

# MERLIN



*Deliverable D5.4*

**MERLIN Marketplace (Demo  
Version / Final Version)**

# MERLIN

## Imprint

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The MERLIN project (<https://project-merlin.eu>) has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101036337.

Lead contractor: Connectology (CONN)

Contributors: Oppla (OPPLA), University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna (BOKU), University of Duisburg-Essen (UDE), Schnee auf Moss (SAM)

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## MERLIN Key messages

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- 1. The MERLIN Project has developed the MERLIN Marketplace, a distinctive platform designed to showcase innovative products and services supporting freshwater ecosystem restoration.**
- 2. The platform enables representatives of natural areas to engage directly with solution providers, fostering potential collaborations to mitigate environmental threats**
- 3. The MERLIN Marketplace was designed to integrate with external platforms, facilitating further development, scalability, and broader adoption.**
- 4. The platform currently hosts 60 registered products and services, including several with a Seal of Excellence, and has 251 active users who are associated with both the platform and its solution providers.**
- 5. The MERLIN Marketplace has been actively promoted, with the MERLIN Innovation Awards (MIA) – held annually from 2023 to 2025 – serving as a key pillar. The MIA recognised innovative restoration solutions and actively connected participants with the Marketplace.**
- 6. Despite extensive outreach and innovative formats such as MIA, motivating companies and restoration managers to engage with the platform remains challenging, highlighting adoption barriers in the sector.**
- 7. Long-term success will depend on leveraging MERLIN Marketplace’s unique niche and target audience while addressing challenges such as limited financial transaction capabilities and relatively low investor engagement.**

## MERLIN Executive Summary

The MERLIN Marketplace ([www.merlin.market](http://www.merlin.market)) was developed to promote innovative products and services within the nature restoration sector, ensuring alignment with user needs while providing a straightforward and engaging experience. Its design and functionality were informed by a detailed analysis of the needs and expectations of diverse stakeholders, including solution providers, nature area representatives, impact investors, and external potential customers. The platform progressed through multiple iterative stages, from conceptual design to the final version, with stakeholder feedback incorporated at each stage.

**A comprehensive promotion campaign enhanced the Marketplace's visibility and engagement, drawing on the consortium's network, social media, newsletters, and outreach to over 165 EU Horizon project partners. The MERLIN Innovation Awards (MIA), held annually from 2023 to 2025, were the centrepiece of this effort. Designed to balance accessibility with rigour, the MIA attracted applications from innovative companies across Europe and beyond, while recognising excellence through Product and Service of the Year categories. By offering benefits such as the Seal of Excellence, fast-track Marketplace registration, and promotional visibility, the MIA significantly boosted awareness and credibility, positioning the Marketplace as a hub for innovation in freshwater restoration.**

Despite the MIA's visibility and the wider outreach campaign, motivating companies and restoration managers to use the platform remained challenging. Uptake was lower than expected, even among MERLIN partners, reflecting structural barriers such as reliance on conventional procurement procedures, established personal networks, and limited incentives to adopt new digital platforms. Combined with the initially narrow freshwater focus, these factors constrained engagement. The experience shows that sustained success will require broadening the Marketplace's scope, overcoming entrenched user habits, and demonstrating clear added value over existing channels.

**The MERLIN Marketplace Business Plan outlines a long-term vision for the platform as a permanent digital hub for innovation in nature restoration. A detailed SWOT analysis highlighted the platform's strengths, including its unique niche focus, international reach, and strong institutional backing, alongside challenges including low adoption, limited financial transaction capabilities,**

**and competition for user attention. These insights informed the platform's development strategy and sustainability framework.**

A competitor analysis showed that, while platforms exist in adjacent fields (such as forestry or climate-tech marketplaces), none match MERLIN Marketplace's dedicated focus on freshwater ecosystem restoration and Nature-based Solutions. This unique positioning provides the platform with a clear competitive advantage, particularly if it continues to expand to underrepresented geographies and sectors.

The marketing strategy combines targeted outreach to solution providers, nature area managers, investors, and public authorities with broader awareness-raising through campaigns, social media, and partnerships. The approach has proven successful in increasing visibility, as demonstrated by the growth of user numbers and engagement through the MERLIN Innovation Awards. This multi-channel approach will remain central to scaling the platform in the coming years.

**The sustainability plan foresees a gradual transition to financial independence by 2028, supported initially by Oppla and reinforced by revenue models such as premium listings, subscription services, and strategic partnerships. By 2030, the platform aims to engage over 3,000 registered users and establish itself as a European reference point for restoration-related products and services, with potential to extend globally.**

This report presents the final version of the MERLIN Marketplace, developed and implemented by Connectology (CONN) and Oppla (OPPLA) as lead contractors, with contributions from the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna (BOKU), the University of Duisburg-Essen (UDE), and Schnee auf Moss (SAM). It summarizes the activities undertaken as part of Work Package 5 of the MERLIN project and provides an overview of the creation, adaptation, promotion, and post-project prospects of the platform.

While adoption challenges remain, particularly in engaging companies and restoration managers, the MERLIN Marketplace demonstrates strong potential to connect innovative solutions with users and support nature restoration efforts. Continued strategic promotion, stakeholder engagement, and phased development of financial functionalities will be essential to realize its long-term impact.

# Content

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## Overview of Task 5.3 MERLIN Marketplace

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### 1.1 Task Description

**Task number:** 5.3 MERLIN Marketplace

**Work Package:** WP5 - Networking and Training

**Work Package lead:** University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna (BOKU)

**Coordinating partners:** Connectology (CONN) & Oppla (OPPLA)

**Contributing partners:**

- University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna (BOKU)
- University of Duisburg-Essen (UDE)
- MERLIN Work Package leaders
- MERLIN Case study conveners

**Task timeframe:** Months 1-48 | October 2021 - September 2025

Task 5.3 is summarized in the Grant Agreement as follows:

Task 5.3 MERLIN Marketplace: (OPPLA, CONN; BOKU, UDE, WP leaders, case study conveners) (month 1-48)

- **Directory of Marketplace users:** the marketplace user community will be established as an online database, initially through the invitation of members belonging to existing relevant communities and proactively expanded through promotional activities following the initial launch. MERLIN partners will suggest companies which have reliable and innovative approaches in terms of restoration/NbS. Communities that will be engaged in the initial development include: (1) natural reserves/Natura2000 managers, (2) restoration project managers and consultancies, (3) innovative and sustainable companies involved in restoration/NbS, (4) potential investors and potential donors and (5) Oppla's own community of 3000+ individuals with an interest in NbS. This activity will be closely aligned with Task 4.1.

- **Marketplace functionalities:** the specifications for the Marketplace - i.e. the requirements of the tools and services it will provide to users - will be co-developed with stakeholders to ensure the end product is fit for purpose. The service providers will be divided into product and service suppliers. Each restoration/NbS project presented on the Marketplace will be "tagged" (categorized) with a variety of metadata, including possible constraints of the ecosystem or possible uses/activities in the ecosystem that will be the base for analyzing the economic value of activity uses. Knowing the economic benefit will allow the interconnection with investors. The linking will be semi-automatically, with final matching through experienced project partners. Case studies will be highlighted, providing an opportunity to advertise specific projects, products and services that exemplify good practice. The core functionalities of the marketplace will be based on the tried-and-tested services provided by Oppla (notably Oppla's own marketplace of NbS products and services and its community match-making service).

- **Developing the Marketplace:** the development of the MERLIN Marketplace will be guided by the specifications created with stakeholders under the previous task. The Marketplace will be built using open-source software and made available through an API, enabling its functionality to be embedded within other platforms. Integration within the Freshwater Information Platform will be completed, providing an example to incentivize further dissemination and exploitation. A first version of the MERLIN Marketplace will be available in Month 18.

- **Testing the Marketplace:** The Marketplace will be extensively tested by the user communities identified in the first subtask using data submitted by the project case studies. All data will be subject to quality control to ensure a harmonized appearance and to maximize analyses regarding activities, their economic values and the interest of investors. An upscaling process will be used to generalize the results for broader regions. A second phase of testing will be conducted with the projects with which the MERLIN case studies are twinned (WP1).

**- Business Plan:** a business plan will be developed for the purpose of (1) promoting the MERLIN Marketplace and ensuring continued interest, engagement and expansion of the user communities and (2) generating sufficient revenue and/or in-kind contributions to maintain the Marketplace as a full service. Use of the Marketplace will be monitored and analyzed through the project period to inform development of the business plan and identify opportunities for commercial exploitation, e.g. added-value services made available to users through subscription or via micro-payments (“pay per use”). As a minimum, the technical infrastructure of the Marketplace will be integrated within Oppla and maintained as part of Oppla’s portfolio of NbS community platforms. Access to the Marketplace’s core functionalities will remain free at point of use and similarly shared freely with other projects and platforms through the Marketplace API - further contributing to its ongoing exploitation and legacy.

## 1.2 Task Outputs

*Table 1 - Summarised list of MERLIN Marketplace outputs*

#Number	Title	Lead Beneficiary	Type	Dissemination Level	Due Date
MS13	M5.3 MERLIN Marketplace functional design draft	CONN	Other	Confidential	M12 (Sept. 2022)
MS14	M5.4 Final version of MERLIN Marketplace available	CONN	Other	Confidential	M48 (Sept. 2025)
D5.4.1	MERLIN Marketplace (demo version)	CONN	Other	Public	M18 (March 2023)
D5.4.2	MERLIN Marketplace (final version)	CONN	Other	Public	M48 (Sept. 2025)

## 1.3 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

*Table 2 - Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) related to MERLIN Marketplace from the MERLIN Description of Action*

Title	Dissemination Level	Due Date
MERLIN Marketplace to feature 60 service/product providers and 20 investors/funders.	Month 24, September 2023	Annex 1 (Part B) page 30
500 registered users.	Month 48, September 2025	Annex 1 (Part B) pages 3 and 36
MERLIN Marketplace is a self-sustaining platform with more than 3000 users.	5-10 years after project end (2030-2035)	Annex 1 (Part B) page 31

## 1.4 Links with other MERLIN Tasks and Products

Development of the MERLIN Marketplace was linked to the following complementary tasks within the overall project structure:

**- Task 4.1 EU communities of practice for transformation (led by WWF HU).** T4.1 focused on the co-design of deliverables with sectors including policy and commercial actors. The T5.3 team drew upon the communities of practice engaged in T4.1 for the purpose of testing and contributing content (products/services) to the MERLIN Marketplace during the phases of development, since the demo version became available.

- **Task 5.2 MERLIN Academy (led by BOKU).** The commercial products/services of the MERLIN Marketplace will complement the academic resources of the Academy in providing a holistic content offer to project stakeholders and end-users. The WP5 team will therefore build links between the MERLIN Marketplace and Academy.

- **Task 5.4 Dissemination activities (led by BOKU).** T5.3 collaborated closely with the T5.4 implementers, providing dedicated content on the MERLIN Marketplace to support a range of dissemination activities, including publication on the project website and related communication channels, in line with the objectives of T5.3. In addition, T5.3 established the MERLIN Innovation Awards (MIA), a restoration award recognizing technological innovations in the freshwater restoration sector developed by companies worldwide

## 2 Current State of the MERLIN Marketplace

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### 2.1 Principles of Development

At an early stage in the development process, during the assessment of potential use cases, it was agreed that the MERLIN Marketplace should prioritize simplicity and user-friendliness. Three core principles were therefore established to guide the platform's design and implementation:

1. **Clear focus on commercial offering**

The MERLIN Marketplace was designed to showcase commercial products and services, rather than mixing these with freely available academic resources or project outputs. The consortium considered that combining commercial items with open-access material could blur the purpose of the platform and undermine its usability. To address this, it was decided that a separate repository of academic resources would be developed within the MERLIN Academy, thereby ensuring a clear distinction between the two.

2. **Simple and intuitive user experience**

The platform's structure was deliberately kept straightforward to make navigation as convenient as possible. The homepage and product/service index pages were designed to provide direct access to content with minimal clicks, while a wide range of filters enables users to locate the desired information quickly and efficiently.

3. **Flexibility for future development**

To allow for ongoing adaptation and improvement, the MERLIN Marketplace was built on Drupal 9.3, an open-source content management system (CMS). This approach offers greater flexibility than an off-the-shelf solution, which might have imposed restrictions on future updates. As a result, the platform can be readily re-designed, customized and enhanced in response to user feedback. Importantly, it also provides a basis for continued exploitation beyond the MERLIN funding period, including potential use in other projects seeking to collate commercial products and services.

### 2.2 MERLIN Marketplace Functionality

The developed version of the MERLIN Marketplace provides a fully operational platform with the following features:

1. **User and solution provider account management**

Regular users willing to review the content and dedicated solution providers are able to register, manage and easily edit their accounts. For providers, the account includes a summary of organizational details and contact information, necessary for engagement with potential interested customers and partners.

2. **Product and service listings**

Registered providers can advertise their products and services by listing them on the MERLIN Marketplace. These listings may be updated at any time through the provider account, ensuring that information remains current.

3. **Browsing and access to information**

Users can browse products and services relevant to ecosystem restoration and access individual product or service pages to learn more and obtain the contact details of the responsible organizations.

4. **Sorting and filtering functions**

Products and services can be sorted and filtered according to pre-defined categories (developed with input from MERLIN partners and drawing on the experience of the platform's demo version), as well as by scale of availability (global, EU and/or selected countries), date of listing, title (alphabetical order), and price (ascending or descending):

- Construction
- Consultancy
- Data
- Education
- Energy
- Equipment
- Fauna
- Flora
- Forestry
- Machinery
- Materials
- Software/IT
- Stakeholder Engagement
- Tourism

### **2.3 MERLIN Marketplace Design**

During the initial design and functionality discussions, it was determined that the MERLIN Marketplace should be developed as a standalone yet interoperable platform, with its own bespoke content templates, design, and layout, operating completely independently.

Consequently, the initial design version was developed as a dedicated website, separate from both the MERLIN project and MERLIN Academy websites. This approach ensured maximum flexibility in design and development, whilst safeguarding the platform's long-term sustainability and future legacy.

Design of the demo version of the MERLIN Marketplace has been an iterative process, the key stages of which are shown below:

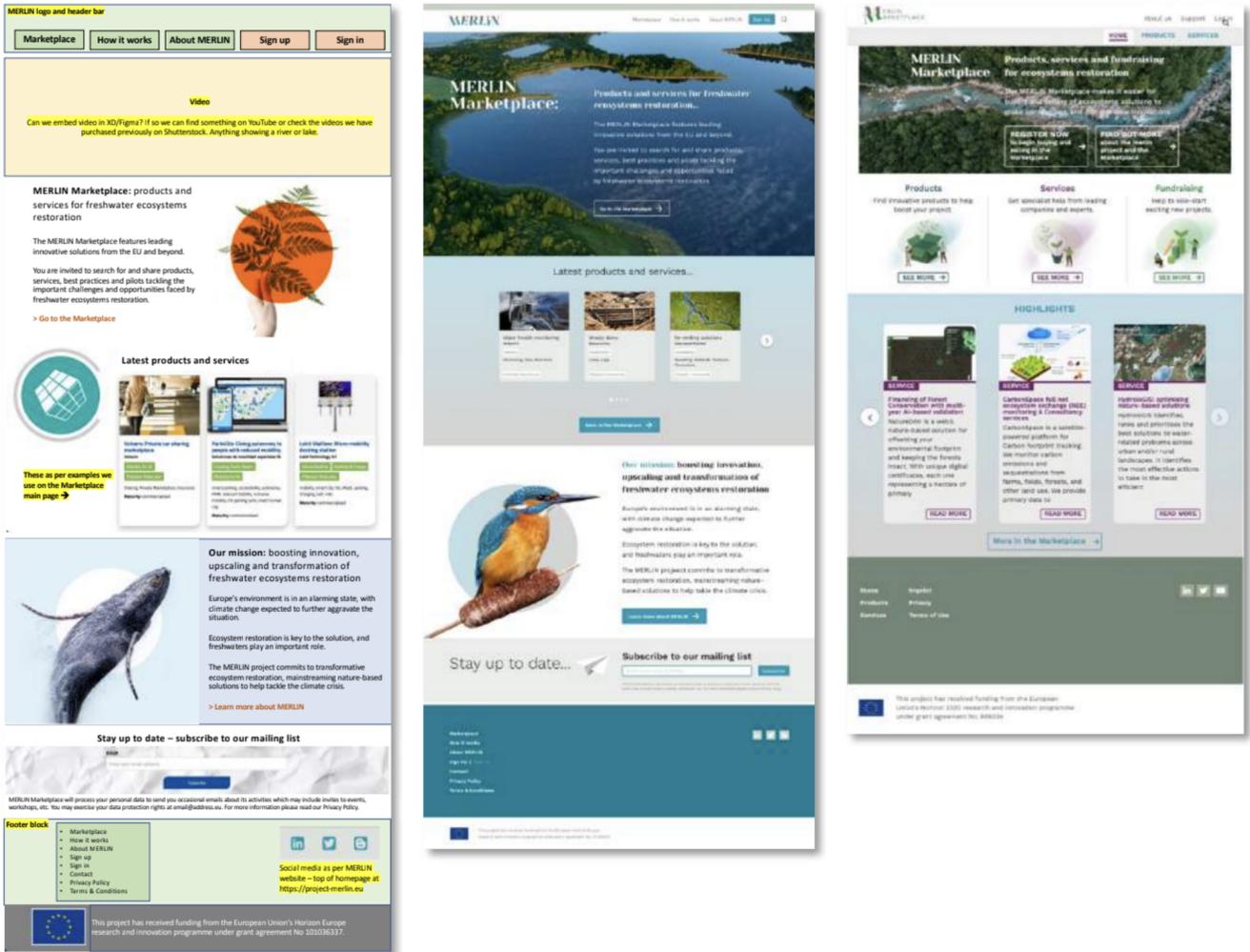


Figure 1 - Evolution of design templates

The refinement of the initial and consultation design versions into the final demonstrator design (Figure 1) was supported by input from the team at Schnee auf Moss (SAM). Although not formally designated as contributors to Task 5.3, SAM proactively shared its expertise to support the development of the MERLIN Marketplace. Their contributions included the provision of MERLIN brand assets (notably the MERLIN Marketplace logo), as well as a series of wireframe designs to guide individual page layouts. These wireframes were integrated into the final demonstrator design, leading to a number of simplifications and enhancements to the consultation design layout. More details on the demo version of the MERLIN Marketplace can be found in [Annex 1 - MERLIN Marketplace \(Demo Version\)](#).

As a result of active interaction between users and platform developers, Connectology and Oppla agreed to upgrade the Marketplace design to make it more interactive and engaging. Particular attention was given to the homepage and the product/service overview pages. These improvements strengthened the interaction between users and the platform, enhanced usability, and reduced the risk of user dissatisfaction or disengagement.

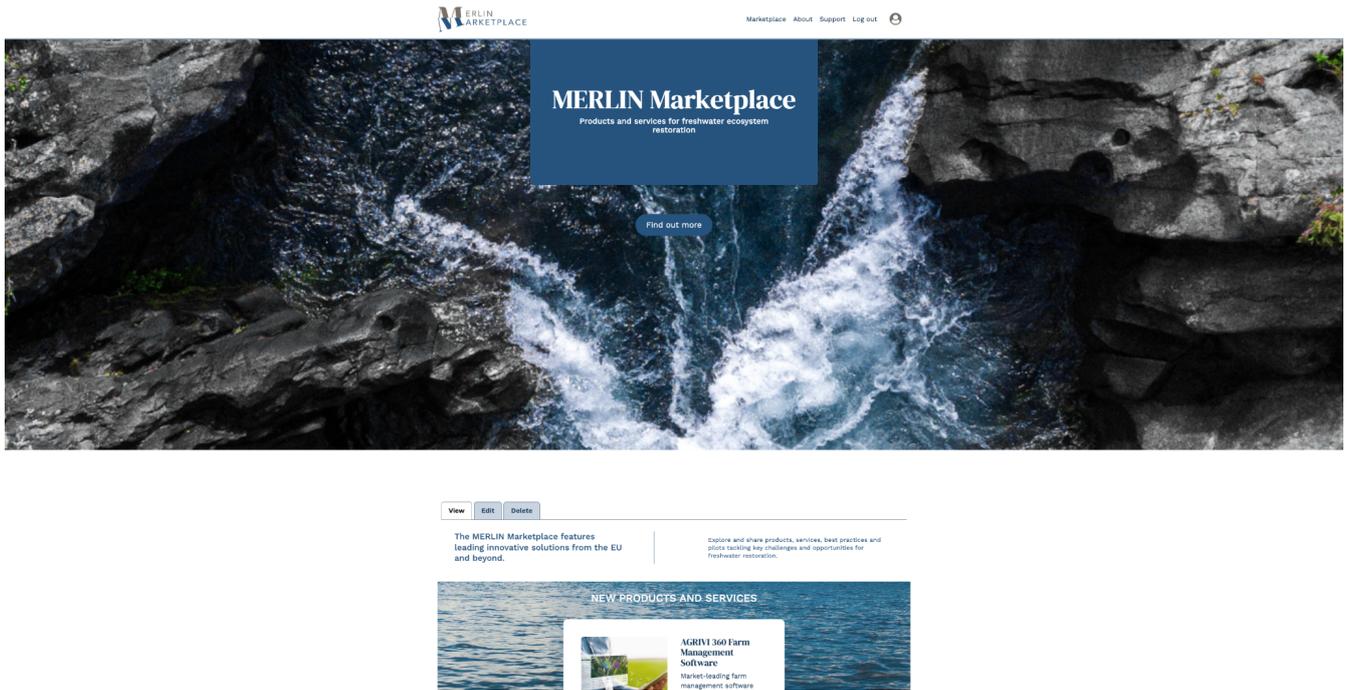


Figure 2 - Final version of the main page of the MERLIN Marketplace

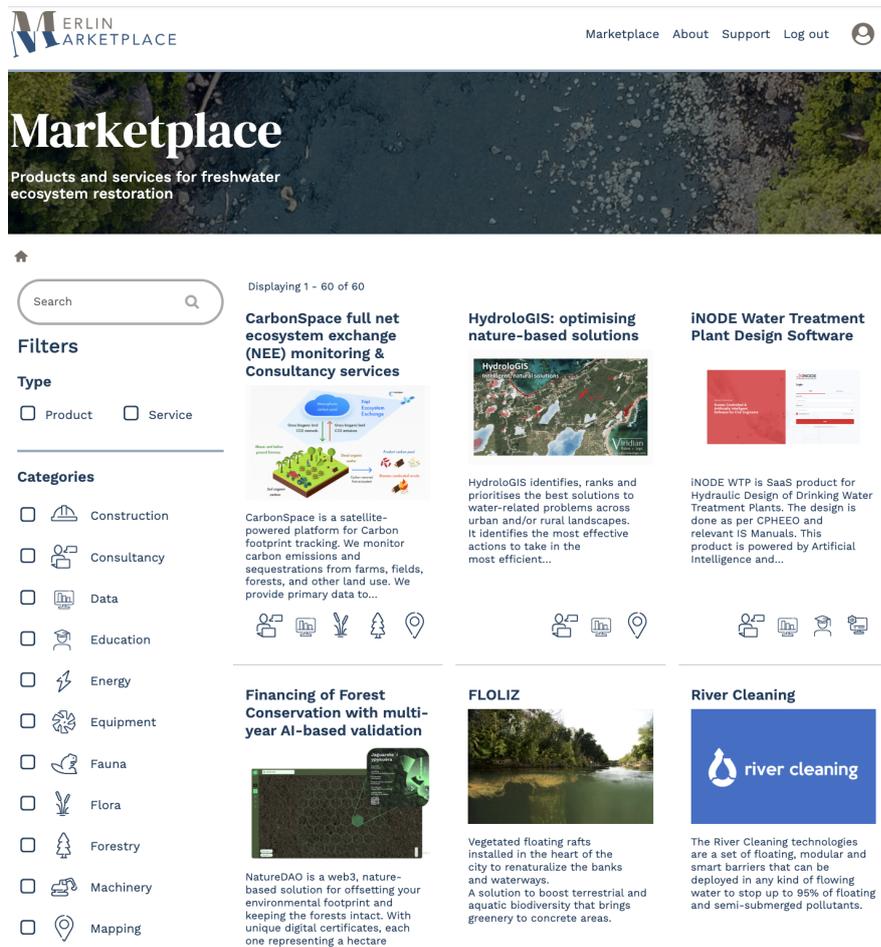


Figure 3 - Final version of the listing page of the MERLIN Marketplace

## 2.4 MERLIN Marketplace in Numbers

The core purpose of the MERLIN Marketplace, as outlined above, was the promotion of innovative products and services that contribute to the restoration of freshwater ecosystems. For this reason, the recruitment of companies offering such solutions was placed at the center of efforts to ensure the success of the platform.

The approach adopted for inviting companies to join the MERLIN Marketplace was implemented in two distinct phases:

**Phase 1:** The initial objective was to onboard 20 products and services. This allowed the team to test the technical functionality of the platform while maintaining close communication with participating providers in order to gather feedback on the MERLIN Marketplace’s design and usability.

**Phase 2:** A broader promotional campaign was launched after the feedback from the first phase had been analyzed and the platform had been refined accordingly. During this phase, 40 additional products and services were registered, bringing the total to 60 by the conclusion of the project.

The full list of products and services registered on the MERLIN Marketplace can be found in [ANNEX 2 - List of MERLIN Marketplace-registered Products and Services](#).

Over the course of the MERLIN project, the MERLIN Marketplace attracted solution providers and users not only from Europe but also from other continents, including North America (USA) and Asia (Republic of Korea). This international reach has facilitated the dissemination of the MERLIN project’s objectives globally and acted as an encouragement to individuals and organizations to engage more actively in addressing environmental challenges, particularly in the freshwater sector.

The MERLIN Marketplace has also attracted a considerable number of suppliers - individuals or organizations offering solutions focused on nature restoration - with **86 suppliers registered on the platform by the end of the project**.

Another important indicator is the total number of registered users on the MERLIN Marketplace, who were then able either to enroll as solution providers and publish products or services, or to browse the technologies available on the listing page. **By the conclusion of the MERLIN project, this figure had reached 251 users.**

Additionally, over the course of the MERLIN Marketplace functioning during the MERLIN project, the statistical data on usage of the platform is the following:

### Visits

Sep 1, 2024 – Aug 31, 2025 • 4,505 Total +67% yr/yr

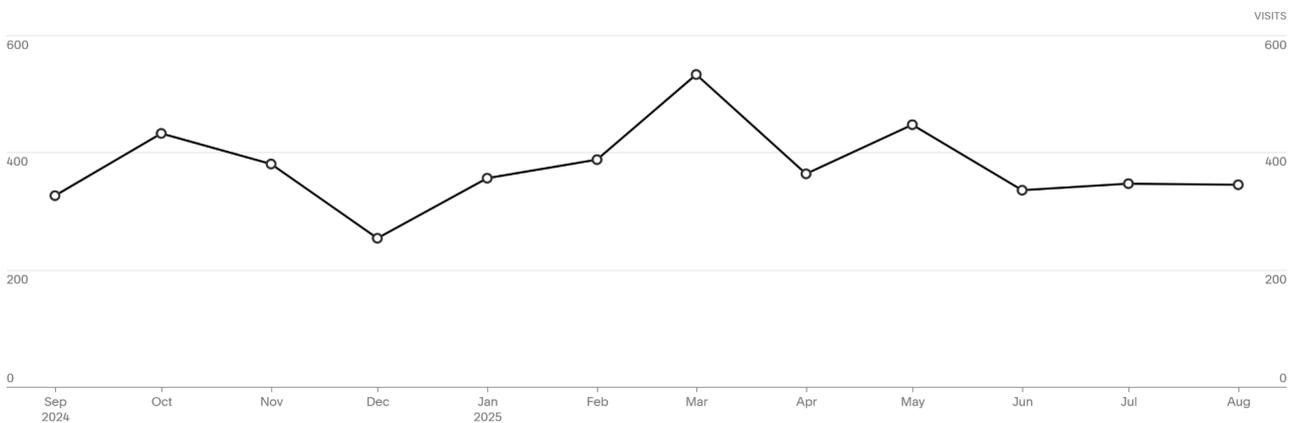


Figure 4 - Unique visits to the MERLIN Marketplace over the past 12 months, averaging 400 per month

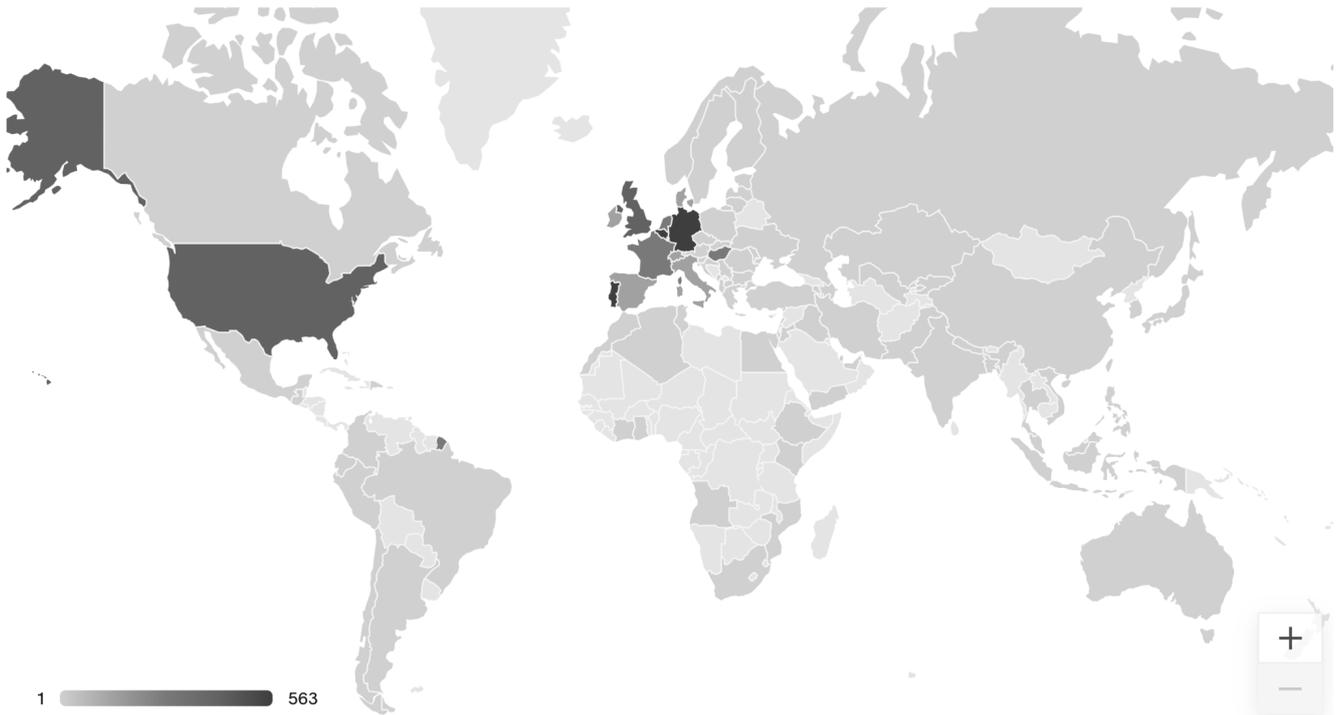


Figure 5 - Global distribution of the MERLIN Marketplace visitors in an average month

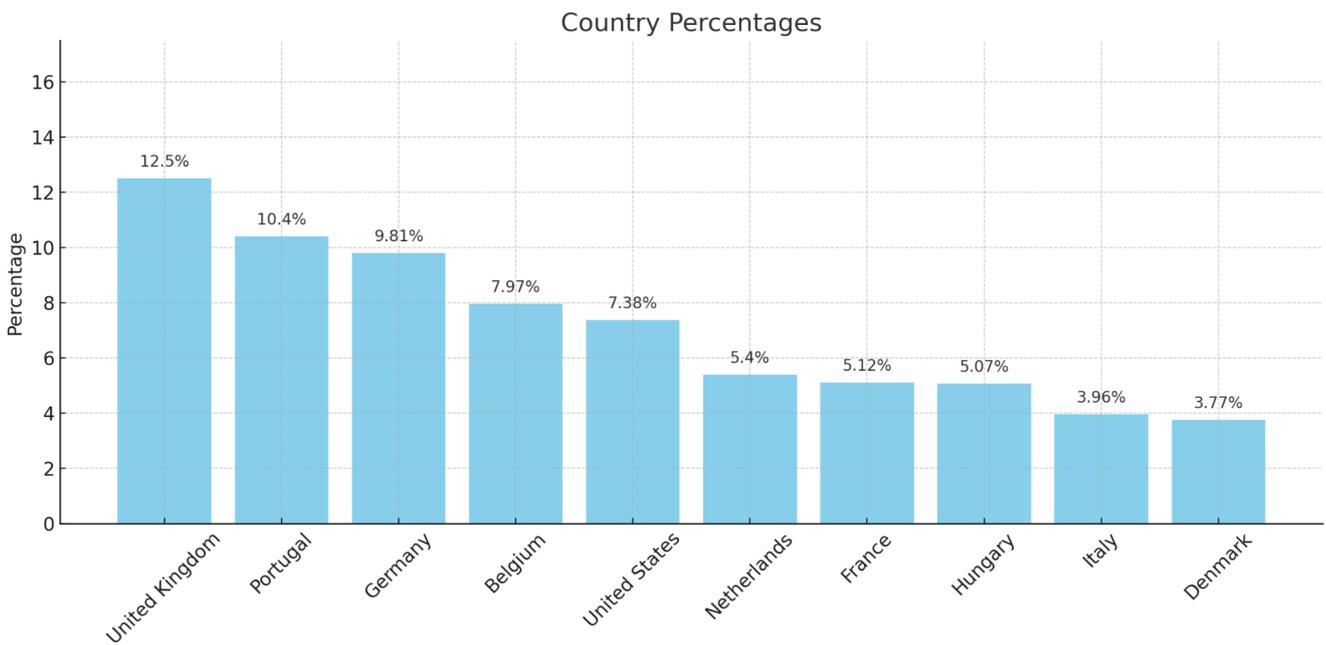


Figure 6 - Proportion of all users by country (top 10)

### 3 Promotion of the MERLIN Marketplace

#### 3.1 MERLIN Innovation Awards (MIA)

One of the key pillars in actively promoting the MERLIN Marketplace was the MERLIN Innovation Awards (MIA) - a competition designed by Connectology to recognize groundbreaking solutions for restoring freshwater ecosystems and strengthening their financial viability. The Awards were held annually over three consecutive years (2023, 2024 and 2025) and successfully showcased leading organizations from Europe and beyond in their pursuit of innovative approaches to nature restoration.

The format of the MIA was carefully designed to be both accessible and impactful: it was straightforward for companies to understand the purpose of the event and submit the applications, while at the same time engaging enough to provide meaningful outcomes for all stakeholders, including the MERLIN project team, participating case studies, and the invited organizations.

Preparations for each award cycle began on average at least four months in advance, with key preparatory steps included:

- defining the eligibility and assessment criteria for applicants, as well as the submission deadlines;
- selecting and prioritizing promotional channels and methods;
- preparing the call text and a dedicated promotional flyer;
- designing and publishing an online application form.

With these foundations in place, the project team then focused on identifying suitable organizations in order to ensure the high quality of applications. Targeted outreach was conducted to introduce the Awards, explain the participation process, and clarify the post-event benefits for applicants. To strengthen this engagement, the team provided direct links to the MERLIN project and MERLIN Marketplace websites, circulated the flyer outlining the core details, and, where necessary, organized video discussions with potential applicants.

The example of a flyer for the MERLIN Innovation Awards 2025 is attached below:

**MERLIN INNOVATION AWARDS 2025**

Call for companies with innovative products or services for freshwater ecosystems, powered by the MERLIN project.

**Are you a company with an innovative product or service for freshwater ecosystems?**

If yes, apply now for the MERLIN Innovation Awards 2025 in one of the two categories:

- + PRODUCT OF THE YEAR 2025
- + SERVICE OF THE YEAR 2025

powered by **MERLIN**

MERLIN seeks **new and widely applicable solutions** for restoring or enabling financial benefits for freshwater ecosystems. **If your innovative product or service is market-ready**, you are eligible to apply.

**Benefits**

- Unique opportunity to pitch your product or service to 18 European freshwater restoration project managers and many other decision makers and stakeholders
- Chance to be part of the systemic transformative change of our society and economy
- Recognition within the European freshwater ecosystem community with your product or service featured on the widely read Freshwater Blog
- Automatic inclusion in the MERLIN Marketplace if your application is accepted for the MERLIN Innovation Awards 2025

**When will the MERLIN Innovation Awards 2025 take place?**

The pre-selection of 10 finalists (5 Products and 5 Services) will be conducted in January 2025 on a date to be announced, with the results to be announced to all applicants within 7 working days. The MIA 2025 online ceremony will be conducted in February 2025 on a date to be announced, with the winners of both PRODUCT and SERVICE competitions will be announced at the end of the online ceremony following all presentations based on jury members' decisions.

**What is the selection process of the MERLIN Innovation Awards 2025?**

The submitted applications will be evaluated by the MIA 2025 committee, consisting of CONNECTOLOGY representatives and MERLIN coordinators/steering group members. The pre-selection procedure will identify 10 finalists (5 Products and 5 Services) that will participate in an online ceremony during which they will conduct a 3-minute presentation and engage in a 4-minute Q&A session. The jury will be composed of freshwater restoration managers and other relevant freshwater community stakeholders and will evaluate finalists based on the following criteria: level of innovation, benefits for freshwater ecosystem and potential impact evaluation of their product or service.

**How to apply?**

In case your company owns the rights to commercialise the product or service, you can apply until the 13 December 2024 (17:00 CET). We encourage applications to be submitted as early as possible to allow for any correction of missing data.

**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR 2025 APPLICATION FORM:**  
→ [forms.gle/H3wdfjggkum4evVb9](https://forms.gle/H3wdfjggkum4evVb9)

**SERVICE OF THE YEAR 2025 APPLICATION FORM:**  
→ [forms.gle/wMgqJeuPur67CHL9](https://forms.gle/wMgqJeuPur67CHL9)

powered by **MERLIN**

**About the MERLIN community**

MERLIN (Mainstreaming Ecological Restoration of freshwater-related ecosystems in a Landscape context: Innovation, upscaling and transformation) is a flagship project of the European Commission, endowed with 20 million Euros, that advocates for transformative ecosystem restoration and incorporates Nature-based Solutions for the urgent systemic change of our society. EU funding also goes to 18 case study areas from Finland to Israel, where streams, rivers as well as bogs and other wetlands are currently being restored to a near-natural state. These major projects will be expanded, upscaled and developed into European-wide models.

Through collaborations with local communities and key economies, MERLIN will co-develop win-win solutions spearheading systemic economic, social and environmental change.

More information and a list of all MERLIN partners – including universities, research institutes, nature conservation organisations as well as stakeholders from business, government and municipalities – can be found on the website: [www.project-merlin.eu](http://www.project-merlin.eu)

[www.project-merlin.eu](http://www.project-merlin.eu)  
 #euMERLINproject | [MERLINproject](https://www.facebook.com/MERLINproject) | [freshwaterblog.net](https://www.instagram.com/freshwaterblog.net)

The MERLIN project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101046332.

Figure 7 - MERLIN Innovation Awards (MIA) 2025 promotion flyer

Timely and proactive communication with potential applicants ensured a high number of submissions, strong quality of proposed solutions, and a generally positive experience among participants, who expressed satisfaction with their decision to apply for the MERLIN Innovation Awards (MIA).

The screenshot shows a LinkedIn post from the company 'CONNECTOLOGY', which has 2,221 followers and posted it 10 months ago. The post is titled 'Calling All Innovators!' and asks if the reader is developing groundbreaking solutions for freshwater ecosystems. It announces that the MERLIN Innovation Awards 2025 are now open for applications, seeking market-ready products or services that can restore or enable financial benefits for freshwater ecosystems. The post lists two categories: 'PRODUCT OF THE YEAR 2025' and 'SERVICE OF THE YEAR 2025', with corresponding LinkedIn links. It sets a deadline for applications on 13 December 2024 at 17:00 CET. The post encourages showcasing innovation to a global audience and contributing to a sustainable future for freshwater environments. It provides contact information for questions and a link for more information. The post includes several hashtags: #Climatechange, #Innovation, #FreshwaterEcosystems, #Sustainability, #MERLINProject, and #EcoInnovation. At the bottom of the post is a promotional flyer for the MERLIN Innovation Awards 2025, featuring a landscape with a winding river and a circular logo with the text 'BRINGING EUROPE'S FRESHWATERS BACK TO LIFE'. The flyer also shows the MERLIN logo and the text 'MERLIN INNOVATION AWARDS 2025' and 'with You and 3 others'.

Figure 8 - MERLIN Innovation Awards (MIA) 2025 promotional post on LinkedIn

Once the application window closed, the MIA team moved into the screening stage. This involved collating all applications and providing the material to a carefully selected jury, identified in advance. Jury members, all of whom had relevant expertise in freshwater restoration, evaluated submissions against three core criteria:

- **Innovation** - the development and application of creative solutions to challenges in water quality, conservation, and sustainable use.
- **Freshwater Ecosystem Benefit** - the extent to which solutions contribute to ecosystem health, e.g. through eco-friendly technologies for water treatment, conservation, or resource management.
- **Impact** - measurable contributions to freshwater ecosystems, such as improved water quality, biodiversity conservation, sustainable resource use, innovation in conservation, community engagement, education, reduced environmental footprint, and effective partnerships.

Following the submission of the scorecards, an alignment session was held with jury members to discuss results, address any uncertainties, and agree on the final shortlist of products and services for the MIA ceremony, during which the winners of Product of the Year and the Service of the Year categories would be announced. Outcomes were communicated promptly to all applicants, including non-selected organizations. Careful justification of results helped maintain goodwill among those not chosen, encouraging them to reapply in future editions and strengthening overall engagement with the MERLIN project.

The next stage was the organization of the MIA final awards ceremony. Key elements included:

- **Jury composition** - representatives of MERLIN-supported case studies were invited to participate, offering direct insight into the proposed solutions.
- **Presentations and Q&A** - shortlisted organizations delivered 4-minute presentations followed by a moderated discussion with the jury.
- **Guest speakers** - selected from within the MERLIN consortium and beyond, sharing insights on the latest topics in freshwater ecosystem restoration.
- **Evaluation and results** - final scores were consolidated, and the winners announced.

To ensure a positive experience for all participants, the event team prepared a dedicated benefits package, including promotional visibility. Winners of the MIA Product of the Year and Service of the Year awards were further featured in the MERLIN Freshwater blog and highlighted via the project's social media channels by the MERLIN communication team.

Some photos from the conducted MERLIN Innovation Awards in 2023, 2024 and 2025 are presented below:

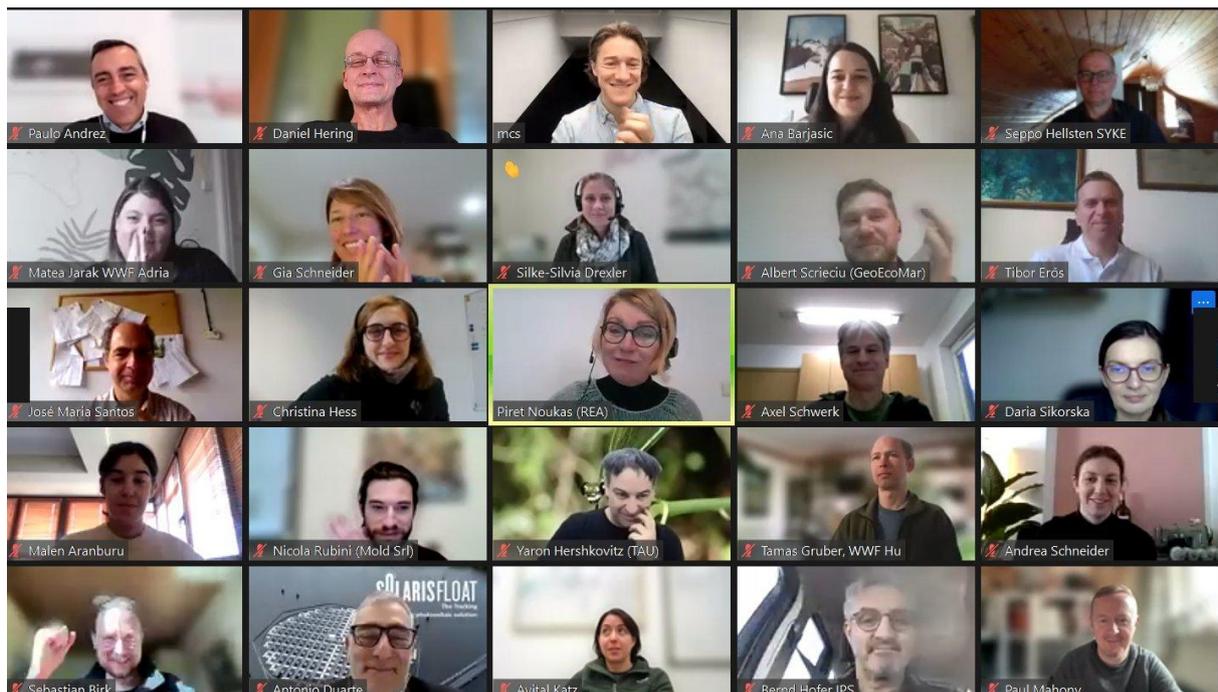


Figure 9 - MERLIN Innovation Awards (MIA) 2023

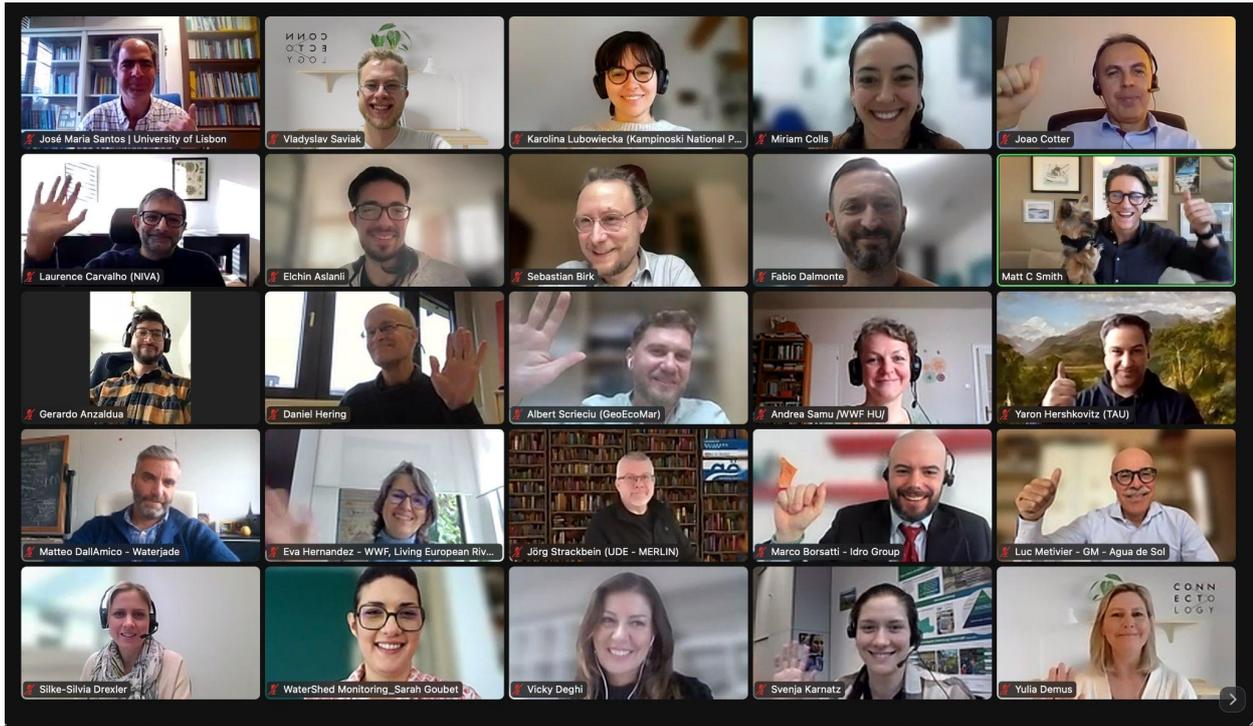


Figure 10 - MERLIN Innovation Awards (MIA) 2024

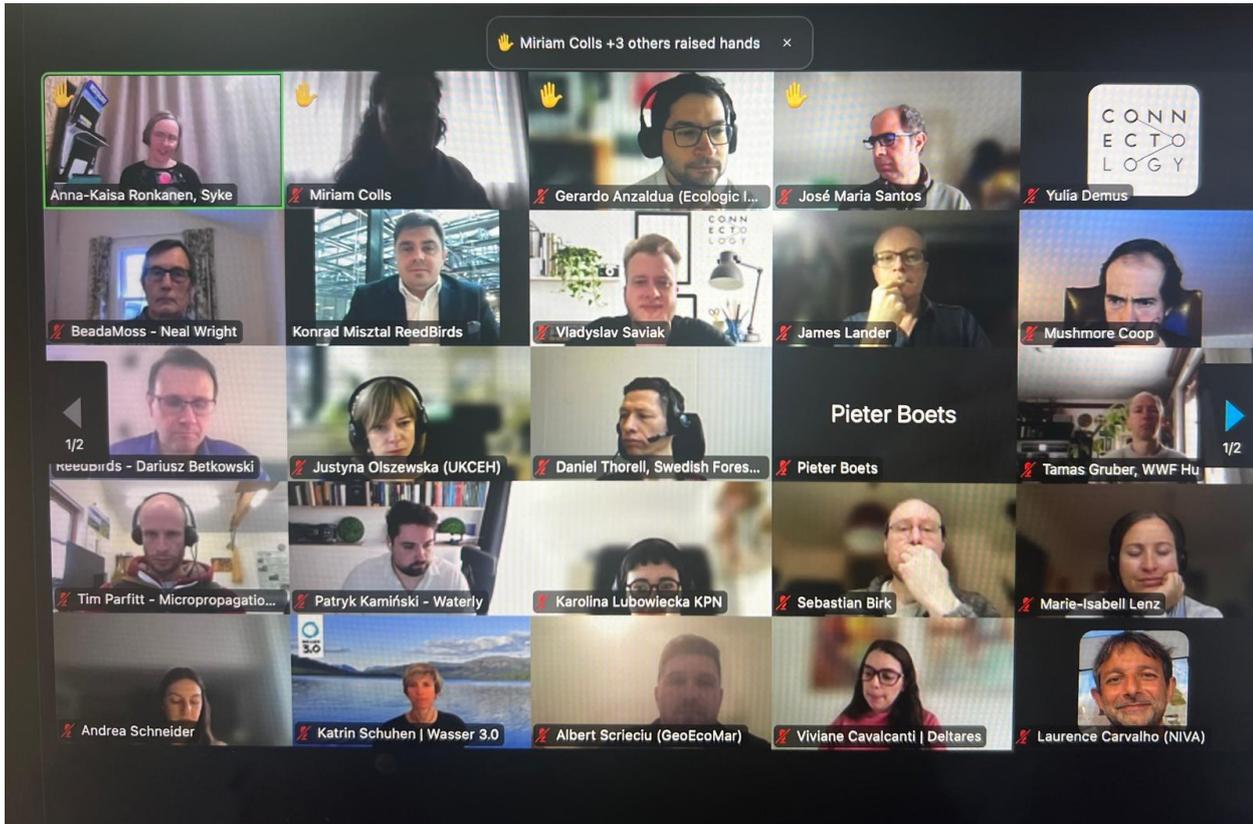


Figure 11 - MERLIN Innovation Awards (MIA) 2025

In addition to recognizing innovation, the MIA served as a powerful tool to promote the MERLIN Marketplace. Efforts to link the Awards with the MERLIN Marketplace followed four complementary approaches:

1. **Outreach communications** - Emails and LinkedIn messages about the MIA also introduced the MERLIN Marketplace, ensuring that even organizations not applying were made aware of the platform and invited to register free of charge.
2. **Fast-track registration** - The MIA applicants benefited from expedited review of their MERLIN Marketplace submissions, giving them faster access to potential contacts and visibility. This led to a notable number of applicants registering simultaneously for both the Awards and the MERLIN Marketplace.
3. **Dedicated session** - During the final ceremony, Paul Mahony (Oppla) showcased the platform's role in raising the profile of innovative solutions and improving user experience. With an audience of participants, jury members and wider stakeholders, an additional opportunity was created to boost registrations.
4. **Seal of Excellence** - All MIA participants received a unique Seal of Excellence they could use for their promotion, including adding to their MERLIN Marketplace profile, with Product of the Year and Service of the Year winners awarded a distinct gold seal. These badges enhanced the visibility and credibility of their offerings, drawing greater attention from the MERLIN Marketplace community.

*The seal of excellence for participants and the winners, designed by SAM:*



*Figure 12 - MERLIN Innovation Awards (MIA) 2025 Seal of Excellence for participants*



Figure 13 - MERLIN Innovation Awards (MIA) 2024 Seal of Excellence for winners

The MERLIN Innovation Awards successfully established strong connections with the community of innovative companies active in the freshwater ecosystem restoration sector. This was achieved through clear communication of the Award objectives, transparent presentation of participation requirements, and careful management of applicants' expectations.

**The organisation team received the following testimonials during the MERLIN Innovation Awards 2023-2025:**

- I am very proud that we have been awarded the Merlin Innovations Award for "Service of the Year"! Thank you so much for recognizing the hard work of our entire team and the created impact.  
(Karsten Hirsch, CEO and Co-Founder of the company, MIA 2023 participant)
- Ecocean is very honored to receive the Product of the Year 2023 award from the MIA awards, for the solutions that we developed with Biomatrix Water to enhance the ecological functions of littoral zones in freshwater. It acknowledges all our efforts to provide functioning habitats to urban and artificialized waterbodies, and to bring back ecological functions, complex ecosystems, and biodiversity in habitat-depleted areas.  
(Etienne Abadie, Project manager and Northern Europe representative of Ecocean, MIA 2023 participant)
- It was a pleasure! Interesting companies, services and products! Will there be another round next year? Thanks for the perfect organization!  
(Silke-Silvia Drexler, Senior Scientist, Jury member)
- Thank you for the opportunity to participate in your event and to be a part of a jury. It was an honor for me to be among so many great people and scientists. Thank you for the organization. Hope we can do something together again in the future.  
(Karolina Lubowiecka, Nature Protection Specialist in the Kampinoski National Park, Jury member)
- It was my pleasure to be part of such a well-organized event! Congratulations to the entire team!  
(Albert Scrieciu, Scientific Researcher, Head of Interdisciplinary Research of the Fluvial Environment Department at the National Institute for Research and Development of Marine Geology and Geocology (GeoEcoMar))

- Thank you so much for the vote of confidence and the opportunity to be a jury member of the 2025 MIA Awards. I very much enjoyed this year's finalists, and there were so many diverse, innovative and inspiring solutions.

(Marie-Isabell Lenz, Research Associate for Nature and Environmental Conservation at the Federal Institute of Hydrology in Koblenz, Jury member)

- Thanks to you and your team for a great competition and online event. I really liked the format and the energy in the room. My team and I were very happy that we made it to the finals and finally to the top of the podium.

(Katrin Schuhen, Wasser 3.0, MIA 2025 participant)

- Congratulations to all! Great presentations, wonderful products and service! Great job done with the organisation.

(Piret Noukas, Project Adviser in the European Research Executive Agency (REA))

Presented below are key statistical highlights from the MERLIN Innovation Awards held in 2023, 2024, and 2025.

- Estimated number of companies reached via targeted outreach activities (2023-2025): approximately 800.

- Total number of submitted applications:

- 12 for Service of the Year and 16 for Product of the Year in 2023
- 6 for Service of the Year and 17 for Product of the Year in 2024
- 14 for Service of the Year and 22 for Product of the Year in 2025

- Total number of audiences during final ceremonies:

- 75 participants in 2023
- 70 participants in 2024
- 60 participants in 2025

The full list of participants with highlighted Product of the Year and Service of the Year solutions for each MIA can be found in [ANNEX 3 - MERLIN Innovation Awards Participants](#).

## 3.2 MERLIN Marketplace Outreach and Dissemination

### Dissemination Campaigns

Building on previous positive experiences of reaching target audiences through earlier initiatives, Connectology utilized newsletter campaigns to promote the unique value proposition of the MERLIN Marketplace. The selected audience included members and founders of start-ups, companies, and non-governmental organizations.

The campaign was implemented in two rounds to minimize the risk of the key message being overlooked and to highlight the tailored approach in selecting companies for inclusion.

An example of the MERLIN Marketplace promotional campaign newsletter is provided below:

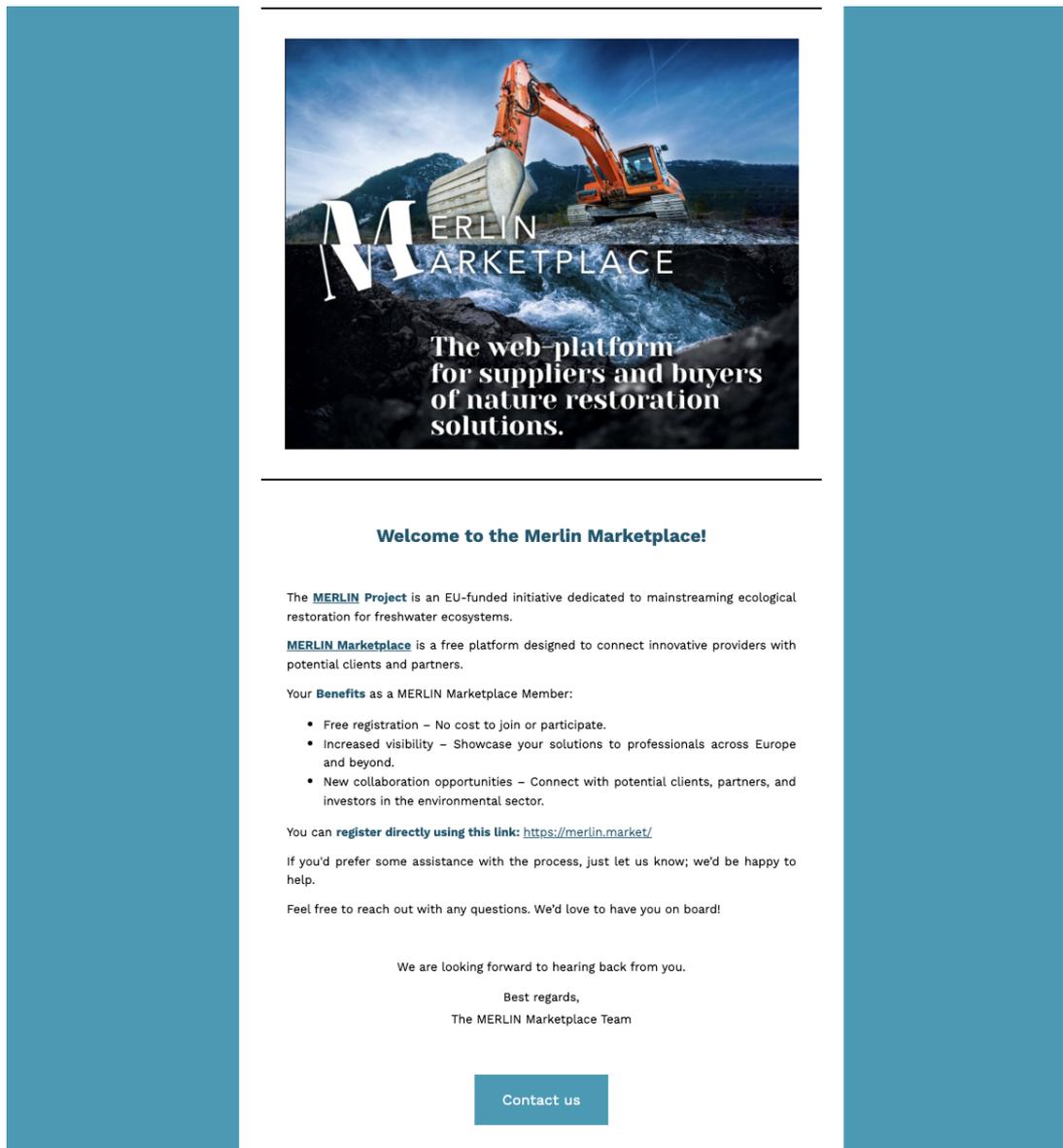


Figure 14 – Example of the 1st round of the MERLIN Marketplace newsletter campaign

As part of the MERLIN Marketplace promotion efforts carried out through the first and second rounds of the campaign, more than 350 representatives of freshwater-focused companies were targeted. The first round achieved an open rate (the number of successfully delivered emails opened by recipients) of 30%, while the second round performed even better, reaching an open rate of 40%.

### MERLIN Freshwater Blog

The MERLIN Freshwater blog is a dedicated platform for promoting freshwater-focused activities and highlighting topics of relevance to the restoration sector, founded 12 years ago as part of the BioFresh project. Being valued for informing the community of practice and the general public about restoration approaches and benefits, it has served as an effective tool to feature content about the MERLIN Marketplace, and it was decided that posts would be published either directly or indirectly referencing the platform.

Over the course of the project, four posts explicitly mentioned the MERLIN Marketplace.

1. **4 November 2022 – “Major new awards seek innovative solutions to restore Europe’s rivers, lakes and wetlands”**

This post, initially focused on the MERLIN Innovation Awards 2023, positioned the MERLIN Marketplace as a dedicated award for participants, who would be automatically included on the platform upon applying for MIA.

2. **23 February 2024 - “MERLIN Innovation Awards celebrates state-of-the-art approaches to freshwater restoration at 2024 ceremony”**

The post featured interviews with the winners of the Product of the Year (Product of the Year) and Service of the Year (Service of the Year) awards. In particular, Planet Srl, the Product of the Year award winner, highlighted the value of recognition via MERLIN activities and the MERLIN Marketplace, stating: *“By being part of the MERLIN Marketplace and engaging with various stakeholders, we can accelerate the adoption of the MTP (Mangrove Technology Platform) and contribute to the systemic, transformative change needed in our society and economy.”*

3. **19 July 2024 - “The MERLIN Marketplace: innovative products and services for nature restoration”**

This article provided a detailed explanation of the MERLIN Marketplace’s purpose, functionality, and sector advantages, as well as its achieved results and future expectations. The author emphasized that the platform’s goal is to *“help mainstream their use in everyday life, economies and environmental projects across Europe.”*

4. **25 February 2025 - “MERLIN Innovation Awards celebrates cutting-edge approaches to freshwater restoration at 2025 ceremony”**

This post highlighted the outcomes of the MERLIN Innovation Awards 2025, including interviews with the Product of the Year and Service of the Year winners. River Cleanup, Service of the Year award winner, noted the impact of the awards and the MERLIN Marketplace, stating: *“It’s amazing to get this prize. It’s another step in getting more people to know who we are, what we do, and how they can contribute. We see our holistic approach as the innovation: we’re bringing people and ideas together, and it’s good that it was recognized by the jury members.”*

### LinkedIn Posts

Following an analysis of activity across various social media platforms, the MERLIN Marketplace team identified LinkedIn as a key channel for promotion. Given its active use by the target audience - including founders and representatives of product and service providers, supporters of nature areas, impact investors, and governmental bodies - the team focused efforts on leveraging this platform effectively.

The MERLIN Marketplace development team implemented the following promotional approaches via LinkedIn:

- **Direct posting:** Members of the MERLIN Marketplace team published posts on their personal LinkedIn profiles, highlighting specific activities such as the MERLIN Innovation Awards.
- **Resharing:** The team reshared posts published by the MERLIN team and extended community, adding context or call-to-action comments where appropriate to increase engagement.
- **Coordination with the main MERLIN LinkedIn page:** For certain posts, the MERLIN Marketplace team collaborated with the team behind the official MERLIN project page, which is followed by all consortium members and a wide network of stakeholders. Post content was provided to the page administrator, who published it according to instructions. Partners were then able to reshare the posts, with or without additional commentary.

The key messages conveyed in the MERLIN Marketplace promotional posts included the following:

- **Create your free account** to promote your products and services, attract new clients, explore new markets, and grow your organisation.
- **Discover innovative products and services** designed to make your work more efficient, impactful, and cost-effective.
- **Join the MERLIN Marketplace at no cost**, taking advantage of the opportunity to showcase your products and services to a global network.
- **Seize the opportunity** to become part of the MERLIN Marketplace.

In total, 19 posts - focused both on direct promotion and indirect promotion through the dissemination of information about the MERLIN Innovation Awards (MIA) - were published by Connectology, Oppla and MERLIN.

Collectively, these posts received 313 likes from LinkedIn users and were reposted 81 times, thereby significantly contributing to raising awareness of the platform.

Examples of direct and indirect MERLIN Marketplace promotional posts on LinkedIn are provided below:

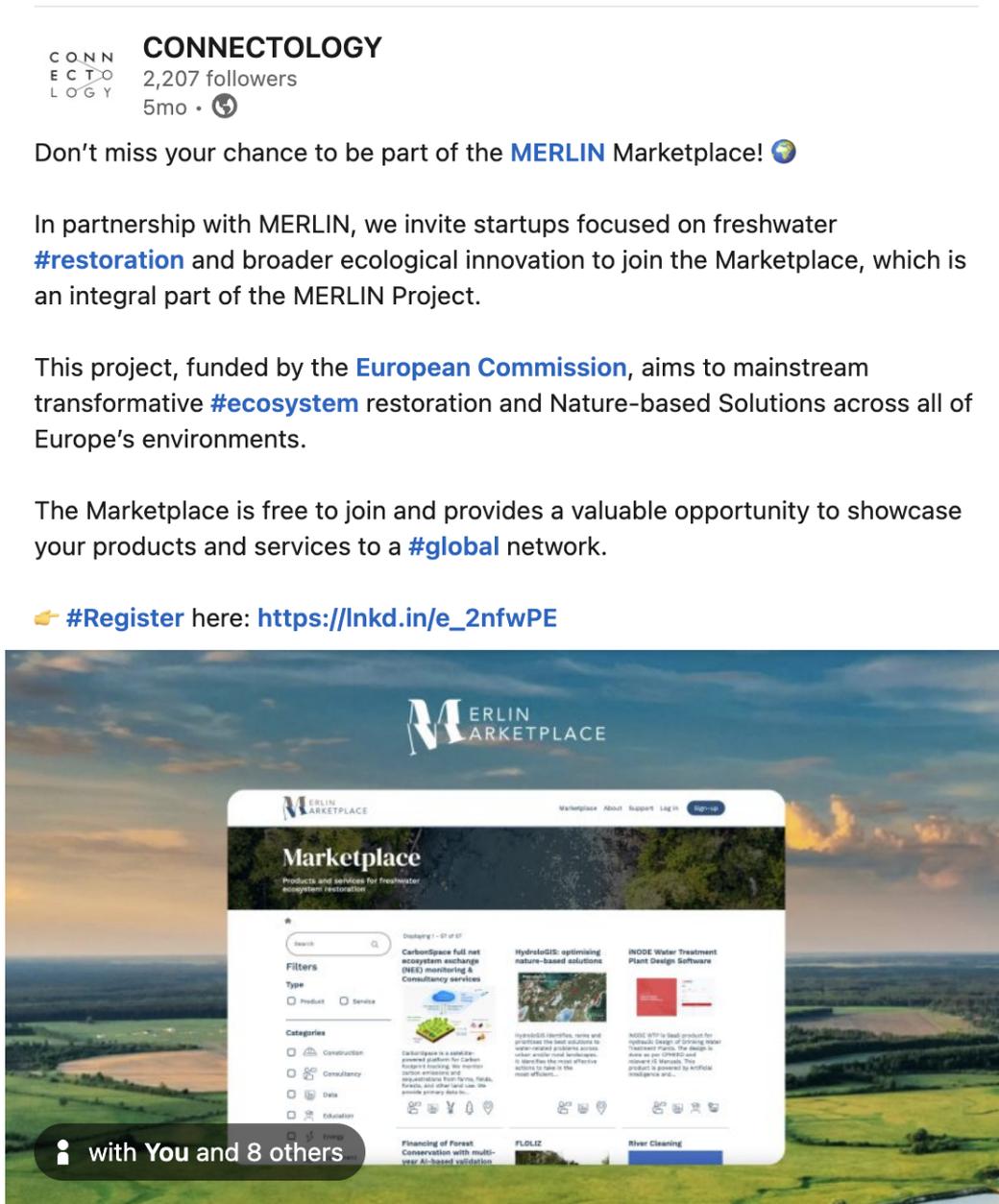


Figure 15 - Example of the MERLIN Marketplace LinkedIn promotional post by Connectology

 **Oppla** + Follow ...  
1,353 followers  
10mo · 

 Are you or your company developing innovative solutions for freshwater ecosystems?

The **MERLIN** Innovation Awards 2025 are now open for applications! If your product or service is market-ready and can restore or enable financial benefits for freshwater ecosystems, this is your chance to showcase your innovation to a global audience and contribute to a sustainable future!

Find out more about the awards and apply: <https://bit.ly/3Z59PBp>

**#ClimateChange #Innovation #Sustainability #NatureBasedSolutions #SustainableInnovation #EcoInnovation #Conservation #Ecosystems #Environment**



 **MERLIN**  
**INNOVATION**  
**AWARDS**  
**2025**

Figure 16 - Example of the MERLIN Innovation Awards (MIA) LinkedIn promotional post by Oppla

**MERLIN**  
1,954 followers  
5mo · 🌐

**MERLIN Marketplace – A web platform for suppliers and buyers of nature restoration solutions**

If you work in nature restoration, join our growing community and stay up to date with the latest best practices from leading organisations.

💡 Create your free account now to:

- **Promote** your products and services, find new clients, explore new markets, and grow your organisation.
- **Discover** innovative products and services to make your work easier, more impactful, and cost-effective.

👥 Who can join?

The platform is open to **businesses and organisations of all sizes**, from both private and public sectors.

🔗 Join now at <https://merlin.market/>  
For questions, contact [support@merlin.market](mailto:support@merlin.market)

The MERLIN Marketplace is an output of the MERLIN project, powered by **CONNECTOLOGY** and **Oppla**.

#freshwater #restoration #innovation #businesses #naturerestoration  
#NaturebasedSolution #Nbs #Horizon2020 #EUGreenDeal

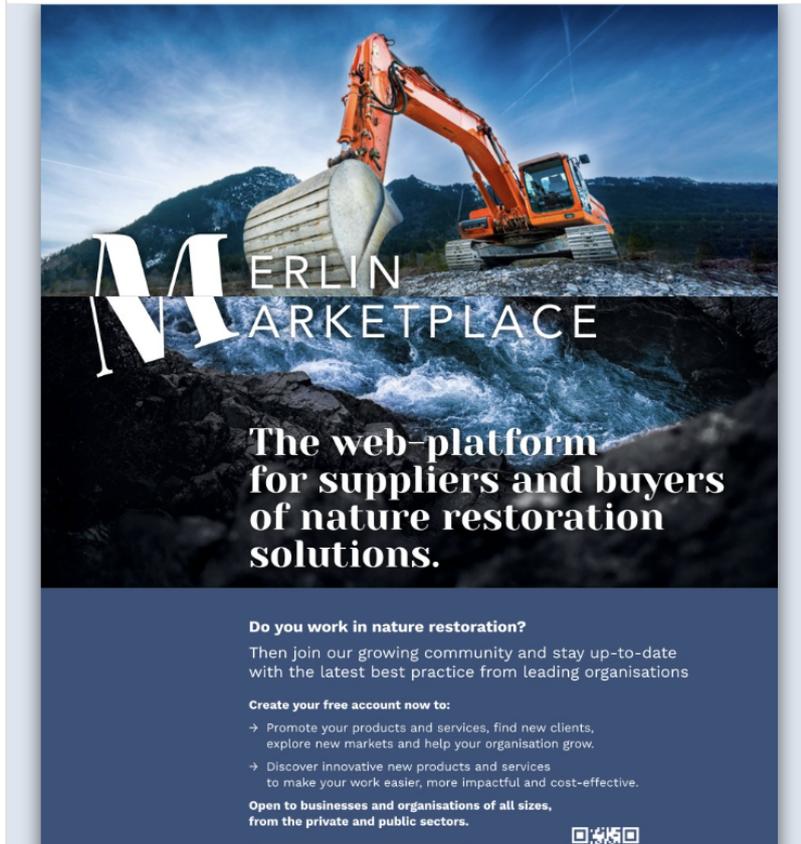


Figure 17 - Example of the MERLIN Marketplace LinkedIn promotional post by MERLIN

## Additional Resources

The MERLIN Marketplace development team also engaged companies offering nature-restoration products or services for publication on the platform through direct email and LinkedIn communication and, where appropriate, by arranging video calls. Both methods offered specific advantages, enabling the team to achieve the desired outreach and engagement outcomes.

Connectology pursued potential solution providers using tailored emails and LinkedIn messages, which included a comprehensive description of the platform, emphasizing its unique features and benefits for participants. A direct link to the platform was provided to minimize the time required to access relevant information.

Ten to fourteen days after sending the initial email, a reminder was sent to non-responding recipients. This reminder highlighted the key points from the original communication and reinforced the call-to-action, for example: *“registration is free of charge and requires only five minutes to upload product or service details”*.

If no response was received, a second and final reminder was sent 10-14 days after the first, suggesting the option of arranging a video call with the platform development team to provide additional support and guidance.

Connectology and Oppla have also liaised with the MERLIN project coordinators to ensure effective communication about the MERLIN Marketplace through the MERLIN weekly newsletter, a dedicated channel for disseminating up-to-date project information. Frequently featured at the top of the newsletter, the MERLIN Marketplace section included a comprehensive description of the platform, along with all necessary links. This approach allowed the MERLIN Marketplace development team to specifically target project consortium partners, who maintain extensive connections with sector organizations and could subsequently inform them about the opportunity to promote nature restoration solutions via the platform.

In parallel, Connectology and Oppla promoted the MERLIN Marketplace through their own newsletters, sharing key insights about the platform with hundreds of potential applicants. Thanks to carefully tailored campaign descriptions, these efforts achieved an open rate of over 40% and generated dozens of new user registrations.

## Direct Outreach to other EU-funded Horizon Projects

Oppla contacted the coordinators of other EU Horizon projects for the purpose of promoting the Marketplace to these projects' own partners and stakeholders. Coordinators were provided with a promotions package including a digital flyer (PDF), designed by SAM, and key messaging for use in email. A total of eight projects were engaged in this way, reaching approximately 160 organizations. The Marketplace was further promoted by some of the European Commission officers responsible for these projects via their own communication channels.

## 4 Business Plan – MERLIN Marketplace

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### 4.1 General Overview

This business plan for the MERLIN Marketplace was prepared by Connectology ([www.connectology.eu](http://www.connectology.eu)), drawing on all available information about the MERLIN project and its Marketplace. As markets evolve, the plan may need to be updated and adjusted over time.

#### The MERLIN Project

The MERLIN project is a large-scale initiative supported by the European Union's Horizon 2020 programme, dedicated to revitalizing freshwater ecosystems such as rivers, streams, peatlands, and wetlands. Drawing on decades of restoration experience, it encompasses eighteen flagship projects across Europe, which act as reference points for innovative ecological restoration and the application of Nature-based Solutions. These examples highlight not only the environmental gains of restoration but also their wider economic and social value, showing how ecosystem recovery can go hand in hand with regional development. In addition, MERLIN develops practical tools and methods that can be adapted beyond Europe, contributing to global restoration strategies.

A distinctive feature of MERLIN is its participatory approach: local communities, scientists, NGOs, and public authorities are actively involved in planning and carrying out restoration actions. This inclusive model strengthens both scientific quality and public support, while also ensuring that projects generate clear social and economic benefits alongside ecological ones.

#### The MERLIN Marketplace and its Sustainability Plan

As a key component of MERLIN, the MERLIN Marketplace is a digital platform designed to accelerate freshwater ecosystem restoration and broader nature conservation across Europe and beyond. It serves as a meeting ground for businesses, NGOs, and researchers by connecting stakeholders, showcasing products and services on Nature-based Solutions(NbS), enabling knowledge exchange, and fostering collaboration.

For solution providers, it offers visibility, and for project developers, it provides access to tools and expertise. Development of the MERLIN Marketplace has been led by Oppla ([www.oppla.eu](http://www.oppla.eu)) and is expected to remain under Oppla's management after the MERLIN project concludes.

This sustainability plan sets out how the MERLIN Marketplace can continue to grow and remain relevant beyond the lifetime of the MERLIN project.

It underscores the platform's strengths, including its stakeholder-driven development, and the quality and credibility of its offerings. At the same time, it recognizes areas where further improvement is needed, such as enhancing transactional and interactive features, such as match-making.

Although other sustainability platforms exist, the MERLIN Marketplace distinguishes itself through its specialized focus on freshwater restoration, its commitment to validated and trustworthy solutions, and its collaborative community that bridges science, policy, and practice.

Financial projections over the next five years chart a path from EU-funded foundations toward potential diversification of revenues through freemium upgrades, subscriptions, and partnerships with other EU projects. With careful cost management and increasing user adoption, the platform could become self-sustainable by 2028.

Ultimately, the Marketplace's success will depend on the evolving needs of users and the entrepreneurial mindset of the management in order to deliver trusted, high-quality content and brokerage services, expanding its diverse user base, ensuring financial sustainability, and maintaining strong visibility and partnerships.

By combining strategic foresight with a collaborative spirit, the MERLIN Marketplace is positioned to become an enabler of Europe's ecological restoration ambitions, helping bridge the gap between innovation, investment, and impactful environmental action.

As the infrastructure is scalable, MERLIN Marketplace can aim to expand its horizons to other geographies outside of Europe. And Oppla is very well positioned in the ecosystem to make the MERLIN Marketplace a long-term success as well as impactful, utilizing its own European network and expansion into Latin America under the joint Oppla-Instituto Humboldt platform, Naturaleza Transformativa (launching 2026).

## 4.2 Importance and Structure of the MERLIN Marketplace

The MERLIN Marketplace is a digital hub that showcases sustainable environmental products and services related to freshwater ecosystems restoration projects. It brings together businesses, investors, researchers, public authorities, NGOs, and entrepreneurs, enabling them to exchange high-quality products and services. From construction machinery and monitoring technologies to consultancy and project design, the platform supports a comprehensive ecosystem of supply and demand.

Many of the participants in the MERLIN Marketplace originated from the initiative MERLIN Innovation Awards (MIA), led by Connectology, which annually distinguished the best products and services targeting nature restoration. The MERLIN Marketplace's long-term ambition is to expand its reach, improve the user experience, become transactional and enhance its reputation as a trusted source for freshwater restoration and nature conservation. By facilitating effective matchmaking between suppliers and project implementers, and by curating services aligned with restoration goals, it streamlines project development and accelerates impact. Aligning with the EU's sustainability and biodiversity agendas and maintaining visibility at sectoral events further strengthens its credibility.

Looking forward, the MERLIN Marketplace aims to broaden its functionality and recognition, not only as a connector of stakeholders but also as a catalyst for transactions of not only products but also services and investments. Oppla is exploring ways to integrate this functionality into its platform as a complementary service to its core role as a repository of public research outputs, potentially expanding the Marketplace to new topics and use cases.

Collaboration with the SUPERB project (Grant Agreement No 101036849), focused on forest ecosystem restoration, has already broadened the Marketplace beyond freshwater ecosystems. This partnership creates opportunities to connect the SUPERB matchmaking platform, which targets new projects and funders, with the MERLIN Marketplace's complementary offer for buyers and sellers of restoration services. With both platforms hosted by Oppla, there is good potential to synergize and strengthen these services going forward.

## 4.3 SWOT Analysis

To ensure the long-term success and adaptability of the MERLIN Marketplace, it is essential to evaluate its current positioning and future potential. This SWOT analysis highlights the platform's key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, providing a foundation for strategic decision-making and risk management.

### Strengths

- Stakeholder-driven development and quality control.
- Ease of use: Accessible without advanced IT skills.
- High-quality standards: Curated services and expert evaluation.
- Open-source adaptability.
- Integration with Oppla: Ensures long-term support and alignment with NbS communities.

### Weaknesses

- Limited financial functionality: Currently, there are no built-in payment or investment tools.
- Limited transactional features.
- Low visibility beyond MERLIN: Awareness remains restricted to partner networks.
- Regional gaps: Weak presence in Eastern and Southern Europe.
- Slow uptake so far: Participation and traffic remain lower than anticipated, despite extensive outreach efforts (including the MIA).

### Opportunities

- Path to financial self-sustainability: Diversified revenues from listing fees, transactional fees, subscriptions, sponsorships, and grants.

- Global rising demand for sustainable solutions focused on NbS and restoration.
- Collaboration and networking: Potential to build long-term partnerships and consortia.
- Scalability and replication: The model could expand to other ecosystem types (forests, coasts).
- New funding pathways: Community involvement and innovative financing mechanisms.
- New markets: Oppla's expansion into Latin America commencing in 2026.

### Threats

- Conservative user habits: Preference for familiar suppliers and personal networks over online platforms.
- Strict procurement rules: Many restoration managers operate under rigid procurement frameworks, limiting the relevance and use of marketplaces for their needs.
- Competition: Other digital platforms or B2B solutions may attract users.
- Platform fatigue: Risk of declining engagement without regular updates and tailored content.
- Cybersecurity and data privacy risks: Sensitive user data requires robust protection.
- Funding reliance: Heavy dependence on EU project cycles could undermine long-term sustainability.
- Financial regulation: FCA oversight may kick in if MERLIN Marketplace handles payments or broker investments, triggering authorization and rules on promotions, anti-greenwashing, client money, AML/KYC procedures, and resilience. Even if unregulated, it should partner with authorized firms, control promotions, and align with Consumer Duty.
- Unclear added value: Compared to other search facilities and marketplaces, it is questionable whether the platform can differentiate itself strongly enough to justify long-term adoption.

### Conclusion

The SWOT highlights that MERLIN Marketplace is well-positioned, with a defensible niche in freshwater restoration, stakeholder-driven design, high-quality curated services, and strong integration with NbS communities. These strengths support credibility and long-term engagement. Opportunities exist in scaling to other ecosystem types, forming strategic partnerships, entering new markets such as Latin America, and diversifying revenues through listings, subscriptions, and transactional fees.

At the same time, challenges remain: uptake has been lower than anticipated, visibility beyond partner networks is limited, and strict procurement frameworks may constrain adoption. Financial functionality is limited, and regulatory considerations could affect transactional or brokerage features. Competition, conservative user habits, and potential platform fatigue further highlight the need for careful positioning and engagement.

To secure long-term sustainability, MERLIN must leverage its niche, demonstrate clear added value, drive adoption, strengthen partner engagement, expand functionality over time, and diversify revenue streams beyond EU funding. With these strategies, the Marketplace is well-placed to convert its strengths and opportunities into lasting impact.



# SWOT ANALYSIS

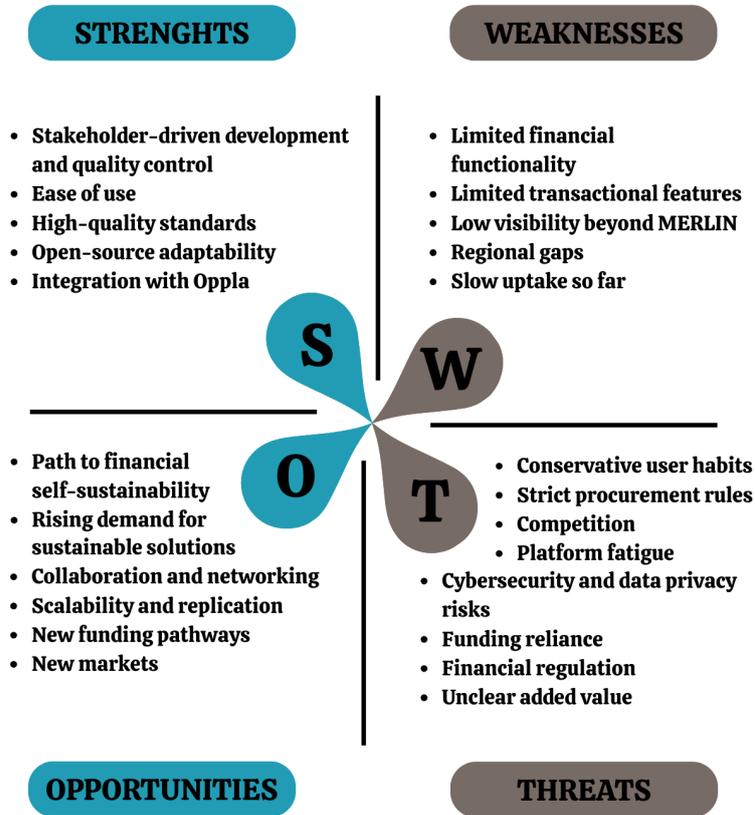


Figure 18 - SWOT Analysis of the MERLIN Marketplace

## 4.4 Competitors

To ensure its long-term sustainability, the MERLIN Marketplace must understand its positioning in the digital ecosystem. Although few platforms directly address freshwater restoration, comparing broader sustainability marketplaces provides useful insights.

### Competitive Landscape

The MERLIN Marketplace operates in a landscape of platforms and initiatives that connect sustainable technologies, services, and knowledge. While no platform is identical in focusing on freshwater ecosystem restoration, several direct, adjacent, and indirect competitors provide relevant benchmarks. This analysis highlights both competitive threats and opportunities for differentiation.

- **Direct Competitors (Europe & Global)**

Direct competitors are platforms that function as marketplaces for green technologies or sustainability solutions.

*WIPO GREEN*<sup>1</sup>: A global marketplace hosted by the World Intellectual Property Organisation. It connects technology providers with seekers across sectors such as water, energy, and waste, with a strong emphasis on technology transfer and IP licensing.

*Future Green*<sup>2</sup>: A sustainable product and service marketplace, primarily consumer-oriented. It includes multiple product categories and incentives for sustainable purchases. While less technical, it illustrates how eco-marketplaces operate and monetize.

MERLIN competes structurally with these platforms, but its niche in freshwater restoration and EU credibility provides a strong differentiator.

- **Adjacent Competitors**

These platforms focus on knowledge, data, or financing for Nature-based Solutions (NbS) and restoration projects rather than direct product/service marketplaces.

- *Marketplace for Nature*<sup>3</sup>: A global mapping platform for biodiversity credit initiatives.
- *Nature4Climate / Naturebase*<sup>4</sup>: A database of NbS project opportunities with a focus on global climate and biodiversity outcomes.

These platforms compete for visibility and thought leadership as the “go-to” knowledge sources. However, they do not facilitate product/service transactions in the way MERLIN does and potentially will do in the near future.

- **Indirect Competitors**

Indirect competitors are alternative routes for restoration solutions or project implementation, bypassing marketplace platforms.

- *Ecosystem Marketplace (Forest Trends)*<sup>5</sup>: Provides market intelligence on carbon, water, and biodiversity credits.
- *WWF NbS Origination Platform*<sup>6</sup>: Identifies and prepares NbS projects for investment. It uses blended finance to deliver measurable benefits for people, climate, and nature, while building a transparent global market for high-quality Nature-based Solutions.
- *Environmental consultancies (AECOM, Stantec, Jacobs, etc.)*: Deliver large-scale restoration services directly to clients.

These actors can reduce the need for an intermediary marketplace if clients go directly to them. MERLIN Marketplace must provide added value in trust, validation, and matchmaking.

- **Global Benchmarks**

Although not direct competitors in the EU freshwater restoration space, global platforms offer useful benchmarks:

- *Beyond Smart Cities*<sup>7</sup> (India): A green technology marketplace combined with training and freelance consulting services. While geographically and thematically broader than MERLIN, it demonstrates the viability of integrating a marketplace with capacity-building services - a model similar to MERLIN's Marketplace + Academy. Beyond Smart Cities should be viewed as a benchmark for innovation in platform design, rather than a direct competitor in MERLIN's core EU ecosystem.

MERLIN Marketplace occupies a unique and defensible niche as a specialized platform dedicated to freshwater ecosystem restoration. By offering curated services tailored to this well-defined community, it acts as both a marketplace and a trusted reference point, limiting direct competition from generalist sustainability platforms. Global platforms like Beyond Smart Cities showcase innovative structures, but they do not directly target MERLIN's niche, reinforcing its competitive advantage.

<sup>1</sup> WIPO GREEN – The Marketplace for Sustainable Technology

<sup>2</sup> Sustainable Products Marketplace: Discover Eco-Friendly Solutions and Savings | Future.Green

<sup>3</sup> Homepage | Marketplace for Nature

<sup>4</sup> Nature4Climate - Tackling Climate Change With Nature

<sup>5</sup> Ecosystem Marketplace - Making the Priceless Valuable

<sup>6</sup> Nature-Based Solutions Origination Platform | Projects | WWF

<sup>7</sup> Beyond Smart Cities | World's 1st Green Technology Marketplace

To strengthen its position further, MERLIN can build a robust knowledge and validation layer, enhancing credibility and trust among users. The platform’s long-term financial sustainability will depend on leveraging this niche advantage while gradually expanding into complementary functions, such as brokerage and financing, and carefully managing user adoption and positioning challenges.

As NbS are not yet mainstream, further EU funding would be welcome to accelerate the growth of MERLIN Marketplace to other adjacent areas, so that financial sustainability can be achieved sooner rather than later.

**Behavioral Barriers**

MERLIN Marketplace’s competitive challenge does not lie only in the presence of alternative platforms. The greater barrier to adoption is stakeholder adaptation and behavior. Many restoration practitioners and procuring entities demonstrate loyalty to established suppliers, relying on existing procurement routines rather than exploring new channels of supply.

Many policymakers talk up innovation and NbS, but procurement usually rewards the lowest upfront price. Lifecycle costs are rarely considered, so “cheap to implement” too often becomes “very expensive to maintain.”

There is a persistent preference for local or regional providers, rooted in trust, protectionism and regulatory familiarity, which can reduce the incentive to search a pan-European digital marketplace. In addition, stakeholders frequently depend on personal recommendations and professional events to identify suitable solutions, limiting their use of online directories.

Finally, concerns about quality assurance and the perception that searching through online platforms is time-consuming further constrain uptake.

**Conclusion**

The analysis shows that while the MERLIN Marketplace faces limited direct competition in its niche, it must contend with both broad sustainability platforms and, more importantly, entrenched stakeholder behaviors that favor traditional procurement channels. To secure its long-term sustainability, MERLIN Marketplace must leverage its unique positioning in freshwater restoration while addressing barriers of trust, quality assurance, and user convenience. By integrating verified case studies, strengthening links with research-based platforms (incl. Oppla and the MERLIN Academy), and fostering a reputation for reliability and efficiency, the MERLIN Marketplace can establish itself not only as a transactional platform but also as a trusted reference point in Europe’s restoration ecosystem.

**4.5 Financial Projections (5 years)**

The financial projections for MERLIN Marketplace were modelled on the premise that revenues are closely tied to the growing role of Nature-based Solutions (NbS) in Europe and to the implementation/enforcement of environmental policy. The model reflects expected impacts from frameworks such as the EU Nature Restoration Regulation, the Water Framework Directive, together with national transposition and funding programmes. As these frameworks scale, the addressable pipeline of restoration projects and procurement opportunities on the platform is expected to expand.

Revenue streams were modelled across subscriptions, listing fees, and transaction/lead-generation fees. Despite there being many upcoming EU-funded project opportunities, for the sake of the sustainability of MERLIN Marketplace, no grants were considered in this business plan.

Until the MERLIN Marketplace reaches breakeven, expected by the end of 2028, Oppla will partially underwrite the project by applying reduced management and operating fees in maintaining the platform. The corresponding percentages are shown in Table 3.

*Table 3 - Percentage of staff and other costs supported by OPPLA*

	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
% of staff and other costs sponsored by Oppla	100%	65%	20%	0%	0%

Once the MERLIN Marketplace reaches the break-even point, Oppla will no longer need to “sponsor” the initiative, and full costs will be paid by the project.

For the purposes of this business plan, the creation of a new independent entity to manage and develop the MERLIN Marketplace was not considered. This approach reduces costs and bureaucracy and aligns with Oppla’s commitment, under the grant agreement, to maintain the Marketplace beyond the project’s end as long as demand exists.

Key assumptions used in this business plan are the ones in Table 4.

*Table 4 - Key assumptions in the business plan*

Assumptions (EUR)	
Inflation rate per annum (avg)	2%
Marketing %/sales	10%
Annual cost of fixed salary for the MERLIN Marketplace manager	75.000
Annual cost of fixed salary for the MERLIN Marketplace assistant	40.000
Annual cost of fixed salary for the MERLIN Marketplace marketing responsible	50.000
Costs per year (legal, website, accounting)	40.000

The inflation rate was estimated to be 2% according to the goals of the European Central Bank to keep inflation in the euro zone at 2%.

The other assumptions were based on Connectology’s own experience in supporting hundreds of startups in Europe and extensive research.

- **Revenue Streams for the MERLIN Marketplace**

In line with EU project practices, the MERLIN Marketplace will initially operate as a free service for basic listing and basic online search. However, as the platform grows, several revenue options should be considered to balance operating costs and ensure continuity. The options that were considered in this business plan are shown in Table 5.

*Table 5 - Potential Revenue Streams for the MERLIN Marketplace*

Revenue Model	Description
Free access (basic listing)	The free basic listing will be limited to the number of words, files attached, and visibility. This will ensure continuity of an EU-funded project.
Premium listing fees	One-off payments for providers to publish products/services for each product or service. This will be billed annually and will provide better visibility and features for the listings.
Annual subscriptions for matchmaking	The matchmaking feature will automatically alert product and service providers to new business opportunities, such as new requests for proposals or new members joining the MERLIN Marketplace, that fall within their supplier-defined target market.
Sponsorship	There will be opportunities for interested entities to sponsor newsletters, online events such as the MERLIN Innovation Awards, and parts of the website.
Brokerage fees	A percentage of the transactions that will occur online will be charged a brokerage fee.
Funding success fee	Despite this being a clear business opportunity, it was decided to exclude from this business plan the revenues associated with it, because at this stage they are uncertain, and potentially will depend on authorizations obtained from the FCA (Financial Conduct Authority).

While analyzing potential revenue streams, we drew on benchmarks from SaaS and freemium platform studies (e.g. UserPilot, FirstPageSage, GetMonetizely) to estimate uptake rates for premium features and subscriptions.

The estimated revenues per source of incoming for the next 5 years are presented below in Table 6.

Table 6 - Estimated revenues for the next 5 years

Revenues (EUR)	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Price per premium listing (avg.)	250	250	500	800	1000
Nr of units sold	40	70	120	150	200
Price per Matchmaking service (avg.)	600	1.500	2.000	3.000	4.000
Nr of units sold	4	40	60	80	100
Price per sponsorship (avg.)	300	400	500	500	500
Nr of units sold	2	6	20	30	40
Amount of transactions	20.000	150.000	400.000	500.000	2.000.000
Brokerage fee (%)	10%	8%	5%	4%	3%
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<b>15.000</b>	<b>91.900</b>	<b>214.000</b>	<b>395.000</b>	<b>680.000</b>

The estimated price per premium listing and matchmaking service is based on the average prices charged by B2B marketplaces. We applied a 50% discount on those prices, taking into consideration that MERLIN Marketplace is still a new player.

The brokerage fee is benchmarked conservatively against Amazon's marketplace (the largest in the world, including the B2B segment), which typically charges 8–15%.

To remain competitive, MERLIN Marketplace will launch with a 10% take rate, which will step down to 3% as the platform scales and average transaction values increase. We have modelled a low brokerage fee % because, rather than building a fully proprietary transactional platform, Oppla may partner with a white-label platform provider, and it will require sharing brokerage fees.

It is important to note that these projections assume highly favorable circumstances, including strong user adoption, successful premium feature uptake, and supportive market conditions. If Oppla later operates its own platform or negotiates more advantageous revenue-share terms, the actual financial performance could exceed these conservative forecasts.

- **Cost Structure for MERLIN Marketplace**

As the assumption made in this business plan is that Oppla will not create an independent entity to develop further and manage MERLIN Marketplace, this creates a huge opportunity for cost sharing with other Oppla projects and initiatives.

Following discussions with Oppla and benchmarking against market hosting costs (e.g., GoDaddy), we project annual operating costs of €40.000 (plus inflation increase per year) for the MERLIN Marketplace, including hosting, maintenance, and legal and accounting support. While these costs might be considered conservative for a standalone project, shared resources across Oppla projects mean there is sufficient capacity to absorb unexpected costs.

In terms of development of the current platform, it is estimated to have annual costs of €20.000, which, considering that the platform is already very well developed, is quite realistic.

In terms of staffing, after research in the main job listings portals in Europe and in the UK (glassdoor.co.uk, cv-library.co.uk, totaljobs.com), it was considered that for a managing director of the MERLIN Marketplace, the

market salary (including all costs for Oppla) should be €75.000 per year, and for marketing manager the total annual cost should be €50.000. For an operational assistant, it was considered €40.000 per year as the total cost for this position.

Additionally, for some of these positions, Oppla will be able to share resources among its own projects. It is estimated that the assistant role will only be joining in 2027, and the marketing manager in July 2028.

Until 2028, once the project reaches the break-even point, it is not expected that Oppla will hire anyone externally, so in the business plan, it is estimated that Oppla will “sponsor” the MERLIN Marketplace by not charging the full amount to the project, as shown in Table 3.

The total estimated costs for MERLIN Marketplace, not considering the initial sponsorship of Oppla, are presented in Table 7.

*Table 7 - Fixed costs of the MERLIN Marketplace*

Fixed Costs	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Managing director fixed costs	75000	76500	78.030	79.591	81.182
Assistant fixed costs	-	40.000	40.800	41.616	42.448
Marketing-responsible fixed costs (starting 1st July 2028)	-	-	25.000	51.000	52.020
Other costs (legal, accounting, website...)	40.000	40.800	41.616	42.448	43.297
R&D	10.000	20.000	20.400	20.808	21.224
Total fixed costs	125.000	177.300	205.846	235.463	240.172
<b>EBITDA (Profit before taxes and depreciation)</b>	<b>111.500</b>	<b>94.590</b>	<b>13.246</b>	<b>120.037</b>	<b>371.828</b>

In terms of marketing, it is currently integrated into Oppla’s communication activities, which have proven to be more than enough to achieve initial engagement.

Taking into consideration market practices such as Amazon<sup>8</sup>, it was estimated that the correct marketing budget for MERLIN Marketplace should be 10% of all revenues.

These were the only variable costs considered for this business plan, because even transactional costs (e.g. credit card clearing) were already deducted in the net margins that are presented in this business plan.

*Table 8 - Variable costs for the MERLIN Marketplace*

Variable Costs	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Marketing costs paid by the MERLIN Marketplace (MM)	1.500	9.190	21.400	39.500	68.000
<b>Total variable costs</b>	<b>1.500</b>	<b>9.190</b>	<b>21.400</b>	<b>39.500</b>	<b>68.000</b>

A full picture of the estimated revenues and costs for MERLIN Marketplace is presented in Table 9 below.

It is important to note that these projections do not take into consideration the initial “sponsorship” of Oppla, which is presented in Table 10.

<sup>8</sup> [https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.mediapost.com/uploads/GARTNER\\_CMO\\_Survey\\_2024.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.mediapost.com/uploads/GARTNER_CMO_Survey_2024.pdf)

Table 9 - Profit and loss projections for the MERLIN Marketplace before the initial Oppla “sponsorship”

Revenues (EUR)	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Price per premium listing (avg.)	250	250	500	800	1000
Nr of units sold	40	70	120	150	200
Price per Matchmaking service (avg.)	600	1.500	2.000	3.000	4.000
Nr of units sold	4	40	60	80	100
Price per sponsorship (avg.)	300	400	500	500	500
Nr of units sold	2	6	20	30	40
Amount of transactions	20.000	150.000	400.000	500.000	2.000.000
Brokerage fee (%)	10%	8%	5%	4%	3%
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<b>15.000</b>	<b>91.900</b>	<b>214.000</b>	<b>395.000</b>	<b>680.000</b>
Variable Costs	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Marketing costs paid by the MERLIN Marketplace (MM)	1.500	9.190	21.400	39.500	68.000
<b>Total variable costs</b>	<b>1.500</b>	<b>9.190</b>	<b>21.400</b>	<b>39.500</b>	<b>68.000</b>
<b>Gross Margin</b>	<b>13.500</b>	<b>82.710</b>	<b>192.600</b>	<b>355.500</b>	<b>612.000</b>
Fixed Costs	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Managing director fixed costs	75000	76500	78.030	79.591	81.182
Assistant fixed costs	-	40.000	40.800	41.616	42.448
Marketing-responsible fixed costs (starting 1st July 2028)	-	-	25.000	51.000	52.020
Other costs (legal, accounting, website...)	40.000	40.800	41.616	42.448	43.297
R&D	10.000	20.000	20.400	20.808	21.224
Total fixed costs	125.000	177.300	205.846	235.463	240.172
<b>EBITDA (Profit before taxes and depreciation)</b>	<b>111.500</b>	<b>94.590</b>	<b>13.246</b>	<b>120.037</b>	<b>371.828</b>

In Table 10 below, it is possible to see the impact of Oppla's initial “sponsorship”.

Oppla’s initial support demonstrates that the project does not require external equity or debt financing. It is financially sustainable. The principal incentive for Oppla to maintain the project is the significant upside available upon successful execution, with profitable returns expected to begin in 2028.

The MERLIN Marketplace is not dependent on grants from EU projects; however, if it were to receive such funding, it would accelerate its trajectory towards sustainability.

*Table 10 - Profit and loss for the MERLIN Marketplace, considering the initial Oppla sponsoring*

EBITDA (Profit before taxes and depreciation)	111.500	94.590	13.246	120.037	371.828
	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
% of staff and other costs sponsored by Oppla	100%	65%	20%	0%	0%
Total costs sponsored by Oppla	150.000	102.245	37.089	-	-
<b>Adjusted EBITDA after deducting costs sponsored by Oppla</b>	<b>3.500</b>	<b>7.655</b>	<b>23.843</b>	<b>120.037</b>	<b>371.828</b>
Total Revenues	15.00	91.900	214.000	395.000	680.000
Total Costs (already deducted the costs sponsored by Oppla)	11.500	84.245	190.157	274.963	308.172
<b>EBITDA</b>	<b>3.500</b>	<b>7.655</b>	<b>23.843</b>	<b>120.037</b>	<b>371.828</b>

## 4.6 Marketing Plan

This section outlines the strategic components that will ensure the success and long-term sustainability of the MERLIN Marketplace: a robust marketing strategy, a comprehensive communication plan, and a clear understanding of stakeholder needs.

Delivery of the Marketing Plan will be dependent on funding, and this is explored in section 4.5 above.

- **Marketing Strategy**

The MERLIN Marketplace aims to become the leading European hub for nature restoration products and services. Its strategy should focus on three pillars: building awareness, driving engagement, and increasing transactions.

- **Businesses and solution providers** will be encouraged to join by highlighting the benefits of visibility in a Europe-wide community. The MERLIN Marketplace will showcase how participation generates new opportunities, strengthens credibility, and supports integration into large-scale restoration projects. Quality assurance will be emphasized through peer-reviewed case studies and verified listings. Access to a targeted decision-maker network is a priority for virtually all suppliers.
- **Public authorities and municipalities** will be encouraged to share their procurement opportunities in the MERLIN Marketplace. Successful examples will also show how the platform reduces search costs, helps authorities access trusted providers and helps authorities to save costs considering the total lifecycle costs of any solution.
- **NGOs and civil society actors** will be shown how the Marketplace amplifies impact by connecting them with funders, partners, and technical service providers, strengthening their ability to deliver meaningful restoration outcomes.
- **Academia and research institutions** will be positioned as innovation drivers. The MERLIN Marketplace will offer a channel for their solutions to be adopted in practice, while knowledge outputs (e.g., methods, tools) can be made accessible to a wider audience.

- **Investors and funders** will be targeted through the MERLIN Marketplace's role as a pipeline for credible restoration projects and services. By presenting high-quality, transparent listings, the MERLIN Marketplace can strengthen investor confidence in ecosystem restoration as a viable field for sustainable finance.
- **Nature restoration EU-funded projects** are potentially interested in adding MERLIN Marketplace to their project in order to increase the impact.

Promotion of the Marketplace at events, webinars, and industry conferences will reinforce this engagement, helping to overcome reliance on personal networks by showcasing the MERLIN Marketplace as a trusted meeting point. Digital marketing, including targeted social media campaigns, newsletters, and partnerships with EU networks, will broaden outreach and drive traffic.

- **Communication Plan**

Communication will focus on clarity, credibility, and visibility:

- **The MERLIN Marketplace website** will serve as the central hub, with user-friendly navigation, detailed provider profiles, and curated case studies.
- **Content marketing** through articles, blogs, and case studies will highlight successful restoration outcomes, demonstrating real-world impact.
- **Email newsletters** will deliver targeted updates, highlighting new listings, projects, and funding opportunities, while reducing the need for stakeholders to search externally. *Emailing business opportunities* to suppliers of services or products will naturally generate their interest in being part of MERLIN Marketplace. Example: A supplier of sensors may receive from MERLIN Marketplace an email mentioning that there is a request for proposals inside MERLIN Marketplace for sensor supply in a natural park in Europe. This will entice the supplier to join the platform.
- **Social media campaigns** will share success stories, raise awareness of MERLIN Marketplace milestones, and encourage interaction.
- **MERLIN Marketplace Announcements** will announce achievements, partnerships, and new features, raising visibility among policymakers and institutional stakeholders.
- **Feedback loops (such as surveys and analytics)** will ensure continuous improvement of both functionality and content.
- **Maintaining the MERLIN Innovation Awards initiative** will keep attracting new entrants in the market and spread the word, as MERLIN Marketplace is the "player" in this market.

The MERLIN Academy will complement these efforts by offering training and capacity-building that reinforce MERLIN Marketplace adoption, but it will be positioned as an add-on.

#### 4.7 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

To monitor the progress and sustainability of the MERLIN Marketplace, a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) is proposed. These cover user engagement, stakeholder satisfaction, institutional participation, and financial sustainability. The indicators are phased across short-term (by 2025), medium-term (by 2027), and long-term (by 2030), reflecting the MERLIN Marketplace's expected growth trajectory after the end of the MERLIN project.

Table 11 - KPIs for long-term implementation

Sector	Measurement	Objective and Deadline
Users' Engagement	Number of registered users	250 users by September 2025
Users' Engagement	Activity rate (monthly active users / total users)	50% active monthly users by 2027
Stakeholders' Satisfaction	Ratings from surveys and feedback mechanisms	Average of 70% positive ratings by 2027 (2 years after MERLIN ends)
Platform Growth	Number of registered users	3.000+ users by 2030
Public Institutions' Engagement	Number of municipalities and public authorities using the platform (case studies, pilots, adopters)	10+ by 2030
Businesses' Engagement	Number of registered suppliers	100+ by 2027
Research Institutions' Engagement	Number of academic/research institutions integrated into the platform (cutting-edge science and technology)	10+ by 2027
Financial Sustainability	Break even	To be achieved by the end of 2028

## 4.8 Conclusion

The MERLIN Marketplace has demonstrated its potential to become a reference in the ecosystem restoration sector by providing a specialized platform that connects businesses, public authorities, researchers, NGOs, and investors. While the near future will rely on Oppla's support and leadership, the analyses in this report show a credible pathway toward financial sustainability and broader impact.

By 2030, the MERLIN Marketplace is expected to have evolved into a well-established reference point with a steadily growing community of active users, suppliers, and engaged public institutions.

Looking beyond 2030, the MERLIN Marketplace should be viewed not only as a byproduct of the MERLIN project but also as a lasting European digital infrastructure for restoration. With continued investment in community building, technical robustness, and policy alignment, it has the potential to expand its role as a channel for the exploitation of EU-funded projects and as a reference point for ecosystem restoration across sectors. Its long-term success will depend on maintaining its niche focus, building trust among diverse stakeholders, and demonstrating measurable ecological and social value.

Naturally, as with any new project, success depends less on the idea than on execution. To deliver this ambitious initiative and avoid dependence on EU funds, it's important that whoever Oppla appoints to lead it has an entrepreneurial mindset rather than a sole focus on grant funding. Oppla has done excellent work building the MERLIN Marketplace to date; however, the next phase requires a shift in capabilities, from primarily technical and marketing expertise to business development, partnerships, and commercial execution.

In this way, the MERLIN Marketplace can move beyond the lifetime of a single project to become a sustainable, self-reinforcing platform that supports Europe's restoration agenda well into the future.

## 5 Lessons Learnt

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Over the course of developing the MERLIN Marketplace, a number of adjustments were introduced to the initial design to ensure the platform aligned with the expectations and needs of both end users and partners. This iterative approach generated valuable lessons that shaped the final version and will also support the platform's sustainable development beyond the planned conclusion of the MERLIN project.

### 1. Involvement of solution providers at different maturity levels of readiness

During implementation, it became clear that solution providers at different maturity levels had varying expectations of the MERLIN Marketplace. Newly developed solutions primarily sought greater visibility, whereas more established providers were interested in broader investment opportunities and stronger networking with governmental institutions.

### 2. The role of platform design in user engagement

In the initial development stages, the MERLIN Marketplace team tested different design options - from a relatively static layout that provided users with a complete set of information at once, to a more dynamic, interactive model, where information was accessed through user-driven navigation. While the static version ensured full information access, it limited long-term engagement as users absorbed everything in a single visit. By contrast, the dynamic approach encouraged ongoing interaction but risked omitting certain details. The final platform design combines the strengths of both approaches, offering comprehensive information in some areas alongside dynamic engagement in others.

### 3. MERLIN Innovation Awards (MIA) - a significant success

The MERLIN Innovation Awards (MIA) were established to connect innovative solution providers with potential customers. As the Marketplace developed and matured, the methodology was diversified to better integrate the competition with the platform's broader ecosystem. Each edition of MIA attracted strong interest from both innovation-driven companies in the freshwater restoration sector and potential customers such as nature area managers. The outcome was clear - MIA proved to be a useful tool contributing to a significant increase in Marketplace users.

### 4. Social media promotion as a driver of growth

To attract potential users to the Marketplace, the development team deployed a wide range of communication tools - from targeted emails and LinkedIn messages to Mailchimp campaigns and the MERLIN Freshwater Blog. The evidence suggests that only a combined approach across these channels has the capacity to deliver significant increases in user numbers.

### 5. Challenges in promoting limited functionality

It was observed that promoting a demo version of the platform was not sufficient to attract companies. Solution providers expected a fully operational tool with all core functionalities in place before engaging. This slowed down initial efforts to populate the platform and limited opportunities for collecting comprehensive feedback at earlier stages.

### 6. Market size may be a limiting factor

Focusing on freshwater ecosystems restoration provides the Marketplace with a clear and defensible niche, but at the expense of targeting a larger audience. The decision to broaden the scope of the Marketplace from freshwaters to 'nature restoration' more generally was taken late in the project, and proved useful in enabling the marketing effort to engage wider audiences. Had this decision been taken sooner, the Marketplace may have gained more traction earlier in the project, resulting in a further increase in users and content. This lesson will be applied in broadening the scope of the Marketplace beyond freshwaters going forward.

### 7. Low uptake among MERLIN partners as an indicator of market preferences

Despite repeated efforts to encourage project partners to join the Marketplace and onboard their products and services, overall uptake within the consortium remained low. This may reflect perceptions of the Marketplace as being primarily business-oriented, with insufficient emphasis on its potential value for showcasing the commercial services of research institutes and similar organizations. The limited engagement from MERLIN partners may also point to broader market realities: most restoration products and services are procured by public sector bodies through conventional tendering processes, which often exclude digital platforms.

#### 8. Branding and marketing must reach buyers as well as suppliers

The Marketplace was widely promoted and successfully engaged suppliers of restoration products and services, as well as the broader EU Horizon community, including public bodies, municipalities and other stakeholders. However, the effectiveness of MERLIN communications in reaching potential buyers, particularly in the private sector, has been harder to assess, and these audiences have proven more difficult to reach through the project's existing channels. Moving forward, partnering with intermediary organizations and networks that maintain strong connections to potential buyers will be essential to driving Marketplace activity and ensuring its long-term success.

#### 9. Partnership with the SUPERB project highlights new opportunities

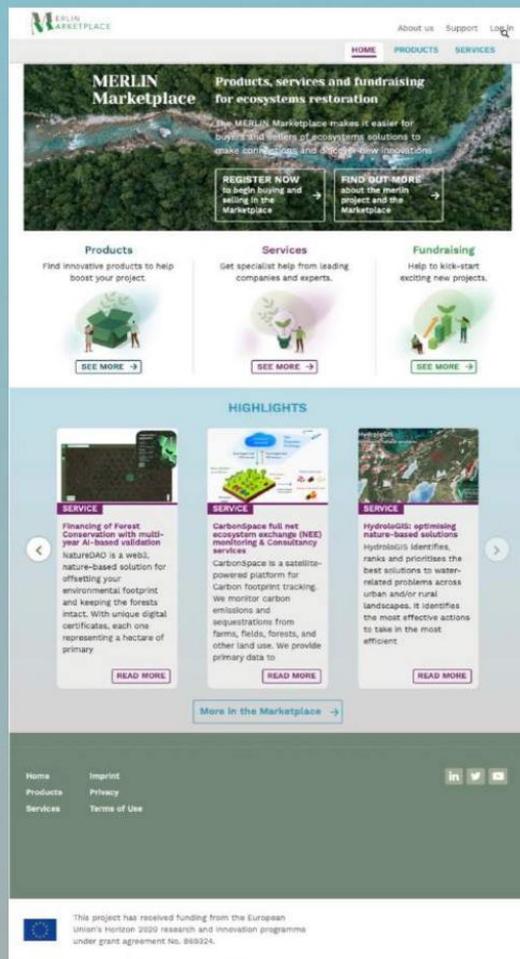
Towards the end of the project, MERLIN and SUPERB collaborated to develop a spin-off platform - the Restoration Marketplace - designed to connect new project proposals with potential funders. A key feature of the platform is a self-assessment tool, created by the SUPERB team, which enables projects to present their restoration potential in a simple and standardized format. This allows funders to more easily compare and evaluate proposals for investment. Both the MERLIN Marketplace and the SUPERB Restoration Marketplace are hosted by Oppla, creating strong potential for future synergies between the two platforms. If this opportunity had been identified earlier in both projects, there would have been greater scope to build a unified platform from the outset and maximize overall impact. At the time of writing, the Restoration Marketplace is scheduled to launch in October 2025 at [www.restoration-market.com](http://www.restoration-market.com).

#### 10. Key Performance Indicators must be carefully considered if they are to be useful

The KPI of reaching 500 registered users by the end of the project was set during the proposal stage, before the full scope and purpose of the Marketplace had been established. In hindsight, this target may have been overly ambitious. Nevertheless, achieving 251 registered users - 50% of the original goal - represents a meaningful milestone and provides a solid foundation for further developing the Marketplace or supporting other restoration projects in engaging innovative businesses.

## ANNEX 1 – MERLIN Marketplace (Demo Version)

# MERLIN Marketplace (demo version)



[www.merlin.market/marketplace](http://www.merlin.market/marketplace)

Deliverable D5.4.1

[www.project-merlin.eu](http://www.project-merlin.eu)



## Imprint

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The MERLIN project (<https://project-merlin.eu>) has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101036337.

Lead contractors: Oppla (OPPLA) & Connectology (CONN)

Contributors: University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna (BOKU)

University of Duisburg-Essen (UDE)

Schnee auf Moss (SAM)

Due date of deliverable: 31 March 2023

Actual submission date: 30 March 2023

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## 1 Overview of Task 5.3: MERLIN Marketplace

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- This report summarises work-to-date in Work Package 5 / Task 5.3: MERLIN Marketplace, undertaken during months 1-18 of the project.
- The report and current version of the Marketplace website constitute Deliverable 5.4.1: MERLIN Marketplace (demo version). The demo website is available at [www.merlin.market/marketplace](http://www.merlin.market/marketplace)
- The finished version of the MERLIN Marketplace is due for completion by month 48 of the project (September 2025) in accordance with Deliverable 5.4.2: MERLIN Marketplace (final version).



## 1.1 Task description

Task number:	5.3 MERLIN Marketplace
Work Package:	WP5 – Networking and Training
Work Package lead:	University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna (BOKU)
Coordinating partners:	Connectology (CONN) & Oppla (OPPLA)
Contributing partners:	University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna (BOKU) University of Duisburg-Essen (UDE) Work Package leaders Case study convenors
Task timeframe:	Months 1-48   October 2021 – September 2025

Task 5.3 is summarised in the Grant Agreement as follows:

### Task 5.3 MERLIN Marketplace

(OPPLA, CONN; BOKU, UDE, WP leaders, case study convenors) (month 1-48)

- **Directory of Marketplace users:** the marketplace user community will be established as an online database, initially through invitation of members belonging to existing relevant communities and proactively expanded through promotional activities following the initial launch. MERLIN partners will suggest companies, which have reliable and innovative approaches in terms of restoration/NbS. Communities that will be engaged in the initial development include: (1) natural reserves/Natura2000 managers, (2) restoration project managers and consultancies, (3) innovative and sustainable companies involved in restoration/NbS, (4) potential investors and potential donors and (5) Oppla's own community of 3000+ individuals with an interest in NbS. This activity will be closely aligned with Task 4.1.
- **Marketplace functionalities:** the specifications for the Marketplace – i.e. the requirements of the tools and services it will provide to users – will be co-developed with stakeholders to ensure the end product is fit for purpose. The service providers will be divided in product and services suppliers. Each restoration/NbS project presented on the Marketplace will be “tagged” (categorised) with a variety of metadata, including possible constraints of the ecosystem or possible uses/activities in the ecosystem that will be the base for analysing the economic value of activities uses. Knowing the economic benefit will allow the interconnection with investors. The linking will be semi-automatically with final matching through experienced project partners. Case studies will be highlighted, providing opportunity to advertise specific projects, products and services that exemplify good practice. The core functionalities of the marketplace will be based on the tried-and-tested services provided by Oppla (notably Oppla's own marketplace of NbS products and services and its community match-making service).
- **Developing the Marketplace:** the development of the MERLIN Marketplace will be guided by the specifications created with stakeholders under the previous task. The Marketplace will be built using open-source software and made available through an API, enabling its functionality to be embedded within other platforms. Integration within the Freshwater Information Platform will be completed, providing an example to incentivise further dissemination and exploitation. A first version of the MERLIN Marketplace will be available in Month 18.
- **Testing the Marketplace:** The Marketplace will be extensively tested by the user communities identified in the first subtask using data submitted by the project case studies. All data will be subject to quality control to ensure for harmonised appearance and to maximise analyses regarding activities, their economic values and the interest of investors. An upscaling process will be used to generalise the results for broader regions. A second phase of testing will be conducted with the projects with which the MERLIN case studies are twinned (WP1).

- **Business Plan:** a business plan will be developed for the purpose of (1) promoting the MERLIN Marketplace and ensuring continued interest, engagement and expansion of the user communities and (2) generating sufficient revenue and/or in-kind contributions to maintain the Marketplace as a full service. Use of the Marketplace will be monitored and analysed through the project period to inform development of the business plan and identify opportunities for commercial exploitation – e.g. added-value services made available to users through subscription or via micro-payments (“pay per use”). As a minimum, the technical infrastructure of the Marketplace will be integrated within Oppla and maintained as part of Oppla’s portfolio of NbS community platforms. Access to the Marketplace’s core functionalities will remain free at point of use and similarly shared freely with other projects and platforms through the Marketplace API – further contributing to its ongoing exploitation and legacy.

## 1.2 Task outputs

#Number	Title	Lead beneficiary	Type	Dissemination level	Due date
MS13	MERLIN Marketplace functional design draft	CONN	Other	Confidential	M12 (Sept. 2022)
D5.4.1	MERLIN Marketplace (demo version)	CONN	Other	Public	M18 (March 2023)
D5.4.2	MERLIN Marketplace (final version)	CONN	Other	Public	M48 (Sept. 2025)

## 1.3 Task timeline



## 1.4 Critical risks and mitigation actions

Risk number	Description	Proposed mitigation measures
14	Low interest of specific user communities (in particular investors) in the MERLIN marketplace (medium risk, medium impact).	Increased involvement of the partners' networks.

*From Grant Agreement Annex 1 - Description of the action (Part B)*

### 1.5 Key performance indicators (KPIs)

KPI	Due date	GA Reference
Marketplace to feature 60 service/product providers and 20 investors/funders.	Month 24, September 2023	Annex 1 (Part B) page 30
500 registered users.	Month 48, September 2025	Annex 1 (Part B) pages 3 & 36
MERLIN Marketplace is a self-sustaining platform with more than 3000 registered users..	5-10 years after project end (2028 – 2033)	Annex 1 (Part B) page 31

### 1.6 Links with other Tasks

Development of the MERLIN Marketplace is linked to the following complementary Tasks within the overall project structure:

- **Task 4.1 EU communities of practice for transformation** (led by WWF HU). T4.1 focuses on co-design of deliverables with sectors including policy and commercial actors. The T5.3 team will draw upon the communities of practice engaged in T4.1 for the purpose of testing and contributing content (products/services) to the MERLIN Marketplace during the next phase of development, now that the demo version is available.
- **Task 5.2 MERLIN Academy** (led by BOKU). It is envisaged that the commercial products/services of the MERLIN Marketplace will complement the academic resources of the Academy in providing a holistic content offer to project stakeholders and end-users. The WP5 team will therefore ensure relevant links between the Marketplace and Academy for this purpose.

### 1.7 Notes from the Grant Agreement

In addition to the main task description (Annex 1 Part A – see 1.1 above), the potential scope and functionality of the Marketplace is further described at numerous points throughout Annex 1 Part B of the MERLIN Grant Agreement. These additional notes are summarised below and have informed development of the Marketplace demo version (D5.4.1):

*“The collective knowledge and experience will feed into NbS networks operationalised by MERLIN’s virtual marketplace. The innovations will be substantially multiplied by the MERLIN Academy addressing the community of practice, restoration project convenors, communities, investors and policy makers. MERLIN results will be translated to non-scientific language, as public acceptance is a key limiting factor for restoration.”*

**Excellence**, page 8

*“The Marketplace will connect communities, stakeholders and investors, enabling interaction and the identification of partners for a range of purposes, including collaboration, funding and investment as well as knowledge sharing and co-production of new products and services.”*

**Excellence**, page 15

*“Generating the MERLIN Marketplace to connect restoration projects with possible investors.”*

**Impact** (financing strategies), page 28

*“Connecting various groups contributing to restoration. The MERLIN Marketplace will connect the community of practice with investors and policy makers to enhance collaboration and to form coalitions.”*

**Impact**, page 29

*“MERLIN Marketplace: A peer and consultancy marketplace for restoration projects and related products and services will be established, to enable an effective and interactive communication and match-making between restoration professionals. It is based on the consideration that effective upscaling of restoration is driven by communication and networking: knowledge on good practices inspires replication, the financing community seeks for investment opportunities and various actors in the area of restoration need to be connected. Communities that will be engaged in the initial development include: (1) natural re-serves/Natura2000 managers, (2) restoration project managers and consultancies, (3) innovative and sustainable companies involved in restoration/NbS, (4) potential investors and potential donors as well as (5) the established community of 3000+ individuals with an interest in NbS that already exists within Oppla, the EU repository of Nature-based Solutions.”*

**Impact**, page 33

*“MERLIN Marketplace: One principal mean of the marketplace is to connect sectorial stakeholders among each other and with other restoration professionals.”*

**Impact**, page 35

*“MERLIN Marketplace: The MERLIN marketplace will connect investors with appropriate ongoing and future projects. This will be done by tagging (categorising) each restoration/NbS project presented on the Marketplace with a variety of metadata, which will allow the estimation of the economic benefits and initialise the interconnection with investors.”*

**Impact**, page 35

*“The MERLIN Marketplace is based on the consideration that effective upscaling of restoration is driven by communication and networking: knowledge on good practices inspires replication, the financing community seeks for investment opportunities and various actors in the area of restoration need to be connected. The Marketplace will be an open space made available online, through which stakeholders can interact and find partners for collaboration, funding and investment as well as knowledge sharing and co-production of new products and services. The Marketplace’s “unique selling proposition” will be in providing an accessible, convenient and easy-to-use platform for connecting restoration projects with interested parties from the business, scientific and investment/funding communities, based on restoration aims and user-groups’ interests. The MERLIN Marketplace – accessible through the MERLIN website – will be developed based on the technology of the Oppla platform (the EU Repository of Nature-based Solutions). It will be integrated with and benefit from Oppla’s core services – notably Oppla’s own knowledge marketplace and community match-making service – with new functionalities meeting the specific needs of the fresh-water restoration community. The functionality of the Marketplace will be made freely available to other platforms, including integration with the Freshwater Information Platform.”*

**Implementation**,  
page 47

*“The MERLIN Academy and Marketplace will in particular be instrumental for capacity building and inter-national cooperation, by training and connecting the community of practice from countries outside Europe. For both, the Academy and the Marketplace, we will monitor and evaluate the use through the MERLIN community and stakeholders and set up a development plan for future maintenance, which may include an advertising or fee-system. The Marketplace will be maintained in perpetuity as part of Oppla’s portfolio of NbS community platforms – providing an ongoing resource for use by other future projects. The Academy will be integrated with the Freshwater Information Platform, and we strive for the integration of its contents into the curricula of various institutes of higher education that offer training on the job.”*

**Implementation**,  
page 47

## 1.8 Summary of key points

- **The expectations of the Marketplace are to:**
  - ❑ Establish and grow a community of interest; and enable members of the community to interact/network for the purpose of seeking potential suppliers, clients, funders and collaborators, as well as for sharing knowledge and good practice.
  - ❑ Enable users to offer and procure products/services relating to freshwater ecosystems restoration.
  - ❑ Initiate interactions between projects potential investors. The Grant Agreement includes an aspiration for the Marketplace to summarise the economic and ecological value of projects for this purpose.
  - ❑ Be developed using open-source software and made freely available for use by other platforms through an API<sup>1</sup>. As part of this requirement, the Grant Agreement states that the Marketplace should be compatible with Oppla (where it will be hosted beyond the project funding period).
  - ❑ Be co-developed with stakeholders. It should be noted that co-development implies a deeper level of involvement in the process than more conventional consultation.
  - ❑ Integrate with and support the MERLIN Academy.
  
- **There is aspiration for the Marketplace to become self-sustaining** beyond the project funding period. This will require capacity for revenue-generation (the Grant Agreement mentions freemium services but does not preclude other models).
  
- **There is strong emphasis on the Marketplace being about "connections" and "match-making"** - between communities of interest; between projects and investors; and between suppliers of products/services and potential users.
  
- **There is no requirement in the Grant Agreement for the Marketplace to facilitate financial transactions** (although this is not excluded from development of the Marketplace per se; and will be explored during development of the accompanying Business Plan). The GA does however envisage that the Marketplace will be capable of initiating and helping to broker interactions between investors and projects seeking funding, as mentioned above.
  
- **The term 'marketplace' as used in the Grant Agreement implies 'a place where things are exchanged'**, rather than the more common understanding of a marketplace being a place where goods and services are bought and sold. This definition has been clarified by focusing initial development of the Marketplace on products and services, with the MERLIN Academy expected to host other non-commercial and research-based content.

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<sup>1</sup> *Application Programming Interface*: software that enables two or more websites to communicate with each other and share, for example, content and functionality.

## 2 Development process

The demo version of the MERLIN Marketplace has been developed during months 1-18 of the project. The development process has involved the follow key stages:



### 2.1 Initial scoping and specification

A range of draft ‘use cases’ of the Marketplace were proposed by Connectology (CONN) as a starting point for development – these are included in Appendix 5.1.

The use cases describe different applications of the Marketplace with potential for development – i.e. demand and supply-side opportunities with relevance to ecosystems restoration.

Meetings were held between CONN, OPPLA, BOKU and UDE to review the use cases and develop an initial shortlist for consultation with project partners and stakeholders. These discussions also explored ideas for the Marketplace business plan, potential revenue streams and other legacy issues.

The outcome of the initial scoping exercise comprised a specification document setting out the shortlisted use cases. These are summarised below.

### 2.2 Prioritising the use cases



**Note on terminology:** The term ‘use case’ is commonly used in software development, but may not be so familiar to all MERLIN partners and stakeholders. For the purpose of communicating with others it can be considered synonymous with ‘applications’, ‘functions’ or more simply ‘uses’ of the Marketplace.

A range of different use cases<sup>2</sup> were proposed for the MERLIN Marketplace. These use cases have been prioritised based on:

- The extent to which they satisfy the expectations described in the Grant Agreement (see 1.7).
- Initial selection and shortlisting of the use cases by a sample of stakeholders (see 2.3).
- The Task team’s own combined expertise in marketplace development, knowledge exchange and freshwater ecosystems restoration.

<sup>2</sup> Connectology (2021), MERLIN Marketplace Use Cases

**Primary uses cases:** these cases match the requirements expressed in the Grant Agreement and by stakeholders. The Marketplace will seek to satisfy these use cases first and foremost.

Functionality	Demand	Supply
<b>1.0 - Exchanging products and services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Company/project looking for innovative product/services and suppliers related to nature restoration*.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Innovative product/services suppliers related to nature restoration looking for potential clients.</li> </ul>
<b>2.0 - Matching projects with potential funders</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Restoration project looking for donor entities (foundations).</li> <li>Restoration project looking for grant programs.</li> <li>Companies or researchers looking to fundraise (equity, debt or another similar instrument).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Donor entities (e.g. foundations) looking for interesting nature restoration projects.</li> <li>Grant programmes seeking to advertise their programmes.</li> <li>Equity or debt providers willing to invest/lend in nature related projects/companies.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0 - Networking and knowledge sharing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Companies/organisations offering themselves to consortia applying for nature restoration projects.</li> <li>Stakeholders wishing to publish research/ IP related to nature restoration.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Companies/organisations looking to form consortia to apply for nature restoration projects.</li> <li>Stakeholders wishing to access to access relevant research/ IP related to nature restoration.</li> </ul>

\*The following use cases are considered sub-sets or examples of this main use case relating to demand/supply of innovative products and services (see Appendix 5.1):

- Companies willing to buy used machinery/equipment related to nature restoration.
- Researchers and companies seeking testing facilities to test a product or to find a certification company to measure an ecosystem component (e.g. carbon sequestration).
- Researchers/companies looking for data access.

**Secondary use cases:** these cases are dependent on the primary use cases proving successful. They will be reviewed and considered for implementation once the primary use cases have been verified.

Functionality	Demand	Supply
<b>2.1 - Additional services for start-up projects and entrepreneurs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Entrepreneurs related to nature restoration looking for co-founders in different domains including business development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Entrepreneurs looking for other co-founders.</li> <li>Manufacturing company/service provider (e.g. software development) willing to partner (or sell their services) with nature related entrepreneurs to manufacture/develop products/ services.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Entrepreneurs related to nature restoration looking for a licensee company which can produce and sell products based on entrepreneur/ researcher's IP.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Company looking to buy/lease/license IP from companies/universities/researchers.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entrepreneurs looking for a TTO, an incubation place or acceleration program.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incubators/accelerators/TTO or similar entities/persons willing to sell their services.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entrepreneurs looking for training or specialized service providers in investment readiness programs/ assessments.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investment readiness specialists willing to sell their services (e.g., business planning).</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Company/project looking for accredited entities (e.g. labs) to validate/ certify the performance/ features of a product (or future product).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Labs, universities or other entities with testing/prototyping facilities offering their services.</li> </ul>
<b>3.1 – Additional services for networking and knowledge sharing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researchers looking for nature restoration related companies to work.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nature related companies looking for researchers to hire (incl. high technical skilled staff).</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Projects/companies looking grant proposal writers/ managers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grant proposal consultancy companies willing to sell their services.</li> </ul>

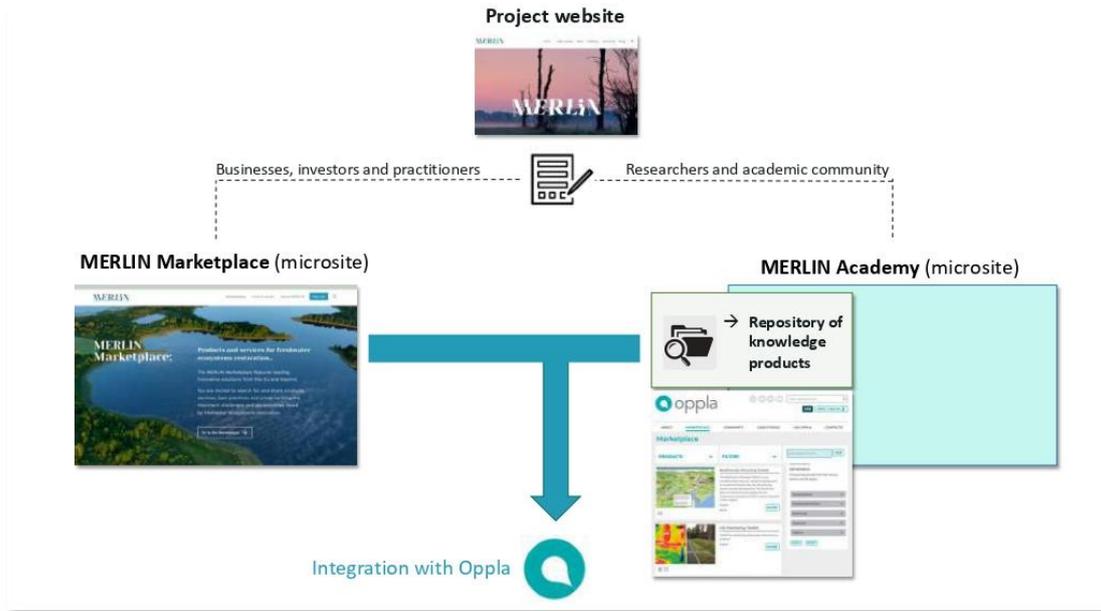
**The initial shortlisting of use cases resulted in the following key functionalities to be taken forward for development:**

1. Enabling the exchange of products and services for ecosystems restoration.
2. Brokering interactions between projects and potential funders.
3. Networking for the purpose of forming project consortia and sharing knowledge.

It was decided that the third function – *Networking for the purpose of forming project consortia and sharing knowledge* – be delivered as part of the MERLIN Academy under Task 5.2. This third function can potentially satisfy the Academy’s requirement to “provide online material”, such as manuals and guidance documents. There is also potential to expand the networking component to include mentoring and support for early career researchers (ECRs). This will be explored separately under T5.2.

This prioritisation of key functionalities allows the Marketplace to focus on serving commercial products/services and projects/funders, with research and learning-focused use cases handled via the Academy – resulting in a clear distinction between these two related outputs of MERLIN.

The proposed relationship between the MERLIN Marketplace, Academy and project website is illustrated on the following page:



Relationship between the MERLIN Marketplace, Academy and project website

### 2.3 Consultation with stakeholders

The demo version of the Marketplace has been developed with the involvement of project partners and stakeholders through the following methods.

It is envisaged that the next phase of development, towards the final version, will involve closer co-production with end users to ensure the Marketplace’s functionality and usability are fit for purpose upon full launch at project end.

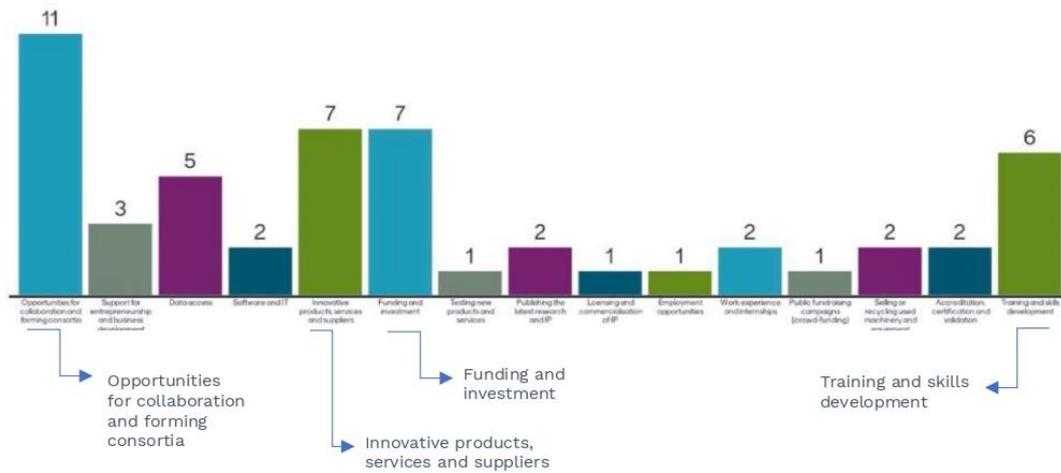
#### 2.3.1 Workshop May 2022

A workshop was held in May 2022 for the purpose of reviewing and shortlisting potential ‘uses cases’ (applications) of the Marketplace, based on the initial set of uses proposed by Connectology.

Date of workshop:	23.05.22
Location/venue:	Online
Facilitated by:	Oppla
Attendees:	22 representatives of MERLIN partner organisations



Workshop invitation



Stakeholders' prioritisation of potential Marketplace use cases

### 2.3.2 Workshops September 2022

Two workshops on the Marketplace were held during the MERLIN all-partner meeting in September 2022.

Dates of workshops:	13.09.22 and 15.09.22
Location/venue:	In-person at Hotel Rhön Residence, Germany
Facilitated by:	Oppla
Attendees:	100+ representatives of MERLIN partner organisations

These workshops comprised:

- **A parallel session** (13.09.22, 16:00-17:10) during which the Task 5.3 team met with interested project partners to present current ideas for the Marketplace, including concept designs, and discuss the categories by which products and services would be organised within the Marketplace.
- **A plenary session** (15.09.22, 11:00-11:45) that was used to update all MERLIN partners on progress with the Marketplace and present ideas for its development beyond the initial products/services use case; including the concept of providing a match-making service for investors and projects seeking funding. The plenary session also included opportunity for partners to sign-up for Marketplace updates and share their views on the proposed Marketplace categories via an online questionnaire.

#### Key findings from the workshops:

- **It is difficult to reach consensus on the Marketplace categories**, because different MERLIN partners tend to prioritise categories in different ways. This presents a risk of creating an excessive number of categories to satisfy the many different possibilities, which could impact on the overall usability of the Marketplace. Feedback from the plenary session was used to shortlist and refine the categories to a 'final draft' set for inclusion in the demo version. These categories will be further tested and adjusted based on user feedback going forwards.

- **There is considerable interest in the proposed ‘match-making’ service that is being considered for inclusion in Phase 2 of Marketplace development** (from April 2023 onwards). This is the service by which relationships between investors and projects seeking funding could be initiated and/or brokered. Numerous MERLIN partners expressed an interest in such a service, which is aligned with the project’s overall ethos of helping restoration managers reduce their reliance on grant funding. The Marketplace demo version includes a ‘Fundraising’ section where this service will be prototyped and tested, commencing 2023. The Fundraising section of the website currently invites interested parties to contact the Marketplace team if they would like to be involved in its development.

### 3.2 Marketplace functionality

The demo version of the Marketplace enables users to:

- **Register and manage a user account**, summarising their organisation and contact information.
- **Advertise products and services** (once the user is registered), by creating listings in the Product and/or Service sections of the Marketplace. These listings can be updated at any time via the user account.
- **Browse products and services** with relevance to ecosystems restoration; visit individual product/service pages to find out more and obtain contact details of the organisations responsible.
- **Sort and filter products/services** based on pre-determined categories (developed with input from MERLIN partners); scale of availability (global, EU and/or selected countries); date added to Marketplace; title (alphabetical); and price (lowest or highest first). The categories used by the demo version to organise products and services are as follows:

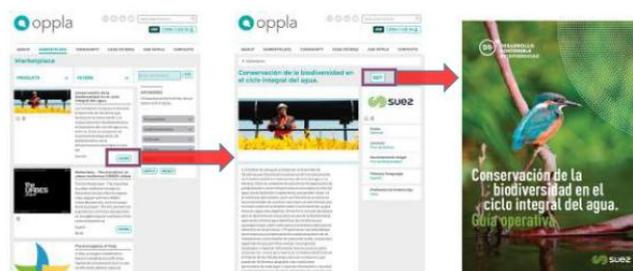
- Construction
- Consultancy
- Data
- Education
- Energy
- Equipment
- Fauna
- Flora
- Forestry
- Machinery
- Materials
- Software/IT
- Stakeholder Engagement
- Tourism



**Copies of the Marketplace templates** (aka 'content types'), which are used to capture and manage information about users and the products/services they contribute to the Marketplace, can be found in Appendix 5.2.

### 3.3 Marketplace design

The starting point for conceptualisation and design of the MERLIN Marketplace is Oppla's own 'marketplace' of resources on natural capital, ecosystem services and nature-based solutions (currently containing 800+ resources); [www.oppla.eu/marketplace](http://www.oppla.eu/marketplace)



Oppla marketplace: [www.oppla.eu/marketplace](http://www.oppla.eu/marketplace)

Oppla is recognised as the EU Repository of Nature-based Solutions and will provide long-term hosting of the MERLIN Marketplace beyond the project funding period (from 2025 onwards).

During early discussions on design and functionality, it was decided that Oppla's own marketplace (a repository of EU-funded project resources) is well-suited for use by the MERLIN Academy; and that the MERLIN Marketplace should be developed as a standalone yet compatible platform, with its own bespoke content templates, design and layout, independent from that of Oppla.

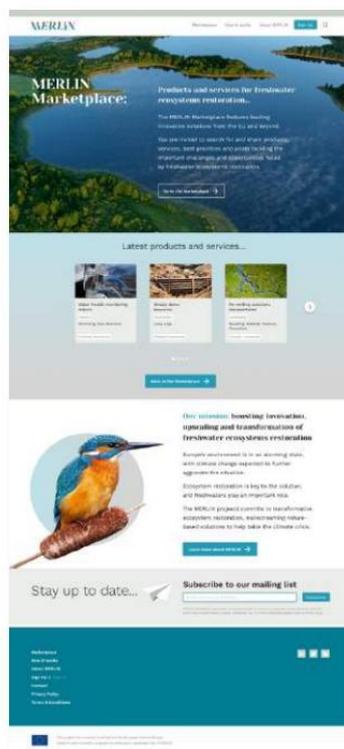
This decision also took account of the new Oppla platform currently in development (due 2023) and that some features of Oppla are in the process of being significantly updated and improved; meaning that development of the MERLIN Marketplace using the current Oppla system would likely result in some functions becoming redundant in the near future.

Hence the demo version has been built as a standalone website, independent of both the MERLIN project website and Oppla, but still fully compatible with Oppla and other Drupal platforms. This gives the Marketplace full flexibility in terms of design and development without compromising its future legacy.

**Design of the demo Marketplace has been an iterative process, the key stages of which are shown below:**



Concept #1: initial design



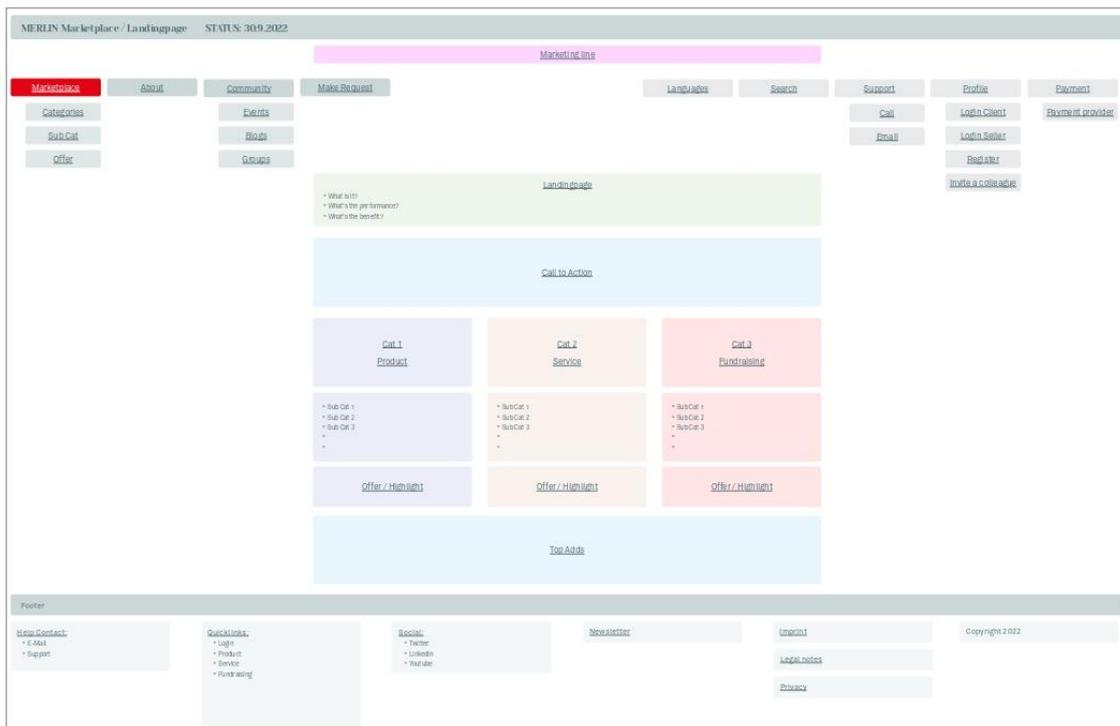
Concept #2: consultation design



Concept #3: demo version design

Refinement of concept #2 towards the current demo version design (concept #3) has been guided by input from the team at **Schnee auf Moss (SAM)**, who although not a designated contributor to Task 5.3 have been proactive in sharing their expertise to inform development of the Marketplace. This has included the supply of MERLIN brand assets for use on the Marketplace (including the Marketplace logo), together with a range of 'wireframe' designs to help guide individual page layouts. These wireframes have been incorporated into the current demo version design, resulting in a number of useful simplifications and improvements to the former concept #2 layout.

An example of the wireframes created by Schnee auf Moss is shown below for reference (depicting the Marketplace homepage). The full set of layouts is included in Appendix 5.3.



Wireframe design by SAM



Marketplace logo by SAM

The Task 5.3 team would like to thank SAM for their valuable input to date and will discuss with the project coordinators at UDE to find a way of resourcing their continued involvement in development of the Marketplace going forwards.

### 3.4 Marketplace content

The demo Marketplace currently contains some example products and services contributed by participants in the **MERLIN Innovation Awards (MIA)**, organised by Connectology.

This example content serves the purpose of testing the onboarding process and demonstrating how products/services are currently displayed on the Marketplace main listing pages, and within individual product/service pages.

28 shortlisted MIA participants have been contacted and invited to become 'early adopters' by registering on the Marketplace and contributing products/services; five organisations have responded to date. We will continue to liaise with the MIA community in encouraging further contribution of products/services to help expand the content of the Marketplace during the next immediate phase of development.



Screenshots of Marketplace demo showing content summaries (above) and an individual listing page (right), giving full details of the organisation and the service being offered – in this instance including a promotional video.

## 4 Next steps towards D5.4.2 (final version)

### 4.1 Testing and improving the demo version

Completion of the Marketplace demo version (D5.4.1) is just the first milestone on the development journey. There is much work to be done in now testing and improving the demo before it is actively promoted to the user community. The immediate actions are to:

- 1 Add additional users and content** to expand the Marketplace and continue testing both the technical robustness and usability/user-friendliness of the platform, ensuring key functions such as account registration and onboarding content (adding products/services) are easy to use and without errors.

We will continue to invite contributions from the MIA community and provide these organisations with early access to the Marketplace (before other stakeholders are invited to register), together with an onboarding service by which the team at Oppla will personally assist in setting up user accounts and uploading content. This service is being offered exclusively to MIA participants as a ‘thank you’ for their support of the project.

We will also invite MERLIN partner organisations to register and begin contributing content, where applicable, to assist with further testing of the platform and also to increase the amount of content hosted by the Marketplace overall.

- 2 Review and improve the design and user experience**, ensuring the Marketplace is attractive to users and both easy and enjoyable to interact with. The current demo design is relatively plain and simple, albeit functional; and we intend to improve this considerably towards the final version. A detailed critique will be undertaken by the T5.3 Team and all MERLIN partners will be invited to put forward comments on the Marketplace’s design and usability. This feedback will be used to draw up a fourth set of layout concepts, which will then be implemented on the website.
- 3 Undertake pre-launch technical testing and bug fixing**, ensuring the Marketplace is error-free and capable of handling the expected level of user traffic in readiness for launch (i.e. stress-tested to ensure no problems occur in the event of many/multiple users accessing the Marketplace simultaneously).
- 4 Prepare the Marketplace for embedding in other EU-funded Horizon project platforms**, including newly-established projects with links to the commercial sector (notably Circhive<sup>5</sup>, focusing on natural capital for businesses; Invest4Nature<sup>6</sup>, exploring business models for nature-based solutions; and NetworkNature<sup>7</sup>, a coordination and support action supporting the NBS community around topics including enterprise). This will involve updating the existing Oppla API to enable two-way sharing of content to/from the Marketplace and other compatible websites. We believe there is significant potential to gain additional users and content by making such links with other projects; and that these links should be established as early as possible to capitalise on momentum whilst projects are active. See Appendix 5.4 for a summary of EU projects in which Oppla has already or is intending to implement its API for this purpose.



**We aim to complete the above actions 1-3 by July 2023**, at which point we will begin actively promoting the Marketplace for use by the wider community of suppliers and stakeholders. Action 4 (development of the API) is expected to be completed by September 2023 to coincide with the development timelines of newly established Horizon Europe projects.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.circhive.eu>

<sup>6</sup> <https://invest4nature.eu>

<sup>7</sup> <https://networknature.eu>

## 4.2 Piloting use case #2: funders–project matching

Once the MERLIN Marketplace has progressed beyond the initial demo and is publicly launched (expected July 2023), the Task 5.3 team will begin developing and piloting the second proposed use case: a service by which projects seeking funding can find potential investors (and vice-versa).

It is envisaged that this service will function in a similar way to the Products/ Services marketplace currently available in the demo version. Organisations will be able to register on the Marketplace; create a listing that describes their project, its value proposition and the level of funding needed; and these listings will be displayed for potential funders to browse, filter and sort depending on their interests and priorities.



We believe this additional service will be relatively straightforward to implement once the core functionality of the Marketplace (use case #1: products and services) is well-established. However, we see potential to go a step further and develop a system by which funders and investors can draw on the knowledge of the research community in **assessing the potential environmental value of projects** to help ensure their investments are supporting good practice and achieving positive impact.

In this way, the Marketplace has potential to make freshwater restoration projects more attractive to investors. And we believe this could be achieved by helping investors more easily identify which projects offer the best sustainable return on investment (S-ROI).

### Sustainable return on investment (S-ROI)

→ S-ROI is about considering the economic, social and **environmental value of projects**

→ It's about reducing risk by providing visibility into intangible costs and benefits that are not typically considered in traditional cash-oriented project planning



The method by which this system could be implemented is not yet developed and requires a considerable level of planning, design and piloting/experimentation by the MERLIN partnership as a whole. This will commence from July 2023 following public launch of the Marketplace's core service. In the meantime, the following concept is proposed as a starting point to help illustrate the idea:

The infographic is divided into four vertical panels. The first panel shows a project listing card for 'Re-wetting solutions' in a 'Saturated Market'. The second panel shows a shopping cart icon next to a checklist, representing a funder's interest. The third panel shows a person at a laptop with a Euro symbol, representing a consultant's payment. The fourth panel shows a person watering plants next to stacks of gold coins, representing an investor's decision-making based on S-ROI.

**Re-wetting solutions**  
**Saturated Market**  
 Consultancy  
 Rewetting, Wetlands, Peatland, Floodplains  
 Finished / Commercial

Projects are summarised in a standardised way that makes them easy to browse and compare.

Similar to how the Marketplace will also display products and services.

If a funder is interested, they can request and purchase a report summarising the environmental value and risks of the project.

Consultant gets paid for producing the report as an independent expert – does the project represent ‘good science’?

Investor gains information that improves decision-making (S-ROI).

**...informing funders about the environmental value of projects**

 **We will commence work on use case #2: funders-projects matchmaking service from July 2023**, following public launch of the Marketplace. The timescale for this second use case is not yet defined, but we envisage it will be ready for piloting during Q1 2024.

## 5 Appendices

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### 5.1 Draft use cases



#### MERLIN MARKETPLACE (MM) – USE CASES DRAFT

*Note: "Entrepreneurs" includes wannabe entrepreneurs and researchers willing to become entrepreneurs*

##### POTENTIAL NEEDS OF MM USERS (demand side)

1. Company/project looking for innovative product/services suppliers related to nature restoration
2. Companies willing to buy used machinery/equipment related to nature restoration
3. MM stakeholder to publish research/IP related to nature restoration
4. Restoration project looking for donors' entities (foundations)
5. Restoration project looking for grant programs
6. Restoration project looking to launch a donation or reward crowdfunding campaign
7. Researchers (includes PhD students) looking for nature restoration related companies to work
8. Researchers looking for other researchers to develop a product or research, including new IP, related to nature restoration
9. Researchers/companies looking for data access (e.g., European rivers levels in real time, European maps of freshwater ecosystems)
10. Researchers/companies looking for EU calls/grant proposal consulting companies to write and manage grant projects related to nature restoration
11. Entrepreneurs related to nature restoration looking for co-founders in different domains including business development
12. Entrepreneurs/companies looking for accredited entities (e.g., labs) to validate/certify the performance/features of a product (or future product) - technology validation
13. Researchers and companies willing to find testing facilities to test a product (e.g., Narec testing renewable energy products) or to find a certification company to measure an ecosystem component (wind potential in a specific site, or carbon sequestration)
14. Entrepreneurs related to nature restoration looking for a licensee company which can produce and sell products based on entrepreneur/researcher's IP
15. Entrepreneurs looking for a TTO, an incubation place or acceleration program [directory]
16. Entrepreneurs looking for training or specialized service providers in investment readiness programs/assessments
17. Companies offering themselves to form a consortium to apply for a nature restoration R&D project, other EU call or big international innovation projects
18. Companies or researchers looking for companies to sell/lease their IP (nature restoration related)

C O N N  
E C T O  
L O G Y

19. Companies or researchers looking to fundraise (equity, debt or another similar instrument)

**POTENTIAL NEEDS OF MM USERS (offer side)**

1. Innovative product/services suppliers related to nature restoration looking for potential clients
2. Companies willing to sell used machinery/equipment related to nature restoration
3. MM stakeholder to access relevant research/IP related to nature restoration
4. Donors' entities (e.g., foundations) looking for interesting nature restoration projects
5. Grant programs to advertise their programs
6. Donation or reward crowdfunding companies willing to sell their services
7. IP attorneys and other innovation ecosystem stakeholders searching for IP and other R&D documents in different databases including MM
8. Nature related companies looking for researchers to hire (incl. high technical skilled staff)
9. Data (relevant for research) companies willing to sell (or revenue share) their services
10. Grant proposal consultancy companies willing to sell their services
11. Entrepreneurs looking for other co-founders
12. Labs, universities or other entities with testing/prototyping facilities offering their services
13. Manufacturing company/service provider (e.g., software development) willing to partner (or sell their services) with nature related entrepreneurs to manufacture/develop products/services
14. Company looking to buy/lease/license IP from companies/universities/researchers
15. Incubators/accelerators/TTO or similar entities/persons willing to sell their services
16. Investment readiness specialists willing to sell their services (e.g., consultancy, business plan)
17. Companies looking to form a consortium to apply for a R&D project, other EU call or big international innovation projections
18. Equity or debt providers willing to invest/lend in nature related projects/companies

## 5.2 Marketplace templates (aka 'content types')

### PART 1. SUPPLIER INFORMATION

#### Organisation name

#### Organisation type [select one]

- Business: large
- Business: SME
- High education
- Research
- Public authority - city
- Public authority - region
- Non-governmental organisation
- Investor
- Other

#### Organisation country [select from list]

#### Organisation address [building number, street name, city, postal code]

#### Year of incorporation

#### Number of employees [select one]

- 1-10
- 11-50
- 51-250
- 251-1000
- 1000+

#### Contact person

First name / surname

Job title

Telephone

Email

#### Organisation website

#### Organisation logo

#### Organisation social media

**PART 2A. PRODUCT INFORMATION**

**Product name** [250 characters]

**Main product image**

**Other images** [upload multiple]

**Keywords** [add up to 5 keywords]

**Categories** [select multiple]

- Construction
- Consultancy
- Data
- Education
- Equipment
- Energy
- Fauna
- Flora
- Forestry
- Machinery
- Mapping
- Materials
- Software/IT
- Stakeholder Engagement
- Tourism

**Summary description** [250 characters]

**Value proposition** (key differentiation features of the solution) [250 characters]

**Full description** [free text]

**Availability**

- Globally
- European Union
- Selected countries [add multiple]

**Pricing**

- [select currency – choose from list]
- [select fixed price or rate: daily/weekly/monthly/yearly]
- [enter numeric amount]

**Payment conditions** [free text]

**Delivery time** [enter number of days]

**Product dimensions**

- [select unit of measurement: cm, metres]
- [enter length/width/height]

**Product weight** [enter numeric amount in kg]

**Product material** [free text]

**Manufacturer part number (MPN)** [free text]

**Video** [YouTube/Vimeo embed URL]

**Brochure or other document** [upload PDF/other common formats]

**Example of solution implementation** [+option to add multiple examples]

- [upload image]
- [free text]
- [web link]

**Web link** [add multiple]

Link name

Link URL

**Other solutions from this organisation** [system will automatically aggregate and display]

**PART 2B. SERVICE INFORMATION**

**Service name** [250 characters]

**Main service image**

**Other images** [upload multiple]

**Keywords** [add up to 5 keywords]

**Categories** [select multiple]

- Construction
- Consultancy
- Data
- Education
- Equipment
- Energy
- Fauna
- Flora
- Forestry
- Machinery
- Mapping
- Materials
- Software/IT
- Stakeholder Engagement
- Tourism

**Summary description** [250 characters]

**Value proposition** (key differentiation features of the solution) [250 characters]

**Full description** [free text]

**Availability**

- Globally
- European Union
- Selected countries [add multiple]

**Pricing**

- [select currency – choose from list]
- [select fixed price or rate: daily/weekly/monthly/yearly]
- [enter numeric amount]

**Payment conditions** [free text]

**Implementation time** [enter number of days]

**Video** [YouTube/Vimeo embed URL]

**Brochure or other document** [upload PDF/other common formats]

**Example of solution implementation** [+option to add multiple examples]

- [upload image]
- [free text]
- [web link]

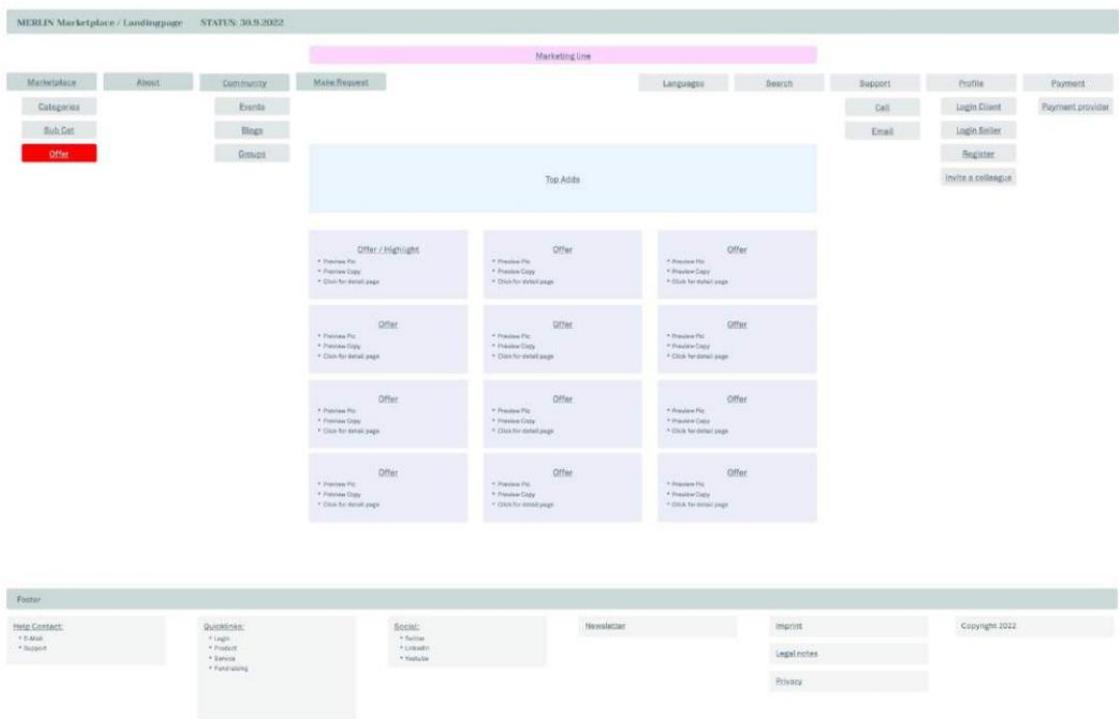
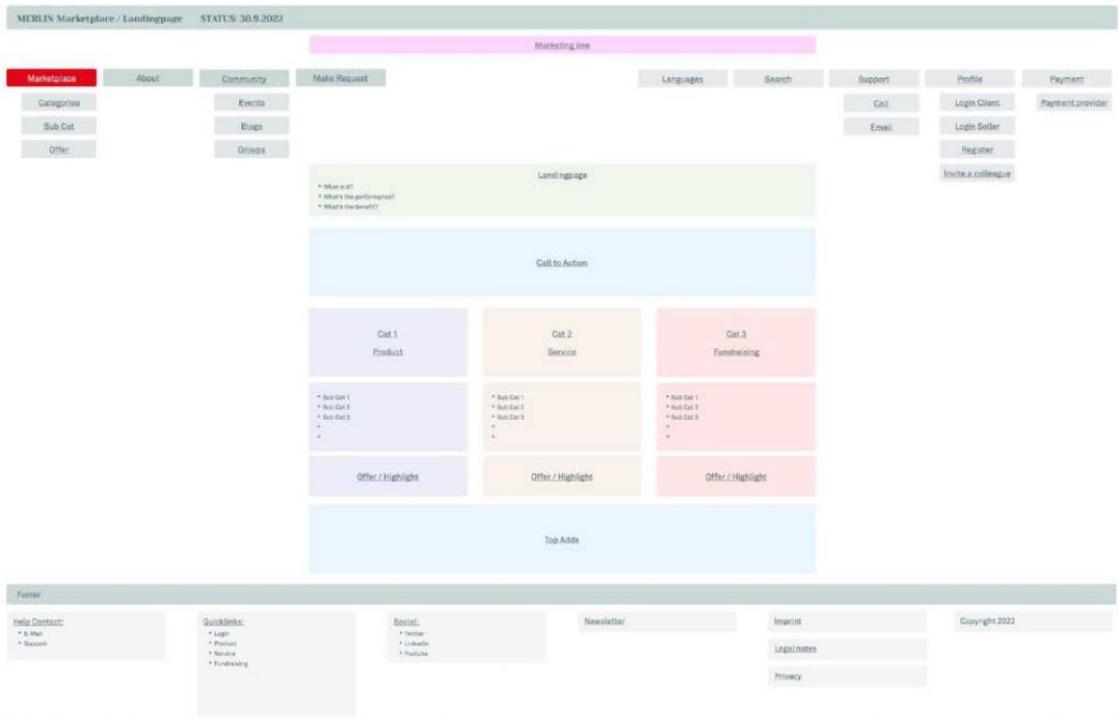
**Web link** [add multiple]

Link name

Link URL

**Other solutions from this organisation** [system will automatically aggregate and display]

### 5.3 Wireframe designs by SAM



MERLIN Marketplace / Landingpage STATUS: 30.9.2022

Marketing Line

Marketplace	About	Community	Make Request	Languages	Search	Support	Profile	Payment
Categories		Events				Call	Login Client	Payment provider
Sub-Cat		Blogs				Email	Login Seller	
Offer		Groups					Register	
							Invite a colleague	

Top Ads

Detail Offer

- Wolke U.S.L.
- Copy
- Video
- Call to Action / Download

Detail Offer

Seller detail page

- Logo
- Company presentation / Logo
- Wolke U.S.L.
- Download material
- View

Offer

Offer

Offer

Footer

<p>Help Contact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Email</li> <li>Support</li> </ul>	<p>Quicklinks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Login</li> <li>Product</li> <li>Service</li> <li>Partnership</li> </ul>	<p>Social:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Twitter</li> <li>LinkedIn</li> <li>Facebook</li> </ul>	<p>Newsletter</p>	<p>Imprint</p> <p>Legal notes</p> <p>Privacy</p>	<p>Copyright 2022</p>
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MERLIN Marketplace / Support STATUS: 30.9.2022

Marketing Line

Marketplace	About	Community	Make Request	Languages	Search	Support	Profile	Payment
Categories		Events				Call	Login Client	Payment provider
Sub-Cat		Blogs				Email	Login Seller	
Offer		Groups					Register	
							Invite a colleague	

Support

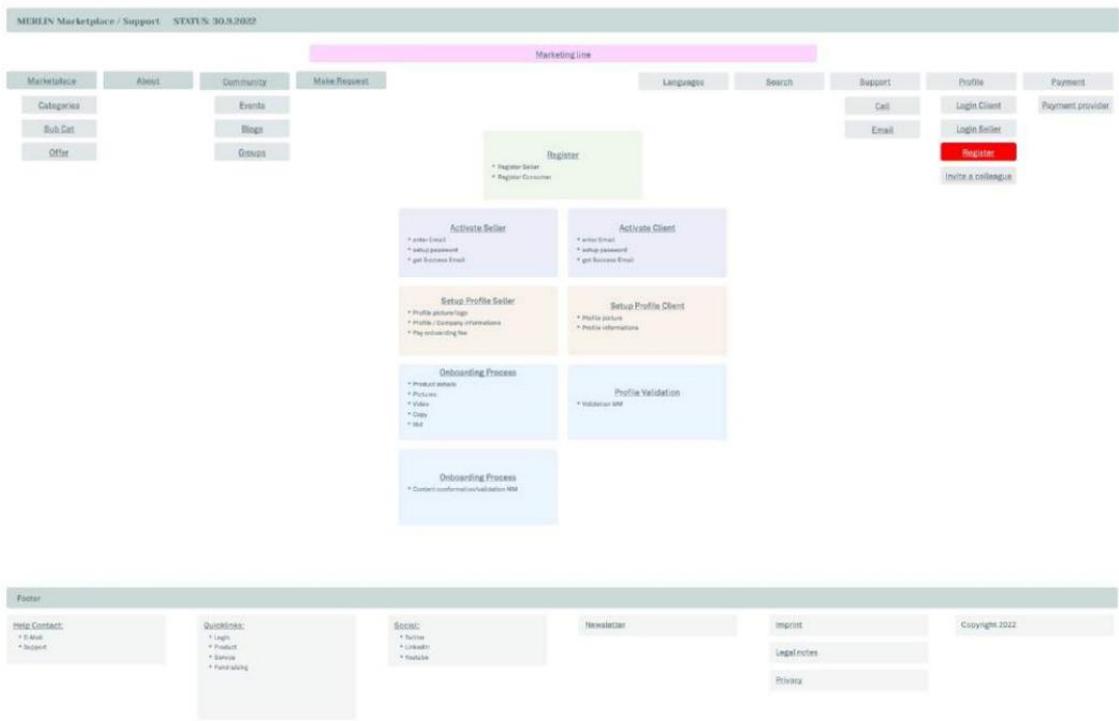
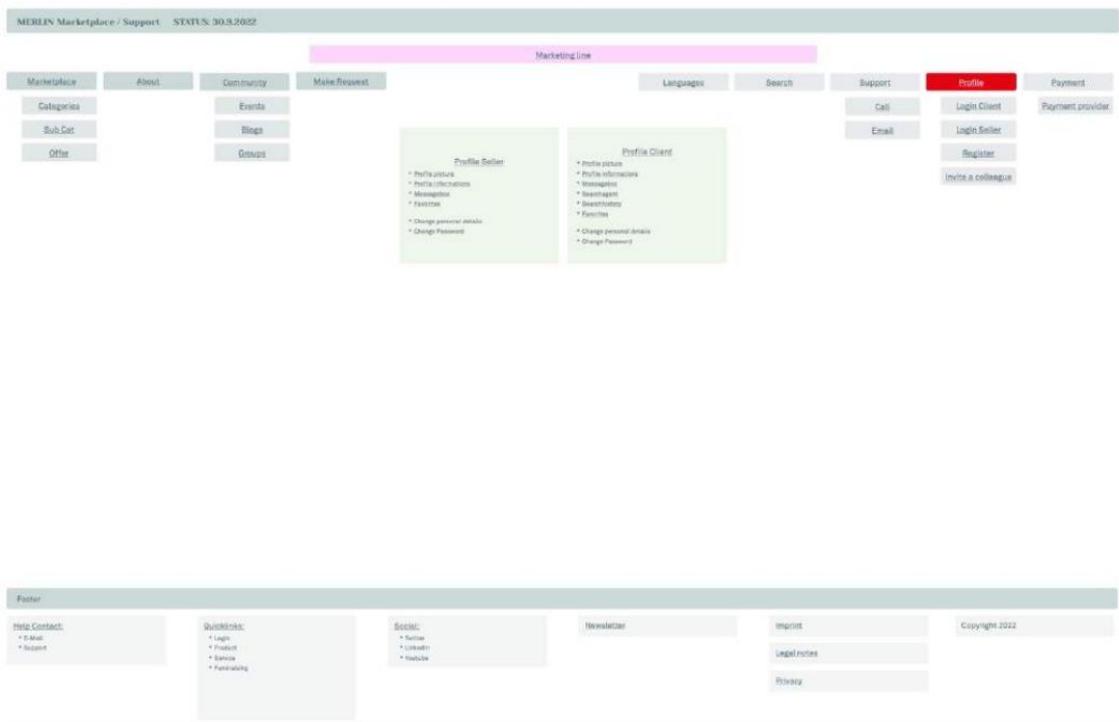
- Instant Logo
- Feedback details

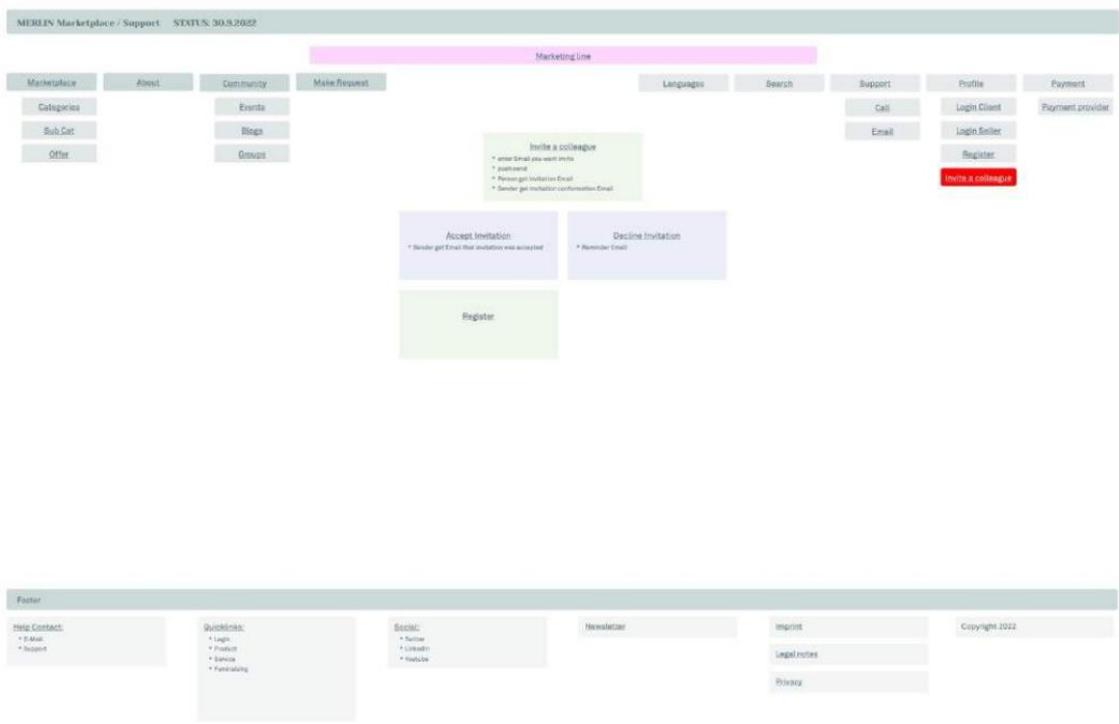
<p>Call back / Open case / case history</p> <p>case 1</p> <p>case 2</p> <p>case 3</p>	<p>Email / Open case / case history</p> <p>case 1</p> <p>case 2</p> <p>case 3</p>
---	---

<p>Form to Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>case information</li> <li>case assigned</li> <li>case status</li> </ul>	<p>Form to Request</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>describe problem or category</li> <li>what number</li> <li>ask them Support</li> </ul>
---	--

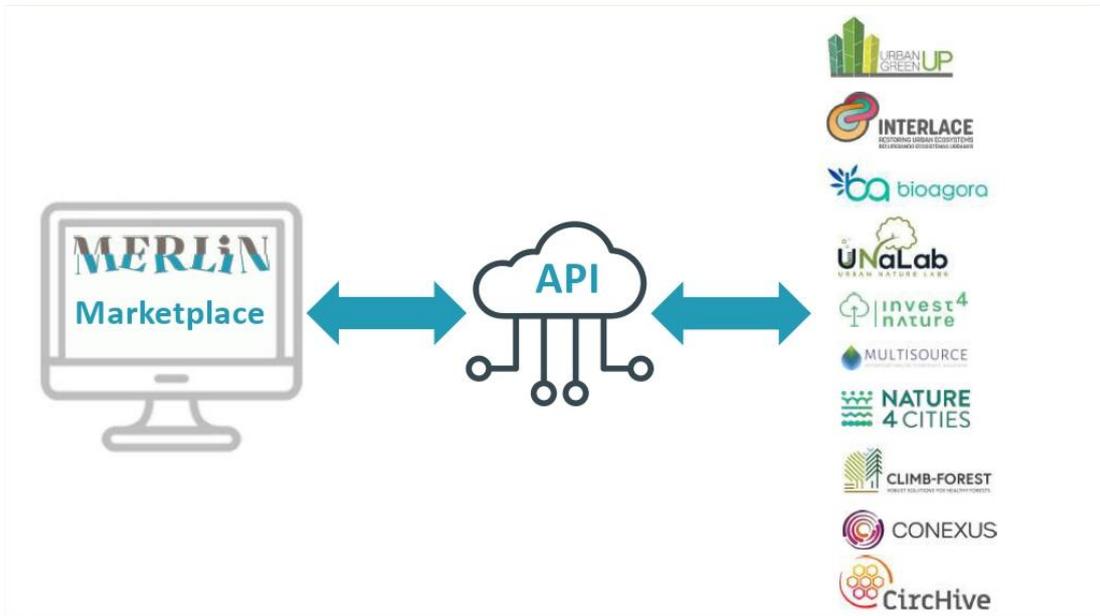
Footer

<p>Help Contact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Email</li> <li>Support</li> </ul>	<p>Quicklinks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Login</li> <li>Product</li> <li>Service</li> <li>Partnership</li> </ul>	<p>Social:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Twitter</li> <li>LinkedIn</li> <li>Facebook</li> </ul>	<p>Newsletter</p>	<p>Imprint</p> <p>Legal notes</p> <p>Privacy</p>	<p>Copyright 2022</p>
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#### 5.4 Current scope of Oppla API



## 5.5 Notes and observations

- **Links with other projects and platforms:** There is potential for the Marketplace to link with other initiatives seeking to support nature-based enterprises – for example, the Connecting Nature Enterprise Platform (CNEP), EU Business @ Biodiversity Platform and others. It may be useful to shortlist which initiatives we intend to engage with (and why/how) and make initial instructions prior to public launch of the Marketplace.
  
- **Developing a method for evaluating the economic and ecological value of projects will be complex.** This is an aspiration of the Grant Agreement relating to use case 2: matching projects with potential funders. As a first step, we need to identify which partners (beyond those of the T5.3 team) will be involved in developing this method and also which partners will be responsible for ‘staffing’ the evaluation process during the project period, whilst the Marketplace is being piloted. This is an action for UDE to facilitate as T5.3 contributor and overall project coordinator.
  
- **There is unidentified risk from the Marketplace brokering financial transactions** (unidentified because the Grant Agreement does not foresee transactions as being part of the service; hence this does not feature in the GA’s list of critical risks and mitigation actions). This needs to be discussed by the Task 5.3 team. Key points:
  - Which partner(s) would be liable for any risk arising from the Marketplace brokering financial transactions - e.g. in the event of cyber-crime? CONN as lead beneficiary of the Task; OPPLA as developer/host of the Marketplace website; UDE as project coordinator; or would this risk be borne by a third party (e.g. PayPal)? Needs clarifying if we are to proceed with transactions.
  - As an alternative, the Marketplace could provide a service whereby suppliers and ‘introduced’ to potential buyers (i.e. via provision of contact details), but products and services are not directly purchased. Transactions would then need to be completed at users’ own risk outside of the Marketplace.

## ANNEX 2 – List of MERLIN Marketplace-registered Products and Services

#Number	Full name	Provider	Type
1	2ZERO	Shayp	Service
2	4D Scavenger Container	Weeefiner Oy	Product
3	4D Scevenger Skid	Weeefiner Oy	Product
4	AGORA'	VAIMEE	Service
5	AGRIVI 360 Farm Management Software	AGRIVI	Product
6	AI traffic video analytics tool for smart cities	Greenroads Limited	Service
7	Atmospheric Water Generators	GENAQ Technologies	Product
8	Automated drone services	Inteliports	Service
9	Awareness and Training Services	CubeX SAL	Service
10	Biomass Valorization Consultancy	CubeX SAL	Service
11	BIOPAR	United Biopolymers	Product
12	Blue Barriers - River Plastic Clean Up	SEADS Sea Defence Solutions	Product
13	BlueOperation	Argeloji Information Technologies	Product
14	Bluephage ENUMERA Rapid Kit	Bluephase S.L.	Product
15	Capacity Building Consultancy	CubeX SAL	Service
16	CarbonSpace full net ecosystem exchange (NEE) monitoring & Consultancy services	CarbonSpace	Service
17	Circular solution to ocean plastic pollution	Riverrecycle Oy	Service
18	ciriabest	CIRIA	Product
19	Compact and Mobile Water Treatment Plants	IDRO Group SRL	Product
20	Consulting, Advertising, Communication, Brand Building	Schnee auf Moss Advertising Agency	Service
21	DeepVolt Location Intelligence Assistant	DeepVolt	Product
22	Droneport	Atam Robotic and Software Technology	Product
23	Eco Egg Box	Fishheart Ltd.	Product
24	Ecolucao - Agroecology for climate change	Mushmore Coop - Ecolucao	Service

25	Ecosystem Restoration Finance and Risk-Management Software	Axon Protocol	Service
26	Electric Jet Propulsion	Sealence Spa SB	Service
27	Enki	Watershed Monitoring Europe	Product
28	Fecal Sludge Management Consulting Service	CubeX SAL	Service
29	Financing of Forest Conservation with multi-year AI-based validation	NatureDAO	Service
30	FLOLIZ	ECOCEAN	Product
31	Hydrological and water quality modelling and forecasting	WaterITech	Service
32	HydroGIS: optimizing Nature-based Solutions	Viridian Logic	Service
33	iNODE Water Treatment Plan Design Software	iNODE Software Co.	Product
34	Mangrove Technology Platform	VERTUO	Product
35	Methods for aquatic ecosystem assessments	Universitat Duisburg-Essen	Service
36	Molendotech	Molendotech	Product
37	MSWM Consulting Services	CubeX SAL	Service
38	Nanoplasmas Legionella Detection Kit for Water Samples	Nanoplasmas P.C.	Product
39	New Artificial Leaf	Green Independence	Product
40	Plastic2Fuel Unit X	Blend Energy	Product
41	Ploovium	Soonapse srl.	Service
42	Programmes and services for startups, investors, and governmental entities	Connectology	Service
43	PROTEVS	Solarisfloat Lda	Product
44	Real-time water quality data buoy	WaterITech	Product
45	Restoration Hydro Turbine (RHT)	Natel Energy	Product
46	River Cleaning	MOLD S.R.L - with green project River Cleaning	Product
47	River Diagnostic Tools	Aquatic Ecology, University of Duisburg	Service
48	RIVER PLASTIC CLEAN UP	SEADS Sea Defence Solution	Service
49	Sallus Fire Retardant	Hephaesnus Lda	Product
50	Shadowmap	Shadowmap Technologies GmbH	Service
51	SpaceCrop AI-powered Smart Irrigation Services	SpaceCrop Technologies Inc.	Service
52	SunAir Fountain Panels	Agua de Sol	Product

53	The Origami Solar Panel	Levante	Product
54	Vahaa Smart Garden	Vahaa Dikey Tarim Cozumleri ve Teknoloji A.S.	Product
55	VECMAP/VECTRACK	Avia-GIS	Product
56	VERTUO	VERTUO	Product
57	Waste Advisory Services	CubeX SAL	Service
58	Water - Real-time water quality monitoring	Waterly	Product
59	Water Wise System	WAKARU	Product
60	WaterWebTools Platform	WaterITech	Product

## ANNEX 3 – MERLIN Innovation Awards (MIA) Participants

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### MERLIN Innovation Awards (MIA) 2023 Finalists

#### “MIA Product of the Year 2023 Award“ Finalists:

- Ecocean, France ([MIA Product of the Year 2023 Winner](#))
- Mold S.r.l., Italy
- Natel Energy, USA
- RanMarine, Netherlands
- SolarisFloat, Portugal

#### “MIA Service of the Year 2023“ Finalists:

- CarbonSpace Tech, Ireland
- Nature DAO, UK
- Plastic Fischer, Germany ([MIA Service of the Year 2023 Winner](#))
- Soonapse, Italy
- Viridian Logic LTD, UK

#### MIA 2023 Applicants not selected for the Finals:

- **CETAQUA Water Technology Center**, Spain
- **CubeX**, Lebanon
- **ekolive Germany GmbH**, Germany
- **FieldFactors**, Netherlands
- **Floating Island Int.**, USA
- **Fluidion**, France
- **FUELICS**, Greece
- **Gdańskie Wody sp. z o.o.**, Poland
- **GYBE**, USA
- **Hogen Systems Ltd**, England
- **iNode Software Co.**, India
- **IOT AONCHIP**, Spain
- **Libelium**, Spain
- **MobyGIS-WATERJADE**, Italy
- **Royal Haskoning DHV**, Denmark
- **TicketO Mobility**, Estonia
- **Trinity International**, India
- **WAKARU**, Portugal

### MERLIN Innovation Awards (MIA) 2024 Finalists

#### “MIA Product of the Year 2024 Award“ Finalists:

- AgroBiogel GmbH, Austria
- Agua de Sol, France
- Fishheart Ltd, Finland
- Idro Group Srl, Italy
- Planet Srl, Italy ([MIA Product of the Year 2024 Winner](#))

#### “MIA Service of the Year 2024“ Finalists:

- Aquaponics Iberia, Portugal
- SEADS Sea Defence Solutions, Italy ([MIA Service of the Year 2024 Winner](#))
- Waterjade-MobyGIS, Italy
- WaterShed Monitoring Europe, France
- Werover, Turkey and Germany

#### MIA 2024 Applicants not selected for the Finals:

- **AZUVIA**, France
- **BLUEPHAGE**, Spain
- **Chemical Treinamento e Inovação Tecnológica**, Brazil
- **GENAQ Technologies**, Spain
- **Hogen Systems**, England
- **Nanoplasmas**, Greece
- **PYDRO**, Germany
- **Sealence Spa SB**, Italy
- **Shayp**, Belgium
- **SolarDew Clean Water b.v.**, Netherlands
- **Spacecrop Technologies Inc.**, Hungary

## MERLIN Innovation Awards (MIA) 2025 Finalists

### “MIA Product of the Year 2025 Award“ Finalists:

- ALGAESYS, Portugal
- BeadaMoss, England
- Reedbirds, Poland
- Wasser 3.0 (gGmbH), Germany ([MIA Product of the Year 2025 Winner](#))
- Waterly, Poland

### “MIA Service of the Year 2025“ Finalists:

- River Cleanup, Belgium ([MIA Service of the Year 2025 Winner](#))
- Gdańsk Water, Poland
- BlueGreen Water Technologies, Israel
- Agua Segura, Argentina
- Mushmore Coop, Portugal

### MIA 2025 Applicants not selected for the Finals:

- **Biomatrix Water**, Scotland
- **BluAct Technologies**, Switzerland
- **Blue21**, Netherlands
- **Bluemater**, Portugal
- **Botanical Water Technologies**, USA
- **Genaq Technologies**, Spain
- **Hydraloop**, Netherlands
- **Hydrovolta.**, Belgium
- **Ingeobras**, Spain
- **Liquisens**, Belgium
- **Miya Water**, Spain
- **Pureco**, Hungary
- **Rapid Radicals**, USA
- **Water Insight**, Netherlands