

Experiencing CONNECT 2025

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Abstract: At the CONNECT 2025 symposium, held in Neum, I had the opportunity to meet professors and colleagues from different European countries and to participate in a range of educational and highly engaging activities. For me, the innovative World Café format provided a particularly valuable opportunity for intensive exchange of ideas, exposure to diverse approaches to problem solving, and meaningful scientific networking. This symposium is of special importance as it promotes and strengthens regional and international cooperation while actively supporting and encouraging young researchers in their scientific development, with the strong support of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). The presentation of research groups proved to be highly motivating for early-career researchers, offering insight into different scientific environments and research cultures. Overall, CONNECT 2025 represents an important platform for building academic networks, fostering collaboration, and inspiring young scientists to continue their professional growth.

Keywords: young researchers; World Café; teamwork; DAAD support; academic networking

1. Introduction

At the end of the summer of 2025, I was honored to attend the "CONNECT 2025" symposium in Neum, Bosnia and Herzegovina. I visited that apparently small town for the first time, but it left a big and deep impression on me. That impression is certainly due to CONNECT and the people I met thanks to it. For us, young researchers and students, it is of great importance to make as many contacts as possible with colleagues and professors around the world, and CONNECT has enabled us to do just that.

I had the opportunity to meet professors and colleagues from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Croatia, Germany, Hungary and Turkey. Conversations with them about the scientific fields they deal with are very inspiring and represent an important step towards possible cooperation. The countries of the Western Balkans unequivocally welcome any cooperation achieved in the region. I would especially like to point out how much DAAD's support gives us students a wind at our backs and encouragement to continue to work hard, research and learn.

Every day, one of the professors gave a lecture on a certain topic, and in addition, they presented their work group and the areas they deal with. The lectures were informative, dynamic and most interestingly, interactive. Not only did the professors ask us questions, but we also had the opportunity to ask them and expand the discussion that way. The professors looked forward to the questions and answered them with enthusiasm.

2. Role of world Caffe

World café was a completely new way of working and exchanging ideas with colleagues for me. We were randomly divided into smaller groups and answered the given questions. Considering that we mostly come from different scientific spheres, it was very interesting for me to participate and listen to how a physicist, mathematician or biologist has a different way of thinking, as well as an approach to solving problems. Each of the smaller groups chose one representative who presented the entire opinion. In this way, each of us got "our five minutes", that is, our opportunity to speak and present our team in the best light. The World Café proved to be a very important form of brainstorming, where each of us spoke without any fear of saying something wrong. Professors regularly visited all groups and monitored our way of thinking. They also spoke about some of their ideas and, in that way, provided us with help and support during the work. We were all equal, which probably contributed the most to my feeling of delight.

I believe that working in a group is of great importance, regardless of the level of education or scientific achievement. We in Serbia like to say "two heads are smarter than one" and I am convinced that this is definitely true. The possibility to consult with someone about an idea, to exchange opinions on a topic, and to jointly launch a new project is extremely useful. People were not created to go through life alone, but were created as social beings, and only as such can they fully express their potential.

3. EMOS Research Group and AIDASCO

During his lecture, Professor Stevan Armaković presented his research group for computational and analytical environmental chemistry, of which I am, among other things, a member. As the youngest member of our team (<https://emos.armakovic.com/about/>), I want to emphasize how honored I am to be part of a group that exudes collegiality, dedication to work, and knowledge. All this motivates me to advance in the scientific and research world. The professor also presented the Atomistica software (<https://atomistica.online/>). He explained the wide range of possibilities that this tool offers us and expressed its great importance in modern research.

I would also like to highlight the role of the Association for the International Development of Academic and Scientific Cooperation (AIDASCO), a non-profit, non-governmental, and apolitical organization established with the aim of fostering international academic and scientific collaboration through the support of young researchers, the promotion of science, and the creation of sustainable international networks (<https://aidasco.org/>, Figure 1).



Figure 1. Professor Stevan Armaković and PhD student Dušica Krunić in the conference hall, where all CONNECT 2025 sessions were held.

The mission and activities of AIDASCO are strongly aligned with the core objectives of the CONNECT 2025 symposium, particularly in encouraging early-career researchers, strengthening regional and international cooperation, promoting inclusive scientific environments, and emphasizing gender equality in education and research. This alignment was explicitly recognized during the preparation of the DAAD funding application for CONNECT 2025, where it was noted that initiatives such as this symposium contribute directly to strengthening the activities and impact of organizations like AIDASCO. In this sense, CONNECT 2025 represents not only a scientific event but also a concrete example of how international cooperation initiatives and non-governmental academic organizations can work together to support the next generation of researchers.

4. Conclusion

Although we spent our days in Neum in a working atmosphere, the time passed quickly. There was no pronounced fatigue, so in the evening we all went to the beach together. We used that time, spent by the sea, to talk about various topics and get to know each other, as we jokingly said, it was "a time for better mutual connection". The city of Neum will forever associate me with science, learning, connecting, socializing, and inspire me to continue doing science in Serbia, all thanks to CONNECT 2025.

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