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## Meeting details

Workshop: Co-creation and Sustainability on the Nexus EXCELLENTIA mentoring program

Date	23–24/09/2024
Place	Face-to-face, Department of Civil Engineering, Faculty of Engineering, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki, Greece
Author(s)	Giannis Adamos, Tamara Rađenović
Version	Final

## Report

Nexus EXCELLENTIA Mentoring Event was organized in the form of a workshop, combining plenary inspiration talks, group mentoring formats (co-working, world café, speed-science style exchanges) and mentee pitch presentations. The main objective was to operationalize the Nexus EXCELLENTIA mentoring programme through an intensive two-day mentoring workshop, with a strong emphasis on Early Career Investigators (ECIs) and other mentees.

The event aimed at:

- Exposing mentees to concrete innovation pathways, funding opportunities and Nexus-relevant projects.
- Providing structured group mentoring formats (co-working, world café, pitch feedback) linking mentors and mentees.
- Co-creating ideas for future collaborations and for the further development and sustainability of the Nexus EXCELLENTIA programme.

The workshop opened with a welcome and introduction by:

Assist. Prof. Giannis Adamos (Workshop host & NexusNet Grant Holder Manager, AUTH),

Prof. Chrysi Laspidou (NexusNet Chair, UTH),

Prof. Aikaterini Tsikaloudaki (Chair, Department of Civil Engineering, AUTH),

Prof. Fotini Kehagia (Director, Transport and Project Management Division, AUTH), and

Prof. Srdjan Glišović (Dean, Faculty of Occupational Safety, University of Niš).

Speakers underlined the dual nature of the event: as a capacity-building activity for ECIs and mentees, and as a space to connect NexusNet with a broader portfolio of EU-funded Nexus and climate-resilience projects. The Nexus



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EXCELLENTIA mentoring programme was introduced as a key legacy instrument of the Action to sustain collaboration beyond its lifetime.

A first block of short talks provided concrete examples of career and innovation pathways:

- Inna Petrenko (Enrich Global) presented “Navigating Innovation: Strategies for turning ideas into impactful solutions”, highlighting stages of innovation, support instruments available through Enrich Global, and typical bottlenecks when moving from research results to market-or policy-relevant outputs.
- Theocharis Vlachopanagiotis (Rhoé) discussed “From Student Group to Reality: How Rhoé achieved its vision”, illustrating how a student initiative evolved into a functioning enterprise and emphasising team building, risk-taking, and partnership strategies.
- Dr. Nafsika Stavridou (AUTH) introduced “Exploring funding opportunities in the research world”, mapping main EU and national instruments relevant for ECIs (e.g. MSCA, Horizon Europe, Interreg) and explaining basic principles of proposal preparation.

These talks provided mentees with practical examples of transition from academic projects to professional careers and entrepreneurship, setting the tone for the mentoring components.

A second block focused on governance, Nexus implementation and systemic approaches:

- Alexia Spyridonidou (European Public Law Organisation) presented governance trends and challenges drawing on DesirMED and Sustainable Tourism (Interreg Euro-MED) projects.
- Dr. Georgios Papangelis (National Observatory of Athens) introduced an innovative, multi-stressors methodology for urban environmental management developed in the ARSINOE project.
- Christina-Maria Androna (National Technical University of Athens) presented “SustainGraph: A Knowledge Graph for Tracking Progress and Interlinking of the Sustainable Development Goals”.
- Dr. Tadej Stepišnik Perdih (National Technical University of Athens) outlined the EU Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change, its objectives and relevance for Nexus-oriented research.

The session illustrated how Nexus thinking is implemented in concrete projects and how governance, data and climate adaptation agendas intersect.

The morning concluded with an open discussion moderated by Assist. Prof. Giannis Adamos, followed by a light lunch and informal networking. Questions were centred on:

- How to position ECI-led projects within larger consortia.
- The role of NexusNet in creating entry points for ECIs in upcoming calls.
- Ways to ensure that mentoring continues after the end of the Action.

Participants were transferred by bus to ERGON Agora East for a dedicated co-working slot labelled “Nexus EXCELLENTIA co-working time”. In this session:

- Mentors and mentees worked in small groups to discuss ongoing research ideas, proposal outlines and career questions.
- ECIs received feedback on how to sharpen problem statements, frame interdisciplinary Nexus questions and identify appropriate funding instruments.
- Informal mentoring relationships were strengthened through one-to-one and small-group conversations.



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The day closed with a networking cocktail in Thessaloniki city centre, which further supported informal exchanges among mentors and mentees.

Day 2 opened with a sequence of very short projects presentations designed as “speed-science” inputs to inspire mentees and provide a catalogue of potential collaboration spaces:

- Retouch Nexus: unlocking water resilience through better water governance (Dr. Maria Vrachioli, TUM).
- REXUS: moving from Nexus thinking to Nexus doing (Prof. José González Piqueras, UCLM).
- ARSINOE: climate-resilient regions through systemic solutions and innovations (Prof. Chrysi Lapidou, UTH).
- BIONEXT: integrating Water-Energy-Food-Transport-Health Nexus approaches under SSP-RCP scenarios to 2100 (Dr. Alexandra Ioannou, UTH).
- NATALIE: accelerating and mainstreaming transformative Nature-Based Solutions (Dr. Alexandra-Eleni Spyropoulou, UTH).
- NEXOGENESIS: streamlining water-related policies (Dr. Nikolaos Mellios, UTH).
- MI-TRAP: mitigating transport-related air pollution in Europe (Georgia Tseva, AMARANTHUS).
- CHOICE: mainstreaming mitigation pathways for climate-conscious change in the food chain (Argyrios Balatsoukas, UTH).
- NexusNet Task Force on extreme events: assessing Nexus implications of extreme events (Prof. Cevza Melek Kazezyilmaz Alhan, Istanbul University, and Dr. Dimitrios Kofinas, UTH).

This session exposed mentees to a broad range of Nexus applications (governance, data, nature-based solutions, food systems, transport) and highlighted opportunities for internships, secondments, joint publications and proposal writing.

After a coffee and networking session, Inna Petrenko (Enrich Global) presented “Enrich Global: Advancing Climate Change and Sustainability through Collaboration – Opportunities and initiatives for engagement”. The intervention underlined how the Nexus EXCELLENTIA programme can plug into global innovation networks, and how mentees can use Enrich Global instruments for visibility and matchmaking.

A structured world-café session, co-designed by Serena Caucci, Tamara Rađenović and Giannis Adamos, was organised for senior experts and mentors. Three rotating discussion tables were set up, each addressing a guiding question:

- Identify areas for collaboration – mapping potential joint collaborations for the next 12 months, specifying both topics and concrete products (e.g. papers, policy briefs, tools).
- Added value to Nexus EXCELLENTIA – reflecting on what the programme is currently missing and how additional elements (e.g. online clinics, thematic clusters, joint training schools) could add value for ECIs and mentors.
- Synergies with existing projects – exploring how Nexus EXCELLENTIA can benefit ongoing projects and vice versa, identifying cross-project synergies and possible co-branded outputs.

Participants rotated across tables, allowing convergence of perspectives and producing a set of preliminary ideas to be taken up by the AC when refining the mentoring scheme and planning the next Mentoring Events.

In the afternoon, participants moved for a combined lunch and co-working session. The focus was on mentee pitch presentations:

- Mentees presented short pitches of their research ideas, ongoing PhD work or project concepts (5–7 minutes each).



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- Mentors and peers provided structured feedback on scientific focus, methodological choices, Nexus relevance and potential funding pathways.
- Several pitches aimed at follow-up proposals for STSMs/VMs, Horizon Europe or Interreg calls.

This session represented the core group-mentoring activity of the event, as mentees received feedback not only from their assigned mentors but from a wider panel of senior experts and peers.

The day ended with a bus transfer back to AUTH premises and an optional networking dinner, which continued informal exchanges and planning of joint activities.

## Main action points

The Thessaloniki mentoring event generated several practical follow-up actions for the Nexus EXCELLENTIA programme and NexusNet more broadly:

### 1. Refinement of the Nexus EXCELLENTIA mentoring scheme

Use the input from the world-café to refine the structure of the remaining two mentoring events (e.g. balance between plenary content, group mentoring, online follow-ups) and to consider establishing thematic mentoring clusters (e.g. governance, modelling, nature-based solutions, innovation and entrepreneurship).

### 2. Continuation of mentor–mentee interactions

Encourage mentors and mentees who met in Thessaloniki to schedule at least one follow-up online meeting, focusing on concrete outputs (joint paper, proposal idea, data analysis plan).

### 3. Linkages with NexusNet calls and instruments

Align mentee ideas and collaboration plans with upcoming STSM, VM and DC/ITC grant calls of NexusNet, ensuring that ECIs can use the Action's instruments to further develop ideas discussed during the workshop.

### 4. Synergies with EU projects and Enrich Global

Map the synergies identified in the project showcase and world-café sessions and explore opportunities for joint sessions, cross-project publications or policy briefs under the Nexus EXCELLENTIA umbrella.

### 5. Preparation of subsequent mentoring events

Use the Thessaloniki experience as a reference model for the next Mentoring Events, maintaining the combination of inspiration talks, co-working, world-café-type group mentoring, and mentee pitch sessions.

According to the signed e-COST attendance list, 47 participants from 11 COST countries attended the Thessaloniki mentoring event.