CIVIS Digital Campus

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CIVIS Digital Campus

Overview of the project

The development of a European university involves building bridges between its member universities. The digital aspect plays a fundamental role in the integration of the technical, administrative and educational processes of CIVIS. The creation of a digital campus responds to the need to develop tools that allow us to create a common European university based on the particularities of the universities that make it up.

Introduction

Three years of intense collaborative work have articulated the CIVIS project around an idea: "1 alliance, 11 universities, countless possibilities". A few words that nevertheless represent an immense challenge. In a geographically fragmented scenario, how can cooperation between students, teachers and administrative staff be facilitated if they do not know each other? Where can people get together to share their visions and explore common projects? Where can innovative joint activities be developed if teachers are hundreds of kilometers away from each other? How can a sense of community be developed? In short, how can we create a campus for 11 universities?

Digitization helps to meet this challenge, but it is not an answer in itself. Of course, it is essential for the development of common technical solutions, in terms of communication, integration of processes, data exchange and so on. However, as important as it is, it is only a part of the picture. When we decided to develop a Digital Campus within CIVIS, we did so considering at least two fundamental aspects. First, the need to create common environments compatible with the internal functioning of universities. Sometimes, the best technical solutions are not the most functional ones. Experience has shown us the importance of understanding the potential (administrative, regulatory, cultural) barriers and develop solutions that meet the particularities of all contexts. Second, digital tools must serve concrete objectives. This may seem simple, but it requires a deep and collective reflection on the needs to be met and the direction in which the project should evolve. The Digital Campus is not intended to be a tool, but rather a process to build a comprehensive set of digital tools directly linked to the very CIVIS objectives.

This is why, from the early stages of the Digital Campus development, not only IT experts, but also project managers, administrative staff and students were involved in the discussions. The project's own urgencies do not always allow it to be done to the same extent, but in order the Digital Campus to be really operational, decisions need to be made in a collegial manner, as it concerns the CIVIS community as a whole.

This document sums up the main contributions of the Digital Campus to the development of CIVIS. We particularly focus on four axes: project monitoring, mobility, community building, and e-learning environments. For each case, we will present the context in which the need arises, the tools used and the functioning of the teams involved to make these tools meaningful for the achievement of the objectives.

What is the CIVIS Digital Campus?

Building a Digital Campus is, for every European Universitie, a strategic objective. In this pilot phase, where the overall objectives of our Alliance were still to be build, what should be the role of the CIVIS Digital Campus? As every partner university has already their own set of digital tools to support their activities, how the CIVIS digital campus could be complementary?

Digitalisation cannot be an objective in itself. Digitalisation needs to answer needs and expectations. The application already described some objectives with different Work Package that had to detail actions to be implemented to reach them. Included in WP1, management and governance, the implementation of the CIVIS Digital Campus was soon seen as a transversal element with a supporting function to other Work Packages activity.

The first missions of the new IT Officer hired by Aix-Marseille Université in September 2019 was to contact each WP Leader to understand their goal and collect their IT needs but also to improve the collaborative tools supporting the collaboration and the management of the project. At the same time

understanding each university IT systems was important to develop a common strategy. Discussions were organised through the IT Task force, gathering all IT managers in order to identify, first, the potential interoperability between the CIVIS Digital Campus and each university information system and, second, what areas would need specific inter-campus digital platforms.

Two Main Task Forces

IT managers Task Forces - Created at the early beginning of the project, this Task Force gathered IT Managers from all partners Universities to define technical needs.

Digital Campus Task Forces - Created after a first phase of consultation, this Task Force aimed to gather all WP Leaders, student representatives and IT Task Force members to discuss on the concrete implementation of the Digital Campus project.

After this phase of consultation, it became clear that the CIVIS Digital Campus should cover a large spectrum of functionalities that impossible to be implemented in one unique digital platform. Some needs were shared by different Work Packages and required to provide common digital tools. The importance of the CIVIS educational offer is substantial. The development of short-term mobility courses or online courses had impact on how to manage student mobility and the recognition process. The creation joint programmes developed by at least 3 university changed the way we could support the creation of their online courses content that could be accessible by student from all university.

To confirm this first vision of the CIVIS Digital Campus we organised two collaborative workshops in April and May 2020 gathering academics, students and administrative staff members from the different universities. This was a way to collect inputs from the future final user needs and expectations. Online learning and collaboration emerged as the major elements in the discussion, but the idea of using the Digital Campus as a tool to create a CIVIS community and develop the sense of belonging in our Alliance also arose in the context of these consultations.
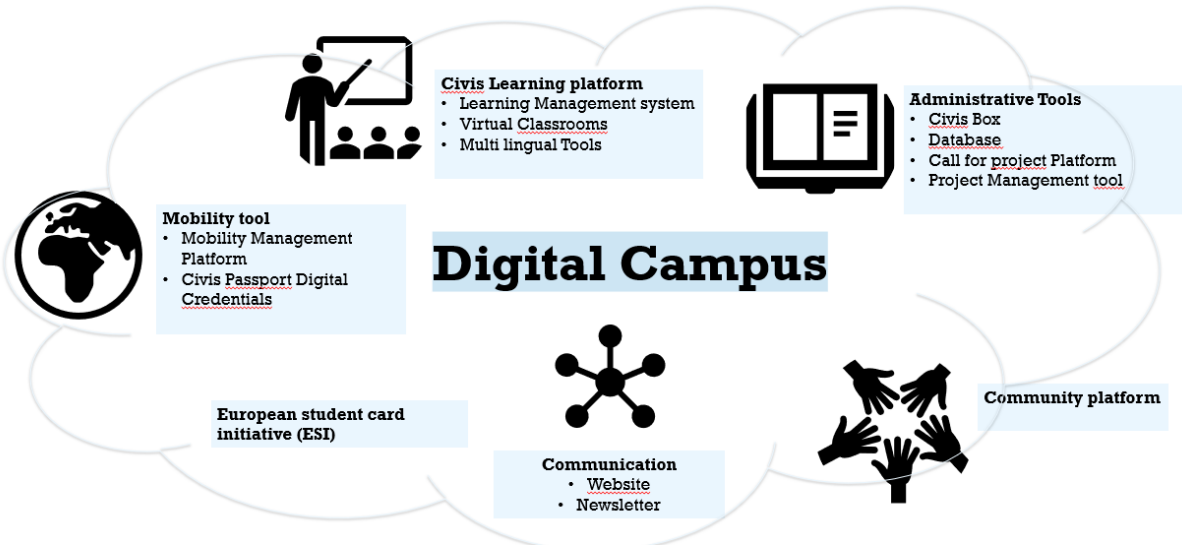
Global overview of the CIVIS Digital Campus

A first architecture of the CIVIS Digital Campus with the main different functional domains was designed. Administrative tools, Online Learning, Mobility management, Collaboration were identified as primary needs, so the challenge was to define and develop the potential of the Digital Campus to respond to each need.

A step by step approach

The implementation of the CIVIS Digital Campus was not done all at once. In this three-year project, we couldn't wait to get all the different needs to start launching first platform. Moreover, as the Digital Campus aimed to support CIVIS project and activities, we had to be agile and propose tools once some needs were clearly expressed and became urgent.

It was the case with a platform to collect call for projects, as we had to improve our efficiency and be able to really follow applications and evaluation. Later, with some academics working on a student week on Global Migration that had to be launched in September 2021, we had to implement the CIVIS Moodle in coherence with other digital tools to propose the first CIVIS online learning experience.

Even if we tried to anticipate on potential needs and platforms, during this building phase of the Digital Campus, a real sense of adaptation was required in order to stick with the progress of our Alliance. That came often with having to really define the minimum scope to offer for each platform, to be able to start, and be able to show to our entire community our progress.

Once the Digital Campus platform were launched, we had to be reactive to be able to extend those first experiences as more and more activities were developed. With our limited human resources, we still improved the functionality and management process. This was important to keep increasing the involvement of our academics on creating their educational content and having students that could develop new competencies offered by our Alliance.

Even if the Digital Campus was implemented in different steps, the general architecture envisaged during the consultation phase was a guide to keep a global coherence. We managed to choose platforms and digital tools that could be complementary and technically interoperable. The Digital Campus aimed and will keep aiming to provide a comprehensive digital experience to our users that fits with CIVIS overall objectives.

2

Supporting the European Project

Collaborative & administrative tools

Supporting the implementation of the CIVIS Alliance was the first mission of the Digital Campus. Collaboration between members from different universities was a need since the beginning of the project. The CIVIS Digital Campus first goal was to provide tools to enable this collaboration and help on managing the first activities framed by the project.

Introduction

Today CIVIS has a rich educational offer: during the first three years, more than 4000 students participated in one of the 200 activities organized, either online or in a face-to-face format. However, for all this to be possible, it was necessary to create from the beginning a structure that would guarantee collaboration, information exchange and an adequate monitoring of project evolution. The first mission of the digital campus was, therefore, to provide tools to facilitate collaboration between the different partners of the project.

The development of the CIVIS Box aimed at sharing information among the different work packages and task forces. However, apart from the effectiveness of the CIVIS Box, there was a basic technical problem. How could we guarantee the access of partners from all CIVIS universities without having to create a personal account for each of them? To solve this problem, we decided to take advantage of the existing identity management system of each university to let user authenticate in the CIVIS Box using their own university credentials.

The CIVIS Box was a real challenge in terms of organization of information, as we needed a tool that reproduced the project's management structure and at the same time be flexible enough to adapt the evolution of the project. Again, the most important thing was not the chosen tool, but to use it effectively. This implied a reflection on how the information should be structured so it was easily accessible to everyone.

Those first Digital Campus tools are now key for our alliance. New project like RIS4CIVIS or CIVIS3i use both the CIVIS Box and the authentication to share document and collaborate, and other may come in the future.

Support the project management

One of the first main goals of every European project is to be able to manage tasks and milestones planned in the application form. With eight university involved at the beginning of the project and a large spectrum of subjects to be covered, having a space to for example share the meeting minutes, collaborate on deliverables or provide templates was key.

Multiple collaboration tools are available and used in each university, but a strong choice was made to prefer an opensource solution that can provide data security and confidentiality. As Aix-Marseille Université, in charge of the Digital Campus implementation, already used *Nextcloud* for its internal communication, the decision was made to create the CIVIS box with this open source solution and host it on AMU datacenter.

Launched in December 2019, the CIVIS Box was a real challenge in terms of organization of information, as we needed a tool that reproduced the project's management structure and at the same time be flexible enough to adapt the evolution of the project. This implied a reflection on how the information should be structured so it was easily accessible to everyone.

A complete structure of shared folders was created to let each member involved in the project to be able to consult and contribute regarding their role in the organization.
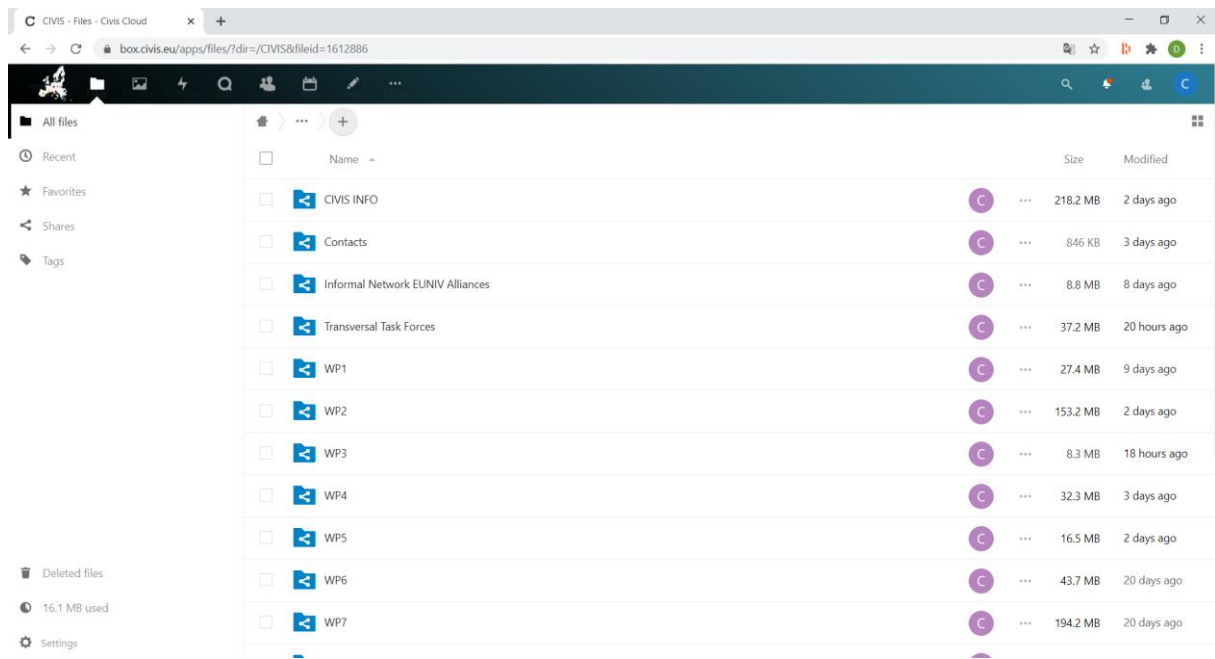
After three years, the CIVIS Box is now used by almost 1 000 users, including those from other alliance's sister projects such as RIS4CIVIS for the research part or CIVIS3i for post-docs. The CIVIS Box is now the Collaboration platform where we can see the intense activity generated by academics, staff member and students to build or European University.

Manage user Identity

One of the first question for every IT project is how to manage user Identity and access. The easiest way is to create new accounts directly but it requires time to administrate the process and for users to remember the new password created.

How could we guarantee the access of partners from all CIVIS universities without having to create a personal account for each of them? To solve this problem, we decided to take advantage of the existing identity management system of each university. *Nextcloud* allowed us to and implement a first "federated authentication" but only to get access to the collaboration platform.

The same issue arise from other Digital Campus platform needs, and it became and urgency to implement a federated authentication tool that could be used not only on the CIVIS Box. With the great contribution from Tübingen University we chose to implement *Regapp*, an open source tool developed by Karlsruhe Institute of technology also used in the Bade-Wurtemberg context.

Regapp is a service provider where we can easily add all identity provider from our partner universities registered in *Edugain*. However, as for example Bucharest University is not registered on *Edugain*, *Regapp* allowed us to also add directly one of their identity systems directly. We were able then to connect for example our online learning platform Moodle with *Regapp* to propose CIVIS authentication to our users.

Having this federated authentication system was an important milestone, as it was the first step towards the interoperability of the CIVIS systems. It also helped us to quickly add our new partners Paris Lodron University of Salzburg and University of Glasgow to let their academics and staff members having access to the Digital Campus tools.

Some challenges remain as we still have some Digital Campus platforms that are not using the CIVIS authentication. We also experienced some difficulties with student authentication at some of our partners universities, as staff and academics are not managed the same way. We are sure, anyway, that this federated authentication system will be important in the future, both to reinforce the integration of the partner universities and to develop a stronger collaboration with our six African strategic partners.

3

Facilitating Mobility

From Short Term Mobility activities
to Blended Intensive Programmes

The development of a common educational offer prompted the movement (both in physical and virtual terms) of a large community of students, professors and administrative staff. The development of adapted digital tools was essential to facilitate the exchange of information among all the universities in the alliance in order to properly manage all types of mobility actions.

Introduction

Mobility is the backbone of CIVIS. The implementation of a joint educational offer, the exchange of good management and teaching practices, the development of a common identity, the strengthening of links with civil society actors… The major objectives leading the way of the project depend, to a large extent, on an effective mobility that allows the permanent exchange of the CIVIS community. The pandemic obliged us to broaden the vision of mobility also to digital forms, which allowed us to develop working methods and an educational offer with unexpected innovative approaches. But regardless the format, as CIVIS progressed, two important needs emerged: how to manage mobility and how to encourage it.

In this sense, the efforts of the Digital Campus have been aimed at developing solutions to these challenges. With respect to mobility management, the objective was to provide a common platform to centralize information in order to have a better overview of the participants in the activities organized in CIVIS. This was important both at the level of the alliance and at the level of the member universities. On the occasion of the first call for CIVIS Blended Intensive Programmes in September 2022, we launched a tool that has allowed us to have a comprehensive view of the mobility processes, as it concerns the reception of student applications, the selection process, the student participation... This information is accessible to the mobility offices of all partner universities in order to facilitate the financial, administrative and pedagogical mechanisms of a mobility action.

Our goal is not only to manage a mobility action but also to recognize the skills acquired in this experience. There are many activities organized in CIVIS, some of which are part of the student curriculum and some others not but still have a learning value. The idea of the CIVIS Passport is to provide students with a virtual space where all the activities in which he/she participated appear. These digital credentials, whose security is guaranteed via blockchain, allow CIVIS students to collect very valuable information when looking for a job or validating knowledge in another institution.

Short term mobility and virtual activities

How to develop student mobility in a European alliance? As complete bachelor or master jointly created can be long and complex to be implemented, the first choice made was to develop short courses that could be organized on campus as for summer school, online or blended. Different call emerged from Hubs to start the collaboration between academic working on their thematic. Work Package 6 on mobility also proposed a call to organize short-term mobilities such as summer schools, and also Work Package 7 on Teaching Excellence for only virtual courses. For each of the calls, one principle was established: having at least three partner universities involved.

To support the collection of proposals, *Survey Monkey Apply*, a platform to organize call for projects was launched in January 2021. Almost 15 call for projects were managed using this platform to collect proposals using an online application form to be evaluated collectively through the platform.

Almost 300 projects were validated through this call and were open to students from all partners university with the challenge to follow student participation in the different activities. To collect student participation before and after mobility, and being able to manage the grant for physical mobility and potential recognition, the first tool used was a mobility report with an Excel spreadsheet.

Managing and following all those activities was a real challenge as they were organized one by one with lots of difficulties to have a clear calendar and not much time between the selection process and the physical mobility. The need for a proper mobility management platform emerged during that period to support the management of the CIVIS educational offer.

CIVIS Passport – the Digital Recognition Tool

CIVIS European University is one of the first alliances to adopt the blockchain certification for all curricular and extra-curricular activities with the CIVIS Passport. The CIVIS passport aims to secure students' recognition of participation in CIVIS activities. Through the use of Diploma, CIVIS is dematerializing the deliverance of certificates using *Openbadges*. The blockchain certification will come as a complementary feature to the paper documents and will be a means to prove the authenticity of training throughout the participants' professional career. With just one click, the *Openbadge* is displayed, along with a whole range of elements that prove its authenticity.

With the guarantee of authenticity provided by the Alliance, the Civis Passport attests the students' use of the various CIVIS educational and co-educational tools, as well as the relevant skills acquired. For each curricular or extra-curricular Civis activity successfully completed, students will receive a digital OpenBadge with details on the activity's learning outcomes, competencies and skills acquired and method of assessment.

Example of Openbadge for the online programme Global Migration on the Ground

The CIVIS passport is important to promote the different types of mobility offered within CIVIS, including extra-curricular activities, as it will allow students to have access to a comprehensive, visualized record of their CIVIS achievements. It provides a valuable addition to the students' CV, letting them share their activity record through their social networks or with future employers. For students, the CIVIS Passport will provide a proof of their active engagement and experience. For future recruiters and employers, as well as other Higher Education institutions, it will serve as a mark of confidence and quality for those applicants possessing it.

CIVIS Passport – First Digital Credential certified using the Blockchain

Why using digital credentials? Digital credentials allow students to receive a permanent proof of authenticity for their diploma or an acquired skill. Based on blockchain technology, digital credentials can be stored more easily than a paper document and are fully secure, forgery-proof and verifiable. By definition, any data entered on the blockchain cannot be altered or modified. Digital credentials built on the blockchain can help prevent the circulation of fraudulent CVs or diplomas, which has become a key issue for both recruiters and schools.

What are the benefits of blockchain digital credentials? Digital credentials delivered on blockchain via BCdiploma are 100% secure, tamper-proof, verifiable and permanent. Blockchain is a decentralized database and by definition a forgery-proof digital technology. Digital credentials are stored securely because falsification of blockchain information is impossible. It is a guarantee of trust and security that allows students and learners to prove the authenticity of their education and training throughout their professional lives.

Blended Intensive Programmes – a new paradigm

In the first semester of 2022, CIVIS considered the new Erasmus initiative on Blended Intensive Program (BIP) as a real opportunity to support student mobility in the Alliance. As the budget for student mobility in CIVIS project may decrease in the future, the BIP, as it allows the possibility to use each university Erasmus funding, was seen as a way to maintain student mobility among our universities. For academics, the possibility to get organizational support if they reach at least 15 Erasmus students was also important to maintain their engagement.

The first shift was to create the first common call for project for all Hubs, which was launched in May 2022 using our call for project platform with 33 projects validated. But as BIP request to follow more closely Erasmus student participation to secure both student mobility funding and organization support, it was necessary to implement a Digital Tool to manage those activities and launch the CIVIS mobility management platform.

For the CIVIS Digital Campus project, the Blended Intensive Programmes were the perfect case to use the different platforms to support the overall process from the call for project to the recognition with the CIVIS passport.
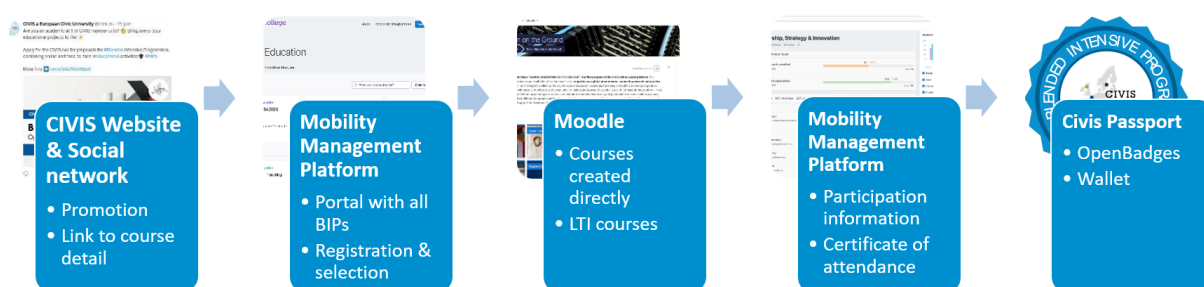
Digital campus tools process to support the Blended Intensive Programme

To simplify the overall management of BIP activities, we decided to create a calendar with the different phases for student application, where several BIPs would be open to student application at the same time. The first period for student application was organized from 1st to 30th of September 2022 with 6 first BIPs.

This allowed us to publish the courses on the website with a link to an application form and use the relay of each partner university to promote those activities efficiently. The mobility platform helped us to really follow student applications during that period and to also send reminders to students that had started application and showed some interest to complete and submit it. For the 6 BIPs, we received a total of 323, with a minimum of 40 Erasmus students' applications for each of them.

The selection process was planned to be done in two weeks and two phases. The first week each program coordinator had to select students based on their academic background and their motivation. The second week mobility officer from the different university had to check whether students would be eligible for the Erasmus funding. This collaborative selection process was done using the mobility management platform to get a final selection of students for each BIP to be notified.

Even after the notification of student selection we had to get their final confirmation to keep following the real number of students participating in each BIP to be able to contact waitlisted student to try to secure the 15 minimum Erasmus Students at the end. All those communications on the selection but also information from Program Coordinator on practical information to use the online courses on the CIVIS Moodle were sent through the mobility management platform.

The last step we will have to follow is to collect student participation and the result of their evaluation. The mobility management platform should then provide document such as transcripts of records or certificate of attendance to student so they can get their credit recognized by their home university. With the list of successful students, we'll be able to send CIVIS passport Open Badges that students may be able to add in their wallet.

As the Blended Intensive Programme should remain one important mobility offer to our student in the future, we still need to improve our process and our Digital tools but the CIVIS Digital Campus project already proved an efficient support on managing this new Erasmus mobility initiative. With all the experience we have now we are more prepared to develop further Educational opportunities that CIVIS alliance will surely develop.

4

Developing Innovative Pedagogies & Online Learning

Towards the cocreation of learning activities

European Universities are an excellent opportunity to become laboratories for innovative teaching approaches. The CIVIS online course platform has been conceived as a digital environment that fosters the co-creation of learning activities, where technology significantly enhances the learning experience for students.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated a process that was already taking place in a natural way. The splitting of teaching between a virtual and a face-to-face part was occurring in parallel with the rest of society. More and more often, digital tools were used to search for information, communicate between students and exchange pedagogical material. However, this transition was driven not by an organized and coordinated response of educational institutions, but by the more or less isolated initiative of those professors who felt more comfortable in a digital environment.

But the pandemic's impact was severe. As classrooms closed, universities around the world were obliged to offer immediate and systematic responses to a reality for which they were not prepared. CIVIS was no exception. Many of the projects that were intended to be developed in a face-to-face format at one of the member universities were compelled to be adapted to an online or –once mobility restrictions began to be lifted– a hybrid format. This required making readjustments in administrative, technical and pedagogical processes in order to find emergency solutions to a new reality.

This is the context that frames the launch of the CIVIS Moodle in September 2021[1]. As we come to the end of the first phase of CIVIS, this document reviews the obstacles and achievements of the platform during its first year of life, in order to outline some possible directions for the future. To this end, it is important to point out something that, although obvious, is worth remembering: it is not the tools that will provide solutions to the problems of a changing educational context, but our ability to identify these problems and to develop adapted working methods.

For this reason, this report does not focus so much on the functionalities of the platform as on the challenges we have faced during its first months of life. The objective is to develop sustainable strategies for online teaching and learning contexts. Or, in other words, to move from emergency educational practices to an ecosystem that favors an emergent and innovative education.

## Why did we launch a CIVIS online course platform?

Within the framework of the development of a CIVIS Digital Campus that aims to interconnect the campuses of all universities, Moodle was launched in order to facilitate the implementation of the CIVIS educational offer. Although most of the universities already had their own Learning Management System (LMS), the experience of the first projects brought to light the technical and administrative difficulties of bringing together students and academics from nine different universities on a "local" platform. Just to mention a few examples: language barriers, problems with the registration of external participants, difficulties for professors from other universities to participate in the development of the course.

That said, it is necessary to clarify two things. Firstly, that the CIVIS Moodle was not launched with the vocation of replacing the LMS of each university, but with the intention of offering a solution to those project coordinators who wanted support in the development of their courses. Secondly, that this support was not only intended to solve the technical obstacles that a professor might encounter with the use of an unfamiliar platform, but also to encourage the development of innovative proposals from a pedagogical point of view, as will be explained below.

There is one more element that justified the use of an online course platform common to the entire alliance. Given the wide variety of the CIVIS educational offer (during the first phase of the project, more

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[1] Click here to access the platform's website: https://moodle.civis.eu/

than 250 activities were validated, either online, blended or face-to-face), the platform was considered to be helpful to promote the development of a "CIVIS identity". To this end, the courses on the platform, in addition to meeting the pedagogical needs defined by the professors, were intended to be easy to navigate and visually attractive. The objective was to facilitate the identification of a CIVIS course through a common design and organization of information.
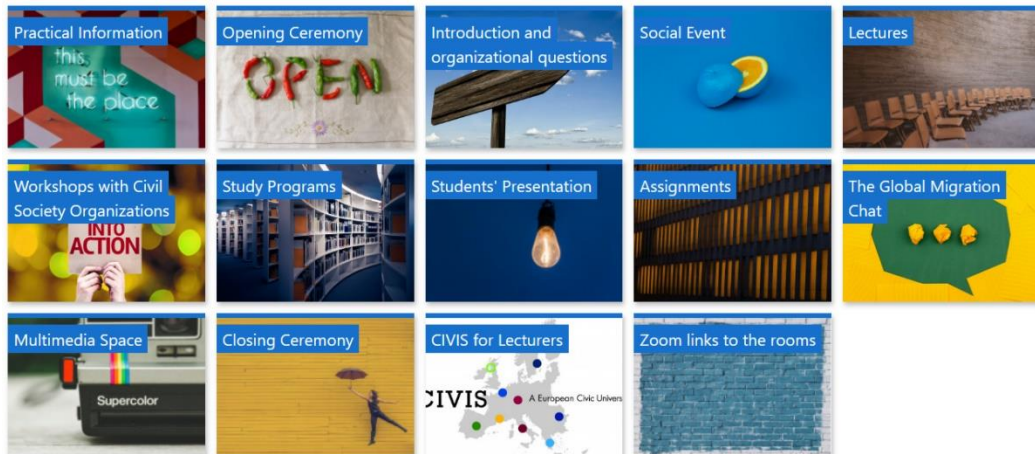
Global Migration on the Ground Moodle main page

During this first year, the platform has not abandoned the experimental nature with which it was born. The complexity of the CIVIS reality has required testing different solutions (in technical, design and pedagogical terms), some of which have been more successful than others. The goal now is to move from a pilot phase to a consolidated strategy that responds to the challenges identified since its launch

The CIVIS Moodle in numbers

On September 13, 2021, the project "Global Migration on the Ground", coordinated by the Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen (UT), Sapienza Università di Roma (SUR) and Aix-Marseille Université (AMU), launches the CIVIS Moodle[2]. This project illustrates the impact of the pandemic on the CIVIS reality. Initially conceived as a summer school in face-to-face format, the pandemic obliged its coordinators, first, to pedagogically adapt the idea and, second, to seek technical solutions to facilitate the implementation of the activity. From mid-June 2021 until the start of the event, a collective work was carried out in which the project coordinators, one student and one learning designer participated in the choice and development of pedagogical resources to achieve the predefined learning outcomes. 51 students, 22 academics and representatives of 12 NGOs were enrolled on the platform. In all, 87 international participants who, during the week-long event, discussed in different formats the new perspectives of global migration.

Since then, 40 activities have been or are being carried out on the platform. 4 more activities are in preparation at the time of this writing.

With regard to the type of activity, and in line with the CIVIS educational offer, there is a predominance of summer or winter schools (12), i.e. short-term activities that apply an intensive approach to a subject

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[2] More information of the project on the CIVIS website: https://civis.eu/en/civis-courses/global-migration-on-the-ground

of study. In addition, we find courses of longer duration (11), activities related to multilingualism (4) and micro-programmes (3). The rest of the offer is divided between series of webinars, series of workshops and short-term training formats. 6 out of 10 activities were carried out in a hybrid format; the rest, in an entirely online mode.

More surprising is the disparity regarding the Hubs representation on the platform, with Society, Culture and Heritage having the largest presence (17) and Climate, environment and energy, the smallest (2). However, this does not seem to be due to a thematic issue but to an administrative one, since a number of projects, from all disciplines, are the result of the Virtual Mobility call, which has remained continuously open. The difference may therefore be due to the dates of publication of the calls. This would explain, for example, the growing interest of Hub Health coordinators in the platform, as this call was the last to close.
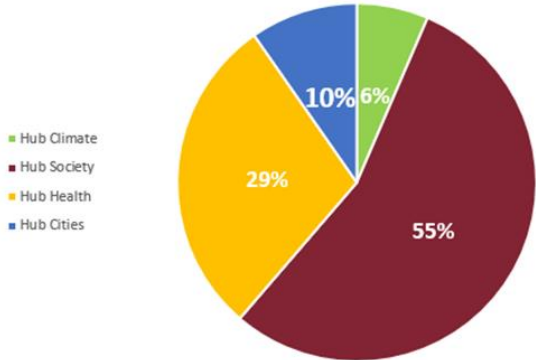
Hubs presence on the platform

In the absence of the activities that are still in a preparatory phase, a total of 1079 students have participated in the platform to date, which makes an average of 24 students per activity. This figure, nevertheless, should be interpreted with caution, as the variety of academic formats present on the platform also leads to a wide disparity in the number of participants.

Finally, it is important to note the universities representativeness in the use of the platform. If we consider the project coordinator's home institution, the numbers show a fairly even distribution. Although UAM is the university with the largest presence (20), all partner universities have participated in at least 5 projects.
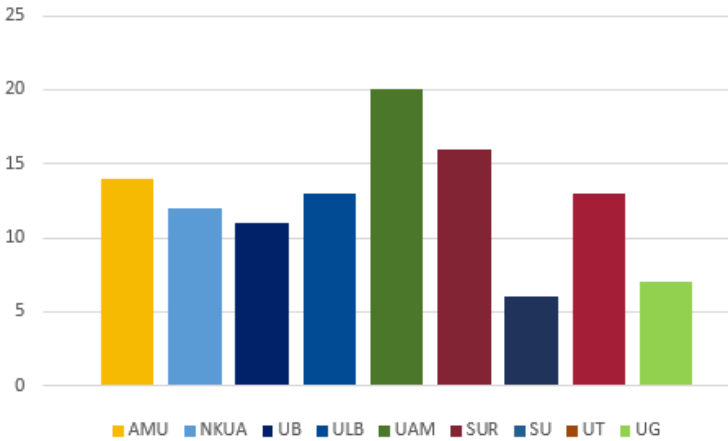
Universities representativeness on the platform

The numbers show a progressive growth in the use of the CIVIS Moodle. There is an increasing number of requests for support for the implementation of online and blended activities. This confirms the utility of having a common online course platform. However, at the same time, it poses a difficulty: the greater the volume of activities, the lower the capacity to support the coordinators in the courses design. This constraint, while natural to the rapid growth of the CIVIS educational offer, raises a question that has a strategic component: to what extent should the courses on the platform represent an innovative teaching approach?

Main obstacles

During this first year, and especially in the first few months, the development of the platform has been the result of two opposing forces. On the one hand, the urgency of providing a solution to projects that had already been validated and did not have an LMS for their implementation. On the other hand, the need to decide, with an eye more on the medium term, on elements that required either the consensus of other CIVIS working groups or more time to develop solutions to the issues as they arose. Some examples: identifying colleagues in other universities to coordinate a teaching support, defining a way of working with academic, deciding on a platform design consistent with the CIVIS graphic charter, organizing information according to the classification of the CIVIS educational offer and solving technical problems related to the registration of participants on the platform.

In addition to these obstacles, there is another element that should be mentioned. In some cases, particularly when the platform did not yet have enough courses to show the intention behind it, there was a certain misunderstanding regarding the relationship between the CIVIS Moodle and the existing LMS at each university. The reason is understandable: some academics are used to their university's platform and fear that using a new one will require additional time and work in preparing their courses.

Two possible solutions were explored. On the one hand, as will be explained in the next section, to provide support that meets the technical and pedagogical needs of academics. On the other hand, to implement a technology aiming to connect the CIVIS Moodle with the LMS of the member universities. This would allow a teacher to design his course in his university's LMS and allow participants from other universities to access it through the CIVIS Moodle. This protocol, called Learning Tools Interoperability (LTI), was successfully implemented for the first time in September 2022 with the course Introduction to Geosciences, originally developed on a platform (ILIAS) used by the University of Tübingen. This solution is currently being tested with the IT teams of other CIVIS universities to evaluate the extent of its application at the Alliance level.

Pedagogical support for CIVIS learning activities

It is a legitimate question: why do we talk about pedagogical support for online projects? Or, to put it another way: what is the need to add a new element to the relationship between professor and students? And yet a third possibility: what is the relationship between this collaborative work and pedagogical innovation? All variants of the question refer to a more general one: what is the role of digital in learning?

The question is particularly important given the tendency to look for the answer in the greater or lesser presence of digital tools in class. This may lead us to think that the adaptation of a face-to-face course to a digital format consists in the search for tools that make it possible to reproduce the same teaching dynamics. If so, to simplify, the classroom space could be replaced by a videoconferencing tool; the

course material, previously on paper, would be shared in a digital format; and students would be evaluated remotely with the same exam that had been designed for a face-to-face context.

It must be clarified that some courses can indeed be adapted in this way to a digital format without losing anything in the process. However, it is necessary to broaden the scope in order to consider the social and cultural impact that digital technology has on our lives and that inevitably affects the relationship between teaching and learning. Three examples will serve to illustrate the idea. First, the forms of social interaction, which, as a result of the popularization of the use of smartphones and internet connectivity, are increasingly spontaneous, global and multimedia. Second, the way of acquiring and processing information, which, following the very logic of the internet, is more fragmented and visual today than it was before. Third, people are no longer mere consumers of information, but also producers of information to be shared with their social networks.

There are no common solutions. However, this change of habits, which particularly affects the young population, is not disconnected from learning contexts. Therefore, it should at least be considered when creating activities intended for students to learn. When designing a course, many questions can arise that will determine its pedagogical impact: how does the fact that information is abundant, immediate and not always reliable affect the role of the teacher? How can the student's ability to communicate without geographical limitations be used pedagogically? How to take advantage of their ability to produce and share content in social networks? How can non-formal learning be embedded into the course structure? And how does it change the traditional role of the classroom, understood as the space where learning happens?

In addition to this global phenomenon, there is a particularity of CIVIS that makes it necessary to rethink the ways in which courses and programmes are designed. The fact that every project must be coordinated by at least three universities of the alliance sets a context that is innovative in itself. This is so from two points of view. On the one hand, because it requires working as a team, with professors from very different disciplines and academic backgrounds. On the other, because every activity is designed for an audience of potentially ten different countries. The goal is to create learning environments that are meaningful for all of them. This is a fascinating challenge, but it requires developing working methods based on collaboration. The pedagogical support has the function of facilitating this task in order to achieve the learning objectives defined by the professors.

An example: Civic Engagement: A Transdisciplinary Approach

The use of the CIVIS Moodle is not mandatory. Each time a project is validated by the responsible evaluation committee, the program coordinator receives, together with the letter of acceptance, an invitation to use it. Needs vary from project to project. In some cases, they are already existing activities that only need a common LMS to make them accessible to the entire CIVIS community. In others, which at the time of the application were in a planning stage, the work with professor may start in the development phase.

This is the case of the course Civic Engagement: A Transdisciplinary Approach, which is part of the Micro-programme: Civic Engagement, coordinated by the Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen (UT), the University of Bucharest (UB) and the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (UAM)[3]. Its creation process

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[3] More information on the CIVIS website: https://civis.eu/de/civis-micro-programmes/micro-programme-civic-engagement

represents an example of the innovative potential of CIVIS projects when they are built in a collective way. Let us consider some aspects:

- The form of organization

Once the participating professors were defined, a work team, made up of the project coordinators, the professors of the modules and two learning designers, was created. Since then, a group of around ten people has been working together on the course. The objective is to jointly make decisions of a diverse nature: the content of the modules, the pedagogical format, the student selection process, the promotion of the course among the CIVIS community. To this end, regular meetings are organized, which are guided by a previously fixed agenda and a person responsible for facilitating the discussion.

- The definition of a pedagogical pathway

Once the learning outcomes –the backbone of the course– have been set, it is necessary to define the most effective way to achieve them. This implies making decisions regarding multiple aspects: the (more or less active) role of the students, the structure of the course to ensure pedagogical coherence, the activities to be developed to encourage reflection on civic engagement, how to evaluate these activities, how to create a community of learners, how to create bridges between the course and the work developed by a CIVIS open lab, etc. Each participant brings not only a different academic vision, but also a different know-how, which includes, for example, ways of interacting with students, teaching methods and the use of different digital tools for educational purposes.
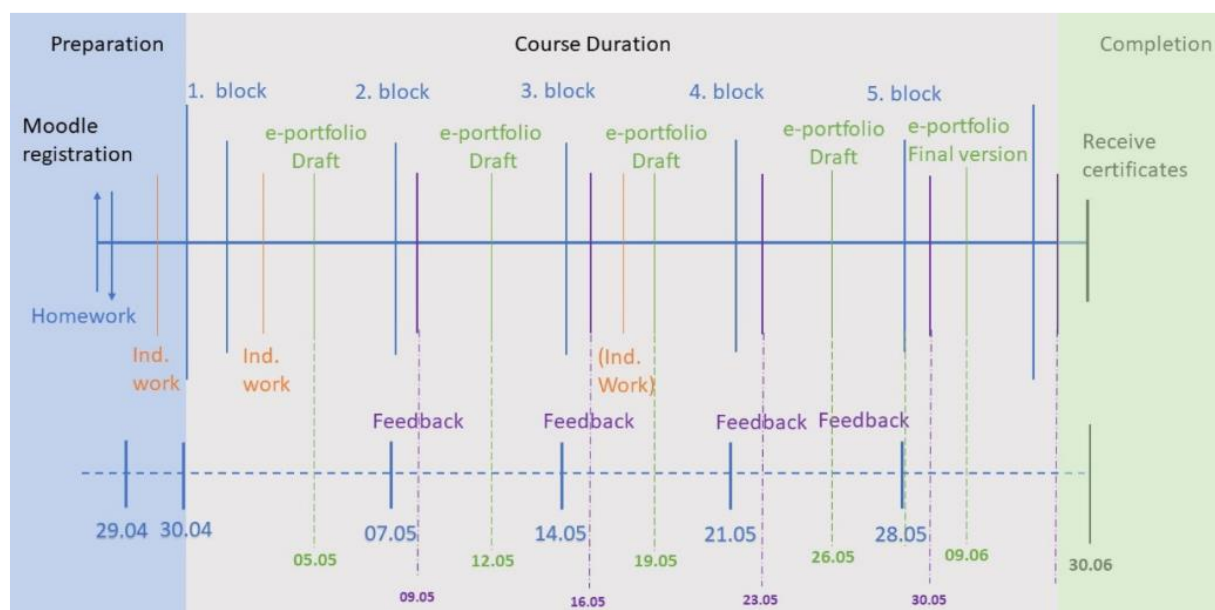
Course Timeline

- The selection of digital tools

The CIVIS Moodle works as a gateway that centralizes information and course material. However, in many cases there are other tools (videoconferencing, collaborative work, etc.) that are better suited to specific objectives or activities and that can be embedded into the course Moodle space itself. The selection of these tools is essential, but needs to be subject to the pedagogical criteria previously defined. In other words, it does not occur in the first phase of course development, but in the last one.

Once the needs have been identified, several tools are tested and a decision can be made considering criteria such us relevance, free access, privacy and ease of use.

Let us take the example of the course assessment. First, it was decided that the course would not be evaluated through a final test. The intention was for the student to reflect, from the beginning to the end of the course, on what he was learning with respect to civic engagement. Second, the e-portfolio was chosen as the method of assessment. The idea is that the student collects "evidences" (documents, maps, videos, concept maps) of all course activities, select those most relevant to his learning, use them to create an online space about civic engagement and, finally, present it to classmates, professors and external stakeholders. Third, several e-portfolio digital tools were tested and it was decided to use the one that best met these criteria.

- The evaluation of the course impact

The work team meetings do not end with the preparation of the course, but continue up to the evaluation of its results. The goal is to identify the elements that have worked well, correct errors and propose solutions for future editions of the course. In addition to this internal evaluation, there is an external evaluation in which students share their impressions and suggestions about the course with the coordinators through various means (questionnaires, messages, videos, etc.). This is not the only course that has an experimental component. The impact of digital in education and the international nature of CIVIS raise permanent pedagogical challenges. And the truth is that we do not know for sure what works and what does not. It is therefore essential to develop analysis and evaluation mechanisms that allow us to adapt CIVIS courses and programmes to the needs of students.

A paradigm shift: towards the co-construction of learning activities

The pedagogical decisions of this course are not exportable to all CIVIS projects. However, this experience –along with other similar ones– suggest the advantages of developing collaborative working strategies throughout the life cycle of a course: the definition of learning outcomes, the pedagogical coherence of the structure, the design of activities, the selection of (digital or not) tools and the assessment methods. The same could be said of long-term programmes.

The aim is to move from isolated innovative practices to an ecosystem that promotes innovation. But what role can the CIVIS Moodle play in this process? The experience of the last year provides an important clue: the development of the platform must be adapted to the role that digital will play in learning. This implies at least two things: on the one hand, creating the conditions to identify the main challenges of online and blended learning and, on the other hand, creating a Centre for Teaching and Learning with the aim of designing courses and programmes adapted to a digital context.

Some challenges have already been identified during the first phase of CIVIS: incorporate the voice of students in the course creation process, adapt some classrooms to the needs of a blended format, consolidate a network of Innovative Pedagogies and Learning Centers, promote the exchange of teaching methods from all universities, create bridges between educational activities and open labs to connect learning with the social reality of students…

Some of these questions will be key to outlining the innovative character of the CIVIS educational offer. It is not, therefore, a matter of innovating for the sake of innovating. It is about working collectively to identify society's needs in order to create adapted pedagogical solutions. The greatest value of Moodle lies in its potential to become a laboratory to develop them.

5

Engaging the CIVIS community

The Digital Campus as a meeting point

A university campus is basically an environment for the exchange of experiences. This is why in CIVIS we want to encourage the creation of communities of people around common topics of interest. The development of a user-centered platform will reinforce our shared inter-university campus strategy, facilitate the collective development of activities and reinforce the sense of belonging to the CIVIS community.

Introduction

As a European university, one of the major challenges CIVIS faces is the development of a sense of belonging to a common project. The fact that we are made up of 11 different universities (to which the six African partners universities should be added) requires us to think in cross-border terms. In order to go beyond a national approach, this implies creating a social fabric within the alliance that facilitates exchanges between people with common interests. In other words, the sense of belonging is not an end in itself, but a necessary condition for jointly identifying and working on global challenges.

This is the reason why we decided to develop a community platform within CIVIS. The objective is both to contribute to the creation of a CIVIS community and to facilitate the creation of communities, in plural, with common concerns. Students, teachers and administrative staff are invited to use this social network that will allow people from all over the CIVIS community to get in touch. Although the platform is still in an experimental phase, during the first phase of CIVIS, we noticed on numerous occasions need of various groups for networking: researchers looking for partners in other countries to set up a training project, doctoral students looking to expand their network in their area of expertise, CIVIS ambassadors needing a meeting place, and so on.

For the second phase of CIVIS, which began in October 2022, this tool is expected to become a central element. Once the foundations of the project have been laid, our ability to consolidate CIVIS work over time will depend, to a large extent, on the effectiveness with which these communities are created.

Digital Campus to develop the sense of belonging

Enabling collaboration, networking and creating communities of practice were some key words expressed by academics, students or staff members after being asked on what should be the added value of CIVIS. Of course, when working on creating our inter-university campus, the digital aspect was soon seen as a way to create connection, share information on all the opportunities our alliance offers.

Having a digital space that could enable academics and students to connect and develop new projects, where every member could find information on each partner university and on all the opportunities accessible was seen as a means to support the creation of a CIVIS community. This digital space could be the future entry point for every CIVIS member to get access to all the Digital Campus platform and see all the information about our alliance activities. This was the base to start building the CIVIS Digital Campus Community platform and to choose a digital tool that could fit with our needs with *OpenSocial*, an opensource community platform.

What should be the added value of this potential CIVIS community platform? Why would students, academics, or administrative staff take part and contribute in this community? We soon saw that this project would not only be on providing a digital platform but more on being able to develop a process to respond those questions by involving future users.

To start this process, we had to identify a potential group of users to be involved. After the first feedback, it became clear that our heterogenous community (including students, academics and staff from all the partner universities) would have very different needs. That is why we choose to work in different phases, starting with the students, as the student council and the CIVIS ambassadors represented organized groups that could provide real input.

Focus on the student community

Students are used to platforms based on community exchange and are not afraid by digital tools. As they were familiar with different social networks, they did not this initiative to start exchanging information between their different universities. So why should they need a specific CIVIS community platform when most of the students can be already informed with mainstream tools? This was the first feedback we got when informing the student council about this project.

During the Global CIVIS Days in Athens, both the student council and CIVIS ambassadors were gathered. This was a unique opportunity to collect more input from them. We organised a collaborative workshop, with different questions to facilitate the discussion:

- Regarding other universities and the available opportunities, what kind of content as student would you like to know more about?
- What content would you like your university to promote (way of life, different faculty, student opportunity…)
- What content would you like to see to know more about CIVIS opportunities?

After some intense discussion we gathered lot of ideas that covered different topics such as the life in each campus, tips and tricks, opportunities… but also the possibility of having smaller "place of discussion" on more thematic topics that could be related with their studies but also with common interests. We then tried to organise those different propositions to build a first structure to be implemented in the community platform.
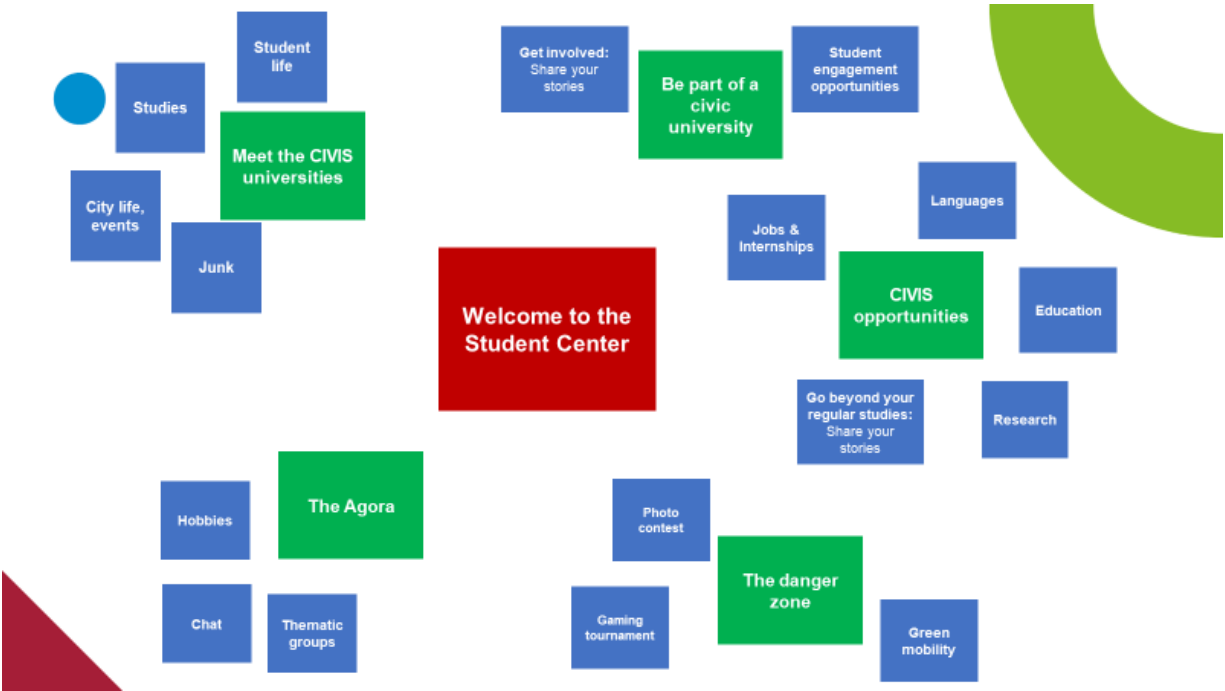
Potential Community Platform Student Center structure

There is nothing worse than a community platform with no interesting or updated content. This implies to be organised to create content and to maintain a good level of discussion among the members. This meeting was also a chance to discuss about the need for us to involve students since the beginning of the process so they could be the first ambassadors of the CIVIS Community platform and even start identifying some potential other students that could help us lately.

In the next CIVIS phase, we will need to keep the involvement of students in the building phase of the community platform with more focus on the editorial aspect of the community platform, as they have shown a real interest in contributing to the community platform and already foreseen the possibility to develop new competences working on that project.

Further steps and challenges

We have the experience of involving students and collecting input to structure their future space. We should now repeat the process with academics, researchers and administrative staff. The main difficulty will be to identify some potential group of users that could be gathered to organise the discussion. One the first needs expressed by them was to develop communities of practice, where members with common interests could share information, events and develop new initiatives. We identified some first groups that are already organised and expressed their interest to develop deeper collaboration.

In order to move forward, we will organise workshops with some of those groups in order to collect information and needs. The objective is to deepen their collaboration, but also to get their input on the potential use of the platform to easily find CIVIS opportunities and activities and share content with other members of CIVIS.

Community experience pyramid

Those first groups of academics, researchers or staff members will be, along with the students one, our first beta tester and future ambassadors of the platform. If we use the community experience pyramid developed by our partner *OpenSocial,* those first users should be either co-owners or creators of the community. These two roles will be really important to increase the number of active users when launching the CIVIS community platform to our first participants.

The Digital Campus Community platform could be a real asset to develop a sense of belonging in our alliance. But we really need to be careful and create the conditions to properly launch this new digital space. We have to take the time to really involve user to co-create this platform and gather their feedback. They will be our voice, our example to convince other CIVIS members to join our community.