

Annex 13 – CIVL 2012 Plenary – Chinese Taipei

Poland Proposal of new air sports discipline

We would like to bring about creation of a new flying discipline called “XC open distance paragliding”

Justification:

1. We strongly believe that official disciplines should reflect those widely practiced by large (relevant) groups of people. Paragliding pilots have been competing ever since – racing to goal, accuracy landing, aerobatics and who will fly further or in other words open distance. So far only the last one – open distance – is not officially recognized as separate discipline.
2. Open distance flying is significantly different than racing along given course. You can't really compare a marathon runner with a sprinter. Apparently they are both just running, but in reality everything is different (gear, preparation, tactics, training and physical qualities of the athletes – there is not a single runner in the world who would excel in both sports).
3. Popular servers like XCC, WXC, XContest or Leonardo clearly show the open distance paragliding to be the mainstay of paragliding. Nevertheless, paragliding competitions completely miss that type of tasks, distorting image and spirit of paragliding.
4. Officially, free-flight paragliding as of now has three established disciplines: „paragliding competitions” „paragliding accuracy competitions” and „aerobatic competitions”. „Paragliding competitions” feature a set of tasks like race to goal, elapsed time race, assigned area tasks and open tasks. While open tasks are sometimes present during FAI 2 class competitions, they are not to be encountered during FAI 1 championships.

Thus, current character of the FAI 1 championships does not reflect the paragliding as a whole, so instead of „paragliding competitions” they should be called „paragliding races”. Creating a new discipline of cross-country/open distance paragliding competition would restore the balance, opening space for determining new national/continental/world champions.

5. Creating such a new sport type leads to creation of wholly new set of Champions, national teams, coaches etc., with according new possibilities of obtaining grants, donations and sponsors (good news for organizers of the competitions, as their significance will grow).
6. Currently the winners of FAI-approved WXC competition receive nothing but diplomas (no champion titles) and that fact proves the situation to be far from normal. The diplomas bring only personal satisfaction to pilots and do not mean much to sponsors, thus are neither helpful to pilots in return for their often outstanding airmanship, nor to paragliding as a whole.
7. Perhaps the most important effect of the new discipline is a radical improvement of the safety in the FAI approved championships. Open distance cross-country competing means eradication of many risks typical for racing (low altitude, close to obstacles full-speed flying, with waypoints often forcing pilots to choose dangerous routes in areas they would never visit otherwise. On the contrary, XC flying emphasizes prudence, integrity and meteorological skills of independently flying pilots – something highly needed in our sport.
8. We recognize fact that creating new discipline is an audacious proposal calling for serious changes in official rules, starting with Sporting Code. Thus, we need time for discussion, determining legal procedures, scoring rules etc. This is rather too much for hasty solutions, so perhaps the best solution for now is to delegate an international working group in order to prepare detailed scheme, ready for implementing at the next CIVL meeting.

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FAQ

1. What is „XC Open Distance Paragliding“?

XCODP is a distinct type of paragliding activity. You fly as far as you can, without pre-defined route or landing point. You can set a goal beforehand if you like, but you don't have to stick to it if weather changes. You simply adjust your route to make the best of the day. Only the distance counts, time is not as important as in the racing, though you have to be fast to fly far. For many pilots this way of flying is the essence of paragliding.

2. It is allowed to set open distance tasks in current paragliding competitions. Why do we need another XC discipline?

Yes, OD tasks are allowed but there is no cat. 1 OD competitions as such - hence there is no Open Distance World Champion title for the discipline. The cat. 2 winner title is not enough to attract sponsors, grants, financing etc. Especially for those who would like to compete but are not too much into crazy racing over sharp rocks.

3. Should there be a separate competition category and scoring within WPRS created?

Yes. National Teams in Open Distance flying would be formed on the basis of such ranking. Of course pilots can participate in both – the racing and the open distance competitions – but scoring should be kept separate so that racing points don't count for open distance and vice versa.

4. How to play Open Distance comps?

In terms of time and place there is no big difference to classic racing comps. Pilots meet in a given place (offering good conditions, easy retrieve in most common directions etc). The comps last a number of days, with minimal number of tasks required to make the comp valid.

Task validation proposal:

- At least 20% pilots reach min. distance of 30km. The winner scores 1000 points, others get proportion of the best pilot's points based on a flown distance.
- At least 10% pilots reach min. distance of 30km. Winner scores 500 points, others get a proportion of the best pilot's points based on a flown distance.
- At least 1 pilot reaches min. distance of 30km. Winner scores 250 points, others get a proportion of the best pilot's points based on a flown distance.

Types of tasks:

Only Open Distance tasks with given start cylinder and preset landing time, with following options:

- flight in any direction optimized via 3 turn points (any)
- flight in any direction optimized along start – landing straight line
- flight along given axis; landing place is projected on the axis
- flight via given turning point* and then optimized via 3 turning points, straight line or an axis

(*) safety reasons (weather conditions, airspace, big cities etc); not more than 15km from starting point

5. How will out-and-return and triangle flights be scored during comps?

Since OD format focuses on the distance covered during flight, the out-and-return and triangle flights will be scored same as classic open distance flights. It is possible that some organizers will award bonus points for certain routes or landing zones due to local laws/terrain/weather conditions, yet basically it is only the distance that counts.

6. CIVL has decided to run online WXC and announces its winners. Is this not enough?

Of course it's good that CIVL listens to the voice of community and reacts to trends, but it's not enough. Nice diploma is nice but it doesn't mean much in terms of prestige and definitely not enough to help to attract sponsors.

Bringing up a new discipline will open door to a new competition format – Open Distance flying, thus creating a whole new scheme of champions, coaches and national teams, opening new avenues of seeking sponsorship.

7. What is the future of WXC platforms?

Many national WXC platforms exist rather as personal flight log books than a competition – a place where you can compare flights, compare your score against others on a given date, sum up your kms etc. Even as they can be used as rankings constituting national OD teams, their role as a fundament in determining national/world champions is subject to dispute.

Basically open distance flying format and technology are created to exist together. In this way something like Open Distance World Cup is possible - instead of going to one place and praying for weather we could open, let's say, 21 days' window during which at least 6 declared flights would have to be made and best 3 flights would count for a round. We can have few rounds (based on the northern hemisphere seasons): Winter – South Africa, Australia; Spring – Alps; Summer – Central Europe flatlands; Autumn – Brasil.

8. Aren't speed and distance flying the same? In both formats pilots have to fly a number of kilometers in thermals.

Let's compare sprinters and marathon runners. They both do run, but that's where similarities end. All the rest is different - how they train, what they eat, what shoes they use, even how they are physically built. Sprint runners have big muscles that deliver lots of power in few seconds while marathoners are very fit, some even look skinny but they can run for hours. There is no way the same runner would be successful in both disciplines.

It looks just the same with PG racing and open distance flying. Yes - it is both about flying in thermals and yes, it is both about time and distance. All the rest is different, including safety.

Now, look at WXC, XContest or XC-Open World Series results and compare them to the WPRS scheme. You'll find a number of same names on both lists, but the majority will be always different. Why? Simply because these disciplines are different – they require different preparation, different tactics, different physical and mental condition etc. It's also about preferences. Hundreds of pilots are not willing to risk flying into the lee side turning points, to race full-bar just a few meters over a sharp ridge or simply land on the goal in the middle of a super-day. But it doesn't mean those pilots don't want to compete. Race tasks often force pilots to take risks they are not ready. In contrast, open distance flying emphasizes prudence, integrity and meteorological skills of independently flying pilots – something highly desirable in our sport.

9. How to do it?

Creating new discipline calls for serious changes in official rules, starting with Sporting Code. Thus, we need time for discussion, determining legal procedures, gathering opinions etc. Perhaps the best solution for now is to delegate an international working group in order to prepare detailed scheme, ready for implementing at the next CIVL meeting.