

Dear followers of AIDASCO,

This issue marks a significant milestone for AIDASCO Reviews: it is the journal's first special issue. With this initiative, AIDASCO Reviews formally introduces the possibility of organizing thematic special issues dedicated to specific scientific topics, academic events, conferences, or the promotion of institutions and collaborative initiatives. The present special issue is devoted to CONNECT 2025 (Figure 1), a conference with which the members of AIDASCO have been closely involved for many years.



**Figure 1.** First day of conference.

The decision to dedicate the inaugural special issue to CONNECT 2025 was both natural and intentional. The CONNECT conference series has grown into a well-established academic platform, with the 2025 edition representing its seventh consecutive conference since its inception in 2017. Over the years, CONNECT has brought together a large and diverse group of students, early-career researchers, and mentors, fostering dialogue across disciplines, institutions, and national borders.

With this special issue, our aim is twofold. First, we seek to showcase the CONNECT 2025 conference itself, with particular emphasis on student participation, reflections, and academic growth. Second, we wish to demonstrate the ability of AIDASCO Reviews and AIDASCO as an organization to curate and deliver a focused, high-quality special issue dedicated to a single theme. In this sense, the present issue serves not only as documentation of a conference, but also as a proof of concept for future special issues.

A defining characteristic of the CONNECT conference series is its thematic openness. While firmly rooted in science and academia, CONNECT does not confine itself to narrowly defined research topics. Instead, each edition addresses broader, timely issues relevant to the academic and societal development of the region. In particular, CONNECT conferences have consistently aimed to support the integration of the Western Balkans academic community into wider European Union-related processes, including research collaboration, mobility, education, and science communication.

Experienced experts lead the conference in science and science communication from Germany, and it brings together participants and contributors from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia, alongside guests from other countries (on this occasion from Hungary and Turkey). This international and regional dimension has been central to CONNECT's identity from the very beginning and is clearly reflected in the contributions included in this special issue.

By launching this first special issue, AIDASCO Reviews opens the door to future thematic collections that may be dedicated to conferences, collaborative projects, institutional initiatives, or emerging interdisciplinary topics. We see special issues as an essential instrument for fostering visibility, encouraging reflection, and strengthening connections between research, education, and society.

We hope that this inaugural special issue dedicated to CONNECT 2025 will serve both as a meaningful record of the conference experience and as an invitation to future contributors and collaborators to engage with AIDASCO Reviews through similar initiatives.

Regards from the AIDASCO team

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