



Mediterranean Regional Information Network (MedRIN)

MedRIN is the newest of the GOCF-GOLD networks, providing coordination on remote sensing to monitor land-cover change, inform soil and water resource management and monitor fire and other hazards. The Mediterranean region is characterized by several organizations and institutions with advanced knowledge and capacity in the area of earth observations. MedRIN aims to capitalize on existing relationships and initiatives, encouraging collaboration and communication to tackle common priorities.

Objectives

MedRIN aims at keeping its members abreast with the latest advancements in earth observation applications based on NASA and ESA satellite data and data products.

In particular, the network supports:

- better coordination and linkage of monitoring systems and databases across Mediterranean;
- strengthening and upgrading regional/national EO networks;
- alignment of multi-modal and multi-source data compliant to international norms;
- utilization of Copernicus and freely distributed services in the region by end users; and
- contribution to free publicly-available data through interoperable databases and services.

Priorities and accomplishments

During the 2018 kick-off event and the first network meeting held in 2019, participants discussed objectives, priorities, and strategy. A third meeting planned in collaboration with the SCERIN network for 2020 has been rescheduled to 2021 due to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

The network will include training and capacity building as major components of all its activities. Network coordinators are collaborating to develop a regional “inter-institutional” program which would enable Master and PhD students working on MedRIN issues to transfer between different institutions in the network. The network has also facilitated the participation of young scientists from the MedRIN region in a call from NASA for collaboration on land-use/land-cover change issues.

Capacity development efforts in secondary education include a training event for 100 secondary school students organized during the network’s 2019 meeting.

Launched in 2018, MedRIN is the youngest GOCF-GOLD regional network, and as of June 2020 it counts 75 members.

MedRIN web page:
<https://gofcgold.org/regional-networks/mediterranean-regional-network-medrin>

Perspectives from the development of the youngest GOFC-GOLD regional network, MedRIN

A conversation with Vincent Ambrosia, California State University - Monterey Bay and NASA (USA), Ioannis Gitas, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (Greece) and Diofantos Hadjimitsis, Cyprus University of Technology and ERATOSTHENES Centre of Excellence (Cyprus).

How did the network start and what are the issues it aspires to address?

V.A.: The MedRIN network started with a kick-off meeting in 2018 in Greece. The first actual meeting took place in Cyprus in 2019. During this meeting, we identified five issues specific to the Mediterranean region on which we wanted to focus.

D.H.: These issues are: hazards (fires, earthquakes, floods, etc.) with emphasis on forest fires; urban and built-up areas with emphasis on land-use / land-cover change; rural areas / agriculture, forestry and wildlands; issues related to soil and water resources management (irrigation / hydrology, soil degradation, desertification); and training and promotion of earth observations.

What does the capacity building component of the network look like?

I.G.: We are working at different levels to develop the capacities of students and young researchers. During our first meeting we organized a training for high school students. The course was so successful that the schools have been asking us to repeat it.

At PhD level, we have started to put in place systems for joint supervision of students working on the network's thematic areas. We are also looking at developing joint distance learning resources, which would be a first in this field in the region.

V.A.: The network is also facilitating other opportunities for young researchers, for example a recent call from NASA invited young investigators from the region to join collaborations on land-use/land-cover change issues.

How does MedRIN fit in the landscape of existing regional collaborations?

I.G.: There are many initiatives in the region, including another GOFC-GOLD regional network, SCERIN, that overlaps in part with MedRIN. We do not want to replace existing relationships, but rather capitalize on them. These existing collaborations allowed us to hit the ground running with MedRIN.

D.H.: We plan to use existing initiatives to the benefit of MedRIN, and vice-versa. MedRIN aims to capitalize on existing relationships, capacities and networks such as 'GEO-CRADLE' and 'EXCELSIOR'. One of the biggest upcoming projects in the region is the 'EXCELSIOR' H2020 Widespread Teaming Project that aims to establish a sustainable, viable and autonomous Centre of Excellence in Cyprus with funding from the European Union, the Government of Cyprus and the Cyprus University of Technology. The ERATOSTHENES Centre of Excellence (ECoE) will be a world class digital innovation hub for earth observation and geospatial information, becoming the reference in the Eastern Mediterranean, Middle East and North Africa region. MedRIN members are deeply involved in this project: Vincent Ambrosia is a member of the Advisory Board and Ioannis Gitas participates through Aristotle University as a committed organization.

What are the priorities for the future of MedRIN?

I.G.: We want to expand the network by encouraging new members to join. Once the collaborations are established, they are very successful, but how can we spark that connection? How do we enable younger researchers to participate, when there is no specific funding allocated? How can we encourage established experts to get involved? These are some of the challenges we are trying to solve.

V.A.: One of the ways we are overcoming these challenges is by organizing MedRIN meetings around larger events. This provides an opportunity to maximize travel budget and increase the visibility of the network.

D.H.: There isn't a "how-to" manual for regional networks. We have been discussing various strategies to make the network more visible and sustainable, from developing its online presence, to looking at registering it as a legal entity in one or more countries. It is work in progress but for the moment we are really enjoying the collaboration and the early benefits that it has brought to the region.

Network members in Cyprus in 2019.

