A unique community transcending borders and generations

The Argo program has been built on a unique collaborative and problem-solving culture. These values are being passed on to young experts joining the program today.

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The Argo program was born from the impassioned will of a handful of scientists to promote climate forecasting and to provide prediction services for people all around the world. To reach this goal, the scientists were convinced that the data produced by the Argo floats had to be shared freely and as fast as possible. In the world of science research where competition and hoarded information are the dominant norms, it was and it still is a paradigm shift. "There was a culture of collaboration and problem-solving established right from the beginning," recalls Susan Wijffels, a senior scientist at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution and one of the co-founders who launched Argo 24 years ago. "And we have been able to maintain this culture as new people come on board today."

For Susan Wijffels, this culture of global collaboration is at the roots of Argo's success. "One of the best things about working in the Argo world is this wonderful international peer group of very dedicated people that are determined to see Argo succeed," she says. Different countries or groups of scientists do their share in different ways. "Euro-Argo, for instance has done incredible work investing in the Argo data management system, while other members have lent their expertise in improving other components, from deployments to technologies," Susan Wijffels explains.

What is Argo

Argo is an international program that collects information from inside the ocean using a fleet of robotic instruments that drift with the ocean currents and move up and down between the surface and a mid-water level. Each instrument (float) spends almost all its life below the surface.

The name Argo was chosen because the array of floats works in partnership with the Jason earth observing satellites that measure the shape of the ocean surface. (In Greek mythology, Jason sailed on his ship Argo in search of the golden fleece).

At a European level, Euro-Argo has been cultivating the Argo spirit since 2014. "There is a very strong mindset in the Euro-Argo community to share all the information we have so we can build upon each other's work instead of redoing the same things or making the same mistakes," says Ingrid Angel, an ocean scientist for Argo Germany - a member Euro-Argo, who has worked on Argo for four years. "Collaboration has always been an implied rule, but through the Euro-Argo RISE (Research Infrastructure Sustainability and Enhancement) project which aimed at further developing the Euro-Argo infrastructure, putting our efforts together has officially become one of the main objectives."

The Argo program was created more than 20 years ago and many of the researchers from that time are now retiring, and they are all ready to pass the torch to the new generation", says Sylvie Pouliquen, Euro-Argo former director. "When a newcomer starts working on Argo, it can be a bit overwhelming," shares Ingrid Angel. "There are so many places to seek out information about the program and you have to understand all the different structures involved."

Fortunately, the collaborative mindset embedded in Argo's community means that knowledge and experience are smoothly shared between veteran scientists and young experts. Since Ingrid Angel entered the Argo program, she has been working with Birgit Klein, an oceanographer operating in the same German institute (BSH) and who has been part of the Argo world for 18 years. "Birgit insists that I take part in all the major international Argo meetings – such as the steering team meetings or the Euro-Argo board meetings – and that I observe the personal dynamics in these gatherings," Ingrid Angel says. "Beyond transferring knowledge, there's also a focus on transferring the way we do things in Argo, how we collaborate within an international community and how we manage our relationships with other members."

"Collaboration has always been an implied rule"
Ingrid Angel
Argo Germany/ Euro-Argo

The international Argo community gathered in Brussels at the 7th Argo Science Workshop to discuss the latest scientific achievements, October 2022

With the Covid-19 pandemic, most of the meetings are now virtual. As a benefit, a lot more people can participate. Young scientists from all around the world that might be interested in getting into an Argo group can attend the meetings and get all the information they need. "We also encourage each national group to bring along a young expert and to partner them with a more senior scientist," tells Susan Wijffels.

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> WHOI / member of Euro-Argo Scientific and Technical Advisory Group

With OneArgo, a United Nations endorsed set of actions that will expand Argo into a global, full-depth and multidisciplinary array of floats, the program is now at a turning point. And these new objectives will be undertaken by a new generation of scientists. Following this mindset, Euro-Argo organizes biyearly science meetings to share the state-of-the art knowledge about Argo and to connect veteran and young researchers.

Sylvie Pouliquen
Euro-Argo ERIC former program manager

Birgit Klein
Chair of Euro-Argo ERIC Management Board
Federal Maritime & Hydrographic Agency of Germany (BSH), Argo Germany

Ingrid Angel
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