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BioReCer Work Package 7 Leader

How can Horizon Europe project partners, like those involved in the BioReCer project, ensure effective protection of intellectual property while still adhering to the framework's open science and data sharing principles?

That's a great question, and it's one of the core challenges we face in Horizon Europe projects, where there's a strong emphasis on both innovation and transparency. For BioReCer, which focuses on enhancing the sustainability and traceability of bio-based products, we've taken a multi-faceted approach to balance IP protection and open science.

Can you give us an overview of this approach?

Certainly. The first thing we did was identify our Key Exploitable Results (KERs) early on in the project. This includes tools, data models, methodologies, and the ICT platform we're developing. By knowing what our valuable outputs are from the outset, we can plan appropriate protection measures.

It's all about striking the right balance. On the one hand, we're committed to open science principles because we want our findings to advance the field and support industry growth. On the other hand, we need to ensure that innovations with commercial potential are protected adequately so that they can be brought to market effectively.

How do you decide what data and results can be shared openly and what needs protection?

It comes down to categorising our data and results based on their sensitivity and commercial potential. For instance, general methodological frameworks, sustainability indicators, or high-level findings that don't compromise any trade secrets or competitive advantage are candidates for open access. This ensures that we're contributing to scientific progress in line with Horizon Europe's requirements.

Conversely, any proprietary algorithms, software, or specialised methodologies are treated differently. We look at patenting options or other forms of legal protection for these. In some cases, we may share data only after a certain embargo period, giving us enough time to secure the necessary IP protections first.

And how do you manage IP ownership within a multi-partner project like BioReCer?

This is where our consortium agreement plays a critical role. The agreement clearly outlines the ownership rights, access provisions, and responsibilities concerning both background IP (existing knowledge brought into the project) and foreground IP (newly generated results). By establishing these rules upfront, we reduce the likelihood of disputes and ensure everyone understands the path from research to exploitation.

We also have mechanisms for joint ownership when results are co-developed by several partners. This can be a bit tricky, but we often use joint ownership agreements to define how the IP will be managed, commercialised, or licensed after the project ends.

With open science being a key principle of Horizon Europe, how do you ensure compliance while protecting valuable IP?

We follow several strategies to ensure compliance with open science. For example, we make use of embargo periods where certain data or results are temporarily restricted from public access to secure IP protection first. Additionally, when we share software or data, we often employ open-source licenses with specific terms that protect the original IP rights while allowing public access.

Our data management plan is also tailored to distinguish between open data and proprietary data, specifying how datasets will be shared and protected. It's a living document that we review regularly to ensure we're in line with both IP protection strategies and Horizon Europe's open science policies.

Have you considered training the partners on these topics?

Absolutely. Training on IP management and open science is essential for the success of the project. We've provided all partners with sessions on best practices for handling IP, strategies for patenting, understanding licensing agreements, and even the nuances of data sharing. This helps to ensure that all partners are on the same page and can make informed decisions regarding IP and data.

It sounds like a comprehensive approach. Are there any other ways you are balancing IP and open science?

Another key aspect is collaboration with stakeholders, including potential users and regulatory bodies, throughout the project. By engaging with them early on, we can tailor our IP and data-sharing strategies to meet market and regulatory needs while still contributing to the broader scientific community.

What key market analysis factors should be considered to identify potential demand, competition, and commercialisation pathways for the Key Exploitable Results (KERs) in Horizon Europe projects?

Great question. When it comes to Horizon Europe projects, identifying and exploiting Key Exploitable Results (KERs) is a critical part of maximising the impact of research and development efforts. The whole point is to ensure that these innovations don't just stay in the lab but actually reach the market where they can make a tangible difference. To do that effectively, there are several key market analysis factors that project partners need to consider.

Could you elaborate on those factors? What are the main considerations?

The first step is understanding market demand. We need to know if there is a real need for the KER out there, and if so, how big is that market? We should be asking questions like, "How large is the potential market?" and "Is this market growing?" This helps us understand whether we're looking at a niche opportunity or something with much broader appeal. For example, if the KER addresses a growing need in renewable energy, the expanding demand in that sector could indicate significant commercial potential.

Once we understand the demand, the next step is to segment the market. Who exactly are we targeting? Are we aiming at big corporations, SMEs, specific industries, or even end consumers? Proper segmentation allows us to tailor the KER's features and benefits to meet the needs of distinct customer groups.

What about the competitive landscape? How does that factor into the market analysis?

The competitive landscape is absolutely crucial. We need to know who else is playing in this space. Are there direct competitors offering similar solutions, or are there alternative ways that customers are addressing the same problem? For example, if we have developed a new sustainable packaging material, we need to consider not just other innovative materials but also traditional packaging solutions.

Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of these competitors helps us identify our own unique value proposition. It's about finding what we do better than anyone else and capitalising on that. Maybe our KER is more cost-effective, or maybe it's easier to implement. We need to articulate why potential customers should choose our solution over others.

Speaking of customers, how important is it to understand their needs and pain points in this process?

It's absolutely vital. At the end of the day, it's the customers who will decide whether or not a KER is successful in the market. We need to get inside their heads and understand the problems they're trying to solve. This could involve gathering customer insights through interviews, surveys, or focus groups to understand their unmet needs.

For instance, if our KER aims to improve the traceability of bio-based products, we need to understand what frustrations companies have with current traceability solutions. Are they too expensive? Too complicated? Do they lack real-time data? Pinpointing these pain points allows us to develop a solution that addresses those specific issues, making our KER much more attractive.

Let us talk about regulatory requirements. How does that factor into the commercialisation pathway?

That's a great point. Especially in industries like healthcare, energy, or environmental technology, regulatory compliance can be a make-or-break factor. We need to know what standards or certifications are required for the KER to enter the market legally. For example, if our project involves a new medical device, it needs to meet specific health and safety standards before it can be sold.

This is where understanding the Technology Readiness Level (TRL) of the KER also comes into play. If the technology is not mature enough, it may need further development to meet these regulatory requirements. Knowing where the KER stands in terms of readiness helps us map out the steps we need to take to get it to market.

Are there different pathways for bringing KERs to market? How do you choose the right one?

Absolutely, there are several pathways, and choosing the right one depends on factors such as the nature of the KER, market dynamics, and the resources available. Some common pathways include licensing the technology to established companies, forming joint ventures or strategic partnerships, or even creating a spin-off company dedicated to commercialising the KER.

For instance, licensing might be the best option if the project partners don't have the resources to scale up manufacturing themselves. On the other hand, if the KER has a high commercial potential and the partners want to maintain control over its development, forming a spin-off could be a viable approach.

It sounds like a lot of planning and strategy go into this. How does the go-to-market strategy fit into this whole process?

The go-to-market strategy is essentially the roadmap that guides how we bring the KER to the market. It involves defining the business model – are we selling a product, offering a service, or maybe a subscription model? It's about finding the right pricing strategy, identifying the most effective sales channels, and crafting a marketing plan to raise awareness and drive adoption.

The ultimate goal is to make sure we have a solid plan for how we will actually generate revenue and make the KER sustainable in the long term. If we do this right, we're not just creating a new product or service – we're creating a new solution that addresses a real market need and has the potential to scale and grow.

Can you explain the role of communication and dissemination activities in maximising the impact of exploitation in Horizon Europe projects?

Communication and dissemination activities are fundamental to Horizon Europe projects, particularly when it comes to maximising the exploitation of project results. In the context of R&I projects, exploitation refers to the process of translating research outcomes into practical, valuable applications – whether that's in the form of new products, services, policies, or standards. But even the most innovative results won't have much impact if they remain hidden or are not shared effectively with the right audiences. That's where communication and dissemination come into play.

How would you differentiate between communication and dissemination in this context?

While the two terms are often used interchangeably, they do have distinct purposes. Communication involves engaging with a broader audience, including the general public, to raise awareness about the project's goals, activities, and potential societal benefits. It's about making people understand why the project matters and how it could potentially improve their lives. Dissemination, on the other hand, is more targeted and focused on sharing the project's results with specific stakeholders – like industry professionals, policymakers, academic peers, or regulatory bodies – who can directly use or further develop the outcomes.

Why is this distinction important for achieving effective exploitation of project results?

It's important because different audiences require different types of information and engagement strategies. For example, policymakers need to understand how a project's results can inform new regulations, while industry players need technical details on how a new technology can be integrated into their existing processes. If you try to communicate with all these different stakeholders in the same way, you're unlikely to meet their specific needs, and you could miss out on critical opportunities for exploitation.

What kind of impact can effective communication and dissemination have on a project?

The impact can be substantial. First and foremost, they help increase visibility and awareness. When people know about the project and its results, the door opens for further discussions, partnerships, and funding opportunities. Secondly, these activities help build credibility. When stakeholders see that a project's findings are published in reputable journals, presented at respected conferences, or featured in high-profile media, they are more likely to trust the quality of the work. This trust is crucial for adoption and exploitation.

Moreover, well-planned communication and dissemination efforts can actively engage stakeholders and create feedback loops. This engagement can lead to valuable insights that improve the project results themselves or the strategies for bringing them to market. In some cases, it can even uncover additional applications or markets for the project outcomes that the team hadn't initially considered.

Can you give an example of how these activities can facilitate policy uptake or regulatory alignment?

Certainly. Let's say a Horizon Europe project develops an innovative solution for reducing industrial emissions. If the project partners engage with policymakers early on through targeted dissemination – such as policy briefings, white papers, or stakeholder roundtables – they can present evidence that supports the adoption of new environmental regulations. The project's results could then influence policy development directly, paving the way for the widespread implementation of the innovation.

What about the role of communication in preparing the market for new innovations?

That's a great point. Communication plays a key role in market readiness. It's not enough to just invent a new technology; you also need to educate the market about it. This could mean creating user guides, demonstration videos, or even training programs to ensure that potential customers understand the benefits and practical applications of the new technology. By doing so, you reduce the resistance to adoption and make it easier for end-users to integrate the innovation into their daily operations.

Horizon Europe promotes open science. How can communication and dissemination align with these principles while still protecting intellectual property?

The beauty of open science is that it promotes knowledge sharing and collaboration. Communication and dissemination activities can align with open science by making data and publications widely accessible through open-access journals or public repositories. However, this does not mean that intellectual property protection should be overlooked. It's about finding a balance – sharing results in a way that allows for peer validation and further research while also securing intellectual property rights through patents or other mechanisms before full disclosure.

What are the challenges when it comes to communication and dissemination, and how can they be overcome?

One major challenge is engaging the right stakeholders at the right time. Not all stakeholders will have an immediate interest in the project results, and their interest may vary throughout the project lifecycle. This requires a carefully timed and tailored approach to ensure that stakeholders are reached when they are most likely to engage. Another challenge is translating technical language into something more accessible for non-specialist audiences, which is where professional communicators or knowledge brokers can be valuable.

Ultimately, successful communication and dissemination are about understanding who needs to know what and when – and then delivering that information in the most compelling and accessible way. When done right, these activities can significantly enhance the impact of Horizon Europe projects, ensuring that research doesn't just stay in the lab but actually contributes to economic growth, societal improvements, and sustainable development.