

EMODnet Portals

Discussion document on guidelines for the further harmonization of the thematic portals

EMODnet vision [to be specified and agreed]:

EMODnet's vision is to provide long-term access to high-quality marine data covering all European coastal waters, shelf seas and surrounding ocean basins and to make that data interoperable and freely available for all users.

+ short note on EMODnet portal – and how EMODnet family of portals should be presented on the medium to long term.

→ On the long term... to improve the user-experience, data and data products should be accessible via a single point of entry supported by a series of data portals with different types of data that are seamlessly connected.

→ This will be achieved by, on the medium-term...

1 About this document

Much work has been done since the onset of EMODnet (Phase I) to achieve **where we are today**: a growing number of partner organisations and institutes making available a huge and very diverse set of European marine data, data products and metadata through a set of pilot data portals that are, for most cases, (ready to go) fully operational. Most of what is required to create a fully operational/useful EMODnet on the medium to long term is already in place or has been developed to some degree.

This **document aims** to stimulate the discussion among the thematic lots about how the current EMODnet partners can build upon past achievements and tweak the existing/new web-portals/landing pages to significantly improve the end-user experience. This should allow the user to fully benefit from the services provided (data, data products, metadata) in a coherent and seamless way, and will allow the thematic portals to focus on their core business, i.e. providing more high-quality and interoperable data and data products.

It is **important to consider further harmonisation** and achieve maximum coherence within the available human and financial resources because the thematic portals are essentially online 'shop windows' to the EMODnet service: open all the time and accessible to users all over the world. The more streamlined, coherent and up-to-date they are, the better impression the whole (and thus the individual portals and partners) will make.

A lot of **information about EMODnet**, including the projects and the services they provide, is available on the Phase I thematic pilot portals. However, it is **not presented in a uniform way** and is scattered across the thematic portals and the entry portal. In Phase II of EMODnet it is essential that the full extent of these services are clear and apparent, since there will be an increase in the volume of data and its geographical coverage as well as the creation of new data products across thematic lots.



The **Secretariat proposes** to develop, together with the Steering Committee, a core set of guidelines relating to EMODnet's internet presence, style and content, which will be applicable to all portals. This harmonisation should focus on reducing duplication of information and providing a consistent user experience across the different portals, thereby ensuring that users fully benefit from using EMODnet as a gateway to European marine data.

Developing the harmonisation guidelines is a collaborative effort that relies strongly on the knowledge and expertise held within the thematic and regional portals.

Proposed Action: Develop a common set of guidelines to harmonise the thematic portals (All lots with assistance from the Secretariat, early 2014).

2 Uniform web address (URL)/ domain registration

Currently the URL's across the thematic portals are not standardised. For users to be able to locate the individual portals and navigate easily between them, it is recommended that a uniform set of URLs are used for the EMODnet thematic (and regional?) lots.

Current URLs (as of October 2013):

- Biology: <http://bio.emodnet.eu/>
- Chemistry: <http://www.emodnet-chemistry.eu/>
- Geology : <http://www.emodnet-geology.eu/> (intro page then directs to OneGeology-Europe)
- Physics: <http://www.emodnet-physics.eu/>
- Physical parameters: <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-5040> (this is direct link to portal)
- Hydrography: <http://www.emodnet-hydrography.eu/>
- Entry portal: <http://www.emodnet.eu/>

Conclusion: Several thematic portals follow the www.emodnet-XXXXXXX.eu format, which provides a logical and clear indication of what a visitor can expect so we would suggest using this as the standard. Whilst acknowledging there is work and modest cost associated with registering and migrating to a new URL, this work will need to be done only once and the benefits for the users seem to outweigh the additional work/costs.

Proposed Action: All thematic and regional portals should follow the www.emodnet-XXXXXXX.eu standard of EMODnet URLs (all portals, early 2014).

3 Standard nomenclature of thematic lots

The terminology used to identify the thematic lots across the portals is not uniform:

- Lot 1: Hydrography, bathymetry, digital bathymetry
- Lot 2: Geology, marine geology
- Lot 3: Physical habitats, Seabed habitats, EUSeaMap
- Lot 4: Chemistry, chemistry and pollution
- Lot 5: Biology, marine biodiversity
- Lot 6: Physics, Physical parameters
- Lot 7: Human Activities

Proposed Action: Agree among thematic portals on common nomenclature, which is then used as EMODnet headers across the portals (Steering Committee, 17/12/2013).

The Secretariat proposes the following standard nomenclature for consideration by the Steering Committee.

- Lot 1: Bathymetry

- Lot 2: (Marine) geology
- Lot 3: Seabed habitats
- Lot 4: (Marine) chemistry
- Lot 5: (Marine) biology
- Lot 6: (Marine) physics
- Lot 7: (Marine) human activities

4 Style guide

During Phase I of EMODnet, a basic style guide was created to ensure uniform visual appearance of the pilot portals. This style guide was very useful and clearly resulted in obtaining a certain level of visual coherence. To respond to the needs in Phase II with reference to the thematic portals and the development of the entry portal, it is recommended that the style guide is reviewed and an updated version agreed among the thematic lots.

Proposed Action: Update and expand the style guide to further strengthen the coherent visual identity of all portals/websites within the EMODnet family (EMODnet Secretariat with assistance from thematic portals, early 2014)

5 Single Sign On

One way to improve the user-friendliness of the EMODnet service is to offer a **Single Sign-On (SSO)** procedure, provided that the SSO procedure is **simple and fast**. This was highlighted in the Commission Staff Working Document “Interim Evaluation of the European Marine Observation and Data Network” accompanying the Marine Knowledge 2020 Green Paper:

“Data providers need to know what data is being used for, so some of the portals have user identification procedures. A single sign-in procedure for all EMODnet portals, also allowing access to GMES, should be a goal for the next generation of EMODnet.”

The DG MARE tender specification documents for the thematic EMODnet lots (DGMARE2012/10) calls for such an SSO:

“The contractors must agree on a single sign-in procedure for all portals. A procedure that does not require any signing in at all is also acceptable.”

Several of the thematic lots (e.g. lot 4 Chemistry, lot 2 Geology and lot 6 Physics) have taken note of this goal and have incorporated it specifically in their objectives (listed in the technical specification document) the need to develop and synchronise all portals on a single sign-in procedure.

EMODnet lot 6 (Physics) has proposed to take the development of a SSO within the framework of the Physics lot (based on the MyOcean and SeaDataNet progress in this area) as a **proof of concept for creating a EMODnet-wide Single Sign-On procedure:**

*“The objective is to achieve the minimum of formality when downloading data. Identification is required and the portal [Physics] must be configured to allow users registered within SeaDataNet or MyOcean to access all the metadata and data products and, where possible, the data. MyOcean and SeaDataNet are using the same technology to give access to users (i.e. CAS - Controlled Authentication System) that facilitates integration and creation of a unique wider users list, and the previous EMODnet Physics portal has already encouraged a common basic license for “basic public access” that guarantees access to most of the data (estimated to be about 90%) as well as facilitating MyOcean and SeaDataNet to start developing a common Authentication and Authorisation (AAA) service with a Single Sign On (SSO) mechanism [...]. Users are asked to register twice (i.e. in SeaDataNet and MyOcean), but only one authentication is visible. **The development of***

the SSO service for the EMODnet Physics represents a proof of concept for creating a unique general EMODnet user list and authentication system.”

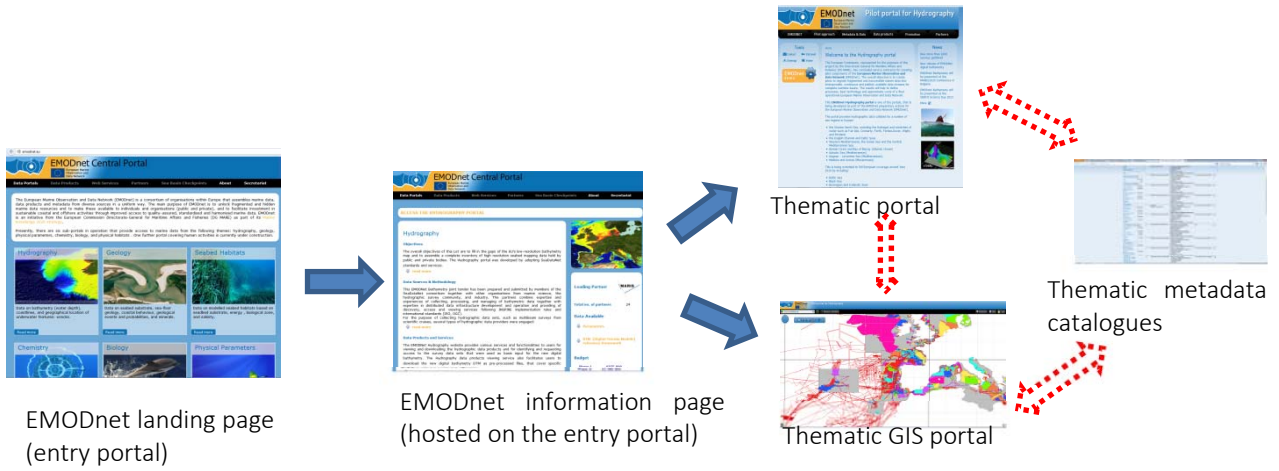
Proposed Action: Set up a working group (or use the entry portal technical working group) with representatives of the thematic lots [e.g. under lead of thematic lot 6] to develop and implement a unique user list and authentication system (Steering Committee, 16-17/12/2013).

6 User flow between entry and thematic portals

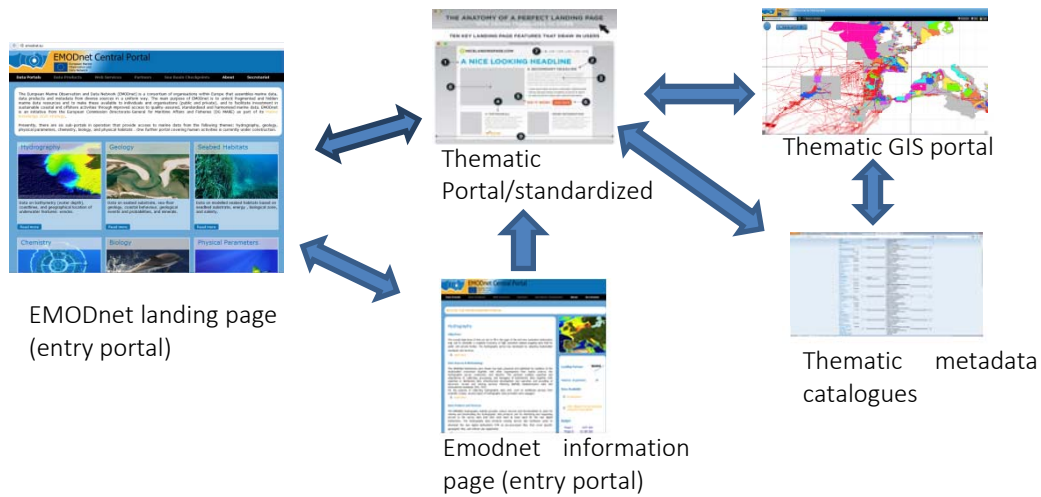
The level or amount of EMODnet information presented on each website will depend on how the user will access the service. The user’s main navigation point of entry may be via the entry portal to the thematic portal, whilst others may go directly to the thematic portal(s). If the latter is the case, the user should be able to jump to other portals (directly or via the entry portal) and potentially be directed to the entry portal for certain information.

A number of scenarios are presented below (not listed in order of preference), where the user access point is the EMODnet entry portal. Dashed red arrows indicates that the level of exchange between the items varies across the thematic portals. The choice of scenario will determine to some extent how/where the necessary information is provided on the thematic and entry portals and should be developed in a separate document based on the recommendations of the Steering Committee.

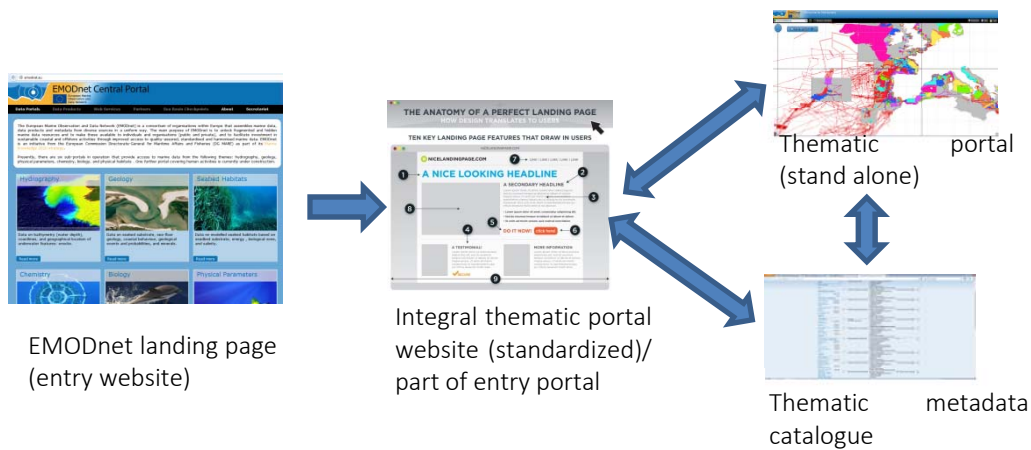
Current scenario [for majority of the portals]:



Proposed Scenario 1: Thematic portal (standalone) & EMODnet information page



Proposed Scenario 2: (Thematic website integration into entry portal/ thematic portal)



7 Core information requirements for the thematic portal

A specific set of core information and links need to be present on each of the thematic portals to ensure that users can navigate and obtain relevant information, independent of their point of access (via social media, email link, organic search, press/media).

Decisions will need to be made on:

- what information is necessary for the user;
- where this information should be made available (on the thematic portals or on the entry portal); and
- how prominently certain information is made available: visible upfront on the landing page, or more deeply embedded as background accessible with more effort (i.e. more clicks) – this requires prioritisation from the perspective of data users/providers.

A proposed checklist with essential information can be found below. Much will depend on the desirable medium and long-term vision with relation to the level of integration among the various portals and with the entry portal as outlined in Section 6.

7.1 Tentative checklist with core elements of information:

7.1.1 Overview of thematic portal level navigation elements:

- Access data
- Submit data
How to contribute data to the project? How to add/combine your own data?
- News/social media (facebook/linkedin/twitter) – it is recommended that all message are channelled through the maritime forum, the general EMODnet twitter/facebook/linkedin accounts and/or the entry portal news sections.
- Links to the entry portal and other portals
Access to other portals could potentially go via the entry portal. It is important to ensure consistent terminology to refer to the other thematic portals.
- About
This could aggregate summary information + all other background info and project details additional to the information on the entry portal (e.g. historic background, partners involved, extranet/workspace for partners, funding received etc.). Could contain elements such as EMODnet general background, Partners, Budget, Improvements for Phase II, Methodology, Objectives.
- Extranet (for internal project information)- if required (and preferably integrated under ‘about’)
- Assistance
Could contain FAQ’s (can be compiled based on general FAQ, e.g. do I need to register?, Is the data free?), help function, contact for help button and user manuals etc.
- Browsers supported
 - o This information should be clearly indicated (*detect user browser ?*) if this will affect functionality of services
- Single Sign-In.
Due to the shared infrastructure of the metadata catalogues across some of the thematic lots, which require user registration the lots will need to collaborate on this



7.1.2 Overview of thematic portal level core information elements

- User guidance
 - o Services provided
 - Clearly indicated data services/ functionality which requires prior registration
 - Provided information on QA/QC of the data (at EMODnet product level, at catalogue level)
 - Clearly outline data licensing conditions
 - Data coverage
 - Overview of Data products and services
 - o Acknowledgement statement
 - A short standardized statement easily accessible, at EMODnet level (*agreed among the consortium*) for data products developed as part of the project
 - Statement easily accessible for services with other data origins
 - o User documentation
 - There should be a clear help document/user document to services provided and/or creation of a demo (examples include: as a standalone element by the EMODnet hydrography portal, or build into the portal as in the case of OBIS mapper <http://iobis.org/mapper/>). ***This is critical due to the many different type of users that will access the service from non-expert to experts in the thematic field***
 - o Information/ technical help request email
 - These email addresses need to be clearly identified with the nature of the request they will handle (service level, e.g. registration) or technical (GIS portal, metadata catalogue, etc.). Unless one general email can be used which will then be forwarded to the appropriate entity. An indication of the timeframe of a response should also be provided.
 - o User feedback
 - Standard forms and questionnaires. These could be developed specific for each thematic lot or based on one generic template, but should at least consider:
 - **Mention the time commitment up front.** Before someone opens your survey, let them know how long it will take to answer all the questions.
 - **Vary the types of questions.** Try not to give someone a survey that requires an individual response (free text) to every question, as these take a lot of time and thought to answer. Be sure to include multiple choice and ranking questions.
 - **Topics of the questionnaire.** To ensure feedback is received which can be evaluated to improve your services ensure questions cover specific topics
 - o Quality of data and data products (metadata, data export format, parameters)
 - o Functionality of Data discovery services (catalogues, gis portal, user guidance documentation)
 - o Feedback on possible future services (data or data products) or functionality

- Testimonials and or case studies (These provide validation of the service to other users)

7.1.3 Overview of thematic portal level technical information elements

More specific technical requirements and recommendations will be made available in separate technical document in due time as part of the technical portal testing/monitoring process.

8 Proposed concept design of thematic portals landing pages

For the user, the first and arguably most important feature of any of the portal/pages, is an indication of exactly what service it provides (i.e. its UPS: Unique Selling Point). With a defined goal, it's up to the design of the thematic portal landing page then to direct the user towards the services of interest. To illustrate how the core elements for navigation and information (outlined in the previous sections) could be presented in a template page, the Secretariat has developed a concept design of a thematic portal landing page, which is provided below.

Proposed Action: Agree to a common design/structure for the thematic landing pages and harmonise accordingly (Steering Committee, December 2013 / early 2014)

The concept design shows a landing page layout with the following elements and annotations:

- Header:** Includes the EMODnet logo (European Marine Observation and Data Network), a navigation menu (Home, Access Data, Submit Data, FAQ, About, EXTRANET), and social media icons (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn).
- Main Content Area:**
 - Section 1:** Titled "UNLOCKING EUROPEAN MARINE DATA". It features a map of Europe with data overlays. Below the map is the text: "Search, Discover, Analyze, Inform". An annotation points to this text, stating: "Single statement of what the objective is and what service is provided".
 - Text:** "Quality controlled, expert validated marine data covering all European basins for research, resource management and planning....."
 - Buttons:** "NEW USER REGISTER HERE", "SEARCH FOR DATA", and "SEARCH FOR DATA PRODUCTS". An annotation points to the "SEARCH FOR DATA" button, stating: "Clear indication of how to access data".
- Testimonial Section:** Titled "A TESTIMONIAL". It includes a "Suggestions? Tell Us What We Can Improve" button and placeholder text: "adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua. Ut enim ad minim veniamdolor in reprehenderit culpa qui officia deserunt mollit anim."
- News Section:** Titled "NEWS/ MORE INFO". It includes a placeholder image and placeholder text: "adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua. Ut enim ad minim veniamdolor in reprehenderit culpa qui officia deserunt mollit anim." An annotation points to this section, stating: "Information on Workshops, events etc".