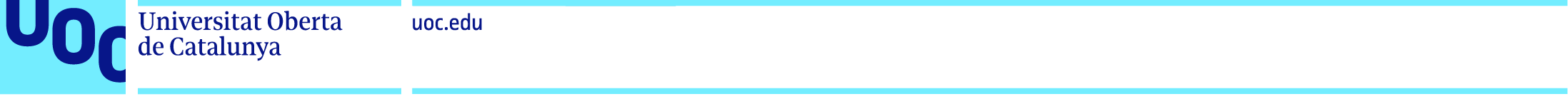
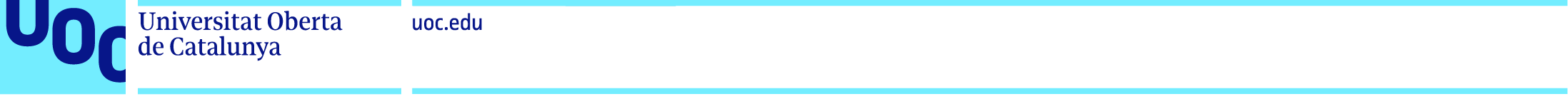
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| MU Bioinf. i Bioest. | 15/01/2023 |



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| Reproducible analysis pipelines using containers and data exploration using R/Shiny | |
|  | |
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**FICHA DEL TRABAJO FINAL**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Título del trabajo:** | Reproducible analysis pipelines using containers and data exploration using R/Shiny |
| **Nombre del autor:** | Luis Morís Fernández |
| **Nombre del consultor/a:** | Mireia Ferrer Almirall |
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| **Fecha de entrega (mm/aaaa):** | 01/2023 |
| **Titulación o programa:** | MU Bioinf. i Bioest. |
| **Área del Trabajo Final:** | Omics |
| **Idioma del trabajo:** | Inglés |
| Palabras clave | reproducibility, pipeline, bioinformatics |
| **Resumen del Trabajo** | |
| Máximo 250 palabras, con la finalidad, contexto de aplicación, metodología, resultados y conclusiones del trabajo | |
| **Abstract** | |
| A maximum of 250 words, detailing the purpose, context of application, methodology, results and conclusions of the work | |

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# Introduction

## Context and justification of this work

Reproducibility is one of the cornerstones of the scientific method, nonetheless is one of the most commonly forgotten, sometimes shadowed by the novelty or alleged impact of the results (Ioannidis 2005; Errington, Denis, et al. 2021). With the advent of informatics more powerful and flexible analyses are available to researchers in all fields everyday (Gauthier et al. 2018). Unfortunately, this power and flexibility comes usually at the cost of complexity and length. Bioinformatics pipelines are paramount examples of the benefit of these powerful and flexible analyses and also of the cost of complexity (Brito et al. 2020; Ioannidis et al. 2009; Mangul et al. 2019; Markowetz 2015). This issue is not solved exclusively by properly storing the scripts of analysis and the data, additional considerations must be taken, such as the pathing, the version of the language used, the version of the libraries, the operating system and its version, etc (Wallach, Boyack, and Ioannidis 2018; Wratten, Wilm, and Göke 2021). All these problems hinder reproducibility and outmost care must be taken when preparing and storing these pipelines, so they can be run not only at the moment of the initial analysis but at any moment in the future when another researcher may need to verify the analyses, extend them or run them on new data.

This work will explore two possible ways of improving reproducibility when developing bioinformatic pipelines. The first one is making the analysis steps traceable from the start to end. This regards the actual scripts that will be executed during the analysis. To address this issue I will take advantage of workflow creation tools that allows creating long reproducible analysis pipelines. The second is creating a reproducible light-weight stable environment where the previous pipeline will run by using containers.

The other objective of this work has to do with the interactivity of the reports obtained during the analysis process. It is rarely the case, particularly in clinical environments, that the same person has the ability to program and run analyses (e.g.: a bioinfomatics expert) and also to make decisions based on those data (e.g.: a medical doctor) (Ludt et al. 2022). This usually creates a communication overhead between the data expert and the decision-maker until the exact data needed to make the decision is found. This work will also create an interactive tool that will try to ameliorate this problem by providing the decision-maker with a small set of tools that would decrease this communication overhead.

## General description

The intention of this work is to create a proof of concept that would address two problems commonly found when developing bioinformatics pipelines. The first one is how to improve its reproducibility through the use of workflow tools and containers. And the second one is to explore interactive tools as a mean to reduce the overhead between bioinformatics and medical personnel improving the decision making loop.

## General Objectives

Create a proof of concept that includes a traceable and reproducible pipeline through the use of workflow tools. This pipeline must run inside a container and produce an interactive report as a result.

## Specific objectives

1. Describe the reproducibility problem in bioinformatics
2. Explore containers and workflow tools as a mean to improve the reproducibility of bioinformatics pipelines
3. Explore interactive tools as a mean to improve the decision making loop in clinical settings
4. Create a microarray analysis pipeline using containers that produce an interactive report as a result in a real setting

## Approach and method

Firstly, this work will address the state of the art in reproducibility with particular emphasis in the bioinformatics field. Secondly, this work will explore the creation of a proof of concept microarrays analysis pipeline created in a workflow tool that will run inside a container that will produce, among other products, an interactive report. In this second part, I will count with the support of the *Plataforma de Bioinformática de la Unidad de Estadística y Bioinformática (UEB)* for having access to data and creating a useful pipeline that could be used in a real clinical setting.

From a technical point of view, albeit other tools may be explored during this work:

* The R(R Core Team 2022) language will be used as the foundation for all the software produced in it.
* The maUEB package functions, currently under development by the *UEB*, will be used to implement the microarray analysis pipeline.
* The targets(Landau 2021) package will be used as the workflow tool to create the pipeline itself in combination with the maUEB functions.
* R/Shiny(Chang et al. 2022) framework will be used to create an interactive tool.
* Docker(Merkel 2014) container technology will be used for containerizing the pipeline.

While selecting the tools for this work the following considerations were kept:

* Minimize friction between components when developing the proof of concept. That is the reason why all tools are R-based, with the exception of docker.
* Use components easily installed and run inside a container.
* Favor analysis scripts over graphical user interfaces.
* Favor simplicity and closeness to the R language (Ousterhout 2018).

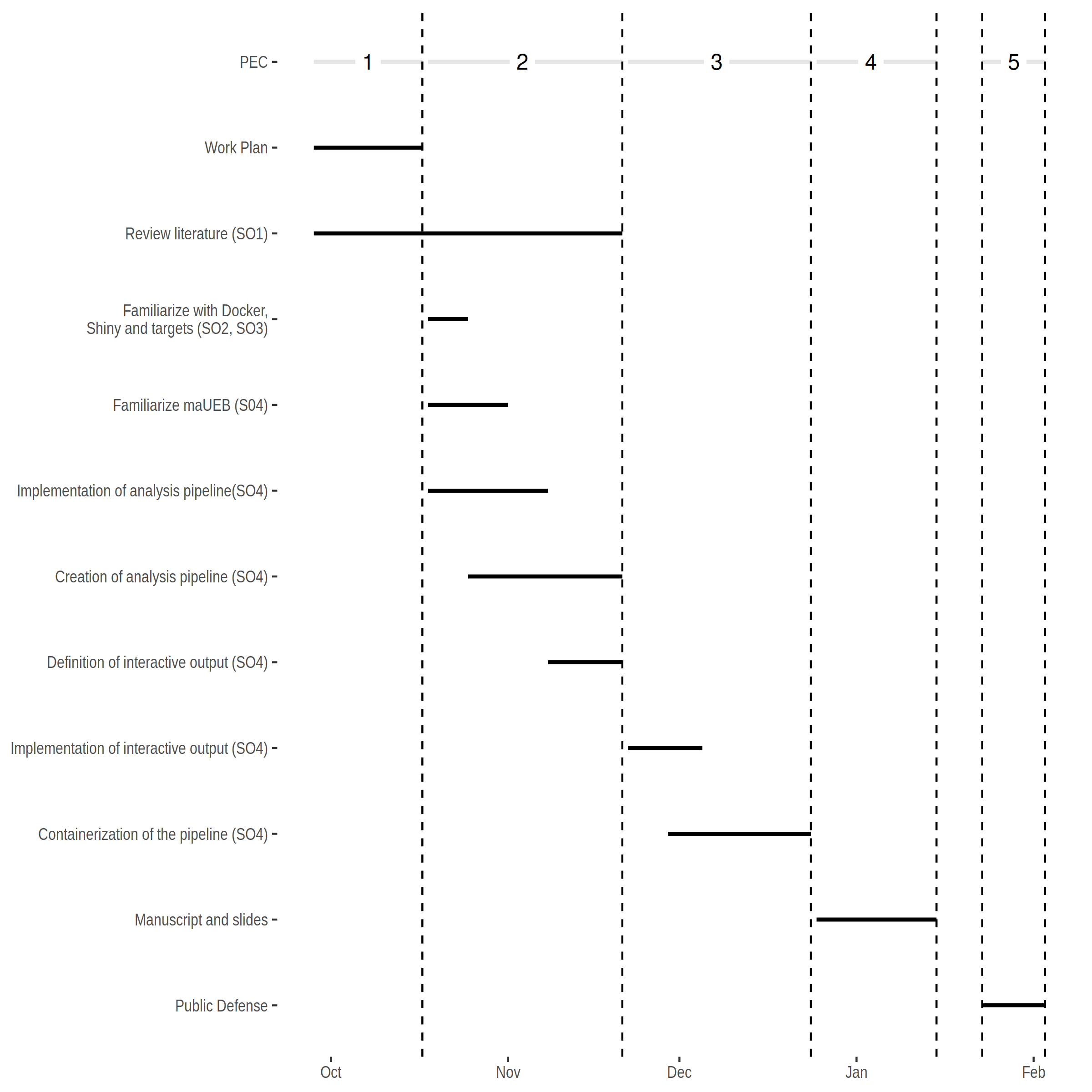
## Planning

### Tasks

Each task will be related to a specific objective using the acronym *SO*

1. Review literature for:
   1. **(SO1)** General problems of reproducibility in science and in bioinformatics
   2. **(SO1)** Current approaches to solve this problem
2. Software and technical knowledge and familiarization with:
   1. **(SO2, SO3)** Docker, R/Shiny and targets R package
   2. **(SO4)** maUEB package
3. **(SO2, SO4)** Definition and implementation of the analysis pipeline
4. **(SO3, SO4)** Definition and implementation of the interactive tool
5. **(SO2, SO4)** Containerization of the pipeline

## Schedule



### Milestones

1. Workplan **(17/07/2022)**
2. Literature review and state of the art
3. Creating a pipeline using targets
4. Defining the interactive output
5. PEC2 **(21/11/2022)**
6. Implementing interactive output
7. Containerize the pipeline
8. PEC3 **(24/12/2022)**
9. Manuscript and slides **(27/12/2022 - 15/01/2023)**
10. Public defense **(23/01/2023 - 03/02/2023)**

### Risk analysis

Below are described present possible risks and proposed solutions.

1. Oversized scope. This work tries to address two well-differentiated problems, the reproducibility and the report interactivity. The interactivity scope can be reduced or removed from the work if the amount of time is not enough to cover both. The solution proposed is to reevaluate the scope when PEC2 is finalized and the scope is better defined.
2. Package availability. The initial intention is to use a recently developed package maUEB. If the package is not available other alternative packages covered during the master classes will be used.
3. Data availability. If data is unavailable, for example confidentiality for confidentiality reasons, open data sources will be used.
4. Pipeline definition. If the the pipeline is not possible to define in a real clinical setting, steps similar to those used in the other pipelines during the master classes will be used.

## Expected results

1. Work plan
   1. A detailed workplan for the thesis work.
2. Thesis document
   1. A document containing an state of the art, methodology, results and conclusions obtained during the master’s thesis.
3. A working proof of concept
   1. A containerized pipeline, delivered as an R package.
4. Slides and virtual presentation
   1. Slides and a video presentation for the defense.

## CCEG

Although the work has a strong technical nature, its nature can be related to at least one *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDG) directly and another one which is transversal to many research works.

In first place, this work is directly related to *SDG 9 Build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialization and foster innovation* in particular to point *9.5 Enhance scientific research, upgrade the technological capabilities of industrial sectors in all countries(...)*. One of the core aspects of this work is to improve the reproducibility of research in the field of Bioinformatics. This reproducibility is valuable in itself as it improves the quality of the evidence produced, but its impact goes beyond that. Low quality evidence may impact the allocation of research resources, as researchers may pursue lines that may have been discarded in the light of more solid and reproducible evidence. In fact research indicates that low quality evidence, although not restricted to reproducibility, wastes billions of dollars each in year in the biomedical field (Macleod et al. 2014).

In second place, almost all research works can impact into *SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*. In particular, a common issue is that cites are not equally distributed between genders and men tends to cite other men more often (Chatterjee and Werner 2021). Therefore in this work particular caution will be placed on considering all works that may be referenced regardless of the gender of the author/s and citing using full names. Additionally, inclusive language will be used during the writing and the third person plural will be used to avoid making assumptions about gender, for example, of the possible users of the work produced (“Singular "They"” 2022). Although initially none is detected, this work will also consider possible biases or issues with this product beyond gender, regarding race, social position or level of technology access among others. One key consideration will be the open source nature of the work and the licensing of the software used to maximize its availability in institutions in developing countries (also related to *SDG 4 Quality education*).

# Overview

«To boldly go where no man has gone before!». This quote from one of the most famous science fiction universes, Star Trek, could be used to describe scientific research as the strive to learn and advance human knowledge. Unfortunately, as appealing and exciting as this quote may be, a non-trivial amount of the scientific effort should be devoted to check and reproduce previous results. Therefore, the previous quote should be complemented with «and also to revisit and thoroughly check where other men affirm they have gone before».

Reproducibility is one of the hallmarks of science, as described by Karl Popper in his book T*he Logic of Scientific Discovery (Popper 2005)*: *«Only when certain events recur in accordance with rules or regularities, as is the case with repeatable experiments, can our observations be tested — in principle — by anyone. We do not take even our own observations quite seriously, or accept them as scientific observations, until we have repeated and tested them. Only by such repetitions can we convince ourselves that we are not dealing with a mere isolated ‘coincidence’, but with events which, on account of their regularity and reproducibility, are in principle inter-subjectively testable.»* Nevertheless, despite its mention in fundamental works describing the scientific research method, reproducibility of scientific research is under discussion (Errington, Denis, et al. 2021; Ioannidis 2005; Munafò et al. 2017; Nelson, Simmons, and Simonsohn 2018).

As a particular example in the biomedical field the *Reproducibility Project: Cancer Biology (Errington, Denis, et al. 2021; Errington, Mathur, et al. 2021; Rodgers and Collings 2021)* was an initiative that tried to replicate high-profile papers in the field of cancer biology. This project found many hurdles that prevented the replication of many of the studies included in the project: failure to replicate the effects reported in the original studies, lack of descriptive and inferential statistics or lack of detail in the methodology.

Albeit, usually (as in Errington, Mathur, et al., 2021) the focus of reproducibility is the replication of the results of one study by running an experiment equivalent to the one run in another laboratory, the reproducibility problem expands beyond that (e.g: re-creating the results by rerunning the same analysis on the same data set; replicating the results by using a similar experiment setup but a different team; replicating the results by using a different experiment setup and a different team). In fact, the reproducibility problem is so multifaceted that the terminology can be confusing. Several terms (reproducibility, replicability, repeatability,...) have different meanings depending on the context where they are used (Barba 2018). In this work we will focus on what Barba (2018) defined as reproducible research according to the nomenclature used by Claerbout & Karrenbach (1992) Donoho et al.(2009) and Peng (2011): «*Authors provide all the necessary data and the computer codes to run the analysis again, re-creating the results».*

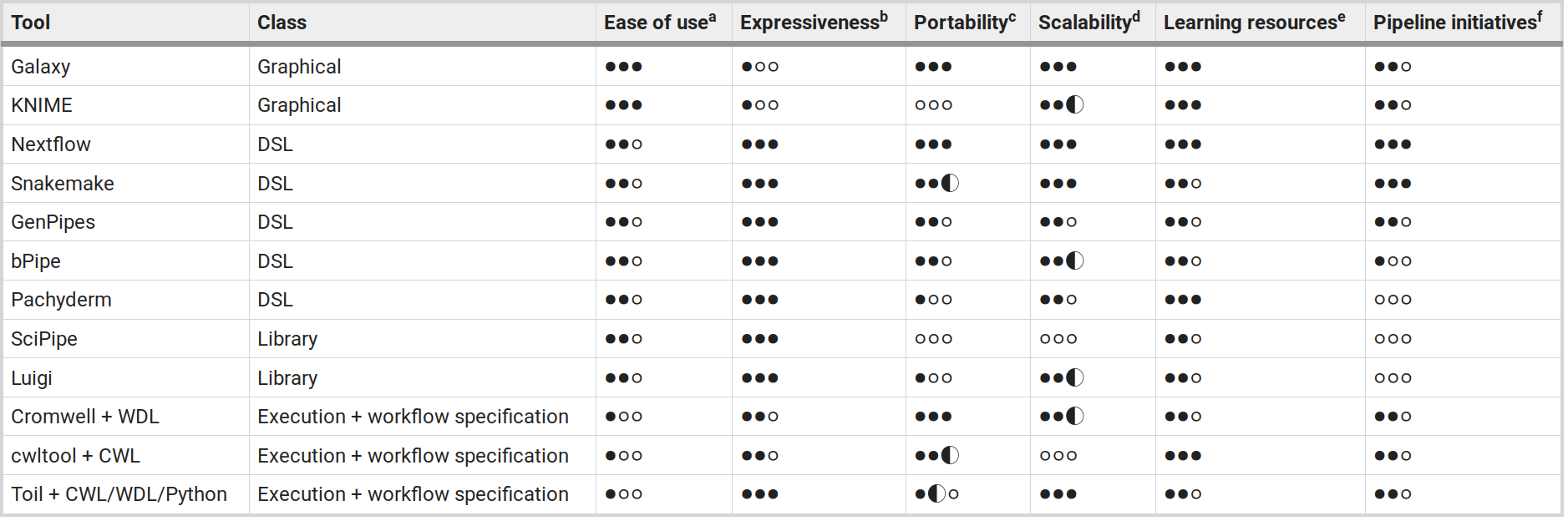
Recreating the results of a study given its data and its methods can be considered the most basic level of reproducibility, as it only assures that the results of a study were correctly calculated, but it does not delve in them being correct at an epistemological level. One could be tempted to think that this level of reproducibility is so trivial that could be considered granted but it is not (Hardwicke et al. 2018). In 1995, Buckheit & Donoho paraphrased Jon Claerbout (one of the pioneers in computational reproducibility Claerbout & Karrenbach, 1992) stating that an article should be considered an «*advertising»* and that the full research work is «*the complete software development environment and the complete set of instructions that generated the figures»*. The initial solution proposed by Claerbout & Karrenbach (1992) involved using CD-ROMs and magnetic tapes as well as the ubiquitous *makefile* tool, luckily a lot have changed in those 30 years. In the present work we illustrate how to use the *targets (Landau 2021)* R package and Docker (Merkel 2014) containers to ameliorate the reproducibility problem in the bioinformatics field.

## *targets Package*

Workflow managers[[1]](#footnote-1) tools can now be found in many different flavors, from the most general like Apache Airflow, to those focused on scientific analysis like Scipipe and *targets*, to those specific to the bioinformatics domain such as Galaxy and KNIME (Amstutz et al. 2022). Wratten et al. (2021) reviewed the state of the art of workflow managers and compared key features of the most common ones in bioinformatics as depicted in Figure 1. *targets* package was not included in this review, but in this section the rationale followed for choosing it is described.

The author of *targets (Landau 2021)* describes it the following way:

«The targets package is a Make-like pipeline tool for Statistics and data science in R. With targets, you can maintain a reproducible workflow without repeating yourself. targets learns how your pipeline fits together, skips costly runtime for tasks that are already up to date, runs only the necessary computation, supports implicit parallel computing, abstracts files as R objects, and shows tangible evidence that the results match the underlying code and data.»

Figure 1: Overview of workflow managers for bioinformatics. Extracted from Wratten et al. (2021)

The first valuable feature is that this workflow manager is written in R. R (R Core Team 2022) is one of the most common languages used in bioinformatics and data analysis in general (Giorgi, Ceraolo, and Mercatelli 2022). Bioconductor, one of the main repositories for the analysis of biological data, contains tools programmed in R. Therefore using *targets* allows using all the tools available in Bioconductor directly in our pipeline[[2]](#footnote-2). Also, given the prevalence of R in bioinformatics, and other data science fields, many users will already be familiar with the language itself. For users already familiar with R, targets itself brings a small learning overhead, as most of the programming usually correspond to the task themselves and not so much to the pipeline preparation.

targets package by design also automatically keeps track of the dependencies in the different pipeline steps, therefore, when the pipeline is modified and rerun many time consuming calculations are skipped if the modifications do not affect them. This is particularly beneficial in the case of bioinformatics given that many of the data analysis steps include long computations. This dependency tracking also makes the pipeline easily reproducible as it guarantees that no invalid information is used and the results will be consistent when running the pipeline. It is also easy to track which information is used as an input in each of the tasks.

Regarding scalability, targets is prepared to run single-threaded, locally in parallel or in high-performance computing environments with just simple changes in the declaration of the pipeline.

One substantial difference with other more complex workflow managers is that *targets* does not keep track or controls the version of software or the environment where the pipeline is executed. This could can be easily overcome by using complimentary R packages that control the versions in the R library such as *renv* (Ushey, 2022), or, as covered in a following section of this work, running the pipeline inside a Docker container.

As all the content in *targets* pipelines consist of text files (with the exceptions of inputs and outputs) this makes the pipelines defined using targets ideal for versioning control systems (e.g.: git).

Finally, *targets* is a general purpose solution, offering a very concrete functionality and is highly decoupled, from a software perspective, from the packages offering the analysis functionality, this means that changes in those packages can be incorporated without waiting for any update in *targets*.

## Docker

Controlling the executing environment of a software has been a challenging task for many years. Software developers and system administrators coined the term *«Dependency Hell» (2023)* to describe the common situation in which a «Software A» depended on a given version «Library Z» while «Software B» depended on a different version of «Library Z» creating a complicated situation for installing «Software A» and «Software B» in the same environment. This situation was particularly troubling when installing «Software B» automatically updated «Library Z» making «Software A» in the best case unusable or in the worst case silently providing erroneous outputs. A similar kind of problem appeared when a piece of software was discontinued for the new version of a given operating system forcing the user to find an alternative software that provided the same or similar functionality. These problems were inherited and expanded as soon as researchers started using computational methods and writing analysis scripts.

Controlling the environment, from the OS to the software versions and libraries, are fundamental to be able to recreate the results of a given study. Albeit, arguably, it could be easier to recreate the results days just after the initial analysis was done, recreating it months or even years after the analysis happened may be more complicated. R versions, versions of R packages, and Bioconductor packages change very often. Just in 2022 four different versions of R (Index of /src/base/R-4, 2022) and two Bioconductor versions were released (Bioconductor Releases, 2022) as well as five versions of the Ubuntu operating system. Therefore, controlling the exact versions used for creating them in first place is fundamental. On top of that, it is important that other researchers can recreate this results in different machines so they can build a new research on top, or maybe run the same analysis on their own set of data. Containers, and particularly Docker containers, are a common solution for these problems nowadays.

A Docker container is a piece of software that packs up code and dependencies and allows to an application to be run in different computing environments or at different times. Because it packs both code and dependencies it recreates a full environment, in our case: OS, system libraries, R, R libraries, Bioconductor libraries, etc. Allowing us to recreate the full set of results in any machine and in any time in the future, even if R, or any of the libraries used, would no longer be available.

## R/Shiny

Finally, in this work we wanted to create an interactive tool to reduce the loop between the data analysts and the final consumers of the results. It is commonly the case that the same person is not in charge of analyzing data and making decisions on the results of this analysis. Sometimes this creates a loop between the data analyst and the decision maker until the correct set of results required by the decision maker is achieved and a decision can be made. A way of improving this situation is empowering the decision maker to modify some of the setting in the final analysis, without the intervention of the data-analyst, through interactive applications.

In this work the R/Shiny (Chang et al. 2022) framework will be used that allows creating web applications using R.

# A targets containerized microarray pipeline

For this work, a microarray analysis was implemented in *targets* and later run inside a Docker container[[3]](#footnote-3).

To implement this microarray analysis the maUEB package (Ferrer Almirall and Camacho Cano 2022) was used. This package, under development, is prepared to run a full microarray analysis.

## *targets* pipeline

### Steps of the microarray analysis pipeline

In this work a common microrray analysis was implemented with the following steps[[4]](#footnote-4):

1. Data loading
2. Quality control
   * 1. Raw expression data
        1. Create a boxplot figure (maUEB::qc\_boxplot)
        2. Create a PCA figure (maUEB::qc\_pca1)
        3. Create Hierarchical cluster figure (maUEB::qc\_hc)
        4. Create an arrayQualityMetrics package report
   1. Data normalization (maUEB::normalization)
   2. Annotate normalized data (maUEB::save\_annotations)
   3. The same quality control steps were repeated for the normalized data
      * 1. A PCA figure to control for batch effects was included (maUEB::qc\_pca1)
   4. Artifactual or outlier samples are removed from the normalized data
   5. Create a figure of the standard deviations of the probesets (maUEB::sdplot)
   6. Control probesets, probesets with missing or duplicated EntrezIDs and probesets with low variance can be removed from the dataset (maUEB::filtering)
   7. Annotate filtered data (maUEB::save\_annotations)
3. Linear model
   1. Create a design matrix for the analysis (maUEB::dea\_lmdesign)
   2. Fit the linear model to the data (maUEB::dea\_lmfit)
   3. Calculate the relevant contrasts for the model (maUEB::dea\_compare)
   4. Gather results of the linear model comparisons:
      1. Create toptables with the results of the contrasts (maUEB::dea\_toptab)
      2. Create a summary table with the number of significant genes in each of the contrasts (maUEB::dea\_summary\_ngc1)
      3. Create a volcano plot of the contrasts (maUEB::dea\_volcanoplot)
      4. Create a Venn diagram of the contrasts (maUEB::mc\_venn\_upset)
      5. Create a heatmap figure of the results (maUEB::mc\_hm)
4. Gene Set Enrichment analysis
   1. Over Reactome database (maUEB::abs\_gsea\_ReactomePAunfilt and maUEB::abs\_gsea\_ReactomePAfiltplot)
   2. Over Gene Ontology (maUEB::abs\_gsea\_GOunfilt and maUEB::abs\_gsea\_GOfiltplot)
5. Over-representation analysis
   1. Over Reactome database (maUEB::abs\_ora\_ReactomePAunfilt and maUEB::abs\_ora\_ReactomePAfiltplot)
   2. Over Gene Ontology (maUEB::abs\_ora\_GOunfilt and maUEB::abs\_ora\_GOfiltplot)
6. Proof of concept Rmarkdown report

As the main object of this work is not the pipeline analysis itself but its implementation inside the targets package, the next sections will focus on the strategies used for its implementation and readers should refer to the documentation of the maUEB package for the particulars the functions used.

Parameters of the analysis pipeline

The parameters of the script are divided in four different sections:

1. Data loading and Quality Control
2. Linear model
3. Multiple comparisons
4. Gene Set Enrichment and/or Over-Representation analysis

The parameters for each of the sections are contained in four different nested lists with separated entries for each of the steps in the section. Each of these parameter lists are declared inside a function to avoid cluttering the global environment with the auxiliary variables.

In Code 1 an example of the function used to create the first parameter list for «Data loading and Quality Control» is included.

Code 1: Example of parameter list declaration

|  |
| --- |
| 1 get\_load\_qc\_parameters <- function() {  2 data\_dir <- "data"  3 cel\_dir <- "celfiles"  4 targets\_file\_name <- "targets.RSRCHR.STUDY.csv"  5 targets\_file <- file.path(data\_dir, targets\_file\_name)  6 results\_dir <- "results"  7 targets\_fact <- c("Group", "Batch")  8 colorlist <- c(  9 "firebrick1", "blue", "darkgoldenrod1",  10 "darkorchid1", "lightblue", "orange4",  11 "seagreen", "aquamarine3", "red4",  12 "chartreuse2", "plum", "darkcyan",  13 "darkolivegreen3", "forestgreen", "gold",  14 "khaki1", "lightgreen", "gray67",  15 "deeppink"  16 )  17 summary\_fn <- "ResultsSummary\_Load-QC-Norm-Filt.txt"  18  19 raw <- list()  20 norm <- list()  21 norm\_f <- list()  22 norm\_filt <- list()  23  24 # boxplot ----  25  26 raw[["boxplot"]] <- list(  27 group = "Group",  28 group.color = "Colors",  29 samplenames = "ShortName",  30 cex.lab = .6,  31 outputDir = create\_dir(results\_dir, "raw", "boxplot"),  32 label = "RawData"  33 )  34  35 norm[["boxplot"]] <- purrr::list\_modify(  36 raw[["boxplot"]],  37 label = "NormData",  38 outputDir = create\_dir(results\_dir, "norm", "boxplot"),  39 )  40 # [...Part of the function is removed for space reasons...]  41  42 list(  43 targets\_file = targets\_file,  44 cel\_dir = cel\_dir,  45 targets\_fact = targets\_fact,  46 results\_dir = results\_dir,  47 color\_list = colorlist,  48 raw = raw,  49 norm = norm,  50 norm\_f = norm\_f,  51 norm\_filt = norm\_filt,  52 outlier\_samples = outlier\_samples,  53 sdplot = sdplot,  54 filtering = filtering  55 )  56 } |

For ergonomic purposes all the parameters in the pipeline are defined at the beginning of the analysis script. This allows the user to concentrate the changes on the first part of the script, while keeping the target definition, explained in the next section, intact.

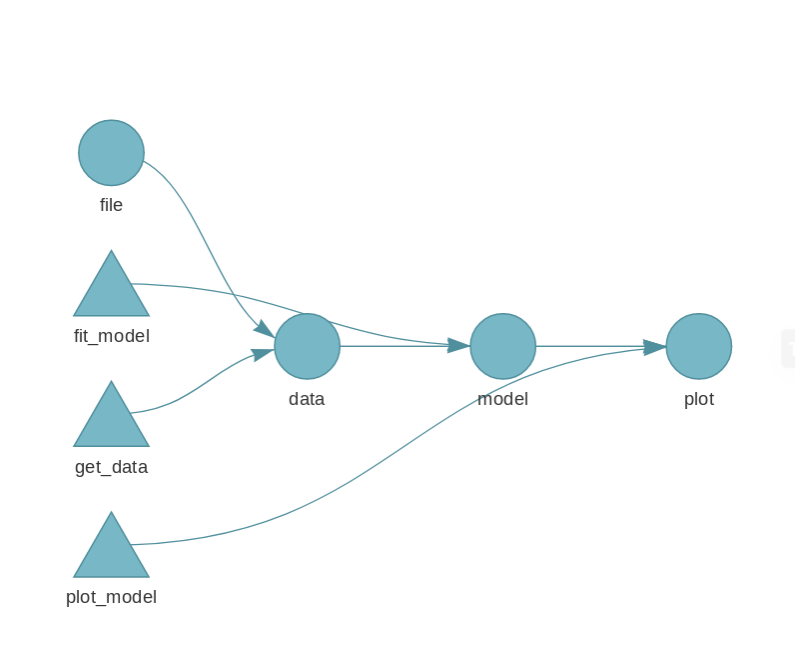
This is only one of the multiple options to create these lists of parameters. For example, the same parameter declaration could be moved outside of the targets script, in a separate R file, separate R files could be declared for each of the parameters or they could be declared in other configuration markup languages, such as yaml. For this work it was decided that it was more ergonomic to have a single file containing the whole pipeline, but this is a highly opinionated decision.

### Small multiples

A *targets’* pipeline is implemented as a list of targets each of them depending on previous targets. Below, there is a graph of an example *targets’* pipeline. Each of the elements in the graph is a target inside the pipeline that can, as depicted in the figure, depend on previous targets of the pipeline. When defined, each target will declare its name followed by the command used to create the target. In Code 2, the target *data* is declared and is created by running the function *get\_data* over a previously calculated target *file*.

Code 2: Example of a target declaration

|  |
| --- |
| 1 tar\_target(data, get\_data(file)) |

Figure 2: Pipeline graph extracted from targets manual.

The depiction of the graph for the implemented in the pipeline of this work appears below. As seen in Figure 3, the pipeline implemented is more complicated than the one in the example.

Figure 3: Graph of the pipeline implemented in this work

Given the complexity of the pipeline, we followed a small multiples approach, described below, that in combination with the parameter approach in the previous section, will minimize the cost of modifying and maintaining the pipeline.

All the targets in the pipeline, with only few exceptions, are declared following the same pattern following a small multiples approach, see an example of a target declaration in Code 3.

Code 3: Example of a target declaration using small multiples

|  |
| --- |
| 1 tar\_target(  2 name = qc\_raw\_boxplot\_file,  3 command = do.call(  4 what = maUEB::qc\_boxplot,  5 args = purrr::list\_modify(  6 !!qcl\_par$raw$boxplot,  7 data = eset\_raw  8 )  9 )  10 ) |

Instead of including all the parameters in each of the target declarations we use the *do.call* function from R that allows calling a function with a set of parameters contained in a list. Those lists of parameters are declared at the top of the file. In this case, it is the list from quality control that corresponds to the list of parameters for the raw boxplot. The only parameters that are appended during the target declaration are those that make reference to previous targets in the pipeline and, obviously, could not be declared in the parameter section.

This small multiples approach helps the user focusing on a single part of the script the parameter list, without having to navigate the whole target list changing the values of the parameters. Even more, if several targets use the same parameter list they can be reused very easily.

Note that in line 6 in Code 3, the reference to the parameter list is preceded by two exclamation marks, !!, also called the *bang bang* operator. This operator is part of the helpers in tidy evaluation[[5]](#footnote-5) defined in Tidyverse. Very briefly, if that operator was not present, the whole declaration would depend on the whole qcl\_par list, and not just on qcl\_par$raw$boxplot. That would imply that any change in qcl\_par would invalidate the target, when in fact only a change in qcl\_par$raw$boxplot should invalidate it. By using the *bang bang* operator we do an in place replacement of qcl\_par$raw$boxplot by its value therefore, when executing, it would be equivalent to Code 4. There would be no dependency on the other elements of the list, just on that specific entry·

Code 4: bang bang operator replacement

|  |
| --- |
| 1 tar\_target(  2 name = qc\_raw\_boxplot\_file,  3 command = do.call(  4 what = maUEB::qc\_boxplot,  5 args = purrr::list\_modify(  6 list(  7 group = "Group",  8 group.color = "Colors",  9 samplenames = "ShortName",  10 cex.lab = .6,  11 outputDir = create\_dir(results\_dir, "raw", "boxplot"),  12 label = "RawData"  13 ),  14 data = eset\_raw  15 )  16 )  17 ) |

This allows the pipeline user to modify the parameter of other targets without invalidating other targets in the same list.

### Running specific targets

*targets* is prepared to calculate the minimal sets of targets needed for the required target. As seen Code 5, it may be interesting to only calculate ‘qc\_raw\_arrayQM’ in an initial stage to only check the arrayQualityMetrics reports for the raw data, before modifying other parameters and proceed to calculate the normalized or the filtered data.

Code 5: running a specific target

|  |
| --- |
| 1 targets::tar\_make(qc\_raw\_arrayQM) |

### Recovering targets

Recovering targets back into the workspace can be done with a simple command as in Code 6.

Code 6: loading targets in the workspace

|  |
| --- |
| 1 targets::tar\_load(qc\_raw\_arrayQM)  2 arrQM <- targets::tar\_read(qc\_raw\_arrayQM) |

### File outputs in target

Some of the functions of the maUEB package, do not return an R object (plot, dataframe, etc.), but it writes a series of files, usually PDFs. This is not ideal for the *targets* package, particularly in combination with an Rmarkdown report. Albeit, *targets* package covers targets in the form of files (see Code 7) by specifying the format parameter, it requires that the returned value of the command is the list of files created by the target. This is not the case in the maUEB functions, therefore we created a helper function *as\_list\_of\_files*, that lists all the files in a given directory. This function decorates the maUEB functions by listing the files inside the output directory of the folder. In the example in Code 7 the decorated function returns a list of all the files inside the directory specified in the *outputDir* parameter passed to in the parameter list. Unfortunately, this strategy forces to place the outputs of each of the targets in separate directories.

Code 7: file outputs in targets

|  |
| --- |
| 1 tar\_target(  2 name = qc\_raw\_boxplot\_file,  3 command = do.call(  4 what = maUEB::qc\_boxplot %>% as\_list\_of\_files("outputDir"),  5 args = purrr::list\_modify(  6 !!qcl\_par$raw$boxplot,  7 data = eset\_raw  8 )  9 ),  10 format = "file"  11 )  12 |

### Static report

The final target of the pipeline is an static[[6]](#footnote-6) Rmarkdown report, only a proof of concept is presented for time reasons (see Figure 4). *targets* has a complimentary package *tarchetypes* that allow additional target types among which is the *tar\_render* target as shown in Code 8.

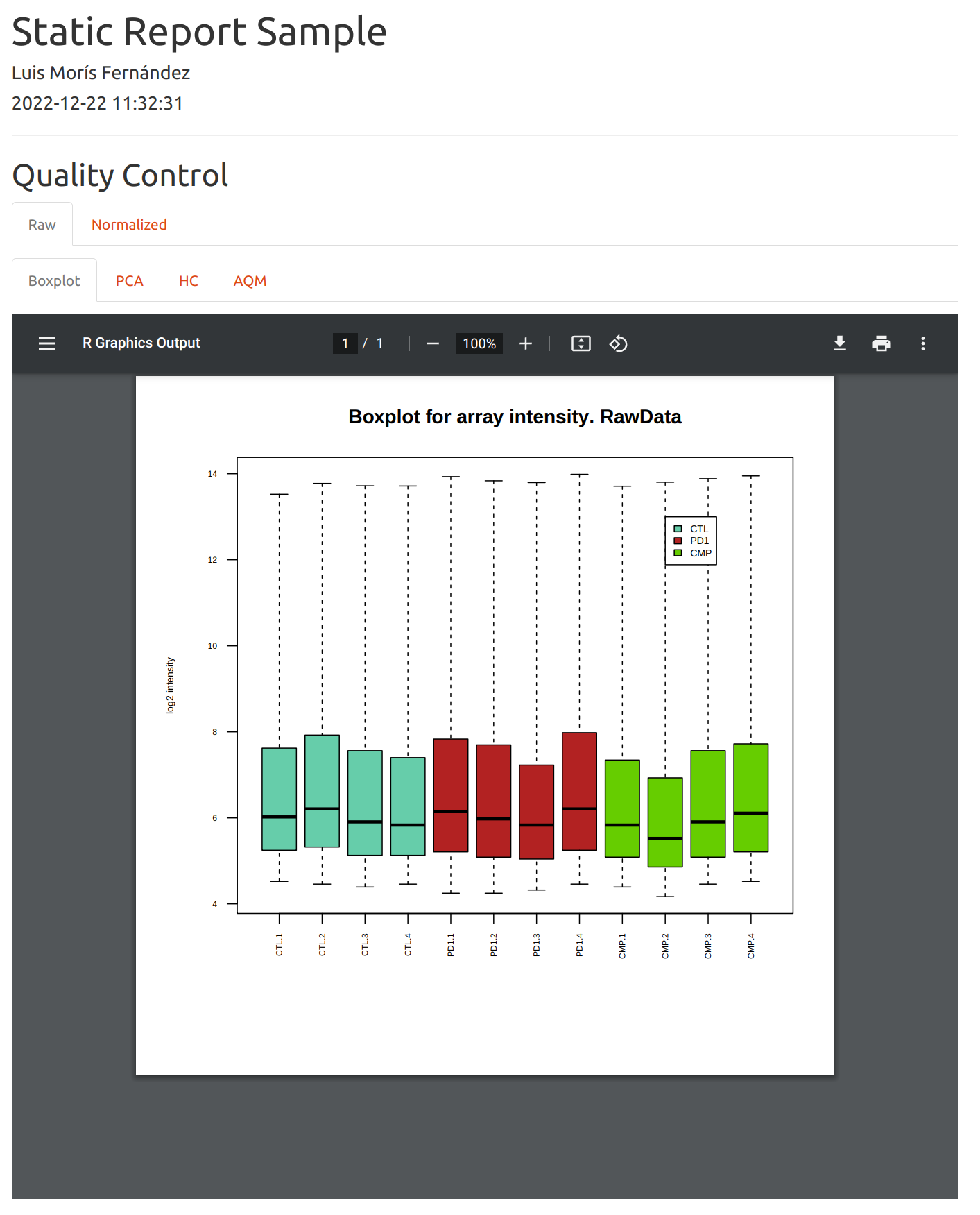
Code 8: tar\_render example

|  |
| --- |
| 1 tarchetypes::tar\_render(report, "report.Rmd", output\_dir = "results") |

This type allows rendering Rmarkdown that make reference to other targets as in Code 9.

Code 9: example Rmarkdown chunk using a target

|  |
| --- |
| 1 ```{r, out.width=pdf\_width, out.height=out\_height, fig.align="center", echo = FALSE}  2 file <- targets::tar\_read(qc\_raw\_boxplot\_file)  3 knitr::include\_graphics(file)  4 ``` |

Figure 4: Static report output

## Containerizing in a Docker

A custom Docker image was created to make the previous pipeline fully reproducible. The image created was based on a rocker image (Boettiger and Eddelbuettel 2017) created on top of a Ubuntu Focal image and with a full Tidyverse installation (“Rocker-Org/Rocker-Versioned2” 2022). One of the advantages of this image is that the R libraries version is frozen in a specified date, therefore rebuilding the image does not impact the R libraries version[[7]](#footnote-7).

All the dependencies needed to run the previous pipeline were installed. The automatic installation of the Bioconductor dependencies for maUEB failed, therefore some Bioconductor packages are installed independently. Additionally a bug, required that the *preprocessCore* dependency was installed from source. Code 10 shows the code for the Dockerfile and all the additional scripts for installation are included in the folder *docker\_scripts*.

Code 10: Dockerfile

|  |
| --- |
| 1 # 4.2.1  2 FROM ghcr.io/rocker-org/tidyverse:4.2.1  3  4 ADD docker\_scripts/install\_system\_dep.sh docker\_scripts/install\_system\_dep.sh  5 RUN chmod +x docker\_scripts/install\_system\_dep.sh  6 RUN docker\_scripts/install\_system\_dep.sh  7 ADD docker\_scripts/install\_script.R docker\_scripts/install\_script.R  8 RUN chmod +x docker\_scripts/install\_script.R  9 RUN docker\_scripts/install\_script.R  10 ADD docker\_scripts/install\_bioc\_dep.R docker\_scripts/install\_bioc\_dep.R  11 RUN chmod +x docker\_scripts/install\_bioc\_dep.R  12 RUN docker\_scripts/install\_bioc\_dep.R  13  14 # Fixes bug  15 ADD docker\_scripts/install\_fix.sh docker\_scripts/install\_fix.sh  16 RUN chmod +x docker\_scripts/install\_fix.sh  17 RUN ls docker\_scripts/\*  18 RUN docker\_scripts/install\_fix.sh  19  20 CMD ["sh"] |

A shell script, Code 11, that runs the whole pipeline inside the container is included:

Code 11: run\_in\_docker.sh contents

|  |
| --- |
| 1 docker run --name target\_trial -v $(pwd)/:/workspace -w /workspace --rm uoc:final Rscript -e "targets\_::tar\_make()"  2 echo "Remember the property of \_targets is transferred to root due to running the pipeline in a docker!"  3 echo "Return property to the current user running: sudo chown -R ${USER} ./\_targets" |

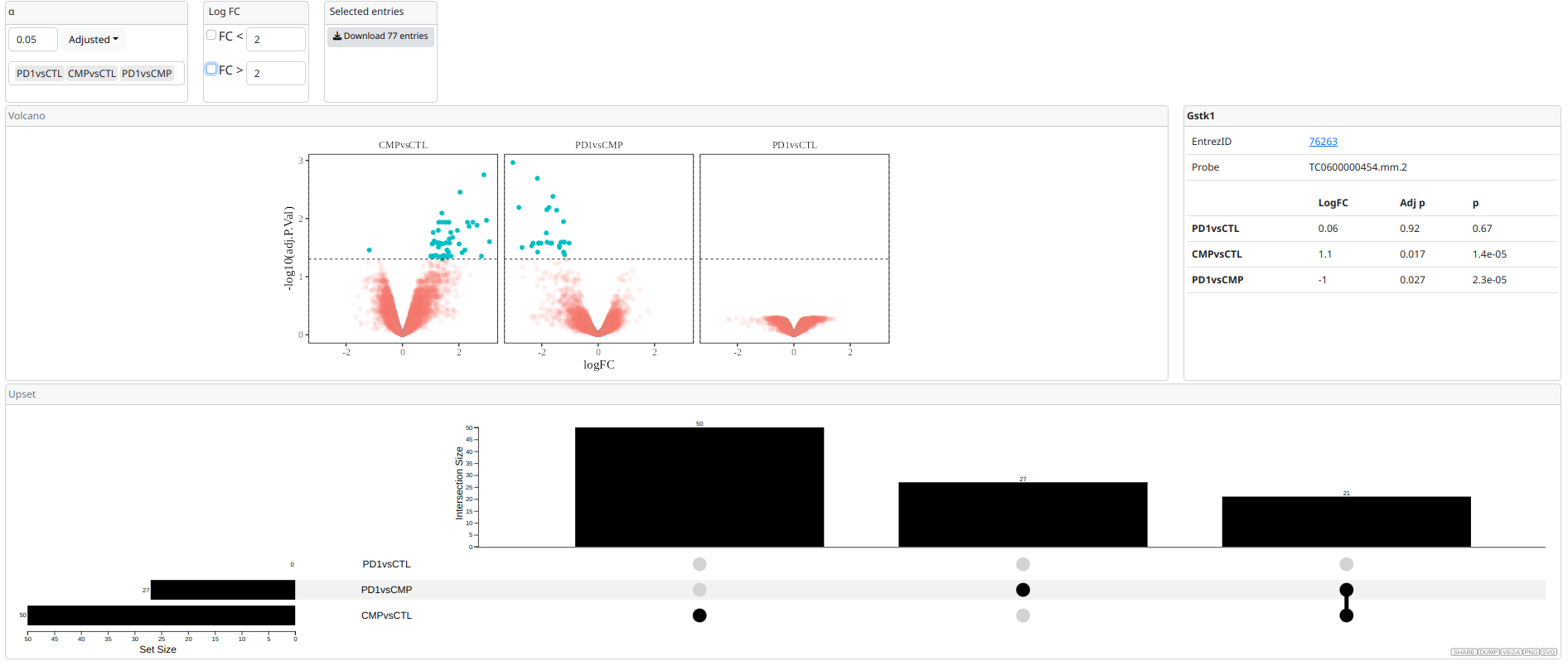
This shell script makes several assumptions, easily changed for another use case:

1. The Docker image name is tag is *uoc:final*
2. The Docker command will be invoked from the base folder of the pipeline.

The Docker call will mount the pipeline folder inside the running Docker and execute the command at the end of the call. As the results are saved in the same pipeline folder they will be available once the command is run inside the Docker. As indicated in the messages of the shell script, one particularity in Unix systems is that the results folder will be owned by the *root* or *docker* user. This are superusers and usually those folders cannot be accessed or modified by a regular user, therefore, at the end of the execution the ownership of those folders must be modified.

# R/Shiny Application

An R/Shiny application to visualize and explore the results of the contrasts was implemented.

Figure 5: Application screenshot

As seen in Figure 5, the application includes:

1. A control for selecting the p value threshold and if it should be applied over the adjusted or unadjusted p-value to select genes
2. A control for including limits depending on the log Fold Change, so only values above or below a given log Fold Change are selected.
3. A download button to download a csv file with all the selected genes
4. A volcano plot that shows the selected genes in another color
5. An information box that shows the information of a gene when it is hovered
6. An alternative graph to the classical Venn Diagram, that shows which of the selected genes are significative in each of the contrasts implemented using the Upset plot (Gratzl 2022)

The application can be loaded with a specific dataset, or an alternative application can be loaded with the option of uploading an RDS file. The example applications can be run locally by installing the *brightPlots* package, available in <https://zsigmas.github.io/brightPlots/>, or accessed in their deployed versions at:

* <https://zsigmas.shinyapps.io/brightplots_demo/> (With a demo dataset)
* <https://zsigmas.shinyapps.io/brightplots_demo_upload/> (With the option of uploading a local RDS dataset)

The developed applications are composed by several Shiny modules (Chang 2020). Therefore the plots and menus presented in the application can be quickly recomposed or reused in other Shiny applications.

# Results

The results of this work are hosted in the following repositories:

1. *targets* pipeline: <https://github.com/zsigmas/UOC_TFM>
2. Shiny applications:
   1. Package: <https://github.com/zsigmas/brightPlots>
   2. Package Documentation: <https://zsigmas.github.io/brightPlots/>
   3. Applications:
      1. <https://zsigmas.shinyapps.io/brightplots_demo/>
      2. <https://zsigmas.shinyapps.io/brightplots_demo_upload/>

All the repositories contain a Readme with a brief explanation on the usage of the packages and scripts.

# Conclusions

Reviewing the initial objectives of this work:

1. Describe the reproducibility problem in bioinformatics
2. Explore containers and workflow tools as a mean to improve the reproducibility of bioinformatics pipelines
3. Explore interactive tools as a mean to improve the decision making loop in clinical settings
4. Create a microarray analysis pipeline using containers that produce an interactive report as a result in a real setting

It can be confirmed that all of the goals of this work were achieved almost satisfactorily, with the exception of the point 4 in which an interactive report was replaced by an static one.

## Detailed conclusions

### Pipeline Implementation

The main goal of implementing the pipeline was fully achieved. An structure that allow pipeline users to concentrate in smaller portions of the script, parameter definition, and minimize the complexity of the target declaration, small multiples, was achieved.

Regarding difficulties, during this project we found that the compatibility between the *maUEB*  package and *targets* was not ideal. *maUEB* was mainly designed to output static files and not R objects. The *targets* pipeline is more focused on R objects as intermediate steps that can then be further processed or plotted. m*aUEB* functions were decorated to ameliorate this problem, but this created an additional issue when creating an interactive report. As the results of the functions were already in some cases static files (mostly PDF files), it was not possible to add interactivity to this outputs, which was the main reason for the change in the original workplan. A deeper initial evaluation of the *maUEB* package and its compatibility with the *targets* package could have shown this issue earlier and then modifications to the *maUEB*functions could have been implemented or another package could have been selected to perform the analysis.

## *Docker containerization*

The goal of running the pipeline inside a Docker container was achieved. A simple strategy to run this pipeline. This solution can easily be generalized to other pipelines. The main difficulty in this regard was founding some, already described but not solved yet, bugs when installing Bioconductor packages. A more smooth package installation procedure was expected, but the difficulties found did not prevent achieving this objective.

The solution found will help improving the reproducibility of Bioinformatics pipelines.

## *R/Shiny application*

This goal was fully achieved with an easy running application, which parts can be reused and recomposed. Albeit it is simple it may speed up some data-analyst vs data-decision-makers loops.

## CCEG

This goal has been achieved as described in the initial planning. The goal of creating a pipeline that could improve reproducibility in Bioinformatics research was achieved and this may have an impact by reducing the amount of wasted resources in this field. Additionally, all software used to develop this work is free and mostly open source (with the exception Docker that is free but not open source), this allow researchers and institutions with low resources to benefit from the results of this work.

Regarding gender equality as mentioned during the initial planning the bibliography includes full names, citations were done regardless of the gender of the authors and, albeit the impact was minor in this work as no manual was written no assumptions about the gender of the application user or reader were made.

## Future lines of work

Several improvements can be made to the current work:

* Pipeline:
  + Modifications to the *maUEB* package could be done to allow implementing an interactive report
  + A more extensive manual on the pipeline could be written
  + Additional versions of this pipeline could be written for other analyses
  + Another strategies for creating the parameters list could be explored
* Docker container:
  + Instead of mounting a volume, the data needed for the analysis could be included in the Docker image making the image self contained for running the analysis
  + Docker image could be uploaded to a Docker image repository for direct use by researchers
* R/Shiny App
  + Run refinement sessions with users to prioritize new functionalities, for example:
    - Download only genes that are significant in several comparisons
    - Provide more links to external databases with information about the genes

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1. At the moment of writing this document the terms «pipelines» and «workflow managers» is difficult to disambiguate. For example, targets is described as a «pipeline-tool» while Scipipe is used for «Scientific workflows, sometimes also called "pipelines"». The definition used in Wratten et al. (2021) will be used in this document: «Workflow managers [...] simplify pipeline development [...]». Therefore, targets will be considered a Workflow manager and the product an analysis pipeline. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Thanks to reticulate even tools programmed in Python could be used in our pipeline (https://rstudio.github.io/reticulate/) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Results section contain links to the full source code of this work if readers are interested in checking the code while reading the manuscript. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The usual R nomenclature, *package\_name*::*function\_name* is used to indicate which functions from which packages were used in each of the steps [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The following link offers and indepth view of the operator: https://adv-r.hadley.nz/quasiquotation.html#quasi-motivation [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Note that, initially, this report was planned to be interactive. In the conclusions section the reasons for this modifciation are explained. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. This freezing date is specified as explained in:

   <https://packagemanager.rstudio.com/client/#/repos/2/overview> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)