

REPORT ON A SURVEY TO THE MEMBERS OF SG PARTICIPATION AND MOBILISATION ON MEMBERSHIP FEES

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Background

The SG on Participation and Mobilisation has been discussing for some time the appropriateness of raising some modest fees to help fund some activities moving forward. The need has emerged from the realization that, even with considerable voluntary work from the convenors and the steering committee, there is only so much that you can do with no budget for activities.

The steering committee has had several ideas for activities moving forward, from a 'best conference paper' award, a 'best article' award and a 'best book award' to research development and mentoring activities for post-doctoral junior colleagues, and studentships or support for a summer school to be organised by the SG on a regular basis. Having explored other options (e.g. sponsorship by publishers), and with the ECPR core funding stream for SG activities being reduced to funding of less standard activities and only ever 3 years; and given that the SG does not have a journal from which to generate income (as some other SGs do) or a steady conference that can provide an income stream (as some large SGs do), we have felt the need to consider introducing a membership fee.

This was initially and formally discussed, first, within the SG leadership, and then taken for an informal consultation to the business meeting of the SG at the conference in Prague (2016). After having continued to discuss the matter internally and explored other options (all of which have resulted inconclusive), the steering committee decided to consult the members through an online survey.

The survey was designed with Google Forms and was open for responses between January 23rd and March 3rd of 2017. This report summarises the key results obtained through the survey and proposes some ways forward.

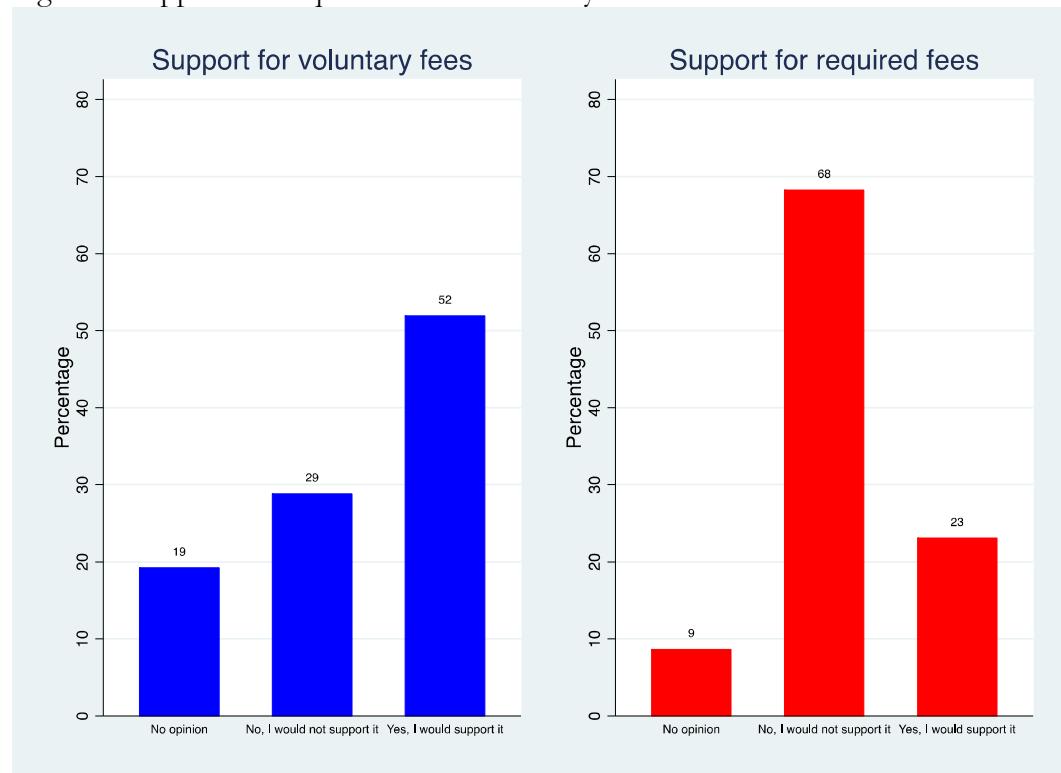
Results of the survey

The survey was responded by 104 members, over a total of 262 members when the survey was fielded and 293 when the survey was closed. This represents approximately 1/3 of the total membership. The respondents had the following profiles:

- 63% identified as men, 34% as women and 3% as neither.
- Respondents are relatively young, as the mean age of respondents is 35.5 years and the median age is 34 years. Approximately 27% of respondents are 30 years old or younger, 36% are between 31 and 40 years old, 16% are between 41 and 50 years old, and 21% is more than 50 years old.
- They are similarly distributed into the various categories of academic positions, with 23% of respondents being graduate/PhD students, 24% part-time or temporary contract academics, 30% full-time or permanent junior academics and 22% being established senior academics.

The key aspect that the survey wanted to capture was the support base to collect fees. Following the discussion of possible options at the Prague conference, we presented the members two options: required/mandatory fees, and voluntary fees. Figure 1 indicates there is a clear rejection of required fees and that a majority of members support voluntary fees. Only 23% of respondents would support a required fee, whereas 52% would support a voluntary one. In turn, only 29% reject a voluntary fee, whereas 68% reject a required one. Still, a considerable proportion have no defined view on the matter, especially when the voluntary option is proposed.

Figure 1. Support for required versus voluntary fees



The much higher support for a voluntary fee is consistent across the various sectors of the SG members according to their self-described academic position (Table 1). A plurality of the respondents in all categories support the introduction of a voluntary fee, whereas a majority of all groups reject a required fee and the size of that majority increases with the precariousness of the academic position of the respondents.

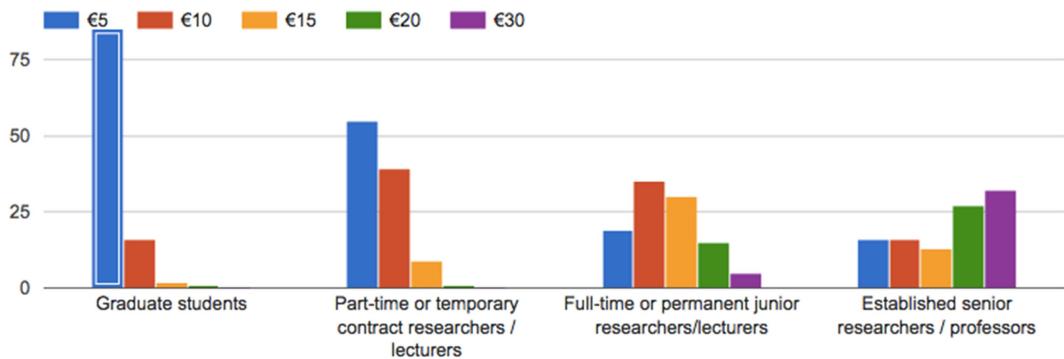
However, it is important to note that even if 52% of the respondents say they support the introduction of a voluntary fee, the percentage of those who indicated they would be willing to pay one every year is reduced to 46%. We asked those who were ready to pay a voluntary fee every year what amount they would be willing to pay as an open-ended question, so that everyone could suggest the amount they wished. The average of the amounts indicated is €11.45 and the median is €10. When the same question is asked about required fees instead, the result is similar: average of €10.6 and median of €10.

Table 1. Support for voluntary versus required fee by type of academic position

How would you describe your current academic position?	Would you support the idea of raising an annual, voluntary fee?			Would you support the idea of raising an annual, required fee?			Total	
	No opinion	No	Yes	No opinion	No	Yes		
Established senior academic	4	5	13	22	4	12	6	22
%	18	23	59	100	18	55	27	100
Full-time or permanent junior academic	8	8	14	30	3	19	8	30
%	27	27	47	100	10	63	27	100
Graduate students	4	7	13	24	1	19	4	24
%	17	29	54	100	4	79	17	100
Part-time or temporary contract	3	7	14	24	1	17	6	24
%	13	29	58	100	4	71	25	100
Unemployed	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1
%	100	0	0	100	0	100	0	100
Total	20	27	54	101	9	68	24	101
%	20	27	53	100	9	67	24	100

Although a required fee for membership in the SG was not supported, the questionnaire asked what amount would it be appropriate to request and whether that should vary across different groups depending to academic position. Figure 2 indicates that there is a clear sense that respondents think the fee should vary depending on the stability and seniority of the position. The value of the fee most supported for each type of academic position (the modal category) is €5 for graduate students and for part-time/temporary academics, €10 for permanent junior academics, and €30 for established senior academics.

Figure 2. Preferred fee by type of academic position



It is important to highlight that the lower fee rate for graduate students and for part-time/temporary academics is not driven by respondents in these two groups expressing a preference for the lower rate, as the percentage of the senior and full-time/permanent junior academics that endorse a €5 rate for graduate students is 77% and 87%, respectively, and the percentage of those two more established groups that endorse the lowest €5 rate for part-time/temporary academics is 54% and 50%, respectively.

Instead, the spread of values that we see for full-time/permanent junior academics reflects the different views that respondents in different positions hold about the fee this group of colleagues ought to pay. A plurality of senior academics and of part-time/temporary academics think that the fee should be €15 (41% and 37%, respectively), whereas a plurality of the respondents in full-time/permanent junior positions and of graduate students think it should be €10 (37% and 39%, respectively).

There is, equally, no consensus around the optimal fee for senior established academics. Respondents from that category, themselves, are equally divided between €10, €15 and €20 (options eliciting all 23% of responses). A plurality of full-time/permanent junior academics think senior academics should pay €20 (33%), whereas a plurality of part-time/temporary academics and of graduate students think they should pay €30 (54% and 30% respectively).

Finally, we also asked respondents whether they would be interested in an option for a named donation by which members who pay above a certain amount would be acknowledged as supporters of the standing group. A large majority of the respondents (73%) answered that they were not interested in such a possibility, but 27% were (with 6% saying they were very interested).

Proposal for next steps

- As the members who have responded are clearly opposed to a required fee, we will not propose to introduce one.
- As the members who participated in the survey supported the idea of a voluntary fee and, by definition, a voluntary fee allows every individual to make their own decisions about whether to pay one or not and which amount to contribute, we propose to introduce one starting with the new year (2018).
- We will request the ECPR to link the process of membership renewal for the SG Participation and Mobilisation to the option of paying a voluntary membership fee through an online payment platform similar to that used for the payment of conference fees (including debit/credit cards and PayPal payments).
- We will provide a suggestion for amounts for voluntary fees following the indications obtained in this survey: €5 for students and part-time/temporary academics, €10 for permanent full-time junior academics and €20 for established senior academics.
- If it is technically feasible, we would like to be able to ask those who contribute €50 or more if they want to be named/acknowledged for their special contribution to the SG.
- We propose to first confirm with the ECPR central services if implementation of the voluntary membership fee is feasible for the membership renewal round of 2018, and if it is we would make a formal decision about this at the SG business meeting at Oslo.