

“World Scout Centres” and “WOSM Accredited International Scout Centres”

Introduction

In his first Report to the World Scout Committee (WSC) in October 2004, the Secretary General introduced the idea of promoting “Scout Centres” worldwide, identifying to that purpose two general categories: *World Scout Centres* and some kind of *WOSM Collaborating Centres*. He proposed to the WSC that a specific policy paper on the subject be developed.

In explaining the proposal he anticipated some possible criteria, such as the need for any Scout Centre that wishes to be accredited by WOSM to comply with well-defined “Scout” operational characteristics and values. As an additional criterion *World Scout Centres* should include a well-defined level of *ownership* by WOSM in order to be recognised and integrated as WOSM structures.

The idea has been debated both inside the WSC and at the Board of Directors of the World Scout Bureau, also considering a written contribution sent by the Kandersteg International Scout Centre.

The proposed concept will be presented to the participants of the World Scout Conference for their information and further inputs from NSOs. It will be up to the new World Scout Committee to eventually complete the elaboration process and deliberate the adoption of the envisaged Policy and Procedures.

The idea of *World Scout Centres*

Gilwell Park started to work as a training centre for the Scout leaders of the British Scout Association in 1919. It was only in 1923, when J.S. Wilson took over its direction, that Gilwell started to function as a training centre for Scouts coming from all over the world. One year later, on the occasion of the World Jamboree and the World Conference in Copenhagen, the idea was born to move sometimes the Gilwell training course outside Great Britain. The natural choice fell on Kandersteg. In fact, the year before, the founder of Swiss Scouting, Major Walter de Bonstetten, following BP’s suggestion to promote Alpinism as part of Scouting activities, proposed to our Founder to buy a chalet on sale at very favourable conditions in Kandersteg. The idea found the enthusiastic support of BP and with contributions from Switzerland, Holland, U.K. and U.S.A., the chalet was bought and later (1929) also a wide piece of land nearby. The Chalet was inaugurated by BP on 22 August 1926 at the beginning of the 4th World Conference. Immediately thereafter the 50th Gilwell course took place in Kandersteg with participants from 13 different countries. Since then Kandersteg has developed as the *Kandersteg International Scout Centre* (KISC), strictly linked to WOSM and especially to its European Region – which has been largely contributing financially and to its management – however always maintaining the character of a Swiss organization autonomous from WOSM, i.e. not subject to the orientation and decisions of WOSM governing bodies, whose representatives are a minority on the board of KISC. Still, KISC is sometimes presented as a “World Scout Centre”.

There are also other structures more or less linked to the work of WOSM that wish to be considered as World Scout Centres, and the WSB receives requests in that sense from time to time, from existing national sites.

This urges the establishment by the WSC of a clear policy on the issue. Worldwide Scouts like to know that in one or more places there are sites that may be considered home to every Scout and where an educational programme is run with Scout standards “guaranteed” by WOSM itself.

Sometimes the idea of Scout Centres is also seen as having a potential for some profit and financial contribution to the activities of the Scout Movement. Experience (including KISC and WAGGGS World Centres) shows that this is not always the case and, on the contrary - especially in the absence of a long-term, well conceived business plan - these kind of Centres may represent a financial risk to the Institution owing them. In any case, considering the nature of Scouting, the educational value should be the leading factor in determining the establishment and recognition of a World Scout Centre with an acceptable degree of economical sustainability, where its profit-making potential would be considered only as an additional, welcome but non-essential characteristic.

With these considerations in mind a first definition of a *World Scout Centre* could be:

"a centre which responds to *world level educational needs* or offers services otherwise related to world Scouting (for example research), and whose programme and management fall under the responsibility of WOSM governing bodies through one of the following mechanisms:

1. it is a property of WOSM;
2. it belongs to an organization which WOSM somehow controls;
3. it belongs to a third party, but through a legally binding agreement, WOSM has the majority of votes in its governing body."

What may be understood under *world level educational needs* is still to be defined and will be part of the work to be done in view of the development of the Scout Centres policy. It can be anticipated that these needs should extend beyond a limited Scout environment, and such Scout Centres should gain social recognition (hence support) for the service offered, including by the local community in which they operate.

WOSM Accredited International Scout Centres

The idea of an International Organization using national institutions for international purposes dates back to the days of the League of Nations. Specific policies were adopted later by the UN and its agencies, in some cases recognising the comparative advantage of coordinating and making use of the activities of existing institutions, rather than establishing similar centres under their own auspices.

These centres are generally indicated as *collaborating centres* and form part of an inter-institutional network set up by a UN Programme or Agency in support of its programme at the country, regional, inter-regional or global levels, as appropriate. In some cases *collaborating centres* may be expected to participate in the strengthening of country resources in term of information, services, research and training in the specific field in which the coordinating UN agency operates.

It is proposed that WOSM applies a similar approach in relation to the tremendous wealth of Scout Centres existing around the world and offering a great variety of services ranging from accommodation and camping facilities, to training, research, documentation and others.¹ Apart from the experience of the European Region through "Where to stay in Europe" (320 Scout Centres listed), and "Scout Campsites and Hostels in the Asia-Pacific Region" published by that Regional Office, there has been virtually no systematic identification, recognition and promotion of these centres.

The services offered by existing Scout Centres, whether owned and managed by NSOs or not, may be of only local relevance, but often the interest may extend to national, regional or international level and their recognition and inclusion in a wider WOSM coordinated programme, hence their worldwide promotion, may represent an enormous contribution to the development of the Scout Movement and an important support to the thriving of those Centres.

¹ Just to enumerate a few, trying a first classification by field of interest:

Heritage: the 17th century Scout Home in old Gdansk; the Tchaikovski house in Tbilisi owned by Scouts of Georgia and used as a community centre; Becours village of EEDF; the MSC-Aragón village in the Pyrenees; the Castle of Jambville near Paris; the Castle of Courrières in Belgium, the Castle of Rieneck in Germany...

Nature/Mountain: Kandersteg International Scout Centre; the Azerbaijan Scout Camp site in the Caucasus; the Iztaru Camp Site of Costa Rica; Mount Sorak in Korea...

Nature/Sea: Alexandria Sea Scout Base in Egypt; the Key West Florida Sea Scout Base; Borj Cedria in the gulf of Tunis...

Nature/Air: the Air Scout Base near Sydney...

Nature/Desert: the Taif Scout centre in Saudi Arabia...

Information Technology: the Tripoli Scout Centre in Libya...

Environment: Rio de Janeiro Camp Site; Cataract Park Camp Site in Australia; Sharjah Camp Site in the U.A.E...

Humanitarian assistance: (ISC with activities related to disaster relief preparedness, refugees...)

Valencia (Spain), Turkey, Iceland or Indonesia...

Peace: the Bujumbura Scout Centre (Burundi)...

Leadership training: Hong Kong BP House; Vajiravudh NTC near Bangkok, Philmont BSA, Gilwell Park...

Social work: the Scout Centres in Erevan, Armenia; Ulaan-Baatar, Mongolia; Maison Carrée near Abidjan; Vocational Centres of Rabat in Morocco; Cochabamba in Bolivia...

To this purpose it is proposed to introduce a specific policy and to operate a specific world programme for the recognition and accreditation by WOSM of Scout Centres offering services of high standard and of international relevance. Detailed criteria and procedures for the accreditation of such *International Scout Centres* will have to be identified by the World Scout Committee following some general principles such as: to be accredited Scout Centres should contribute to the implementation of WOSM policies and fulfil one or several essential functions in support of WOSM programmes and priorities; they would adhere to specific terms and conditions, including detailed descriptions of the services offered and their educational or otherwise Scout related relevance; they should ensure the maintenance of specified standards; periodical work plans and reports should be sent to WOSM. WOSM however would have no right to intervene in the steering or management of the Accredited International Scout Centres (besides the obvious possibility to withdraw accreditation if terms and conditions should cease to be applied).

A redevelopment of the SCENES (Scout Centres of Excellence for Nature and Environment) programme would readily fit into this new approach.

WOSM would ensure a full, regularly updated list of accredited centres, their classification and promotion for the benefit of Scouting worldwide. If needed, WOSM may decide to give assistance to accredited centres, integrate them in world networks and strategic or functional teams and facilitate a joint sponsorship with partner UN agencies or other international organizations working in corresponding fields.

For completeness of information and promotion among Scouts worldwide, Scout Centres of a geographically more limited interest (i.e. national or provincial) could also be considered for registration with WOSM, however NOT as *Accredited International Scout Centres*.