt (MB Vice-Chair); Maurice Hoffmann (Council Chair); Ana Lillebo (Council Vice-Chair); Juliette Young; Lisa Norton; Marie Vandewalle; Philip Roche; Riikka Paloniemi; Sonja Jähnig; Joan Pino; Adriana Cliville Morato

### 1. Opening of meeting and greetings (Maurice/Allan/Jiska)

The meeting was opened and all those present were greeted and thanked for their participation. It was agreed that Maurice Hoffmann would chair the meeting.

### 2. Proposals for additions to agenda

Additions to the agenda were distributed prior to the meeting by Maurice. These additions, as listed in the Adjusted Agenda document, were approved. Jiska van Dijk suggested additionally discussing the Council Meeting (2024); the Council meeting will be discussed at the in-person meeting of the MB in Brussels.

## Internally (financed) activities/actions 2023

### 3. Membership payments (Tyler)

All member institutes have paid their 2023 annual fee with three exceptions: MTA-OK, Archipelagos, and WENR. Reminders have been distributed to these three partner institutes by Tyler Kulfan (Secretariat).

### 4. Gender Plan (**doc 20231114**) (Riikka)

Riikka shared a presentation on the Equality and Non-discrimination Action Plan that was recently produced for Alternet. This plan is based on the experiences from previous research and development activities. It covers the key equality-relevant activities in the management and decision-making of Alternet and sheds light on prioritized activities and objectives. The plan focuses on five main areas/themes: (1) diversity and gender balance in management of Alternet; (2) organisational culture in Alternet as a network; (3) equality, occupational health and well-being in partner organisations; (4) integration of the gender/diversity dimension into research and stakeholder engagement of Alternet; (5) and disruption in events organised by Alternet (gender-based harassment and violence).

The next steps as stated by Riikka were to agree about the plan generally; to decide upon the proposal for equality; and to determine how to share this plan with the





Council.

The responses from the MB were unanimously positive. The plan will be put forward to the Council at the Council Meeting of 21 February 2024 for final approval and eventually on the public website pending their decision to accept the plan. It is not expected that the contents of the equality plan will be in conflict with those of any member institute (the Council will decide accordingly). Riikka and Maurice recommended that MB members compare the plan with their own institutes' plans to check for any possible conflicts or issues by the 15th of December and for the plan to be finalized before the 8th of January. The document will be shared in the public MB drive as a collaborative Google Doc.

## 5. Activities 2023 and ideas for 2024

### a. SPI-webinars (Juliette)

Juliette Young presented on the two SPI webinars that were hosted by Alternet in 2024: a seminar hosted jointly by INBO and SER-Europe on the Nature Restoration Law and challenges it presented to the scientific community; and a seminar hosted by Kerry Waylen of the James Hutton Institute and considered uncomfortable conversations in science-policy. The registration numbers were: INBO SER-E (536) and Hutton (86).

A future webinar hosted by INRAE/PEER has been suggested. No other suggestions have been made. Prior to the Council meeting, the Council will again be approached for possible interest in hosting new webinars. It can be noted that a webinar could lead to a potential conference, as well. Ana and Juliette will have a mail exchange on potential integrated webinar coordination by CESAM. Marie recommended organising a BioAgora webinar; Riikka agreed that project-connected webinars would be of high value. Tyler will serve as the contact point for organisation.

### b. Summer School (Allan)

Allan Watt presented on the 2023 Alternet Summer School, which was another major success. 27 students were selected from a massive pool of 90 applicants. There was a broad mix of Alternet and non-Alternet students, European and non-European, etc. and 18 speakers, including two new ones (Carla Washbourne and Karen O'Brien). It was the second year that the Summer School was supported by Biodiversa+. As always, the programme was held in Peyresq, which remains an ideal though remote venue. A meeting will be held by the conveners in the spring to discuss future directions of the Summer School.

Maurice noted that in informal conversation with Hilde Eggermont it was suggested that there is a desire to have Biodiversa+ continue to support the Alternet Summer School with a higher funding amount, and that she would





defend this to the new Biodiversa+ management. The overall cost for Alternet this year was approximately €10k. It was noted that it would be good to track alumni activities (an initiative that the alumni network A4Cap has already begun work on). Ana Lillebo offered advice for admitting international students from e.g. Africa, the global South, which can be complicated. Tyler will check to resolve a spam issue on the Alternet Summer School Facebook page. A proposal (finalized before 8 January) will be made to the Council to support the organisation of the 2025 Summer School. Support for the 2024 Summer School was already granted.

c. Eklipse (Marie)

Marie presented on the progress of Eklipse, including personnel changes within its governance structure. New requests have been launched, and the report of the request on biodiversity and pandemics was released this week. It was requested that everyone please promote this report! Ongoing requests include: “community empowerment tools and NBS can contribute to addressing coastal challenges and build resilient communities”. Forecasted requests in 2024-2027 include 10-12 requests related to implementation of the BioAgora BDS2030; and a second request for EmpowerUs. 17 evidence synthesis reports on policy relevant topics have been released so far. Both Eklipse and Alternet are recognized as key biodiversity actors.

Juliette asked about the absence of in-depth BioAgora requests to date alongside the many unanticipated urgent requests—and how Alternet and Eklipse should respond to this. Marie noted that issues of credibility were at play. Eklipse needs a proper protocol for rapid requests. The complex relationships between BioAgora, Eklipse, and Alternet were discussed. Maurice asked how Eklipse is legally represented in BioAgora (as it is not done so by Alternet). There is no legal signatory for Eklipse in BioAgora (it is used as a knowledge broker, included in the programme of BioAgora for their knowledge synthesis). The Eklipse budget pertaining to BioAgora is held by UFZ. The Eklipse Management Body is paid through projects without intervention or responsibility from Alternet (e.g. EmpowerUs, BioAgora) and by UFZ.

d. Communication (Adriana/Tyler)

Adriana presented on the communications activities and progress of 2023. These included the following:

1. Newsletters sent: 3 seasonal newsletters, with the winter edition to come soon.

—Partners included: CCRI, CESAM, CREAM, DC, DICAM, Eklipse, Eurac, Hutton, IGB, ILE-SAS, INBO, LIST, NINA, NIVA, RBINS, Syke, UFZ

2. 10 Topical news items written for website, mailing list





3. Redesign of visuals (newsletter, homepage, social media banners)
4. Coordination with Eklipse
  - Shared editorial calendar for social media and web news; two joint comms meetings with more frequent meetings intended)
5. Social media:
  - Posting on average 1-2x weekly on Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram; 3x weekly on Twitter (X)
6. New IT service hired (BitWorkers)
  - Providing routine web maintenance, security, and IT support
  - Planned redesign of news/newsletters/events/calls pages (January 2024)

There should be more proactive sharing of news from member institutes. Tyler is currently spending approximately 25% of his time on explicitly communications-focused work. Riikka suggested communications efforts could be shared among Alternet activities. She and Allan Watt suggested that there may be value in collaborating with projects on communications. Viable alternatives to Twitter need to be considered. A communications plan for 2024 will be given consideration, as well, with a focus on strategic objectives. A heightened use of Instagram was supported, and Allan additionally recommended trying BlueSky. If Alternet member institutes have had positive or negative experiences with certain platforms, their input would be very valuable. A topic on “Scientific advances of Alternet institutes” could be good branding for the Alternet newsletter, as noted by Maurice Hoffmann.

e. Call Exchange (Mart/Tyler)

Since the new Call Exchange system was implemented in 2022, there have been no major developments concerning this activity. 24 registrations of interest were made in 2023, primarily toward the beginning of the year. Consortium building talks between various partners are ongoing and are coordinated on a rolling basis.

f. Conference (Lisa/Maurice/Mart)

It was suggested in 2023 that a partner should take the lead on hosting an Alternet Conference by/at their own institute. Syke has suggested to take the lead in organising an Alternet day on the subject of nature restoration at the Helsinki SRI conference 10-12 June 2024 (<https://sricongress.org/the-2024-sustainability-research-and-innovation-congress-will-be-held-in-finland/>). SER-Europe has additionally announced that they will organise a European-level conference in Tartu 26-30 August 2024 on nature restoration (<https://sere2024.org/>). Informally, ideas were exchanged with the SER-E secretary to co-operate on this. While it is not EMU, Mart Kulvik is well positioned in Tartu to help take advantage of this opportunity. This opportunity to cooperate with SER-E was brought in as an alternative OR as a supplement to the SRI-conference day in Helsinki





A proposal for three sessions was submitted for the SRI conference. Lisa Norton shared the three 1.5 hour sessions that were put forward by Alternet (“Science-policy interface supporting nature restoration”, “Ecosystem restoration for increased biodiversity and multiple ecosystem benefits”, “Governance of nature restoration”). Both herself and Riikka suggested that trying to organise Alternet involvement in two separate conferences this year would be too much work. Riikka stressed that SRI will handle a great deal of the admin and dissemination work which reduces the workload for Alternet. The biggest concern is that it’s only one day of Alternet involvement. Allan noted that he thinks it will be hard to convince Alternet partners to participate for only one day and expressed preference for the spreading of Alternet activity over more than one day. The possibility of skipping the conference in 2024 and waiting until 2025 was raised. Pros and cons were considered, including the benefits of the current proposed format which will be more of a promotional Alternet showcase versus the traditional character of Alternet Conferences in the past (which heavily relied on in-kind from INBO).

The Alternet MB agreed to move forward with Syke’s proposal and to host several (3) sessions on one day at €2k per session; to approach it as a showcase of Alternet; and that it should be suggested to the Council to host a full and recognizable traditional conference in 2025. The alternative/supplementary co-organisation with SERE in Tartu was not retained

- g. Collaborative activities
  - i. AHIA
  - ii. MSR
  - iii. Research Infrastructure
  - iv. Mobility Fund

Funding for the A4Cap alumni workshop was granted using the mobility fund in February 2023. There have been no new initiatives in Research Infrastructure or AHIA and MSR, which were grouped together under the new collaborative activities category. No new calls were released. The continuation of AHIA and MSR will be considered and a draft for an updated procedure on AHIA and MSR is requested from Philip Roche, Joan Pino and Mark Frenzel for the 8 January MB meeting.

## **Externally (financed) projects and activities**

### **6. EU-projects**

- a. CO-OP4CBD (Tyler)
- b. Bio-Agora (Tyler)
- c. Eco-Ready (via Eklipse) (Marie)
- d. RESTOREID (via Eklipse) (Marie)





To save time on the agenda, the presentations of Tyler and Marie on the various projects Alternet is involved in will be shared with the MB following the MB meeting.

## Other issues

### 7. Alternet future prospects, brainstorm text (doc 2023113) (Maurice)

Maurice updated the MB on the present-day management issues arising from Alternet's participation in European projects, the legal status of Alternet, and Maurice's own retirement (along with the dependence on heavy in-kind from certain personnel). Jiska cannot deliver high levels of in-kind in 2024; Maurice has stepped down from INBO but can continue as Council Chair for the remainder of 2023 and as MB Chair in early 2024. It is foreseen that Jiska will start as Council chair from the beginning of 2024 and that she and Ana will chair the 2024 Council meeting. In-kind work is no longer permitted from INBO at the level beyond the intrinsic membership engagement; and it wishes for the Alternet address to be moved to an independent address. Given the i-ngo structure under Belgian law, this address must be in Belgium. Maurice is functioning as legal signatory of Alternet in all its projects, but this is no longer fully feasible and may not be legitimate.

The managerial issues that have come along with participation in European projects was not foreseen and is presently overwhelming. Some steps forward suggested by Maurice and Jiska were shared. These can be found on the Alternet Future Prospects document shared by Maurice under the heading "Thoughts on scenarios/ways of thinking (non-exhaustive) to deal with the issues arising."

Marie noted that if Alternet wishes to be involved in European projects, a (large) degree of administration will be necessary. If Alternet does not wish to have this involvement, a separate internal conversation among Eklipse is also needed. Eklipse is highly attractive to projects and this can be understood as added value. Lisa noted that Alternet needs to find a way to cover all the administrative roles that have been filled in-kind to date and questioned whether PEER might have a model of how to do this. Though there are numerous complications, Juliette noted that the accomplishments and involvement of Alternet in key projects is very impressive and that we should not reign back our ambition—in her opinion, Alternet has become recognized as a key player and should embrace that role while finding viable ways to accomplish this from a managerial stance. Maurice suggested that bringing Alternet partners into projects rather than participating as a full partner would be more appropriate. The complications surrounding the hiring/employment of Brooke Wilkerson was discussed.

Both Marie and Maurice agreed that the role of Alternet within these projects should be considered, elaborated, and communicated to the Council. Marie stated that it is important to distinguish between the projects where Alternet itself is directly employed and those where Eklipse is involved and wherein the only means of hiring for project partners is through Alternet. The integrative role of Alternet in bringing partners into





projects was noted by Philip; and it was questioned whether being a project partner in its own right is perceived by the members as an added value of Alternet. Ana noted that if partners are project members through Alternet they do not receive overheads, which is a major factor. Juliette stated that we need to be clearer in terms of strategic thinking towards what we get involved in, what we specifically offer, and what it brings back to the Alternet community. She also asked what is tangibly needed to push the conversation forward toward resolution at the MB and Council meetings. Maurice requested work on possible scenarios, which he/we can then investigate in terms of consequences. Marie seconded the sentiment that it is critical to consider and determine the specific niche of Alternet. It was broadly agreed that overheads should cover managerial work (rather than depending on in-kind).

## **8. AOB**

No additional business was raised or discussed.

## **9. Preparations for 8-9 January in-person meeting and conclusion**

An in-person meeting of the Management Board is planned for 8-9 January 2024, noon to noon (at INBO - Brussels, Belgium); this is immediately prior to the 10-11 January general meeting of the CO-OP4CBD consortium, which will also be held at INBO in Brussels.

All those present were thanked for their active contribution to the discussion and the activities of Alternet. The meeting concluded at 17:20.

