

Minutes from the telecon of the Interim Board of the European Astrobiology Centre on 9 November 2018

1. Scientific research Areas

After some discussion the Board decided to suggest a regrouping of the scientific areas for the Action Plan as follows;

Investigation into formation of planetary systems and detection of habitable planets and moons

- Formation of planetary systems
- Conditions of habitability
- Detection and detailed characterization (including structure, composition, atmospheres and habitability) of exoplanets

Early earth environment and habitability

- Physical, chemical and geological processes on Early Earth
- Co-evolution of early Earth's geosphere, atmosphere and biosphere
- Evolution of habitability of early Earth

The pathway to complexity: From simple molecules to first life

- Origin and delivery of complex organic molecules
- Prebiotic chemistry, synthesis of biopolymers and self-assembly
- Formation of first cells

Early life and life under extreme conditions

- First traces of life
- Early evolution of life
- Boundary conditions of life and life in extreme environments
- Tracing life in early and extreme terrestrial environments

Detection of life on other celestial bodies

- Detection of life on other celestial bodies in the solar system
- Novel methods and technologies to detect life outside the Solar System

Historical, philosophical, societal and ethical issues in astrobiology

- History of ideas about origins of life
- Views about extraterrestrial life in different cultures
- Search for life on other planets and moons: philosophical, societal and ethical issues

The community is now asked to think about possible amendments and also think interesting research question "selling" with funding agencies. It was argued that for the EAI the research areas should be as wide as possible so that all researchers feel welcome. Also, research might evolve considerably over time so one should avoid to be too inflexible.

2. Field sites for the Research Infrastructure Proposal

A discussion was held with the leaders of Europlanet about the field sites to be included in the Research Infrastructure (RI) proposal. The list might not be complete and that the final selection will depend on the scientific programme for the RI Proposal.

Nevertheless, due to the looming deadline for the RI advanced Community proposal which Europlanet will submit some agreement has to be reached. The following division of field sites was proposed

Europlanet	EAI	Possible overlap
Argentina	Azores	Iceland
Botswana	Atacama Desert	Ries crater
Dallol Plain (Ethiopia)	Australia	
Greenland	Iceland	
Iceland	Karelia	
Ibn Battuta, Morocco	La Palma	
Ries crater	New Zealand	
Rio Tinto	North Atlantic ridge (Hydrothermal vents)	
Tenerife	Ries crater	
Svalbard??	Romania (ice caves)	
	South Africa	
	Tibetian high plane	

Field sites were chosen based on relevance for astrobiology but also on the existence of support structures and strong local astrobiology communities. As can be seen there are 2 areas of overlap:

Iceland

It might be a good arrangement if Europlanet concentrates on hot springs and subglacial lakes whereas EAI focuses on fresh lava fields, solfatares and lava caves. Europlanet has worked with MATIS (a state-run company which has the monopoly of exploiting hot springs). EAC and the Nordic Network have formed teams of early career scientists working on the three latter environments: PELE (lava caves), MAFIC (solfatares) and FELDSPAR (lava fields). Also we propose that Europlanet collaborates with the University of Iceland (Reykjavik) and EAI with the University of Akureyri.

Ries Crater

The museum will be a great asset in Outreach. Concerning the crater site, it was proposed that Europlanet focuses on the geophysical part of the exploration, whereas EAI will concentrate on the ecological consequences of the impact.

Concern was raised that the Dallol site might be vital for the EAI research programme. It was suggested in that case to exploit the field site in cooperation with Europlanet. Also, it was raised that Rio Tinto might fit better into EAI. The Centro de Astrobiología representatives will discuss that issue with his colleagues in Spain.

The community is strongly encouraged to suggest further field sites.

3. Memorandum of Understanding

Wolf drafted 2 documents:

- a short Memorandum of Understanding
- the draft Statutes of the EAI

The drafts have now been circulated to the community on the Google forum.

It was suggested to let Core Organisations (an issue that was raised at the meeting of the Italian Society of Astrobiology) send more than one delegate to the General Assembly. This was supported by the Board.

4. Meeting in Liblice

Preparations are well underway. Wolf suggested to apply for funding from Europlanet and the Swedish National Space Board or funding of the event. If it can be administered by the J. Heyrovský Institute substantial discounts can be obtained.

5. Time Plan

We are in good shape for the recruitment, there have been positive signals in France and Italy. There should be enough time to recruit institutions and organisations to the first General Assembly.

6. Logo Contest

Ruth-Sophie presented the announcement for the Logo Contest which was approved. It will be circulated amongst the community via different channels, especially social media

7. Next telecon

The next telecon will be in the last week of November or the first week of December 2018.