

European Framework for the long term preservation of Earth Observation space data

1 Introduction

The need for accessing historical Earth Observation (EO) data series strongly increased in the last ten years, mainly for long term science and environmental monitoring applications. This trend is likely to increase even more in the future in particular for the growing interest on global change monitoring which is driving users to request time-series of data spanning 20 years and more, and due also to the need to support the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Content of EO data archives is extending from a few years to decades and therefore their value as a scientific time-series is continuously increasing. Hence there is a strong need to preserve the EO space data without time constraints and to keep them accessible and exploitable. The preservation of EO space data can be also considered as a responsibility of the Space Agencies or data owners as they constitute a humankind asset. In the next decade, the wealth of information currently locked inside the global data archives must be fully exploited and re-analyzed on a global scale (Figure 1 and 2 show examples of information extraction from long-term data series). This challenge relies on full accessible and exploitable archives (Figure 3).

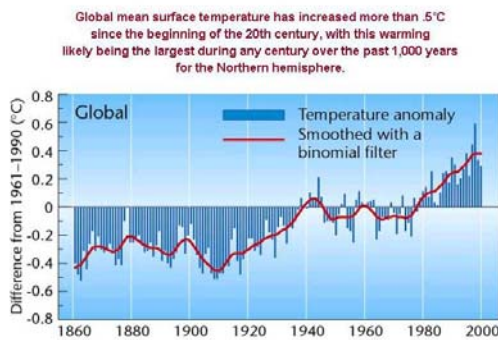


Figure 1 - Surface temperature increase

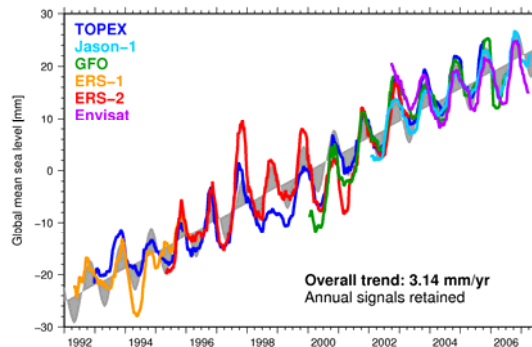


Figure 2 – Global sea level raise (courtesy of Remko Scharroo)

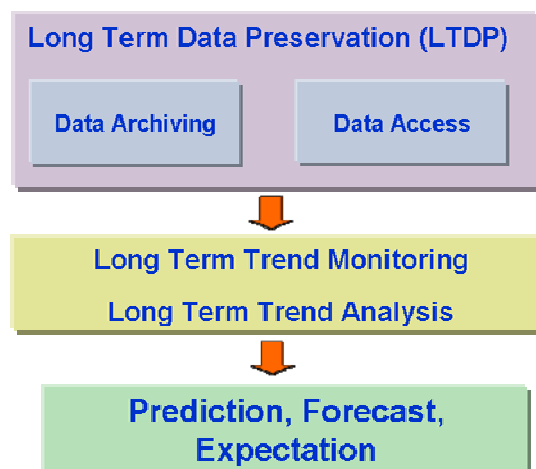


Figure 3 – Long term trend monitoring

The application areas heavily benefiting from the EO long term data archiving exploitation are wide and can be summarized as:

- EC Policies with long-term perspective.
- European and Global Environment (e.g. Forest Monitoring, Soil Monitoring, Urban Development, Air Quality Monitoring, Ecosystems Monitoring and management for protection of terrestrial, coastal and marine resources).
- Management of energy resources (e.g. solar, etc.).
- Development and Humanitarian Aid Health including the understanding of environmental factors affecting human health and well-being.
- Food security including sustainable agriculture and combating desertification.
- Water resource management through better understanding of the water cycle.
- Civil Protection and disasters monitoring (e.g. Flood Prediction and Mitigation, Landslides, Subsidence, Volcanoes Monitoring).
- Global Climate Change (e.g. Systematic Climate Observations, Drought Monitoring, Monitoring of the Atmosphere, etc.).
- Climate understanding for assessing, predicting, mitigating and adapting to climate changes, as well as the improvement of weather information, forecasting and warning.
- Biodiversity enhanced understanding, monitoring and conserving.
- Global Security and Sustainable Development.

1.1 European EO archives challenges

The large amount of new Earth Observation missions upcoming in the next years (Figure 4) will moreover lead to a major increase of EO space data volumes. This fact, together with the increased demands from the user community, marks a challenge for Earth Observation satellite operators, Space Agencies and EO space data providers regarding coherent data preservation and optimum availability and accessibility of the different data products.



Figure 4 – Current and future European and Canadian EO missions (excerpt)

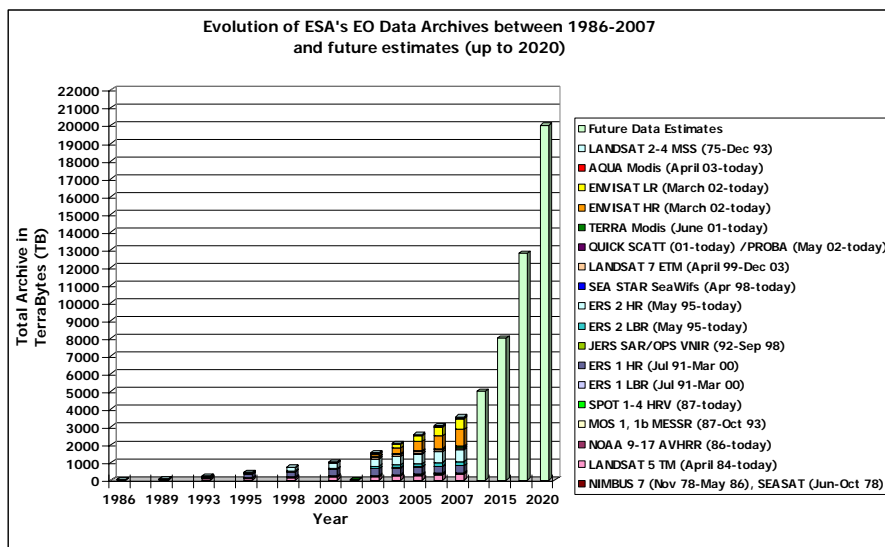


Figure 5 – ESA expected volume of archives

As an example Figure 5 shows in broad values the current dimension of the ESA archive per mission and the expected volume for the next years. The data holding growth boosted since the launch of ERS and in particular of the Envisat mission and will be increasing even further with the contribution of additional Third Party Missions (TPM) and with the GMES program. The plans of new ESA missions indicate 5-10 times more data to be archived in next 10-15 years. Similar trend is also monitored at all National archives.

Traditionally in Europe*, there has been poor cooperation in this field with no common approach for long term preservation and access to EO space data even if cooperation and sharing are key aspects to be pursued for the benefit of the user community. Preserving today's science records (e.g. data, publications) as well as their context is fundamental in order to preserve the future of science but single organizations have difficulties to afford data preservation in the long term that calls for the need of optimising costs and efforts, identifying commonalities.

A cooperative and harmonized collective approach on Long Term Data Preservation (LTDP) in Europe (i.e. a European EO LTDP Framework) is needed to coordinate and optimize European efforts in the LTDP field and to ultimately result in the preservation of the complete European EO space data set for the benefit of all European countries and users and with a reduction of overall costs.

2 Key principles

Main goals of the European EO Long Term Data Preservation Framework are to:

1. Preserve the European, and Canadian, EO space data sets for an unlimited time-span.
2. Ensure and facilitate the accessibility and usability of the preserved data sets respecting the individual entities applicable data policies.
3. Through the adoption of a cooperative and harmonized collective approach among the data owners (LTDP Framework) based on the application of European LTDP Common Guidelines and sustained through cooperative (multi-source) long term funding schemes.

* In the scope of this document Europe is intended including Canada

4. Ensure, to the maximum extent, the coherency with the preservation of other non-space based environmental data and international policies.

The European LTDP Framework is open to all possible members and is to be intended as a collaborative framework consisting of distributed and heterogeneous components and entities cooperating in several areas to reach a harmonized preservation of the European EO space data set. The framework is based on the contribution of European EO space data owners through their ideas and possibly their infrastructure in accordance to the commonly agreed LTDP Guidelines and should follow a progressive implementation based on a stepwise approach (short, mid, long-term activities). A common approach in the field of Long Term Data Preservation should aim at the progressive application of the European LTDP Common Guidelines but also at cooperation of the archive owners in several areas for a progressive development and implementation of technology, methodology, standardization, operational solutions and data exploitation methodologies as key aspects for the set-up of the framework. The European LTDP framework is outlined in Figure 6.

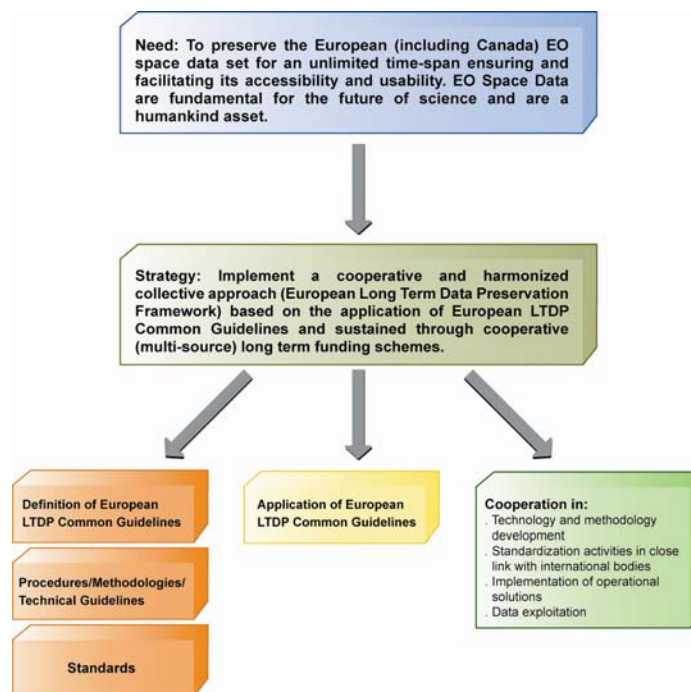


Figure 6 – Long Term Data Preservation Outline Framework

A cooperative framework can facilitate for EO space data owners and archive holders the achievement of the common goal of preserving and guaranteeing access to the own data through benefiting from proven technologies, procedures and approaches and through the possibility to reuse and share infrastructure elements in the long term. The adoption of standards (e.g. for data access interfaces and formats, procedures, etc..) and common technical solutions can also allow to significantly reduce preservation costs.

The European LTDP Framework should be sustained through a cooperative programmatic and long term funding framework based on multilateral cooperation with multiple funding sources from at least the European EO space data owners.

The existence of a European LTDP Framework will also increase the awareness on data preservation issues favouring the start of internal processes at private or public European EO space data owners and

providers. A European framework could also trigger the availability in the long term of additional permanent funding sources (e.g. European Commission) and can increase the possibility for any European (including Canada) EO space data owner to preserve missions data beyond their funding schemes into the cooperative and distributed framework.

3 The LTDP Common Guidelines

In 2006, the European Space Agency (ESA) initiated a coordination action to share among all the European (and Canadian) stakeholders a common approach to the long term preservation of Earth Observation space data. During 2007, the Agency started consultations with its Member States presenting an EO Long Term Data Preservation strategy [R. 1] targeting the preservation of all European (including Canada) EO space data for an unlimited time-span ensuring and facilitating their accessibility and usability through the implementation of a cooperative and harmonized collective approach among the EO space data owners.

The Long Term Data Preservation Working Group with representatives from ASI, CNES, CSA, DLR and ESA was formed at the end of 2007 within the Ground Segment Coordination Body (GSCB, R. 2) with the goal to define and promote, with the involvement of all the European EO space data and archive owners, the LTDP Common Guidelines and also to increase awareness on LTDP. The resulting draft LTDP guidelines were reviewed by all ESA member states in the DOSTAG. The scope of Long Term Data Preservation as intended in the guidelines is not limited to the preservation of the data in the archives but also of the capabilities to generate products from the archived data and includes therefore also processing aspects. The insurance and facilitation of access, respecting the individual entities applicable data policies, and exploitation of the archived data are also part of the guidelines. Data access policies are on the other hand not part of the European LTDP Common Guidelines.

During the 1st Earth Observation Long Term Data Preservation workshop in May 2008 [R. 3], the draft guidelines and the framework were presented and debated by all European and Canadian EO data owners, data providers and archive holders. The participants discussed and developed a joint strategy to move ahead technically and programmatically concerning the Long Term Data Preservation of EO Data and recognized the need and benefits of a common approach. Furthermore all the participants identified and agreed the draft LTDP Common Guidelines presented at the workshop as a first concrete and fundamental step to move ahead in creating the Long Term Data Preservation Framework. The guidelines should be adopted for old missions with a step-wise approach and straightforward for new missions and projects. ESA was given the task to trigger and coordinate the following steps toward the progressive European LTDP Framework implementation.

A consolidated LTDP Common Guidelines document has been produced on the basis of the comments and feed-backs received during the LTDP workshop. The document addresses the following nine main themes defining for each the “Guiding Principle” and the “Key Guidelines”:

- Preserved data set composition
- Archives maintenance and data integrity
- Archives operations
- Data security
- Data ingestion
- Data access and interoperability
- Data exploitation and re-processing
- Standardization
- Data Purging/Appraisal

An extensive public review process of the guidelines document is now open with the goal to collect additional comments and feed-backs from the EO space data owners and archive holders and to issue a

commonly agreed version of the document by the end of 2009. The document can be found at the link http://earth.esa.int/gscb/ltdp/EuropeanLTDPCommonGuidelines_DraftV2.pdf and comments can be submitted until end of September 2009 to the following address: secretariat.ltdp@esa.int.

The LTDP guidelines constitute a basic reference for the long term preservation of EO space data. Their application by European EO space data owners and archive holders is fundamental in order to preserve the European EO space data set and to create an European LTDP Framework. The application of the identified guidelines is not a requirement or a must for European EO space data owners and archive holders but is strongly recommended also following a step-wise approach starting with a partial adherence. To this end different priorities have been associated to each guideline and three different levels of adherence to the LTDP Common Guidelines as a whole have been defined. Adherence to the guidelines should start from the basic level ones to reach full adherence in the long term. The LTDP guidelines document is intended to be a living document and can be also considered as a starting point to support the establishment, and aid the implementation, of more detailed technical procedures/methodologies when missing, favoring active cooperation in Europe in the LTDP field.

4 Cooperation activities

The initial areas of cooperation related to LTDP to be addressed are on:

1. **Policies** for the consolidation and issue of the European LTDP Common Guidelines, and adherence to them, and for the definition and application of a purge alert / appraisal procedure to EO space data.
2. **Technology, methodology and developments.** The aim is to jointly evolve archive and data access technology through studies/pilots sharing the acquired know-how and infrastructure and to share knowledge/experience exchanging information to favour technical cooperation (cross participation into reviews, share of solutions, products, developments, etc). An additional fundamental activity is the continuation of development of harmonized access mechanisms (like HMA) and the definition of common operational procedures.
3. **Standardisation** activities in close link with international bodies (e.g. CCSDS, CEOS, OGC, INSPIRE, EU initiatives, GEO).
4. **Operational solutions** setting-up the principles for a common European distributed archiving concept aiming at the creation of an interoperable network of archive centres possibly reusing infrastructure of the different entities (as a single archive) in the long term. This would pave the way to future cooperation programs starting from standardized and certified services (e.g. share of data archives, archive transfer on demand or in case of a purge alert, coordination of re-processing schemes, format adoption/conversion, etc.).
5. **Data exploitation** through the definition and implementation of joint EO historical data exploitation programmes.

An initial set of activities is currently being defined in some of the areas mentioned above (e.g. studies on next generation archive technology and for the definition of LTDP users' requirements and composition of the data set to be archived to guarantee knowledge preservation). Details on the activities and their results will be provided published on the LTDP area of the GSCB web site [R. 4]. Participation to the cooperation activities is open to European EO space data owners and archive holders and based on voluntary contribution. Comments, feed-backs and proposals for cooperation activities can be submitted to secretariat.ltdp@esa.int.

5 Roadmap vision

The roadmap for the set-up of the European LTDP Framework can be articulated in three main phases to follow the best practices defined in the LTDP Common Guidelines and to progressively cooperate in the areas defined in Section 4. The starting situation is characterized by weak standardization, no clear and common methodology, poor cooperation with each entity dealing with the preservation of its own data often in a one by one mission basis. The objective of the first phase is to reinforce the LTDP approach at each entity, to start the cooperation among agencies and EO space data owners (e.g. in methodology, standardization, sharing of information, etc...) and to define the future European organisation of LTDP in a very long term perspective. At the end of the first phase, standardization and methodology should be greatly defined on the main areas, EO space data owners should deal with LTDP as a transversal activity not closely tied to single missions and good cooperation among a significant number of EO space data owners should be in place.

In the mid term perspective (second phase) cooperation should be strengthened through the implementation of common activities among European EO space data owners with the goal to achieve an interoperable network of archives (e.g. share of solutions and systems, coordination of common technology developments, adoption of standards...), but also improving operational services according to user needs (i.e. Climate changes monitoring operational systems, etc.). Additional entities in Europe will be attracted and become part of the European LTDP Framework that is characterized at the end of the second phase by common technical views and solutions and standardized services, coordinated LTDP approaches and schedules between members and high interoperability between archives. LTDP is at this stage a common process which may be offered as a service able to manage and preserve the huge amount of EO space data owned by the different entities with a cost effective approach.

In the long term perspective cooperation should be further extended through the sharing of infrastructure (e.g. common and shared access points, interoperable and transparent data access and infrastructure), allowing to have a unique network of data, shared resources for data reprocessing and products generation and a common and harmonised security levels and layers. At this stage the EO space data archives could be extended also to other types of data according to user needs and alternative scenarios for the management of the exabyte/zetabyte archives era could be analyzed.

6 Conclusions

The European Framework for LTDP has been initiated. All European EO space data owners and archive holders are becoming part of a progressive process to guarantee the EO space data preservation in the long term.

The next steps will be addressing the public review of the European LTDP Common Guidelines published on the GSCB web site [R. 5] and their promotion within CEOS or GEO international communities. The first identified technical cooperation activities will be started (e.g. studies on next generation archive technology and for the definition of LTDP users requirements and composition of the data set to be archived to guarantee knowledge preservation) and methodologies and standards available in international committees (e.g. CCSDS) or generated in the framework of ongoing projects (e.g. EC funded) will be revised and eventually recommended for adoption within the LTDP Common Guidelines. The international context of the European LTDP Framework is shown in Figure 7.

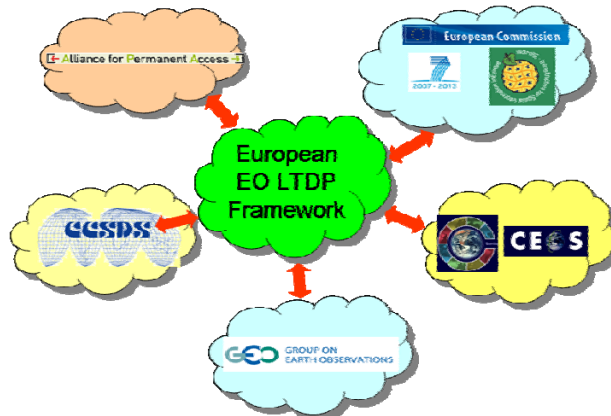


Figure 7 – International context

In November 2008 at the ESA Ministerial Council, an LTDP programme for the period 2009-2011 was approved and ESA is now planning to apply the LTDP Common Guidelines to its own missions. ESA will implement the high priority activities in the next three years focussing on data preservation and enhancement of data access; an LTDP programme will be prepared for the period beyond 2011.

Contacts

Any information related to the Long Term Data Preservation Framework initiative will be published on the LTDP area of the GSCB web site (<http://earth.esa.int/gscb/ltdp>). Additional information can be required writing an e-mail to the following address: secretariat.ltdp@esa.int.

References

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- R. 3 1st LTDP Workshop, May 2008, http://earth.esa.int/gscb/ltdp/LTDP_Agenda.html
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- R. 5 European LTDP Common Guidelines, Draft Version 2, http://earth.esa.int/gscb/ltdp/EuropeanLTDPCommonGuidelines_DraftV2.pdf