

ESPI Executive Brief

An App Store for Earth Observation Tools and Applications?

If you have attended a few conferences on the use of Earth Observation data you might have noticed that most user-made programs and applications are developed in complete isolation from each other. This invites the conclusion that much duplication is done, that cross-fertilisation is limited and that existing functionalities are underused.

In the tech world the masters of opening up choice and enabling broad use of apps are, of course, Apple and Google, the Apple App Store becoming iconic. Not long ago Apple itself had to acquire a filtering program in order to be able to have an overview of the hundreds of thousands of applications being offered in its App Store. Making apps easily available is part of Apple's and Google's strategy for building self-reinforcing eco-systems around their core products.

When talking to some of the ones having developed programs and applications that could be used by others in the Earth Observation field, it becomes clear that many would be ready to share the programs and applications even free-of-charge as long as they would not incur any liability for their use and would not have to provide the data streams used by the programs and applications. Given this readiness, it would seem to be in the interest of the entire Earth Observation community to create a platform on which such 'apps' could be put for the free download by interested users.

But such a platform could, of course, also host commercial products in the field; the platform could become a true product exchange for programs and applications in the Earth Observation field. Conditions for download may then vary, may be conditioned upon no-liability or upon payment of one-off or periodic fees, but the platform would make all this clear in advance, as current stores in other fields do.

There should be a strong interest in the Earth Observation community to create a lively ecosystem of users and developers around the wealth of data coming from the satellites (and in-situ observation). Creating an effective 'market-place', an app store, is a proven method, and creating one for Earth Observation data (volunteers anyone?) would avoid duplication, increase use, allow cross-fertilisation and enhance the effectiveness of the use of resources in this critical field!



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