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The EuroSITES open ocean observatory network: the data managers' perspective

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The EuroSITES project was funded within the EU framework 7 to aid the convergence of the efforts of the 11 European-wide deep ocean observatories which formed its core. A major output of the project was envisaged as the synergies of the 13 partners working together to create a network providing sets of data in near-real-time, and in delayed-mode, which have been collected and processed in such a way as to be accessible to the wider scientific community, and comparable across time and site. The common data policy agreed by all the partners at the start of the project, and the evolution of a EuroSITES quality control manual which includes all the observatories practices, have formed the framework within which each data management group has delivered datasets which now carry the EuroSITES 'brand' as well as all the originators details.
As a focal point for the, currently, 12 sites the EuroSITES data managers have worked as the European partner within the international OceanSITES project, developing the OceanSITES distribution standard, and studying the options for attaching additional metadata to data sets. The influence of EuroSITES as the European champion for the distribution of data in OceanSITES format will be an enduring legacy.
The EuroSITES website (www.eurosites.info) provides a highly visible, and user accessible platform for the distribution of near-real time data from the observatories, as it becomes available. The data from the diverse sites are displayed in a consistent manner and the web pages form a coherent 'shop window' where potential data users can source data sets useful to their research, as well as a visual means of monitoring the health of the observatories. The sister site (outreach.eurosites.info) has been developed in parallel to be accessible to non-scientists.
Working together EuroSITES has been able to develop a single conversion software package taking MEDATLAS and ODV ascii files and outputting the OceanSITES format. The sharing of knowledge in this and other developments ensures that costly duplication of effort is minimised.
During the 3 years of the project the data management groups have interacted to share best practice, and although each is still independent and serves its own National Data Centre, the EuroSITES data inventory now carries data from all 13 sites, distributed in the OceanSITES v1.2 format. This format is NetCDF based, and carries within the

file metadata. This describes the data in a consistent manner which achieves the first step towards interoperablility. The future of the funding of EuroSITES after April 2011 is not yet clear, but the project has achieved a remarkable degree of harmonisation already, and the relationships between the data management groups will undoubtedly continue as the cost benefits of resource and knowledge sharing become ever more important in the scientific arena.