



Digital-Environment System Coalition (DESC) Steering Group

Meeting 1 Notes
10th February 2022, 12.00 GMT/UTC
(main recommendations and action points in **green**)

Present: Carlos Álvarez Pereira, Isabella Wagner, Leandro Navarro, Max Hamilton, Tim Unwin

1. Introductions by members

- Members of the Steering Group briefly introduced themselves
- Carlos was congratulated on becoming Vice President of the Club of Rome
- Apologies: Tim apologised that he had not taken things forward as much as he would have liked over previous 6 months, but his family care responsibilities had been very time consuming.
- **Agreed:** we should consider identifying 2-3 additional members for the Steering Group, recognising our commitment to diversity.

2. Brief updates

- Current Membership (32 full, 3 youth, 7 associate)
- Partners (2) – with WWRF about to join
- Working groups
 - Thematic: Indigenous DESC (two being created: satellites; anti-sustainability business models. Spectrum environmental efficiency may also be a new group)
 - Administrative: Governance and Ethics; Internal Communications
- YouthDESC
 - Max was thanked for his leadership, and for taking forward the Instagram posts
 - Steering Group (currently 3 members, including one from Pakistan and one from India). We need to identify 2 or 3 more members
 - Instagram #YouthDESC – members will be recommending posts, so that we build up to several each week
 - Potential to engage university students
- Website
 - Within UNESCO Chair in ICT4D (at present)

- Regular updates on interesting stories – **Agreed**: need to encourage members to send suggestions for posts
- Discussion forums: not used very much so far – we need to encourage further use
- Follow up actions from last general meeting
 - Very limited, but a few people are active

3. Role of Steering Group

There was a wide-ranging discussion on this, which was linked to the role of DESC as a whole.

- Need to formalise this, but in summary
 - To provide oversight and direction
 - To co-ordinate WGs
 - To enthuse members
 - **Agreed**: Tim's role to be called Founder and Catalyst, and UNESCO Chair will continue to act as Secretariate.
 - **Agreed**: in line with previous discussions Working Groups will be relatively autonomous and Chaired and facilitated by different groups of members. We should regularly initiate calls for new Thematic Working Groups TWGs and membership thereof. Guidance may be needed in more detail about how they operate
- Suggestion for drafting a short constitution for the Steering Group
 - It was **Agreed** that we may not really need a formal constitution, but that its role can emerge organically.
- Ideas discussed included:
 - Main role is to keep the heart of the group beating
 - It can develop key messages and ideas to share with members and the wider community
 - Our holistic aim is very ambitious: holistic in how we approach key themes; and holistic in our overall concept. We can help DESC find out how to take this bull by the horns – it is so big! How do we do this?
 - DESC is a safe space – within our ethical framework – where we can discuss difficult ideas openly; how can we best deliberate on enquiry?
 - Need to be clear about added value/benefits of DESC – many initiatives already exist – what do we bring that is different?
 - We might consider having, say, three mediums that we always use, such as: posting questions that anyone can answer; having common norms and practices of how to engage that are easy, clear and simple; fact finding missions; developing clear concepts that are additional; helping working groups engage with others.
 - One important value add could be encouraging thinking that is not reductionist (whole and parts), and to explore what it means to be holistic. The whole may be of a completely different nature to the sum of its parts. We can encourage completely new ways of thinking.
 - We could convene small specialist high-level conferences/events as at Monte Verità (Ticino Italy) or Wilton Park (UK) or perhaps with UN agencies at the HQs (UNESCO, ITU, UNOOSA)
 - More creatively, we could perhaps arrange DESC walks where we go somewhere to discuss things, or even meet up somewhere for a long weekend to develop ideas.

- What exactly is role of TWGs? **Agreed:** Tim to draft short clarification paper including suggestions around
 - Forum for discussing key issues within the DESC conceptual framework
 - Summarising existing knowledge in field – perhaps c. 25 top papers everyone should read
 - Need to be very clear of added value
 - Forum to develop research grants in areas of gaps
 - Must engage voices that are not usually involved – particularly indigenous peoples, minority groups, those with disabilities...
 - YouthDESC members are encouraged to participate also in TWGs
 - TWGS are responsible for taking forward activities that they want autonomously, providing they fall within the broad agreed DESC structures.
- Perhaps each member of the Steering Group (when larger) could take responsibility for various issues

4. Challenges and solutions

The following challenges were noted in the Agenda, but there was insufficient time for them to be discussed

- Time
 - Many other environmental initiatives: is there a role for DESC?
 - Volunteer basis: DESC gets left until last
- Scope and objectives
 - Too broad a scope?
 - Need to have clear activities in which people can engage.
- Lack of incentives
 - Most people are already set in their own structures and ways
 - For many incentives mean funding
 - Why would people want to participate?
- Too conflictual in terms of current global climate agendas?
 - Challenging existing focus on climate change and carbon
- Decentralised structure
 - Getting the balance right between top-down and bottom-up
- Need to discuss role of UNESCO Chair in ICT4D and Tim's personal role as Founder/Catalyst

5. Potential Activities (over and above membership and partnership building) (10 minutes)

- Conferences (online/in person)
 - Contributing conference sessions (e.g. WSIS)
 - **Agreed** to submit bid to WSIS 2022, preferably in final week as hybrid
 - Our own conference – perhaps a 24 hour discussion later in 2022, chaired by 24 people for an hour each across every time zone. If enough support Tim and colleagues at UNESCO Chair might take this forward

- Initiating new thematic Working Groups
 - DESC is meant to be decentralised
- Book project – Tim to flesh out in more detail
- Funding applications
- Regular (monthly) seminars - **Agreed** as a good idea – would need someone to take this forward

6. Summary actions

- For Tim
 - Open call for new TWGs to be created, and for membership of existing ones
 - Craft an initial short paper on role and activities for Steering Group (based on our existing governance framework and these discussions)
 - Craft a paper on structures and practices of working groups
 - Medium term – flesh out proposed book structure.
 - Submit WSIS proposal
 - Doodle Poll for April meeting
- Isabella
 - To clarify status of final week of WSIS
 - Possibly to share her emergent work at ICT4D.at on systematic ways to encourage organisational effectiveness
- Carlos
 - To introduce Tim to Nolita at Club of Rome re. potential collaborative activities/conference.
- All
 - Suggest new members of Steering Group
 - Send any further suggestions to Tim re. papers on which he will be working
 - Encourage university students to join – contacting through Max

7. Any other business

None – ran out of time

8. Dates of next meeting

- In April to be confirmed through Doodle poll
