E-solutions for Research Management

Sharing knowledge electronically...

The development of the technology includes dissemination and discovery but there's also a developing role as "gatekeeper" for research funding

At the start of the project IWRM-net set up a database and developed a knowledge management tool to support its network of research managers. This involved a MySQL database linked with a PHP website. There is nothing unique about this development and in that became one of the issues. As the development grew the partners started to look at other environmental era-nets to see if they had similar information that could be of value. The answer was yes. Yet all of them work in a slightly different way or perform a slightly different function designed for specific environmental field.

Information management is growing rapidly and as the technology develops the options for project and research managers can seem a little confusing.

One option would be to create web portal (for example www.wastenet.com), that uses combination of federated searching and indexing to interrogate a wide range of www-based resources, and acts as a dedicated repository of relevant documents that have no natural home on the Internet. Discussions have been had with EUGRIS, CRUISE and SKEP and CIRCLE and WISE RTD to work together to find a means of collaboration. With funding at a premium many sites are being used as a means to generate income, both as a means of

maintenance but also growth and development for the organisation in control.

Yet how can a research manager chose which to support and perhaps this is where market forces will come into play. The team that develop the most user friendly site will get the largest market share and justify its continued development. But when public funds are being used to develop many of these sites—are we getting value for money?

CRUISE (CRUE ERA-net) and IWRM-net have agreed to produce xml files that will share data between the two databases. IWRM-net are also aiming to undertake this task with CIRCEL also dependant on the extension of CIRCLE as an eranet. From this IWRM-net hopes that we can start the creation of a valuable eranet resource. Discussions are also underway with the Institute for Prospective and Technological studies in Seville (EU-JRC) and their NETWATCH project. The objective of the portal is to offer a central information platform the European transnational R&D collaboration starting with the era-net programme. By collaborating perhaps each portal for a theme such as water can locate specific resources backed up by a central resource that is ERAWATCH and NETWATCH. This is a long term goal and hosting an maintenance of such a site would take considerable mem-

ber state support but I believe it would be worth it and reduce the current duplication of effort.

In the UK large organisations such as the British Library are increasingly interested in e-

The jigsaw puzzle of era-nets can perhaps be joined together online via federated searches?

solutions, broadening out the catalogue to less formal publications or 'grey literature'. The development of the technology includes dissemination and discovery but there's also a developing role as "gatekeeper" for research funding, which is where they cross over with era-nets. The idea is that a portal is a simple way of helping funders to avoid wasteful overlaps and duplications in the work they commission.

The Scotland and Northern Ireland Forum for Environmental research (SNIFFER) based in Edinburgh joined the IWRM-net project with its 'regional' database that catalogues all its funded research providing simple access to its partners. Within the UK it has donated its data to the Envi-

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Sharing knowledge cont'd

ronmental Research Funders Forum (hosted by the Natural Environment Research Council) that has created a database at the UK or national scale as a pilot. The question then raised in SNIFFER was 'Does this happen in any other countries around and if so how can we link them? The British Library is already looking to link the ERFF database with the Worldwide science portal set up by the American Office of Scientific and Technical Information. Yet this lack a certain amount of detail that ERANETs require.

My vision is for the central portal of NETWATCH to allow access and support to the myriad of databases and sharing of information

for all European research managers. It would need to be supported by the efforts of the current resource managers. Liaison with the world wide science portal could be a start, but much consideration needs to go into how to ensure a user friendly interface for a regional research manager. The technology is fast becoming capable of providing specific tools for a wide range of users but the community must decide what it needs and how it can work more effectively on providing solutions. One difficulty is that as the scale gets bigger we lose some of the specific information that is relevant to the technical user. Can the role of gatekeeper for research funding with its requirement for thematic based and sometimes

technical information still be compatible with a general catalogue of information?

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Do you have something to share?

In order to progress this issue it has been proposed by IWRM-net to organise a technical workshop where the database experts join together with the research managers to investigate possible solutions.

The idea would be to allow a series of presentations from experts already tackling this issue, providing a series of options that could be developed. Then in conjunction with the end users, the environmental research managers, the best possible options and recommendations will be discussed.

These recommendations will be published as an ouput but the real outcome will be a common understanding of where collaboration would bring real benefits to the research community across Europe and what the next steps are to achieve these benefits.

We are looking for interest in joining an e-mail list to try and keep this idea moving forward and to suggest possible conferences and meetings where this can be discussed. The launch of the NETWATCH platform in February 2010 provides a good target for possible solutions and ideas to be presented.

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IWRM-NET (n° ERAC-CT-2005-026025) is a five years (2006-2010) European Research Area project (ERA-Net) funded by the European Commission. It started in January 2006 and will end in 2010.

IWRM-NET aims to implement **new research activities** at the **national** and **regional** levels related to **Integrated Water Resource Management** (IWRM) with a focus on the Water Framework Directive.

IWRM-NET is **open to new research programme managers** working at national or regional level and dealing with Integrated Water Resource Management issues.

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