

Legacy and achievements of the three-year-long Earth Observation user engagement of the Horizon 2020 FIRE project

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The FIRE project team thanks all involved stakeholders who allowed to successfully achieve the project's aim to build a strong community and a well-defined process which have been crucial in delivering the strategic research and innovation roadmap. The roadmap has been disseminated and is already inspiring the workflow of both EO and non-EO stakeholders. Moreover, the community created by the project and enriched due to the engagement of the seven FIRE sector leads and the seven 'EO Evangelists', has become self-aware of its great value and potential and will be maintained beyond the project's lifetime. Similarly, various aspects of the methodology designed by FIRE will continue to be applied in the future.

User engagement – FIRE Focus Groups, FIRE Forum events and the 'EO Evangelists' programme

FIRE animated and encouraged the exchange of the community with multiple tools, notably by organising two rounds of [FIRE Focus Group discussions](#) and three [FIRE Fora events](#). Crucial to the success of these interactions was the commitment of the so-called 'sector leads' – organisations with extensive networks, ties, knowledge and experience within FIRE focus sectors. Throughout the 3 years, FIRE partnered **with 7 sector leads**: COPA-COGECA (**agriculture**), EIT Raw Materials (**raw materials**), Pôle Mer Bretagne Atlantique and Centre national d'études spatiales – CNES (**marine**), Vital Infrastructure Arena – VIA (**infrastructure**), SMURBS (**urban development**), and WindEurope (**wind energy**). In total, during the two rounds of six Focus Group discussions (Autumn 2020 and Winter 2022) FIRE gathered the needs of 147 industry experts from 18 European countries.

Patrick Pagani, COPA-COGECA, sector lead for agriculture, testifies: "The FIRE project brought together stakeholders to discuss the challenges and look for solutions. Still, more work at the level of EU policies is needed for the uptake of the best technologies on the ground, providing farmers a larger room of manoeuvre to make good farming decisions."

Each workshop round was followed by a larger event in a conference format – the [FIRE Forum event](#). Each forum gathered around 400-500 industry professionals, Earth Observation experts and policy and market development executives. In total, three FIRE Fora events (June 2021, June 2022, and February 2023) were organised, attracting 2137 registrants and effectively bringing together 103 speakers and moderators, and 1347 attendees.

To bridge the gap between the Earth Observation and target sector communities, FIRE also designed a novel '[EO Evangelist programme](#)'. The seven impactful, motivated storytellers were selected as a result of an open call recruitment procedure. They promoted the global benefits of EO in a way that resonated with their target audiences and the general public, using various means to this end – video messages, written articles, social media posts etc. Overall, EO Evangelists promoted EO benefits, the FIRE project and benefitted from exchange with the industries at more than 12 events.

"Being an EO Evangelist has been an incredible experience. [...] FIRE is a one-of-a-kind initiative that fills a painful gap between industries with enormous, but currently untapped, potential for collaboration. Much work still needs to be done, especially as the value of space-based solutions for raw materials will only multiply in the coming years," says Irene Benito, raw materials EO Evangelist.

The long-term impact and legacy of FIRE and the FIRE Roadmap

The main outcome of the project and the most tangible result of the consultations and activities described above is the [FIRE Roadmap](#). FIRE Roadmap is an analytical document consisting of a roadmap for each sector and a detailed chapter for transversal challenges. The Roadmap as well as the way forward were the main topics of the FIRE Forum 2023.

FIRE had a significant strategic impact due to the importance of such cross-sectoral activities **bringing the EO community together with non-EO actors**, therefore helping to bridge the disconnect between the supply and the

demand side of the EO market. Moreover, FIRE provided the platform **for converging perspectives of different communities from these sectors** – practitioners, researchers, policy makers, and industry representatives. The results of these discussions, exchanges and building of understanding of each other’s priorities, challenges and capabilities will influence the future work and results of all the involved parties.

FIRE’s success highlighted the need to **pursue these stakeholder matchmaking efforts** in the future, as the benefits for further EO uptake and return on investment in the EO technology are important. Actors involved in the project have already committed to continuing the collaboration, while FIRE methodology will be potentially reproduced in other sectors in the future. Concretely, multiple elements or outputs of FIRE will be continuously utilized, namely, the FIRE Roadmap and the set of sectoral videos, as well as the EO Evangelists programme and concept. The overall success of the project and its sustainability activities, in particular, have served as a **catalyst for the consortium to maintain their support for the FIRE ecosystem** and explore avenues to capitalize on the project's accomplishments in the future.

*EARSC already has prepared a list of dates and set meetings where we’ll bring the FIRE sectoral roadmaps with us. Similarly, **projects and ideas are already in the pipeline** through which we will continue the work of the FIRE consortium. As a starter, don’t miss out on the **EXPANDEO 2023 event, 13-14 June 2023** that will focus on EU policies supported by EO,” invites Natassa Antoniou, the coordinator of FIRE and Market Development Officer at EARSC*

Overall, FIRE has contributed its share to ensuring that the society and economy can benefit the most from the added value brought by remote sensing technologies. EO has been recognised to help reach European Green Deal objectives and enhance the scientific understanding of the Earth and other crucial aspects. Complemented by rapidly advancing technologies, EO transversal opportunities are only expected to grow in the future.

For more details about the FIRE project activities, please visit the [FIRE project website](#) or contact us:

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About FIRE

FIRE is the first initiative fully dedicated to bringing actors from key commercial sectors together to outline the now and tomorrow of their market and to use these insights to shape a strategic roadmap for the EO downstream sector. FIRE, the industry-led Forum for Innovation and Research in European Earth Observation, started its activities in December 2019 and concluded with the FIRE Forum 2023 this February. Throughout three years of action, the project established a user community across several different industries, namely **agriculture, infrastructure, marine and maritime, raw materials, urban development and wind energy**, to shape the Research and Innovation Strategy for Earth Observation solutions in Europe. FIRE also designed a novel ‘EO Evangelist’ programme through which seven ‘EO influencers’ promoted the adoption of EO solutions in FIRE focus sectors. Two rounds of focus group events were each followed by a FIRE Forum, advancing in the discussions and identification of gaps and challenges, the future evolution of each of the sectors, as well as the Earth Observation capabilities. The result of these consultations has been thoroughly analysed and incorporated in delivering the FIRE Roadmap, which was presented and discussed at the FIRE Forum 2023.

The three-year project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 869634. Its consortium brings together four partners: [EARSC](#) is partnering with SMEs supporting innovation and user uptake ([Evenflow and Verhaert](#)) and the [National Observatory of Athens](#).

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