

Benjamin  
**URH**

EDITOR

# — Foresight for — Danube Region's — Future-Oriented — Competitive Planning —

Book of Abstracts



University of Maribor Press





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Faculty of Organizational Sciences

# **Foresight for Danube Region's Future-Oriented Competitive Planning**

Book of Abstracts

Editor

**Benjamin Urh**

September 2025

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# ForeDanube Project: Plan & Implementation Report

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The ForeDanube project, implemented within the framework of the European Union's Seed Money Facility, was conceived as a preparatory initiative to establish the conditions and mobilise resources necessary for advancing research and educational foresight capacities in the Danube region. The project addresses the increasing demand for systematic foresight expertise as a critical factor in enhancing competitiveness, innovation, and policy design across macro-regional and European contexts. Its overarching ambition is to design a sustainable framework that links foresight, knowledge improvement, educational programs, and policy integration while setting the foundations for a permanent institutional structure.

The project was organised into several interrelated work packages, each targeting a distinct dimension of foresight development. Initial activities focused on mapping the state of foresight in the Danube region through comprehensive online surveys. These surveys provided both an overview of existing foresight education practices and a detailed report on the current application of foresight in research and innovation systems. Complementary to this, dedicated analyses were conducted to screen regional, national, and EU-level funding calls to identify opportunities for embedding foresight into future research and educational projects. These findings laid the groundwork for preparing a Horizon Europe application that addresses digital transformation, innovation, and foresight-based capacity building.

Another significant component of the project involved developing a work plan for foresight education and research, including the design of structured methodologies for needs assessment and stakeholder engagement. By systematically analysing stakeholder expectations, the project produced a draft foresight methodology, complemented by preliminary testing and verification activities. These outputs reflect a bottom-up approach to foresight institutionalisation, ensuring alignment between foresight practices and the practical requirements of public, private, and academic actors across the Danube region.

Dissemination and stakeholder engagement were central to the project's implementation. Two high-level conferences, the Opening Conference and the Final Dissemination Conference, were organised to foster dialogue among policymakers, researchers, educators, and practitioners. These events provided platforms for knowledge exchange, consolidation of recommendations, and the formulation of priorities for forthcoming European research funding opportunities. The conferences also facilitated the construction of a cross-sectoral partnership and stimulated discussions on long-term foresight institutionalisation in the Danube macro-region.

The project's concluding phase emphasised the design of a model for institutionalising foresight activities. This model envisages the creation of a permanent multidisciplinary research group, integrating expertise from diverse fields such as mathematics, organisational science, business planning, and information technologies. A key strategic vision emerging from this effort is the establishment of a Foresight Competence Centre at the Danube macro-regional level. Such a centre, envisioned as data-driven and supported by artificial intelligence, would not only consolidate foresight practices within the Danube but also act as a nucleus for interconnecting with other EU macro-regions. In doing so, it would enable foresight to serve as both a bridge between EU-wide policies and local implementation strategies, and as a testbed for inclusive, cross-regional governance innovation.

In conclusion, the ForeDanube project successfully demonstrated the feasibility and necessity of a structured foresight approach in the Danube region. By combining methodological development, stakeholder engagement, and institutional design, the project contributed to advancing foresight capacity as an instrument for regional competitiveness, educational innovation, and evidence-based policymaking. The

proposed Foresight Competence Centre stands as a strategic legacy of the project, offering a scalable model that could be replicated across Europe and beyond, thereby fostering more adaptive and resilient governance in an era of accelerating transformation.

**Keywords:** Foresight, Danube region, institutionalisation, innovation, policy integration



# Artificial Intelligence and Foresight! Navigating Uncertainty in the Age of Intelligent Systems

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Artificial Intelligence (AI) is increasingly recognised as a transformative force influencing today's society, decision-making and strategic planning. However, its integration into critical domains requires more than predictive accuracy; it requires foresight - a predictive ability to manage uncertainty in complex, dynamic environments. This presentation explores the interplay between AI and foresight and how uncertainty, chance and human cognition must be considered to ensure responsible deployment of intelligent systems.

Uncertainty is central to both human and machine decision-making and can be broadly categorised as aleatory (due to inherent randomness) or epistemic (due to incomplete knowledge). AI systems often struggle to distinguish between these two forms, and their performance can be impaired if uncertainty is insufficiently quantified or poorly communicated. Beyond deterministic prediction, AI must incorporate scenario-based reasoning and recognise the limitations of probabilistic models. While Bayesian methods provide powerful mechanisms for updating beliefs under uncertainty, they are limited by assumptions about data and prior knowledge. Therefore, foresight requires tools that go beyond prediction to include scenario planning, resilience strategies and adaptive responses to large uncertainties, including so-called “black swans”.

Quantifying and communicating uncertainty is as much an art as it is a science. Replacing vague descriptions with numerical probabilities, calibrating forecasts and using effective visualisations are crucial for confidence in AI-powered decision making. Historical mispredictions - from political elections to pandemic spread models - show how misinterpretations of probability can mislead policy makers and the public. These lessons underscore the ethical need for humility, transparency and responsible foresight in AI applications, especially in areas where the stakes are high, such as healthcare, climate science and criminal justice.

The human dimension of foresight is equally critical. Risk perception is shaped not only by analytical reasoning but also by emotions and cognitive biases. Aligning AI decision support systems with human psychology requires careful design of uncertainty communication to ensure that probabilistic outcomes are interpretable and actionable. Expert judgements, which are often indispensable in uncertain contexts, need to be elicited, aggregated and integrated into AI prediction systems, considering subjectivity and calibration issues.

Methodologically, foresight in AI can be supported by Bayesian networks, Monte Carlo simulations, ensemble modelling and structured scenario building. These tools enable the exploration of multiple plausible futures rather than a single predicted trajectory. They promote robustness and resilience - qualities that are more valuable than mere optimisation in the face of rapidly evolving and unpredictable conditions. In addition, visualisation libraries and fan charting techniques can improve the communication of uncertainty, increasing stakeholder engagement and trust.

The presentation advocates for a forward-thinking mindset in AI that shifts the focus from optimisation to adaptation. This includes strategies such as horizon scanning, red teaming and stress testing, which together encourage preparation for various unforeseen developments. Ultimately, foresight in AI is not synonymous with prediction. Rather, it is about a broader ability to adapt, remain resilient and manage complexity responsibly.

The main conclusions emphasise that uncertainty should not be seen as a flaw, but as an inherent feature of intelligent systems. Effective foresight integrates probabilistic reasoning with strategic adaptability and combines technical modelling with human-centred decision making. By incorporating humility, transparency and

resilience into the development and deployment of AI, we can harness the power of intelligent systems while mitigating the risks of overconfidence and misinterpretation. In this way, AI does not become an oracle with deterministic outcomes, but a strategic partner in navigating the uncertainties of the future.

**Keywords:** Artificial Intelligence, Uncertainty, Bayesian reasoning, Scenario planning, Resilience





# Awareness, Application, and Training Needs in the Field of Foresight in the Danube Region Outcomes of the Foresight Questionnaire

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This study presents the outcomes of the Foresight Questionnaire conducted within the ForeDanube initiative, aimed at assessing awareness, application, and training needs in the field of foresight across the Danube Region. The primary objective was to evaluate current levels of foresight knowledge, its organisational application, perceived strategic importance, and interest in capacity-building. The survey was conducted between March and May 2025 using the 1KA online platform and was distributed to more than 1,000 contacts representing public and private organisations of varying sizes and sectors. From 422 interactions with the survey link, 68 valid responses were collected, including 51 fully completed questionnaires. Respondents represented a diverse set of organisations, with considerable variation in ownership structure, sectoral focus, and degree of strategic planning involvement.

The findings reveal that foresight is not yet broadly embedded in organisational practice, although a baseline level of awareness exists. Self-reported familiarity with foresight did not statistically differ by organisation size or sector, suggesting a generally moderate and consistent level of understanding. However, individuals more actively engaged in strategic planning demonstrated higher foresight

knowledge, confirming a positive correlation between familiarity and involvement in decision-making processes. Furthermore, the analysis indicates that while the overall use of foresight methods is not dependent on organisational size, it is significantly more prevalent within the private sector. This discrepancy points toward sectoral differences in strategic culture, innovation orientation, and operational flexibility.

Perceptions of the strategic value of foresight were consistently favourable. The average score for the perceived importance of foresight methods was significantly above the neutral midpoint, underlining recognition of foresight as a tool for enhancing organisational development and maintaining competitiveness. Importantly, no significant differences were observed between public and private sectors in terms of perceived importance, suggesting a shared acknowledgement of foresight's relevance across contexts. Similarly, organisational size did not systematically influence these perceptions, although medium-sized organisations showed slightly elevated values.

A further dimension of the study focused on the demand for training and education in foresight. Results highlight substantial organisational interest in building foresight capacity, with average ratings again exceeding neutral levels. Notably, public sector respondents expressed greater willingness to engage in foresight training compared to their private sector counterparts, while overall interest remained consistently positive across organisational sizes. Preferred training formats emphasised practical, flexible modalities such as workshops, webinars, mentoring, and micro-credentials, reflecting the need for adaptable learning opportunities aligned with organisational constraints.

Taken together, these findings illustrate a paradox: foresight is not yet widely applied in practice, yet its strategic relevance is broadly recognised. This suggests a considerable potential for capacity development and institutionalisation of foresight within the Danube Region. The results underscore the importance of initiatives such as ForeDanube, which can bridge the gap between awareness and practice by fostering education, training, and applied foresight methodologies. They also highlight the need for a regional foresight training platform and the establishment of a Foresight Competence Centre to support long-term capability building.

In conclusion, the study provides empirical evidence that foresight in the Danube Region is in a formative stage, characterised by moderate awareness, uneven application, and a strong demand for further training. Organisations across sectors perceive foresight as strategically valuable, with public entities demonstrating a particular appetite for capacity development. These insights confirm the relevance of investing in foresight infrastructures and offer a foundation for future policy and practice aimed at strengthening regional resilience, adaptability, and innovation.

**Keywords:** Foresight awareness, capacity building, strategic planning, Danube region, training needs



# Foresight in the Context of the Danube Region Strategy

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This contribution explores the role of foresight within the framework of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), highlighting its potential to strengthen anticipatory governance, build cross-sectoral cooperation, and enhance policy resilience in times of geopolitical, environmental, and socio-economic turbulence. The analysis emphasises the Danube macro-region as both a beneficiary and a testbed for strategic foresight, offering valuable lessons for EU-level policymaking.

The fragmented nature of Europe's science-for-policy ecosystem, particularly across regions, governance levels, and sectors, poses a challenge for effective future-oriented policymaking. In the Danube Region, where disparities between EU and non-EU member states further complicate strategic alignment, foresight offers an opportunity to foster joint visions and actionable pathways. Recommendations include high-level leadership commitment, structured capacity-building initiatives, inter-ministerial coordination, action-based learning, and the creation of sustained foresight communities of practice. These measures collectively contribute to institutionalising foresight and embedding it into the policy cycle.

Key transversal themes for foresight in the Danube Region reflect broader European priorities: climate resilience, migration and inclusion, youth and skills, innovation ecosystems, and geopolitics. In the face of climate crisis impacts, geopolitical instability, and economic volatility, foresight supports both policy foresight

(anticipating policy needs and stress-testing measures) and business foresight (helping enterprises adapt to long-term market and societal shifts). The presentation underlines that foresight should not be equated with prediction, but rather with minimising surprise, stress-testing policies, and creating robust, adaptive strategies.

The EUSDR is positioned as a laboratory for EU foresight, bridging the gap between global or EU-level strategies and localised policy implementation. Mutual learning exercises, cross-macro-regional exchanges (e.g., with EUSALP or EUSAIR), and foresight-to-policy toolkits can ensure alignment and scalability of insights. Synchronising foresight outputs with key EU policy cycles – such as cohesion policy reviews or the Multiannual Financial Framework—further enhances their practical value. Data-driven approaches, including artificial intelligence (e.g., Knowledge Analytics for Technology & Innovation, and the Danube Reference Data and Services Infrastructure), combined with human expertise in a “human-in-the-loop” framework, are presented as new hybrid models for foresight practice.

Importantly, foresight extends beyond evidence-based analysis to address societal values, stakeholder perceptions, and issues of legitimacy and acceptance. By embedding foresight into policy design, decision-makers can anticipate resistance, align strategies with citizen concerns, and thereby enhance both effectiveness and trust. This perspective reinforces the notion that foresight contributes not only to knowledge generation but also to democratic governance and participatory legitimacy.

Ultimately, the Danube Region illustrates how macro-regional strategies can serve as appropriate governance levels for collective responses to transnational challenges. The presentation concludes that foresight must be seen as a backbone of future-proof policymaking: a means of minimising surprises, anticipating disruptions, and linking shared visions with concrete actions. Without vision, action risks fragmentation; without action, vision remains a mere aspiration. Foresight thus provides the essential bridge—translating anticipatory intelligence into policies that are resilient, adaptive, and strategically aligned with both regional and European futures.

**Keywords:** EU Danube Region Strategy, anticipatory governance, macro-regional cooperation, policy resilience, scenario analysis

# Proposed Master's Programme in Strategic Foresight and Future Studies

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The proposed Master's Programme in Strategic Foresight and Future Studies, developed at the Faculty of Organizational Sciences, University of Maribor, responds to the growing demand for professionals capable of anticipating change and designing resilient strategies in increasingly complex and uncertain environments. The program is designed to cultivate advanced methodological skills, interdisciplinary thinking, and ethical awareness, thereby equipping graduates to lead foresight initiatives across public, private, and research domains.

Structured as a two-year program (120 ECTS), the curriculum provides a progressive learning path through core, elective, practical, and research components. Core modules (45 ECTS) deliver foundational knowledge of foresight and future studies, systems thinking, strategic decision-making under uncertainty, and ethics of the future. Students acquire proficiency in qualitative and quantitative foresight methods, trend and megatrend analysis, and research methodologies. Elective modules (30 ECTS) allow for specialisation in areas such as digital foresight and artificial intelligence, foresight in public policy, environmental futures and sustainability, and sociocultural transformations.

The program emphasises experiential learning through a 15 ECTS practical module, where students engage in interdisciplinary workshops, collaborate with external organisations, and develop strategic foresight deliverables tailored to real-world challenges. The Master's Thesis (30 ECTS) represents the capstone of the program, requiring students to design and implement original research or applied projects. Opportunities for integrating micro-credentials and recognition of prior learning provide flexibility, while Erasmus+ mobility and international partnerships foster global perspectives and networks.

Key program goals include linking theory with practice, fostering interdisciplinary and systematic approaches to future-oriented challenges, and embedding ethics and responsibility into foresight practice. The pedagogical design encourages students to balance analytical rigour with creativity, ethical reflection, and practical application. By engaging with foresight methodologies, scenario development, systems complexity, and innovation strategies, graduates develop the capacity to navigate uncertainty, anticipate disruptions, and contribute to organisational and societal resilience.

Learning outcomes highlight the ability to conduct complex analysis, design foresight processes, apply scenario-building and back-casting techniques, and critically evaluate emerging technologies and societal trends. These capabilities are transferable across sectors, preparing graduates for diverse roles such as strategic foresight managers, policy analysts, innovation directors, consultants, and futures researchers. The career prospects are reinforced by growing global recognition of the need for anticipatory governance, long-term planning, and resilience-building across organisations.

International partnerships with leading foresight networks and institutions—such as UNESCO Futures Literacy, the EU Foresight Network, think tanks, innovation hubs, and governmental agencies—enrich the program through guest lectures, case studies, and research collaborations. These collaborations enhance employability and broaden exposure to state-of-the-art practices in strategic foresight.

In summary, the proposed Master's Programme represents a pioneering initiative to institutionalise foresight education within the Danube Region and beyond. It integrates rigorous academic foundations with practical, ethical, and global



dimensions of foresight practice. By training professionals capable of anticipating transformative trends, designing adaptive strategies, and fostering resilience, the program aims to contribute not only to organisational competitiveness but also to societal preparedness in the face of uncertainty. As such, it embodies the vision of higher education as a driver of futures literacy and anticipatory capacity building in Europe.

**Keywords:** Futures studies, higher education, systems thinking, interdisciplinary learning, strategic foresight curriculum



# A Foresight for a Time of Crisis!

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This presentation addresses the role of foresight in times of crisis, emphasising its importance as an anticipatory capacity that enables timely, coordinated, and effective responses to emerging threats. Crises are defined as unexpected events or actions that endanger human lives or organisational survival, characterised by surprise, limited reaction time, and significant threats to continuity. In such situations, uncertainty represents a temporary but critical state in which individuals or organisations struggle to comprehend the unfolding dynamics. Strategic foresight provides the tools to minimise uncertainty, support rapid decision-making, and restore stability.

The objectives of foresight in crisis management include ensuring adequate preparedness, organised responsiveness, and cooperation with relevant stakeholders and environments. Core priorities encompass minimising response time, guaranteeing continuity of operations, providing essential information, and maintaining transparent public communication. Foresight further enables structured coordination across institutions, ensuring that response mechanisms are both efficient and adaptable.

A wide spectrum of global, supranational, and national security threats underscores the necessity of anticipatory approaches. Global drivers include climate change, financial and economic instability, and the emergence of crisis hotspots, each with the potential to destabilise societies and create cascading risks. Supranational threats encompass terrorism, cyberattacks, organised crime, proliferation of weapons of

mass destruction, illegal migration, and activities of foreign intelligence services. At the national level, threats arise from public safety challenges, natural disasters, health and epidemiological risks, environmental degradation, and scarcity of critical resources. Each category of threat is exacerbated by uncertainty factors such as poverty, social insecurity, and declining trust in institutions.

Climate change is highlighted as a paradigmatic example of a multiplicative threat, amplifying risks related to natural disasters, resource scarcity, and social instability. Similarly, global financial and economic crises may evolve into broader social crises, increasing unemployment and causing tensions that complicate governance. Crisis hotspots—armed conflicts or low-intensity wars—create unstable states, human rights violations, migration flows, and safe havens for terrorism. Cyber threats, meanwhile, jeopardise the integrity of critical infrastructure and government functions, while transnational organised crime undermines governance through trafficking, corruption, and illicit financial flows.

Foresight in crisis contexts operates as both an early-warning system and a strategic compass. By identifying signals of change, stress-testing potential scenarios, and anticipating systemic interdependencies, foresight enables policymakers and organisational leaders to prepare for disruptions before they fully materialise. It also strengthens resilience by informing strategies that balance short-term emergency response with long-term adaptation. Importantly, foresight does not eliminate crises but reduces their unpredictability and mitigates their most severe consequences.

The ethical and communicative dimensions of foresight are equally important. Transparent communication of risks, responsible framing of uncertainties, and coordinated engagement with the public build trust and support collective resilience. By integrating scientific evidence with stakeholder perspectives, foresight provides a more comprehensive understanding of crises and enhances the legitimacy of policy measures.

In conclusion, foresight in times of crisis must be understood as a vital instrument for both preparedness and adaptation. It enables organisations and societies to navigate unpredictability, minimise response times, and coordinate across multiple levels of governance. By addressing complex and interconnected threats—from climate change and pandemics to cybercrime and terrorism—foresight strengthens

resilience and enhances the capacity to safeguard human security and organisational survival. Ultimately, foresight is not about predicting crises with certainty but about reducing surprise, identifying vulnerabilities, and ensuring that rapid, coordinated, and informed action is possible when crises emerge.

**Keywords:** crisis management, anticipatory governance, security threats, risk communication, resilience strategies



# Danube Transfer Centre as Foresight Network Fostering Competitiveness of the Danube Region

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The Danube Transfer Centre (DTC) network is a flagship initiative within the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), particularly under Priority Area 8 (PA8) on the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Conceived in Baden-Württemberg in 2012 and subsequently expanded across 11 countries, the network now includes 54 centres—comprising entry points and hubs—that bridge the gap between research, innovation, and business practice. By fostering foresight, innovation, and technology transfer, the DTC network acts as a transnational platform for strengthening competitiveness and sustainable development in the Danube macro-region.

The network builds on Steinbeis Europa Zentrum's extensive experience in innovation management, with over three decades of expertise, over 80 EU projects annually, and partnerships with over 800 international actors. This foundation provides a robust basis for foresight-driven initiatives, enabling SMEs and regional stakeholders to anticipate technological trends, adopt innovation strategies, and respond proactively to societal and economic transformations. The DTC approach integrates futures thinking into diverse activities, including SME consulting, cluster strategy development, regional innovation systems (RIS3), public policy support, and participatory road mapping. By embedding foresight into these processes, the

network enhances technology watch, cooperation opportunities, business intelligence and long-term competitiveness.

As a flagship of PA8, the DTC network aligns with the EUSDR's broader objectives of sustainable energy, environmental protection, education, labour market integration, and institutional capacity building. Its innovation and technology transfer working group (WG I&TT), coordinated by Steinbeis Europa Zentrum, demonstrates how foresight and cooperation can be institutionalised across multi-sectoral and multi-level stakeholders. The DTCs also serve as connectors between local initiatives and transnational policy frameworks, ensuring that grassroots innovation is linked to European-level strategies.

The DTC model emphasises the importance of “hidden champions” within the Danube Region—innovative enterprises and research actors with untapped potential to contribute to global competitiveness. By acting as intermediaries, DTCs facilitate collaboration between producers and users of knowledge, addressing structural mismatches between academia, industry, and policy. In doing so, they create value for regions, economies, and societies while contributing to responsible and sustainable industrial transformation.

The achievements of the DTC network illustrate its impact: 36 approved projects amounting to €89 million in funding, with contributions across Horizon Europe, Interreg, and the Danube Transnational Programme. The network supports the identification of “lighthouse projects” and provides a structured framework for foresight-informed innovation strategies. With a strong presence in international foresight networks, the DTCs also contribute to knowledge exchange and policy learning at both regional and European levels.

The mission of the DTC network is to turn knowledge into value by fostering competencies, enhancing cooperation, and embedding foresight into strategic planning. Its vision emphasises bridging research and innovation while enabling sustainable competitiveness in a rapidly changing environment. By integrating foresight into SME support, public policy, and cluster development, the DTCs exemplify how anticipatory governance can strengthen macro-regional strategies.



In conclusion, the Danube Transfer Centre network highlights the transformative potential of foresight and cooperation when embedded in innovation ecosystems. By combining local implementation with transnational coordination, the DTCs foster competitiveness, resilience, and sustainable growth in the Danube Region. Their experience demonstrates that foresight is not merely about anticipating the future but about enabling it—turning strategic knowledge into actionable solutions that benefit enterprises, regions, and societies across Europe.

**Keywords:** technology transfer, innovation ecosystems, competitiveness, knowledge networks, SMS Enterprises



# Draft Work Plan for Foresight Development in the Danube Region

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This draft work plan outlines a strategic framework for developing foresight capacities in the Danube Region within the context of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR). The EUSDR, adopted in 2010 and endorsed by the European Council in 2011, provides a macro-regional platform for cooperation across 14 countries, home to 115 million inhabitants. Its mission is not primarily funding, but enhanced coordination and synergies across policies, stakeholders, and governance levels. In this framework, foresight emerges as a critical tool for addressing common societal challenges, strengthening anticipatory governance, and supporting sustainable and resilient development.

The plan identifies six overarching domains for foresight activity: (1) societal challenges such as social cohesion, disruptions, and democracy resilience; (2) methodological development of foresight tools, frameworks, artificial intelligence integration, and futures literacy; (3) geographic scales ranging from global to local; (4) sectoral domains including information technologies, energy, environment, defence, and disaster management; (5) stakeholder groups from governments to businesses and civil society; and (6) alignment with EU research and innovation project formats (RIA, IA, CSA). Together, these domains provide a comprehensive foundation for foresight-driven initiatives tailored to the diverse needs of the Danube Region.

Several European initiatives serve as guiding references. The JRC's *Risks on the Horizon* (2024) highlights the turbulence, novelty, and ambiguity that complicate long-term planning and emphasises foresight as a tool for preparedness. The *Reference foresight scenarios on the global standing of the EU in 2040* illustrate the value of strategic anticipation at the continental scale. The OECD's *Strategic Foresight Toolkit* (2025) offers structured facilitation guides—ranging from disruption exploration to policy recommendations—relevant for both governments and societal actors. The UNDP's *Foresight Manual* (2018) underscores key principles, including pluralising futures, identifying weak signals, and avoiding “business-as-usual” traps. Collectively, these resources demonstrate the methodological richness available for Danube-focused foresight activities.

Operationalisation of foresight development in the region will involve structured project application flows, starting with defining objectives, drafting project abstracts, assembling qualified consortia, and elaborating work packages, deliverables, and milestones. A strong emphasis is placed on building interdisciplinary partnerships across universities, research institutions, governments, and private sector stakeholders. Examples of potential partners include the Faculty of Technical Sciences (Novi Sad, Serbia), the Institute for Artificial Intelligence Research and Development of Serbia, and science and technology parks, which together can provide domain expertise in energy, environmental engineering, digital transformation, and bioeconomy.

The plan stresses that foresight must exceed knowledge accumulation toward cultivating wisdom—an ability to contextualise and apply anticipatory insights in uncertain environments. By drawing from international best practices and tailoring methods to the Danube region's specific needs, foresight initiatives can support more resilient policymaking, future-oriented entrepreneurship, and inclusive societal transformation. Importantly, foresight is not a predictive exercise but a structured means of living with uncertainty, enabling adaptive strategies that address multiple possible futures.

In conclusion, the draft work plan positions foresight as a backbone for strengthening the competitiveness, resilience, and sustainability of the Danube Region. By aligning macro-regional cooperation with advanced foresight methodologies, the plan envisions the creation of robust anticipatory systems that

bridge science, policy, and practice. This approach not only addresses pressing regional challenges – such as climate change, energy transitions, and social disruptions – but also contributes to the broader European objective of building future-ready governance. The integration of methodological innovation, stakeholder engagement, and cross-border collaboration ensures that foresight in the Danube Region will evolve into a systemic capability, supporting shared visions and translating them into actionable strategies.

**Keywords:** work plan, Horizon Europe, futures literacy, cross-border cooperation, research and innovation



# EU Calls for Co-Financing of Foresight Activities

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This presentation examines opportunities for co-financing foresight activities within the framework of Horizon Europe, with particular attention to the Work Programme 2025–2027 under the strand Widening participation and strengthening the European Research Area (WIDERA). The analysis situates the ForeDanube project in the EU context and highlights relevant calls that address persistent gaps in research and innovation (R&I) performance across Member States and associated countries. By linking foresight development to Horizon Europe priorities, the session outlines pathways for strengthening anticipatory capacities in the Danube Region and beyond.

The WIDERA programme targets two complementary objectives: (1) widening participation and spreading excellence, which seeks to reduce the R&I gap and promote a cohesive, integrated research ecosystem; and (2) reforming and strengthening the European Research Area (ERA) through enhanced governance, systemic reforms, and improved connectivity between actors. Four strategic priorities underpin the programme: building a knowledge market, advancing the green and digital transitions, enhancing interconnections between innovation ecosystems, and promoting concerted investments and reforms.

Two calls are particularly relevant for foresight initiatives. The first, HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-06-ERA-06, focuses on strengthening the European Science for Policy (S4P) ecosystem. It aims to create a more robust, interconnected community of practice that supports evidence-informed policymaking across governance levels. Expected outcomes include increased connectivity among S4P actors, mainstreaming S4P approaches in national R&I institutions, and developing repositories of best practices, frameworks, and toolkits. Activities foreseen under the call include building communities of practice, organising peer learning and training, supporting national S4P correspondents, creating an observatory of practices, and producing accessible policy briefs and resources.

The second, HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-WIDENING-02 (Twinning), is designed to enhance institutional capacities in Widening countries by partnering with leading EU institutions. Its primary goals are to elevate scientific excellence, foster research management skills, and create sustainable collaborations that strengthen innovation ecosystems. Activities may include joint research components, staff exchanges, summer schools, policy reforms, and alignment with smart specialisation strategies. Expected impacts range from enhanced reputations and improved management capacities to increased international mobility of scientists and stronger integration of Widening institutions into the European R&I landscape.

Both calls respond to systemic challenges: fragmentation among R&I actors, weak institutional connectivity, disparities in excellence, and insufficient mainstreaming of science-for-policy approaches. By addressing these weaknesses, they provide strategic avenues for embedding foresight into EU research and policy frameworks. For stakeholders in the Danube Region, participation in these calls offers a means to co-develop foresight services, promote futures literacy, and integrate anticipatory governance into broader European initiatives.

Successful proposals will require consortia that combine diverse expertise, including academic institutions, governance bodies, communication specialists, and intermediaries such as the Joint Research Centre (JRC). A strong emphasis on inclusivity, gender balance, cross-sectoral participation, and geographic diversity further underlines the calls' alignment with EU principles of cohesion and innovation.



In conclusion, Horizon Europe's co-financing opportunities represent a timely opening for advancing foresight capacities in the Danube Region. By engaging with ERA and Twinning calls, foresight stakeholders can contribute to narrowing the R&I gap, building resilient science-for-policy ecosystems, and creating stronger interconnections between innovation communities. Beyond funding, these initiatives are strategically significant for embedding foresight into European policymaking, enhancing competitiveness, and equipping societies to respond to uncertainty and long-term challenges. Ultimately, foresight in this context is not only about anticipating the future but about enabling a collaborative and resilient European R&I ecosystem.

**Keywords:** Horizon Europe, WIDERA programme, science for policy, twinning, research excellence



# FORESIGHT FOR DANUBE REGION'S FUTURE-ORIENTED COMPETITIVE PLANNING: BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

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The ForeDanube initiative and its related activities collectively advance the role of foresight as a strategic instrument for competitiveness, innovation, and resilient policymaking in the Danube Region. Across nine contributions, the presentations address both theoretical and applied dimensions of foresight: from integrating artificial intelligence and managing uncertainty, to strengthening education through a dedicated Master's program, embedding foresight into the EU Strategy for the Danube Region, and supporting crisis preparedness. Empirical insights from regional surveys highlight the gap between awareness and practice, while practical frameworks, such as the Danube Transfer Centre network and structured work plans, demonstrate how foresight can be institutionalized across multi-level governance. EU co-financing opportunities through Horizon Europe are identified as crucial enablers for capacity building. The overarching vision culminates in the ForeDanube project's proposal for a permanent Foresight Competence Centre, serving as a hub for anticipatory governance and as a scalable model for Europe and beyond.

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