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Meeting details

Nexus EXCELLENTIA Summit 2025: Resilient Trajectories - Mentoring Young Researchers and Innovators on Future-Proof Infrastructures in Times of Uncertainty

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| Date | 07/07/2025 |
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Report

The Nexus EXCELLENTIA Summit 2025 was conceived as an online mentoring and networking event, building on the experience of the Thessaloniki Nexus EXCELLENTIA workshop and other mentoring activities under the Action.

It aimed to showcase trajectories of young researchers and innovators, connect them with senior experts from academia, business, international organisations and policy, and reflect on how Nexus EXCELLENTIA can remain a long-term, resilient mentoring framework beyond the lifetime of NexusNet.

The summit opened with a welcome session where Giannis Adamos (Founder & Scientific Director of Nexus EXCELLENTIA), Chrysi Laspidou (NexusNet Chair), Floor Brouwer (NexusNet Vice-Chair), Aikaterini Tsikaloudaki (Chair, School of Civil Engineering, AUTH) and Fotini Kehagia (Director, Transport and Project Management Division, AUTH) underlined the role of youth and early-career researchers as central agents of transformation.

The welcome message highlighted that Nexus EXCELLENTIA, launched in 2023, has already connected more than 40 mentees and mentors across sectors and that the summit represents a milestone in reflecting on outcomes and future directions of the programme.

The core of the programme consisted of four thematic science tracks explicitly designed as mentoring spaces, where Nexus EXCELLENTIA mentees presented their work alongside mentors and senior experts.

- **Thematic track 1 – From Nexus EXCELLENTIA to Business & International Organizations** (moderator: Serena Caucci) focused on transitions from academic pathways to careers in consulting, international organisations and applied research. Andrija Popović opened with a talk on overcoming the gap between theory and practice and establishing authority in business, followed by short interventions from Lea Tatry (VITO), Jairo Guzman (UNODC), Loreto Lopez Gamboa and Aatralarasi Saravanan, who illustrated how Nexus-relevant competences are applied in their institutions.

Discussion centred on translating Nexus knowledge into employable profiles and on the value of mentoring for navigating early career decisions.

- **Thematic track 2 – From Nexus EXCELLENTIA to Higher Education Pathways** (moderator: Maria Vrachioli) addressed academic trajectories, including doctoral and post-doctoral opportunities. Edoardo Bigolin presented an example of integrating the WEFE Nexus approach into corporate sustainability practices, followed by presentations from Argyrios Balatsoukas, Milena Mančić and Georgia Tseva.

This track illustrated how Nexus thinking is embedded in curricula and research projects across European universities and how ECIs can position themselves in competitive academic environments.

- **Thematic track 3 – From Nexus EXCELLENTIA to Competencies Upskilling** (moderator: Marko Mančić) placed explicit emphasis on green skills and competencies required for just and sustainable transitions. Tamara Rađenović introduced the conceptual and policy context in her talk “Exploring green skills and competencies to support the transition towards sustainable societies”, stressing that green skills are enablers of systemic change, not only employability. She presented key competency frameworks, highlighted the importance of interdisciplinary problem-solving, participatory decision-making, anticipatory governance and ethical leadership, and pointed to challenges such as fragmentation across disciplines, limited integration into formal education and regional inequalities. Further contributions by Marco Falda, Taiwo Temitope Bamgbose, Felipe Marín Rivera and Brian Kipruto provided case-based perspectives on upskilling within different national and disciplinary contexts.
- **Thematic track 4 – Insights from Nexus EXCELLENTIA training and educational activities** (moderator: Tamara Rađenović) connected the Summit with the training schools and other educational events delivered under NexusNet. Catarina Roseta-Palma and Vladimir Kitanovski reflected on the goals and structure of the training schools, emphasising the deliberate integration of theoretical knowledge with hands-on exercises, group work and problem-driven assignments for ECIs. The round-table discussion examined organisational and pedagogical challenges, participant feedback, and priorities for future training, including the need to further emphasise just transitions, green skills, and transversal competences such as communication, teamwork and stakeholder engagement.

After a short break, the summit moved to cross-cutting topics particularly relevant for mentoring and capacity building. **Session on Gender Perspectives and IP Protection** (moderator: Catarina Roseta-Palma) included a talk by Juliana Gomes Chediek on promoting gender balance and inclusivity in science, followed by a presentation by Argyrios Zilos on intellectual property (IP) protection for European researchers. The session highlighted gendered patterns in participation and leadership, discussed how mentoring programmes can address structural inequalities, and clarified basic IP concepts and protection routes, which are often unfamiliar to early-career researchers.

Special Session I – How climate crisis affects democracy, governmental policy & social justice (moderator: Giannis Adamos) examined the broader societal and governance context in which mentees will operate. Emmanuella Doussis analysed current and emerging challenges in climate diplomacy, while Arjun Avasthy discussed how ambitions in climate diplomacy translate into hireable skills and what ESG and sustainability leaders look for in early-career professionals. This session explicitly linked macro-level climate governance with micro-level competency profiles.

Special Session II – Innovations and challenges across the transport, shipping and logistics landscape (moderator: Vladimir Kitanovski) provided sector-specific examples of Nexus-relevant research and practice, with contributions from Kaan İlker Demirezen (sustainable transportation and emergency risk management), Argyrios Balatsoukas (critical

infrastructure resilience in transport planning), Olympia Nisiforou (Driver-Pressure-State-Impact-Response model applied to port decarbonisation and adaptation) and Giannis Adamos (mobility as a driver for sustainable and prosperous cities). The session illustrated how Nexus EXCELLENTIA mentees engage with real-world infrastructure challenges and provided material for further mentoring on methodological and policy aspects.

In **Session on Building human-centred, sustainable and socially-just urban futures**, Andras Merza presented the *Resilient Futures e-Community of Practice (e-CoP)* as a digital platform to continue exchanges beyond the summit, offering opportunities for peer learning, mentoring and cross-project collaboration.

The event closed with final remarks by Giannis Adamos, who summarised key messages: the importance of intergenerational collaboration, the need to align skills development with emerging climate and Nexus challenges, and the role of Nexus EXCELLENTIA as a bridge between research, innovation, education and practice.

Main action points

The Nexus EXCELLENTIA Summit 2025 generated several conclusions and follow-up points for the mentoring programme and the Action:

1. Consolidation of Nexus EXCELLENTIA as a long-term mentoring framework

The summit confirmed that Nexus EXCELLENTIA provides tangible value for ECIs by connecting them with mentors from academia, business and international organisations, and by showcasing concrete career trajectories. Online summit formats can complement in-person mentoring workshops and training schools, broadening participation.

2. Bridging to diverse career pathways

The four thematic tracks demonstrated that mentees could pursue careers in business, international organisations, academia and specialised technical domains while remaining anchored in Nexus thinking. Mentoring efforts should continue to explicitly address transitions between these pathways and the competencies required in each.

3. Centrality of green skills and transversal competences

Presentations and discussions stressed the importance of green skills as enablers of systemic change and just transitions, together with transversal competencies such as interdisciplinary problem-solving, participatory decision-making, communication and ethical leadership. Future Nexus EXCELLENTIA activities should mainstream these competences in training schools, mentoring sessions and collaborative projects.

4. Enhancing training design through feedback from training schools

Reflections on NexusNet training schools underlined the effectiveness of combining theoretical inputs with practical exercises and group work, while also identifying logistical and pedagogical challenges (e.g. time constraints, balancing heterogenous backgrounds). This feedback will inform the design of future training activities and potential follow-up programmes after the end of the Action.

5. Mainstreaming gender perspective and IP awareness

The dedicated session on gender and IP showed that mentoring programmes must proactively address inclusivity and legal/innovation literacy. Future Nexus EXCELLENTIA activities should continue to integrate gender-sensitive



approaches and provide basic guidance on IP protection, particularly for ECIs involved in interdisciplinary and applied projects.

6. Connecting mentoring with broader governance and infrastructure debates

The special sessions on climate diplomacy, ESG skills, and transport/logistics underlined that mentees operate within complex governance and infrastructure systems. Mentoring and training should therefore situate individual career planning within wider debates on democracy, social justice, infrastructure resilience and decarbonisation.

7. Utilising digital communities of practice

The introduction of the Resilient Futures e-Community of Practice offers a concrete mechanism to sustain interactions among mentees, mentors and external partners. Nexus EXCELLENTIA should actively promote engagement with this e-CoP and explore joint activities (webinars, clinics, peer-review sessions) to maintain momentum after the summit.

Overall, the Nexus EXCELLENTIA Summit 2025 demonstrated that online, thematically structured mentoring events can effectively complement in-person activities, broaden participation, and deepen the programme's impact on skills development, career trajectories and cross-sector collaboration within the NexusNet community.