Observation International Strategic Plan 2022-26

November 2021

The following five strategic imperatives are proposed. These imperatives cover what Observation International already does, including all activities of Zostera, and what Observation International and its membership aspires to do in the coming period.

1. Enhance the platform for people to observe nature

Observation International will enhance a robust and scalable platform that is geared towards offering people an easy way to observe nature as part of their daily lives. A long-term vision for the continued improvement of the technical platform and its associated applications and tools will be developed. A key function is that Observation International unifies technical platforms, but can also offer parts of the platform in a modular way to institutional users. Mobile applications supported with artificial intelligence are a priority.

The following strategic implementation objectives are formulated:

1.a   Unify, enhance, and enable modular use of existing technical platforms
1.b   Position Observation International as an input channel on nature observations for other biodiversity data infrastructures
1.c   Strengthen the development and availability of (mobile) applications to support nature observations
1.d   Improve tooling based on artificial intelligence for species identification

2. Increase the stream of trusted nature observations

Observation International should enable an increased data stream of observations of all living organisms on earth. Both opportunistic nature observations as well as structured monitoring of organisms should be enabled. A key function is the validation of these observations by species experts supported by machine learning. Observation International will further promote open data, while considering sensitive data of particular species and or taxa.

The following strategic implementation objectives are formulated:

2.a   Stimulate a stream of observations of all living organisms covering all taxonomic groups

2.b   Enable observations originating from structured monitoring of living organisms

2.c   Advance the validation of observations by species experts supported by machine learning

2.d   Foster open data licenses while considering sensitive data

3. Engage a community of nature observers & validators

An enthusiastic and engaged community of nature observers and validators forms the backbone of Observation International. Through its membership organisations, Observation International should find ways to promote locally grounded networks of nature observers and expert validators. These networks should also function as an international network. Best practices will be developed for establishing communities of nature observers with respect to differences in various countries. The community should be supported with appropriate capacity enhancement actions, such as creating the enabling environment to feel part of a community, strengthen the organisational setting and improve skills through training and communication materials.

The following strategic implementation objectives are formulated:

3.a   Establish and expand locally grounded networks of nature observers, and enable these to function as an international network

3.b   Maintain and support locally grounded networks of validators, and enable these to function as an international network

3.c   Develop best practices for establishing and promoting nature observer communities

3.d   Enhance the capacity of nature observers, validators and partners through appropriate support, training and communication actions

4. Foster use of nature observation data

Large volumes of nature observations are increasingly being used by different categories of users, for example to unravel patterns and even close to real time trends in species distributions and abundance. Observation International will stimulate that data is available for usage in especially science, nature conservation, and the monitoring of species. Observation International will strive through strategic partnerships to improve the channels for making data available, track and

understand usage better, consistently document user requirements, and increase the communication around usage of data in general.

The following strategic implementation objectives are formulated:

4.a Foster use of nature observation data along the lines of fostering strategic partnership with monitoring and scientific institutions.

4.b Enable tracking of use of nature observation data through strategic partnerships

4.c Promote biodiversity knowledge through analysis of nature observation data for science, nature management, and policy

4.d Improve the communication on the usage of nature observation data for science, nature management, and policy

5. Establish an international consortium & governance

Observation International will position itself as an international (European) initiative. The governance of Observation International should stimulate and enable international collaboration and alliances as a consortium of partners. The Board and Global Team reflect this international consortium. The consortium ensures a sustainable financial foundation that is supplemented with project funding. Observation International will be transformed as one professional organization with a (distributed) secretariat.

The following strategic implementation objectives are formulated:

5.a Position Observational International as an international (European) big data nature observaton initiative for science, international biodiversity policy and nature management

5.b Ensure a sustainable financial foundation through membership contributions supplemented with project funding

5.c Encourage (international) collaboration and alliances with strategic partners

5.d Establish a unified professional Observation International organisation with a (distributed) secretariat

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