Developing a concept for a Una Europa collaboration platform

Task 1.12, Pilot 2

Summary report   WP1, Klaus Wiehl   31st January 2024

Introduction

Una.Resin WP1 was tasked to pilot methods to accelerate cross-disciplinary and cross-sectoral collaboration and networking in addressing the priority challenges. The second of the two WP1 pilots described in this document aimed to **developing a format concept for a Una Europa collaboration platform**. The platform was envisioned to consist of an evolving set of tools and services for cross-disciplinary and cross-sectoral collaboration and networking within the Una Europa ecosystem and throughout the R&I lifecycle on the priority global challenges. Initially, a number of signature projects were planned to be selected for testing the tools, activities and consolidated support services.

The primary aims set for of this concept, was to establish a digitally enhanced one-stop-shop or efficient combination of modules for fostering research collaboration within the alliance. This resource will offer support in identifying relevant funding opportunities, advancing research initiatives, and facilitating innovation within the shared UNA Europa ecosystem. The overall aim of Una.Resin WP1 has been to lay the groundwork for the development of the common Una Europa R&I ecosystem by devising a shared Una Europa Research and Innovation Agenda. As a part of this, the work package was involved in the project aims finding ways to reinforce cooperation in research and innovation within the universities and beyond the sphere of academia.

Early on, we found out that major expectations had been expressed by various actors for such platform in Una Europa. It became clear to us that the scope of a universal platform that incorporates a whole range of very different tools would have to be developed and implemented by various stakeholders and is not feasible from the viewpoint of human or financial resources to complete as one pilot of one project WP. It is important to note that a collaboration platform in Una Europa will have to be a much larger enterprise and will comprise a larger set of tools and formats than "just" for research cooperation.

The initial expectation that there would have been already active research collaboration to pilot the platform with during the course of Una.Resin was also too ambitious. Due to the above-mentioned reasons, WP1 decided to concentrate the limited resources to collecting the needs and expectations, i.e. drafting a concept for such platform from the academic community as well as the professional community to address widely the aspects of building a cross-disciplinary and cross-sectoral collaboration and networking within the Una Europa ecosystem. We had to cut off the phase of development and testing of the tools on a larger scale. We did, however test some approaches in our pilot 1 and report the experiences in this report.

During the runtime of Una.Resin, Una.Futura was launched as the second phase of funding under the umbrella of Erasmus+. As part of that, Una Europa vzw was tasked to develop a comprehensive platform, "Una.Connect". It did not make sense anymore to develop separate Una.Resin delivered platform, but to provide our learnings to the Una.connect development. The development is currently

underway. The main findings and preliminary results of this pilot have been communicated to vzw and this report will be used in the further conceptualization of the Una.Connect platform. The conceptualization of this platform started in 2024 and will be implemented by end of Una.Futura, meaning the end of 2026. As of now (November 2023) the Una.Connect platform will be focusing on the aspects document management, internal communication, connecting with colleagues. This might include a dedicated meeting space for researchers that could facilitate matchmaking exercises and alerts for funding opportunities, but it is still unclear how a tool to harvest data from research portals could be included.

In order to ensure that the needs of the researchers are heard, and the WP1 project managers are working closely with Una Europa vzw to make sure that the insights from our project are used in the process of conceptualizing a broader Una Europa platform. WP1 members have participated in the stakeholder consultations for the design of the platform where preliminary results of this mapping have already been discussed. Thus, this pilot mapping will play a crucial role in designing a platform that will benefit the alliance and the respective partners, considering staff, faculty, students and society at large at the same time. The ultimate goal is to implement the findings of Una.Resin into the Una.Connect platform.

Description of the activities and actors providing input for the concept

Collecting the insights about the purpose and the user groups

As a result of numerous meetings within the structure of Una.Resin work packages and clusters and a dedicated workshop, WP1 prepared a questionnaire that was circulated among the research coordination experts representing the partner universities in Una.Resins work packages and clusters as well as the scientists in the Self Steering Committees of Una Europa. This report presents the findings and learnings of this exercise.

To be exact, the joint platform was discussed at the following meeting with various Una Europa groups:

- Workshops of the Research Coordination Cluster (RCC): 13.12.2021 (online), 14.02.2022 (online), 17.03.2022 in Paris, 02.06.2022 in Helsinki, 29.11.2022 in Edinburgh, 08.06.2023 in Leiden
- PPPTSC cluster workshop at Freie Universität Berlin, April 4 – 6, 2022.
- Questionnaire addressed to other Una.Resin WP leads in spring 2023, the main questions were:
  - Based on the Una.Resin outcomes, what communication needs did you identify? What support for matchmaking is needed?
  - What are the main tasks an Una Europa communication platform would need to fulfil from your WP/Cluster's perspective?
  - What are the main support needs for communication and matchmaking from Una Europa vzw?
- Workshop with One Health SSC in Bertinoro on February 1st-2nd 2022.
- Strategic discussions with the chairs of the Una Europa SSC in April-May 2023
- Pilot 1: Horizon Europe process

Mappings:

- Mapping of the local research portals of Una Europa partner universities
- Preliminary Mapping of Commercial platforms

WP1 carried out a preliminary mapping of existing research portals at the 11 partner institutions and on the basis of this laid out the groundwork of a potential and substantial follow-up mapping of commercial platforms that could fit the needs expressed below. This will most likely be further explored during the conceptualization of the Una.Connect platform that could either be used as best practices for the creation of our own platform or to be used in their existing form.

What are the functions to have on such a platform? What would the researchers like to use? What are important points to be considered?

In the Research and Innovation Strategy (D1.2) Una.Resin clearly laid out the main focus points of an ongoing cooperation in Una Europa. In order to align the needs formulated by the engaged stakeholders for a R&I platform with the strategic goals that were formulated in the R&I strategy it is necessary to reflect where the main tasks of Una Europa lie in respect to building Interdisciplinary Hubs, engage with our academic community and make our existing research infrastructures accessible.

1: Strengthening the Una Europa Focus Areas
- Establishing Interdisciplinary Hubs
- Training Researchers of the Future
- Strengthening Collaboration Beyond Academia

2: Engaging Researchers Broadly
- Supporting Bottom-Up Initiatives
- Promoting Mobility and Community Building
- Digitalizing Collaboration

3: Opening up Research and Data Infrastructures
- Promoting openness of RIs and data infrastructures to foster research collaboration
- Strengthening Research and Data Infrastructure Skills
- Developing a stronger and more integrated Una Europa Research Infrastructure Ecosystem

Outcomes and Impact/Summary of needs

The most important message for the stakeholder consultations was that the platform should be **simple, intuitive and easy to use**. All given information would have to be visible and transparent as possible. For this to be an efficient tool for researchers and external partners it should facilitate their work, not add more complexity to their daily work. Even, if Una Europa would not aim to one platform, but collect features from different sources, every aspect of this has to be clearly communicated within the Una Europa website to guarantee an easy access and to avoid the current situation where multiple landing pages and platforms are in use at the same time.

Research funding portal

TARGET GROUP: academics and research funding professionals

AIMS: Sharing information about research funding opportunities and match-making for the calls

FEATURES NEEDED:
- Joint pool of funding opportunities
  - European funding opportunities
  - national and regional funding opportunities
  - institutional funding opportunities
- Platform for researchers' matchmaking for joint applications
- Collection of interest of researchers at the Expression of Interest phase
- Creation of a repository of relevant information about funding opportunities on a national and European Level and (documents, training sessions on how to apply, taking the Horizon call preparatory sessions as an example, etc.)
- Facilitation of the interaction between participants (e.g. via a chat functionality)

WHO SHOULD MAINTAIN/OPERATE:
- A commercial platform could be used
- Research professionals at each university, identified by RCC members
- Research coordination officer at vzw
- IT-professional(s) at vzw or partner universities

STRATEGIC GOALS ADDRESSED:
- Supporting Bottom-Up Initiatives
- Promoting Mobility and Community Building
- Training Researchers of the Future
- Digitalizing Collaboration
- Establishing Interdisciplinary Hubs

SHORT, MIDDLE AND LONG-TERM PERSPECTIVES
For these tools to work it is important to note that they do not have to be on the very same platform. At least in the initial stage of this process Una Europa could use adaptable platforms, like B2B (for more see below). As was stated above: The functions have to be easily used by the researchers and for this purpose have to be easily found. It could be a feasible process to decide to start implementing tools that address only specific tasks in the beginning and then combine those with other functionalities later, if technically possible. This would start the process instead of waiting until a highly complex digital architecture is developed that encompasses all the functionalities that we aim for. A first step could be to establish a tool for research funding matchmaking, collection of expressions of interest, systematic announcements of international calls, major national and regional funding formats and institutional funding opportunities.

EXISTING COMMERCIAL PRODUCTS
Research Professional (Pivot RP), Research Connect, Crowdhelix.

Developing careers and skills

TARGET GROUP: academics and higher education staff

AIM:
- Sharing the academic and professional positions available at the partner institutions
- Skills training on transversal skills identified in Una.Resin, for example
  - Interdisciplinary research
  - Open research and research data management

　　　o　Particularities of the academic funding landscape and careers at the partner universities / countries

FEATURES NEEDED:
- Ability to share webinar videos and/or presentations
- Ability to register for workshop participants

WHO SHOULD MAINTAIN/OPERATE:
- Research professionals at each university, identified by RCC members
- IT-support professional(s)

STRATEGIC GOALS ADDRESSED:
　　　• Training Researchers of the Future
　　　• Strengthening Collaboration Beyond Academia

SHORT, MIDDLE AND LONG-TERM PERSPECTIVES
In the short term, a list with links to the job announcement platforms of individual universities will suffice. For skills training, a page with announcements of future events is a short-term goal. In the middle to long-term perspective, job announcements can be harvested from individual universities' portals and placed on the Una Europa platform to enhance a better overview. Regarding the skills training, storing of webinar recordings and registration for announced webinars can be added at a later point of time.

EXISTING COMMERCIAL PRODUCTS:
A common internet website with above mentioned features imbedded.

Research Portal (Research Information System)

TARGET GROUP: academics and higher education staff

AIM:
- Sharing information on researcher's profiles, publications, patents as well as research results
- Facilitate match-making between researchers for potential cooperation

FEATURES NEEDED:
- Interoperability of existing research portals of individual universities
- Harvest data from existing portals
- Key words search and other search filters, e.g. disciplines

WHO SHOULD MAINTAIN/OPERATE:
- IT-professional, supported by IT staff at each university. It should not be academics who operate such a portal manually by their own, the data should be updated automatically.

STRATEGIC GOALS ADDRESSED:
　　　• Establishing Interdisciplinary Hubs
　　　• Training Researchers of the Future
　　　• Strengthening Collaboration Beyond Academia
　　　• Supporting Bottom-Up Initiatives
　　　• Promoting Mobility and Community Building
　　　• Digitalizing Collaboration

- Promoting openness of RIs and data infrastructures to foster research collaboration
- Strengthening Research and Data Infrastructure Skills
- Developing a stronger and more integrated Una Europa Research Infrastructure Ecosystem

Research information systems are already in place in most of the Una Europa universities. For the universities that still do not have such a portal this could be a good opportunity to align their needs with the process of developing a platform early on and use this exercise as an additional resource to create the best possible environment for their academic community.

Existing research portals at Una Europa Partner Universities:

UEDIN: [University of Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)
UH: [University of Helsinki Research Portal](#)
UNIBO: [Directories (Registry of employees and structures)](#)
UP1: [Pages Personnelles Enseignants Chercheurs](#) and [Expert Finder System](#) (beta version)
JU: [Staff search engine (Registry of employees)](#)
KU Leuven: a [research portal](#) with funded projects and information on research infrastructures; a [Publication repository](#) (LIRIAS) with all publication output of KU Leuven researchers; a [institutional research data repository](#) (RDR) for the publication of research data; [KU Leuven Who-is-who](#)
FUB: no comprehensive RIS in place yet, considerations to use VIVO; [research data base with research projects](#), [FUB's academic Departments and Central Institutes](#).
UCM: [Portal de la Investigation](#)
UCD: [Research Portal](#)
UZ: No RIS in place yet
UL: [Universiteit Leiden's Academic Staff](#)

SHORT, MIDDLE AND LONG-TERM PERSPECTIVES
At the beginning, links to the research portals (research information systems) of individual universities can be listed on the envisaged Una Europa Platform. At a later stage, Una Europa could develop ways to harvest data from the individual research information systems, incorporate it in its platform, and ensure its synchronization and interoperability. The Una Europa platform's data set can commence by harvesting the researcher's profile and then expand the data with publications, patents, and research results. Initial discussion on the possibility to create such functionality started with KU Leuven and University of Edinburgh, where such functions have been developed in-house.

In a long-term perspective, scientists could use the envisaged platform to start discussing collaborations, elaborate on projects within and without the dedicated Una Europa SSCs . Especially an overview over the research conducted within the funding and organizational framework of Una Europa and the researchers conducting this research would be a good opportunity to showcase the thematic focus areas within the respective partner institutions, within Una Europa, and beyond academia. Thus, a platform of this kind could also give ample visibility to the alliance and enable Una Europa to better serve society as a whole, especially by facilitating contacts to companies. External partners could then also be able to scout projects that are of interest to them and contact scientists and vice versa and start matchmaking autonomously.

EXISTING COMMERCIAL PRODUCTS:

SciVal, SciVal Experts, Pure by Elsevier, Research in View, Converis, Symplectic, VIVO

Sharing information on RIRs

TARGET GROUP: academic and higher education staff

AIM:
- Sharing information on RIRs at the partner institutions
- Giving access to scientists from partner universities
- Connect the academic community and facilitate interdisciplinary research cooperation

FEATURES NEEDED:
- Searching tools for connected RIRs, harvesting data from existing catalogues on RIRs at the partner institutions
- Sharing of instructive webinars on how to use RIRs
- Information on events, projects, networking opportunities, funding opportunities for the RIRs
- Storage of relevant documents, papers and books regarding the RIRs
- matchmaking between RIRs, see above
- Presentation of best practices to the interested public
- Newsletter on recently added RIR, upcoming webinars, etc.
- Entry point to the RIR

WHO SHOULD MAINTAIN/OPERATE:
- Research professionals at each university
- IT-Professional

STRATEGIC GOALS ADDRESSED:
- Establishing Interdisciplinary Hubs
- Training Researchers of the Future
- Strengthening Collaboration Beyond Academia
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- Promoting Mobility and Community Building
- Digitalizing Collaboration
- Strengthening Research and Data Infrastructure Skills

SHORT, MIDDLE AND LONG-TERM PERSPECTIVES

A short-term goal it to establish a Una Europa digital catalogue (operational data store) of the RIR by harvesting data from the existing sources incl. setting up a searching tool. The dedicated Una Europa platform can then successively add information on events, projects, networking and funding opportunities related to the RIR. In the medium term, the collaboration requires data infrastructures. The long-term perspective is for the platform to be the central place from where to access the shared RIRs in Una Europa. A look for funding opportunities on the European level could be useful to develop data sharing tools and study the legal barriers. A matchmaking between RIRs could be part of a broader matchmaking page for Una Europa researchers, where they can express interest, needs, post information and opportunities. Ideally, Una Europa should develop a systematic way to link the infrastructures to research funding matchmaking.

EXISTING COMMERCIAL PRODUCTS

Hevo Data, GigaSpaces, Airbyte, Snowflake's Unistore, Stitch.

Enhancing citizen science in research

TARGET GROUP: academics, higher education staff, citizens

AIM:
- Presentation of research projects, communicating to the general public
- Project incubator as an open forum to suggest projects and engage with citizens
- Matchmaking between researchers for joint citizen science projects
- Matchmaking between researchers and/or research support staff for exchanging of experiences/best practices

FEATURES NEEDED:
- Presentation of citizen engagement projects
- Portal for match-making and expression of interest for joint projects
- online training
- Storage of workshop recordings

WHO SHOULD MAINTAIN/OPERATE:
- Research professionals at each university for specified research areas.
- IT-Professional

STRATEGIC GOALS ADDRESSED:
- Establishing Interdisciplinary Hubs
- Training Researchers of the Future
- Strengthening Collaboration Beyond Academia
- Supporting Bottom-Up Initiatives
- Promoting Mobility and Community Building
- Digitalising Collaboration
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SHORT, MIDDLE AND LONG-TERM PERSPECTIVES
The first step to allow for a more concentrated use of Una Europa in service to society would be to establish easy and efficient ways of communication and matchmaking between Una Europa researchers interested in citizen science as well as between researchers and citizens. To do that links to existing data bases with citizen science projects at individual universities can be gathered on the Una Europa Platform. In the middle term, a search for researchers doing projects on citizen science (or interested in) should be possible on the Una Europa research information system (cf. above). For this a label or hashtag needs to be provided in a researchers/projects profile. A search engine should be able to provide a specific search for such labels/hashtags. Similarly, the Una Europa platform dedicated to research funding opportunities should contain information on calls relevant to citizen science; such filter should be in place. Alternatively, citizen science projects can have a separate page and be curated by research teams.

EXISTING COMMERCIAL PRODUCTS
N/A

General notes

- **Better start from simple and small**
- **Manually maintained manuals do not work**
- **Many tools still require coordination/maintaining/facilitation**