

DANUBE WORKS² FUTURE

Ulm July 7, 2026
One-Day Conference

EMERGENT GOVERNING MODELS

European cities are undergoing a profound transformation. Urban and territorial systems today evolve through unforeseen activities, unexpected threats, and sudden opportunities, challenging the capacity of conventional planning, regulation, and public administration to respond effectively. Along the Danube region, economic volatility, climate stress, political polarization, social fragmentation, migration, and infrastructural fragility intersect across borders, jurisdictions, and ecosystems. Flood risk and drought, energy transition, mobility corridors, and uneven urban development have produced a condition that resembles a permanent state of emergency, not as an exception, but as a governing reality.

This one-day conference, organized within the framework of the New European Bauhaus on Danube Lab, addresses the urgent question of how to govern emergent urban and territorial systems, whose behavior cannot be fully predicted, stabilized, or controlled, yet which demand collective responsibility and long-term care. In these complex systems, conventional institutions prove insufficient. Governing must instead operate across scales and uncertainties, continuously interpreting and steering change rather than stabilizing it.

Governing is here understood as a multifaceted public activity encompassing regulation, coordination, planning, decision-making, and the ongoing maintenance, regeneration, and transformation of shared urban and territorial resources. These activities increasingly unfold within multi-organizational networks, where public authorities, civic initiatives, private actors, and informal practices operate in relations of interdependence. Decisions are made through negotiation rather than hierarchy, and compliance is sustained less by control than by trust, reciprocity, and shared obligations across diverse legal and political contexts.

Against this backdrop, the conference foregrounds emergent governing models as a critical field of inquiry and practice. Drawing on both transdisciplinary researches and lived urban experience of self-organized agencies, emergent governing models reveal how collective action can stabilize urban and territorial systems without reverting to rigid control.

These agencies often operate in underused infrastructures, post-industrial landscapes, and transitional public spaces, investing long-term social, cultural, and economic capital into public resources and developing resilient governing strategies. They give rise to new types of public space, open, adaptive, and participatory environments where institutions, experts, and citizens jointly engage in planning, development, and care. Networks of such spaces may strengthen social ties, raise awareness of ecological and social interdependence, and enhance collective capacity to live with uncertainty.

The central ambition of this conference is not to define a single model of governance, but to ask a more fundamental question: How can emerging urban and territorial systems be governed without undermining the very processes of emergence on which their resilience depends? What institutional transformations, policy experiments, and spatial frameworks are required to support adaptive, inclusive, and sustainable urban life?

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Hosted by New European Bauhaus on Danube Lab in Ulm as part of the Danube Festival 2026, the conference brings together academic and practitioners in urban and territorial governance, commons-based policy, network organization, and spatial practice. Through key-note speeches and a moderated discussion, it aims to contribute to the Danube region as a living governance laboratory, articulating new imaginaries for Europe’s emerging urban and territorial futures.

European Added Value

This conference contributes European added value by addressing governance challenges that cannot be resolved at national or local levels alone. The Danube region functions as a transnational urban and ecological system, where climate adaptation, mobility, energy transition, and social cohesion intersect across diverse political, legal, and socio-economic contexts. By focusing on governing emergent urban and territorial systems, the conference supports EU priorities for territorial cohesion, climate resilience, and democratic innovation. It advances the New European Bauhaus agenda by linking sustainability, inclusion, and spatial quality to governance reform, and by translating bottom-up civic practices into transferable policy insights. Through dialogue among academic researchers and civic actors, the event strengthens European capacity to design adaptive, participatory, and resilient governance frameworks, reinforcing the EU’s role as a laboratory for innovative public policy in conditions of uncertainty.

Objectives

To explore emergent governing models capable of addressing permanent uncertainty and crisis • To position the Danube region as a living laboratory for governance innovation • To connect urban, ecological, and infrastructural challenges across borders and scales • To strengthen the role of self-organized civic initiatives in public policy formation • To contribute actionable knowledge to the New European Bauhaus governance agenda

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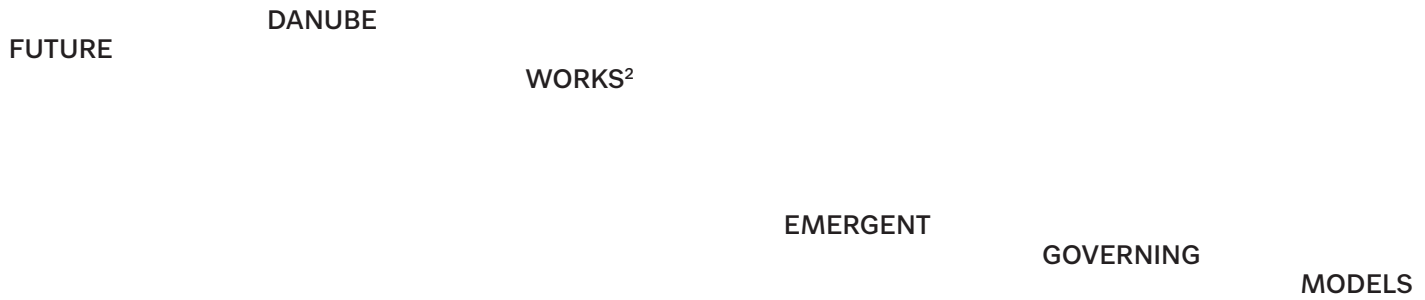
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Structure of the Conference

In the morning, there will be a public workshop in which the protagonists of the “Young Voices” exhibition will present selected aspects of their “city-making” practices from the Danube region, discuss them in a World Café format, and further develop these ideas.

In the afternoon, the conference will follow, featuring a series of short keynote interventions (20 minutes each) followed by a 90-minute moderated discussion. The moderator will frame the conceptual field and connect theory and practice, steering discussion across scales and disciplines. The audience includes policymakers, urban practitioners, researchers, civic initiatives, students, and New European Bauhaus partners.

09 ³⁰ -10 ⁰⁰	Arrival and informal welcome
10 ⁰⁰ -14 ⁰⁰	World Café working session
14 ⁰⁰ -15 ⁰⁰	Lunch Break
15 ⁰⁰ -17 ³⁰	Keynote Speeches (20 minutes each)
17 ³⁰ -18 ⁰⁰	Break
18 ⁰⁰ -19 ³⁰	Moderated discussion with speakers and audience
19 ³⁰	Concluding remarks



Young Voices	Sophie Boesker	Liquid Public Space
	Fruzsina Dézsi	Pro Progressione
	Gergana Ilieva	Collective Foundation
	Verena Krappitz	urbanes.land
	Alexandra Mocioiu	Front la Dunâre
	Tijana Petrovic	Kids Hub
	Mateja Softic	Iskriva Institute
	Mirjana Utvic	Skograd
Speakers	Laura Calbet	University Stuttgart
	Christian Iaione	LabGov, LUISS University Rome
	Patrick Kenis	Tilburg University
	Dragana Kostica	HafenCity University / Belgrade
	Christof Mayer	raumlabor, ZUsammenKUNFT, Haus der Statistik, Koop5, Berlin
	Dulmini Perera	University of Limerick
	Jakob Walter	ETH Zürich