Una Europa research support structure

Discussion paper for RCC meeting, 29th Sept. 2022

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Pre workshop

- Have a look at the Una Europa 2030 strategy
- Read this document including the annexes and prepare for the discussion.

Think about

- What services and practices provided at the partner universities would you like to learn more about?
- How far should Una Europa co-develop the practices and how much should we just share the info sessions etc. provided partner universities?
- Are the institutions willing to share their expertise and info sessions with Una Europa partners? How could this be institutionalized beyond individual interests?
- What would be the priorities for research support expected from vzw?
- Look at the list of needed capabilities. Is there something missing? What should be the priorities? (WP2 and 3 / other clusters' inputs not here yet!)
- The Una.Resin Horizon Europe funding pilot has provided many learnings but leaves still questions mainly about how widely Una Europa can support matchmaking and how would the resourcing look like. Please see questions in the Horizon Europe funding -section.

Introduction

Una Europa 2030 strategy outlines the main strategic aims. R&I strategy thus should focus on prioritizing the aims from R&I point of view and outlining the support to these priorities. The "instruments" presented in the Una Europa 2030 strategy are suggestions the writing team has picked from different discussions, most of all Una.Universitas planning. They are not, however, exclusive, or definitive (according to the writing group).

Una.Resin project will end in January 2024. The new roll-out -project (Una.Universitas, may be renamed) will kick-off in December 2022 and continue for six years. In the current plan there is a WP for research support development, but little resources allocated for implementation of the developed practices in other universities. Thus, the support resource should mainly come from the universities or other external funding.

Understanding of needed capabilities, strategic prisonization of them and understanding of the service structures are needed. Una.Resin WP1 has collected insights from researchers about the support needs and RCC has provided necessary sensemaking to learn about the service structures at each university. A suggestion as capabilities and networks to support Una Europa research collaboration is presented to BoD in November (tentative, may be postponed) as part of Una Europa R&I strategy preparation. WP1 project managers will also discuss with other Una.Resin project managers about the needs raising from their work (RIR, OS, Citizen science, Research careers). Those are not discussed in this paper.

General strategic aims, Una Europa 2030 ⇒Una Europa R&I strategy
⇒ *Organization of the services?*

Strategic priorities

- **Collaborating** in research and innovation for the future
- Offering **multi-disciplinary research** opportunities and networks
- Opening up research and data **infrastructures**
- Promoting innovative science communication and stronger public engagement
- Transforming the European Higher Education Area and shaping European policy

Strategy aims that are relevant for the research support (picked from the strategy document)

- A truly inter-university and pan-European campus requires an unprecedented level of integration between partner universities. It calls for a balance between a single institution and a mere network of collaborating universities
  - Further develop a **common governance framework, with joint structures, common standards and sharing best practices.** In developing its governance, Una Europa will adopt a whole-institution approach to sustainability interlinking our efforts in research, teaching, operations and outreach activities.
  - **Develop mechanisms enabling and encouraging 'bottom-up' initiatives** – including the extension of the seed funding scheme - both among the members of the Una Europa community and across our local communities.
- **Encourage and actively support researchers to apply for project funding within the EU's schemes, particularly when it comes to large scale and signature projects.** Horizon Europe, the EU's key funding programme for research and innovation will be a central instrument. In addition, Una Europa will continue to explore other relevant EU funding programmes, notably Erasmus+, the Digital Europe Programme and others.
- **Develop mechanisms for securing increased funding from national and supranational agencies, private sponsors and grant-making foundations, business collaboration,** strongly engaging own budgets of Una Europa universities.
- In a highly globalized and interconnected world Una Europa needs **partners in other world regions** if we are to share in tackling global challenges comprehensively and from multiple perspectives.
- Una Europa will eventually create a nearly barrier-free R&I ecosystem that will allow a form of **long-term collaboration going beyond the life cycle of single projects** or grants and will be based on established practices and mutual trust.

- All Una Europa partner universities exist within **strong local ecosystems** that consist of other academic institutions and non-academic actors such as NGOs, governmental institutions and business in particular. Una Europa aims to actively use these networks and strengthen an entrepreneurial spirit, transversal skills and an innovation-friendly culture across all Una universities.
- As a signature project Una Europa plans to create an **Una Europa Institute for Advanced Studies** as a space for free and critical thinking and discussion of the fundamental challenges of the contemporary world.
- Create a research environment that will **support projects with participation of all member institutions but also excellent smaller multilateral research projects within the alliance and with academic and non-academic partners outside of the alliance.**
- The alliance will concentrate its collaboration on the following **multidisciplinary focus areas:** Cultural Heritage, Sustainability, Data Science and Artificial Intelligence, Europe and the World, One Health and Future Materials. Within these fields there will be a strong emphasis on opportunities for **early career researchers** who have the greatest need to and interest in developing new networks.
    - Design mechanisms **to identify further joint strategic research themes** e.g. the creation of meeting spaces as well as the organization of shared thematic networks with appropriate levels of inter-university networking.
    - **Create European-wide networking and training opportunities for young researchers through joint Una graduate schools & programmes**, which will be characterised by a transnational mix of doctoral researchers and senior academics, a variety of physical and digital teaching formats and short-term interactions such as workshops and summer schools.
    - **Support pilot projects for double affiliation** so that researchers can easily collaborate with teams or institutes at Una Europa partner universities.
- **Strive to integrate research and education more broadly** and at all levels of education, and set up joint research initiation modules for all students, including at bachelor level.
- **With public engagement as a core priority, Una Europa will engage students and researchers in a dialogue with the wider public and showcase the research related achievements of the alliance**, making them simple to understand and, through open dialogue, bring the benefit of insights from different audiences and the wider public to our work.
- Una Europa will continue to position itself as one of the leading European University Alliances at European level and contribute to the strategic objectives of both **the European Research Area (ERA)** and European Education Area, advocating for a holistic vision of European Universities.
- Focus on Una Europa's overall goal of increasing the quality and impact of research

Organization of the services at Una Europa

The support to Una Europa research collaboration has two aspects:

1) Sustainable support to researchers integrated into the existing structures at the universities

2) Support to the research development and capacity building. The needs may raise from the Una Europa community or for example EC research policies or Una Europa development projects, like Una.Universitas.

The targets of the development processes can be:

1) Direct services for researchers

2) Professional and organizational development

The services can be provided by:

1) The Una Europa partner universities, initiative from the university

      a. Shared local services and trainings

2) Partner universities together as a network

      a. Co-developed services

      b. Shared local services and trainings

      c. All universities or smaller group of universities

3) Una Europa Vzw

4) External partner of commercial provider

Services for researchers

Una Europa should aim to sharing expertise rather than build joint service structures. The outcomes of the discussions so far suggest flexible support networks integrated to the existing service structures. In general, needed service capabilities should be identified together on Una Europa level. The needed capacities /resource should be part of the everyday work at the relevant teams at each partner university. The current clusters lay good ground for this kind of approach.

These networks (including RCC) should be institutionalized beyond 1Europe, Una.Universitas and Una.Resin to make sure that each university allocates a responsible contact person, working hours and dissemination of the outcomes as well as sufficient travel funding. Funding could also be applied from Erasmus+ or other funding scheme.

We have identified certain capabilities that would be necessary for sustainable collaboration supporting the strategic aims. The current clusters provide a good base for the professional network and some of the needs could also be covered by Una Europa vzw. **List is suggestive starting point, and it will be discussed with RCC and Una.Resin WP leads and considered in relation to the Una.Universitas preparations.**

- Support to reseach funding
  - o scanning the suitable external research funding
  - o Informing about the funding possibilities
  - o Education the researchers about the particularities of each funding type
  - o Matchmaking
  - o Una Europa seed funding
- Strategic and futures support to SSCs
- Coordination / communication needs (incl. support to Una Europa digital platforms)
- Lobbying, EC, ERA, following European initiatives and strategies and positioning Una Europa
- Development of multidisciplinary practisies (crosscutting other themes)
- 3rd sector collaboration (both business and policy) (links to funding)
- Collaboration with African partners
- Early carreeer researchres
- OS (for example coordinating the OS trainging)?
- Citizen science?
- RIRs?
- Research careers?
- Institute for Advanced Studies?
- Support for organizing Una fair / Una conferences?

Professional and organizational development

The collaboration should be flexible and collegial. Still, in addition to informal networking, regular meetings of the network are important to define, how the group should work and to make sure all partners are involved and benefit from the collaboration. For this it is useful to appoint a chair inviting the meetings. The network could also provide training to the colleagues according to the strengths of each partner university. These could be organized in connection to Una Europa staff training weeks. Also, internal on-line trainings could be shared with the partners.

What should be the channel for sharing the sessions and should they be under Una Europa label to attract the colleagues and researchers from different universities?

Research funding

Una Europa 2030 strategy identify priority funding instruments. These are based largely on Una.Resin work.

1) European funding, multidisciplinary consortium calls
   a. Pillar II clusters
   b. MCSA
   c. Funding targeted to global collaborations
2) National funding instruments with potential for sharing information with the partners
3) Una Europa Seed funding

Communication of the opportunities and EoIs is essential for success. Key added values of Una Europa are possibility for matchmaking and sharing expressions of interest. The Una Europa common practices should be primarily developed to support this phase.

Support to the proposal writing should be flexible and the support should be allocated from the participating universities, not pooled collectively among all the Una Europa universities. The research specialist involved can put up a task force and base the proposal preparation on the practices of the participating universities, especially the coordinating university. The approach allows sharing best practices, and in best case, also sharing responsibilities according to each partner's strengths.

For Una Europa R&I funding strategy (part of R&I strategy) it is necessary to map also the other research-related funding needs (for example RIR, OS, Citizen science).

Horizon funding

Supporting the Horizon Europe consortium building feeds into the strategic aims of Una Europa 1) Focus on young researchers (The European projects within Una Europa allow the young researchers to learn and grow towards leading project proposals themselves). 2) Multidisciplinary research 3) Bringing Una Europa researchers together - money is enabler.

Process (draft):

- Scanning the potential calls
  - *Vzw?*
  - *How much capacity there is to do this pre-work and how could it be done the most optimal way?*

- - *Should there pre pre-selection phase with Una Europa SSCs?*
- Collecting EoIs on a digital platform.
  - This could be either a commercial one or developed by Una Europa partners. Ideally this would be maintained by Wzv and communicated by the local research offices. The matter of the platform is to be mapped still in fall 2022 by WP1
  - Common Una Europa EoI question template (now available from the pilot, needs to be adjusted to call)
  - *How to incentive the researchers to join? Should we concentrate to topics relevant for focus areas SSCs?*
  - This has to be easy for researchers. They are not going to read the full call texts as first thing, thus summaries are needed. *Who would write them?*
  - *By cluster or by focus areas?*
  - *Timing in relation to call draft launch to the official launch of the call?*
  - *How can we enhance the multidisciplinary matchmaking? Trough SSCs?*
  - Need to consider local schedules (now only Bologna has internal deadlines)
  - *Should EoI platform be open to Una Partners only, or also external partners including 3rd sector? How about coordination roles?*

- Informing those, who have expressed their interest to act as coordinators and identify the most motivated and experienced ones.
  - General info sessions by Vzw
  - …followed by discussions with the potential coordinators and choosing the coordinators supported. *Who should do this?*
- Continue to matchmaking with those coordinators, who can provide an initial idea as a project
  - *Timing in relation to the Call schedule?*
  - We now have a format for on-line session. *Who should be responsible to organize these in future?*
  - *How many sessions it is possible to run?*
- Forming the teams to support the grant writing. Only those universities involved.
  - Coordinating university set the standard
  - Sharing templates
  - *Una Europa seed funding for travels?*

Is matchmaking needed for Pillar III innovation tools or strategic planning of pillar II European partnerships?

National funding instruments

RCC has identified that there are several national funding opportunities that could be shared with the Una Europa partners. Now opportunities are shared in Una Europa, but it is quite random.

The research offices could add national funding opportunities available for other partners and these would be shared locally in local newsletters and intranets. This should be under Una Europa webpages.

The same platform could be used for sharing the opportunities provided by the universities themselves.

Should this be real-time and open to anyone? Should the collecting process be scheduled including newsletters etc?

Seed funding

Focus areas and seed funding initiatives have an important role as incubators of multidisciplinary understanding, which is necessary for success in the consortium calls.

There should be two types of seed funding:

- Horizon Europe matchmaking (travel support)
  - How would this be shared?
  - What should be the optimal timings for annual cycle for this kind of support?
- Seed funding allowing new initiatives possibly growing as new focus areas (as Una Europa One Heatlh). These groups should be supported to get external funding.

Discussion of the ways to collect the seed funding funds was begun in the RSG meeting in Helsinki June. The topic will be further studied during the fall 2022 by WP1.

Strategic and futures support

The RCC excel did not provide answers about the futures, strategic and service design expertise. This is something we could still map. The needs depend also a lot on the Una.Universitas planning outcomes.

- Strategic support to SSCs
  - Helps communicating inside the universities and to the 3rd sector stakeholders and partners what they are doing
  - **Helps to identify suitable funding**
  - Benchmarking of the One Health strategic process would be usefull
- Choosing new focus areas
  - So far mainly top down based on European priorities
  - Should include both research and education
  - Either Bottom-up, for example starting from seed funding, critical mass needed
- EC and ERA aims
  - Lobbying Una Europa goals
  - Scanning for opportunities
  - Ad hoc initiatives
  - Links to for example to LERU

Other services (other Wps)

- To be discussed with other Work packages as part of Una Europa R&I strategy work.

Annex A, Selected outcomes of the RCC excel

Support for Horizon Europe funding

- Support for identifying suitable topics for researchers
  - Yes in all universities, at least upon request. Also distributing draft work programmes to interested researchers.
- Support for match-making, for example workshop facilitation
  - Level of support with internal/external matchmaking varies a lot.
- Special support, if lead university, what?
  - In all cases, more extensive support if coordinators, including depending on the university for example, financial incentives, proofreading, commenting on proposals, communicating with partners, support in budgeting. Only at UP1 no support at pre-award stage.
- Grant writing support
  - Varying levels of support, incuding commenting on proposals, standardized block of text for some parts, help with writing the more technical parts, training in grant writing. Only at UJ, the Research Assistance Service not involved in the grant writing process.
- Other, for example brochures
  - Mostly no or occasionally. Only UB having more extensive and regular service for providing booklets.
- How are the support requests prioritized?
  - Based on deadlines, timing, type of funding, workload.
- Is there a support mechanism in place at your university for MSCA doctoral program calls? What kind of support is provided?
  - Information sessions, commenting on coordinated proposals. Coordination with other relevant units, e.g. doctoral training.
- Do you follow systematically the fundings and collaborations?
  - F&T portal and Horizon dashboard used to gather data to make internal statistics.
- Is there systematic lobbying on the work programmes when they are drafted?
  - Varies from university to university. Draft work programmes circulated at the request of NCPs.
- Financial support for the preparation of Horizon Europe applications
  - Varies from 15 000€ to nothing.
- Do you have a process to collect expressions of interest for pillar II calls?
  - In other case no, except Unibo.
- Do you produce brochures about the researchers interested?
  - In other case no, except Unibo (and JU in the case of MSCA PF).

Where could we share capabilities ?

Should the RCC continue meeting beyond Una.Resin and 1Europe / Una.Universitas? What would be the key interests for knowledge sharing considering: a) development of own services b) Supporting Una Europa collaboration c) Personal career and skills development? What would be the preferable communication channels for RCC?

There is strong support for the long-term continuation of the RCC. The arguments include exploring synergies and opportunities for collaborative projects, sharing best practices, and further developing the skills of research support personnel.

Suggestions for knowledge sharing include staff exchange (between research offices) as well as joint training events (even adapting some existing events, such as KU Leuven's International Staff Training Week). At the same time, it would be important to ensure added value as well as to avoid overlapping with the offerings at each Una Europa university.

RCC ideas for shared practises: Does your university have specific experience or strengths in these? Who should coordinate the shared sessions and communicate about them at your university?

At the moment, Una Europa universities offer a wide range of training events, ranging from short, focussed ones (MSCA, ERC, open science etc) to 1-3-day intensive workshop (e.g. UJ's "Horizon Europe Week"). Further discussion is needed on the type of sessions and key contents that could be covered via shared Una Europa events. Any information about future shared sessions would be best communicated by the research offices of each university.

Information sessions on European funding

Many of UNA Europa research offices provide a wide range of EU funding training to their researchers. This includes not only EU/Horizon Europe general info sessions, but also specialized info sessions and trainings in instruments like MSCA and ERC (e.g. FUB, UH), EIC (e.g. KU Leuven, UH) and open science and data management in HE (KU Leuven). In addition to focussed thematic sessions, UJ also offers a 2-3 day intensive "Horizon Europe Week" aimed at strengthening their international cooperation and develop join proposals.
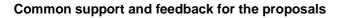
The information about shared sessions would be best coordinated/communicated by the research offices of each university.

Information sessions for early career researchers

The courses and sessions organize for early career researchers cover a great number of aspects such as research integrity, PDM, statistics, finding opportunities (incl. MSCA and national funding), and various transferable skills (career development, leadership, entrepreneurial skills, etc). Some concrete examples are the grant writing courses (e.g. FUB, UH) and KU Leuven's "Storytelling with data".

National funding opportunities in other Una Europa countries

The responses did not provide examples of funding opportunities advertised in/from other European countries. In this respect, research offices seem to act as liaison for national agencies that are tasked with international cooperation. Examples of these agencies were FWO and Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (referred to by FUB and KU Leuven, respectively, with regard to the bottom-up cross-European initiative Weave), and the Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange.

Common support and feedback for the proposals

The research offices offer support and feedback for proposals (FUB's Team Research Funding and Information; KU Leuven's Research Coordination Office together with Leuven Research & Development; UH's Research Funding Services; UJ's International Research Programmes Services; UNIBO's Research Service Division) (2 of the 4 respondents wrote they did not understood the question, and therefore may have missed the intended meaning of "common" -if the idea was experiences in giving common/join cross-institutional support/feedback: therefore you may want to omit references to these responses)

Lobbying, visions and foresight

Support for lobbying, visions and foresight is given at different levels depending of the university. Thus, at KU Leuven the research office focusses on lobbying for general terms and condition of the framework programme and on broader research policy, while thematic lobbying is done at the level of departments. At UH, an EU advisor supports both Research Funding Services and the leadership of the university in these activities. At UJ, this is a role for the Vice Rector for Research. At UNIBO, this is done by the Research Service Division (Strategic Thematic

Linking existing institutes

All three responses indicated "Not clear"; Only Leuven tried to guess an answer, suggesting "Waive or reduce fees for Una Europa Researchers to become external member of established multidisciplinary structures such as institutes?". *This had been unclear question the meaning was to ask how to link existing multidisciplinary institutes.*

Joint virtual research groups -lesson learned so far to be considered

No lessons learned available yet.