

**Interreg
Danube Region**



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Responsible Partner: MKK – Hungarian Cluster Alliance

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1. Executive Summary

- **Objective:** provide an overview of the selection of AI experts for the DanubIA Clusters project and to highlight the process's main outcomes and learnings.
- **Scope:** The focus was on supporting SME and cluster cooperation in the Danube Region by identifying AI professionals who could contribute to AI-driven collaboration platforms.
- **Key Highlights:**
 - A consolidated list of AI experts was compiled from all partner countries based on harmonized selection criteria.
 - The selection process revealed disparities in national-level AI maturity and access to experts, as well as the need for broader engagement with academic and industrial actors.
 - Recommendations include maintaining a diverse pool of experts across sectors, simplifying selection criteria for cross-country alignment, and encouraging long-term engagement of experts in future platform development and testing phases.

2. Introduction

- **Context:**
 - The DanubIA Clusters project aims to strengthen cooperation among clusters and SMEs across the Danube Region using digital and AI-based platforms. In this context, the identification of relevant AI experts plays a key role in supporting applied innovation and practical deployment of AI technologies in business and collaboration settings.
 - Relevance to the Danube Region and international cooperation.
- **Objectives of the Report:**
 - To present the background and motivation for involving AI experts in the project.
 - To outline the process and methodology of identifying and selecting these experts.
 - To provide a transnational overview of expert profiles that contribute to the platform's strategic, technical, and application-level design.

- **Methodology:**

- The report builds on national-level inputs provided by project partners, collected through interviews, participation in events, direct outreach, and internal discussions. The national consultation process took place through structured dialogue with universities, companies, and cluster representatives.

3. Selection Criteria

- **Rationale:**

- The selection criteria were designed to ensure that AI experts included in the DanubIA Clusters project possess the relevant practical and academic background to contribute to the development and validation of AI-based cooperation platforms.

- **Applied Criteria:**

- To harmonize the selection process across partner countries and ensure applicability to SMEs and clusters, the following simplified criteria were used:
 - Professional experience in AI implementation: AI-related projects completed, ideally across different industries.
 - Knowledge of AI tools and methods: Familiarity with applied AI techniques and platforms (e.g. cloud-based tools, low-code environments).
 - Involvement in AI communication or dissemination: Participation in events, education, or publications related to AI.
 - Strategic involvement (optional): Contribution to national AI strategies or cluster innovation activities was considered an asset.

- **These criteria were applied flexibly, emphasizing diversity of backgrounds and real-world applicability over formal academic requirements.**

4. Methodology

- **Partner-Led Approach:**

- Each project partner was responsible for identifying AI experts within their respective regions through decentralized and context-specific methods. The selection process was coordinated by the Hungarian Cluster Association, MKK partner, based on a shared template and competence map.

- **Methods Applied:**

- Direct outreach: Partners contacted potential experts through existing networks, previous collaborations, and targeted invitations.
- Engagement via events: Experts were approached during AI-related conferences, digitalization forums, and innovation workshops.
- Institutional cooperation: Partners consulted universities, R&D centers, and national AI bodies.
- Expert interviews and consultations: Individual interviews helped assess willingness, availability, and practical expertise.
- National workshop: In some countries (e.g., Hungary), no dedicated national workshop was held; however, structured dialogues were conducted through informal but targeted discussions.

- **Outcome:**

- The methodology ensured that the expert pool reflects national and sectoral diversity while aligning with the project's applied innovation goals. Experts were selected not only based on qualifications but also on their interest in contributing to AI platform development in a practical context.

5. Expert Profiles Overview

- **Overview:**

- The selection of AI experts within the DanubIA Clusters project reflects a balanced representation of academic, industrial, startup, and policy-oriented backgrounds. Each partner contributed national-level inputs by nominating professionals aligned with the project's goals.

- **Types of Experts Identified:**

- Academic Researchers (e.g. university professors, PhD holders) with expertise in AI, machine learning, and data science.
- Industry Professionals (e.g. AI engineers, digital transformation leaders) involved in applied AI development across finance, robotics, manufacturing, and transportation.
- Startup Innovators engaged in AI-driven product and platform development.
- Public Policy and Methodological Experts who contribute to national AI strategies and cluster innovation.

- **Domains of Expertise Represented:**

- Natural language processing
- Computer vision
- Autonomous systems
- AI ethics and governance
- AI applications in logistics, retail, health, and manufacturing
- Generative AI and low-code environments
- Innovation policy and digital strategy

- **Contribution to the Project:**

- These experts are expected to support the development and evaluation of the DanubIA Clusters platform by contributing insights into technological feasibility, user needs, sectoral challenges, and ethical considerations. Their diverse perspectives will help ensure the solution's adaptability to different SME and cluster contexts in the Danube Region.

6. Recommendations

- **Strengthen Practical Orientation:**
 - Future activities should prioritize the engagement of application-oriented AI experts with proven experience in implementation, rather than relying solely on academic profiles.
- **Maintain Interdisciplinary Diversity:**
 - Ensure continued inclusion of experts from academia, industry, start-ups, and public sector to reflect real-world AI challenges and solutions across sectors.
- **Promote Regional Balance:**
 - Encourage wider representation from all Danube countries and sectors, especially underrepresented domains like healthcare, creative industries, and agriculture.
- **Support Long-Term Involvement:**
 - Experts should not only provide input during selection but be integrated into the full lifecycle of the DanubIA Clusters platform development — including piloting and evaluation.
- **Facilitate Knowledge Exchange:**
 - Create mechanisms (e.g., expert forums, peer exchange groups) to enable ongoing dialogue among selected professionals, fostering collaboration beyond national borders.
- **Improve AI Awareness in Clusters and SMEs:**
 - Use the expert network to deliver focused training or advisory support to clusters and SMEs, increasing their understanding and readiness for AI adoption.

7. Recommendations for Future DanubAI Platform Development for Clusters and SMEs

- **Modular Design for Sector Adaptability:**
 - Ensure the platform remains modular and customizable to meet the diverse needs of clusters across industries (e.g. logistics, manufacturing, health, IT). Sector-specific modules will allow easier integration and broader uptake.
- **AI-Readiness Toolkit for Clusters and SMEs:**
 - Develop onboarding tools, self-assessment checklists, and training content that help clusters and their member SMEs evaluate and improve their AI readiness before joining the platform.
- **Emphasize Human-AI Collaboration:**
 - Integrate user-centered design elements that support not just automation, but collaboration between human experts and AI systems (e.g., assisted decision-making, explainable AI).
- **Include Open Interfaces and Interoperability Standards:**
 - Ensure that the platform can connect with existing CRM, ERP, logistics, and data systems used by SMEs through APIs and standardized data formats.
- **Embed Feedback and Co-Creation Loops:**
 - Allow clusters and experts to provide feedback during platform testing and operation phases. This co-creation process will strengthen relevance and long-term usability.
- **Secure and Ethical Data Use:**
 - Incorporate transparent data management practices, role-based access control, and compliance with EU AI and data regulations to ensure trust and adoption.

8. Conclusion

- The selection and engagement of AI experts across the Danube Region represents a key step toward building effective, transnational cooperation platforms for SMEs and clusters. The diversity of backgrounds and approaches contributed by the experts reflects the multidimensional nature of AI deployment in business environments.
- The process revealed both strengths and challenges. While all partners succeeded in identifying relevant professionals, differences in national capacities and access to AI talent must be addressed in future activities.
- Going forward, the involvement of these experts should be deepened through continuous collaboration, pilot projects, and participation in platform design and testing. Their insights will be essential in shaping solutions that are realistic, inclusive, and scalable across the Danube Region.
- **Recommendation:** A cluster-specific AI platform— should be used to support collaboration, knowledge exchange, and AI implementation among SMEs.

Appendices

- **AI Expert Competence Map (summary format)**

Name	Affiliation / Role
Gergő Szertics	AI Coalition / Strategic AI Expert, Hungary
Gyula Kovács	Generative AI Developer, Hungary
György Bögel	Professor, Business AI Researcher, Hungary
Dr. Ferenc Darvas	ELTE, Faculty of Informatics, Hungary
Dr. László Kozma	BME/SZTAKI, AI Researcher, Hungary
Tamas Téglás	aiMotive, Head of AI, Hungary
Tamás Bíró	ELTE, NLP Specialist, Hungary
László Papp	Morgan Stanley, AI in Finance, Hungary
Balázs Csáji	SZTAKI, Intelligent Systems, Hungary
Róbert Pálovics	Founder, Datapao, Hungary
Róbert Ács	AI Startups, Hungary
Gábor Hosszú	ELTE, AI System Developer, Hungary
László Zombory	aiMotive, Tech Lead, Hungary
Norbert Bátfa	University of Debrecen, AI Researcher, Hungary
Lukas Reha	Hyverr, Low-code RPA + AI, Czech Republic
David Fogl	Mingleminds.ai, CEO, Czech Republic
Johnson Darkwah	Gauss Algorithmic, Czech Republic
Vojtěch Dlouhý	Feedyou, Conversational AI, Czech Republic
Petr Rumpel	University in Ostrava, CZ – Methodology

Ivo Riha	CEDEG Cluster, CZ – Cybersecurity & AI
Zoltán Balogh	Univ. in Nitra, Sensor Systems, Slovakia
Matej Maderič	KInIT, Innovation Policy, Slovakia
Artur Bobovnický	SIEA, Slovakia
Martina Maláková	Industry Innovation Cluster, Slovakia
Božidara Pellegrini	National HPC Center, Slovakia
Kristián Fodor	PROUNION a.s., Slovakia
Miloš Lukáč	3D SOLUTIONS, Slovakia
Ana Maria Stancu	Bucharest Robots, Romania
Bianca Muntean	Transylvania IT Cluster, Romania
Daniel Giurea	ARIES-TM, Romania
Marius Geru	Open Hub Cluster, Romania
Bela Bihari	IT Plus Cluster, Romania
Catalin Mihacea	Sibiu IT Cluster, Romania
Oleksandr Ochkasov	Dnipro Transport University, Ukraine
Sergey Subbotin	Zaporizhzhia Polytechnic, Ukraine
Andriy Zablovyy	Ministry of Digital Transformation, Ukraine
Nataliia Trushkina	NAS of Ukraine, Industrial Policy
Nathalia Skorobogatova	Kyiv Polytechnic Institute, Ukraine
Yuriy Shchyrin	AIM Group, AI in Construction, Ukraine