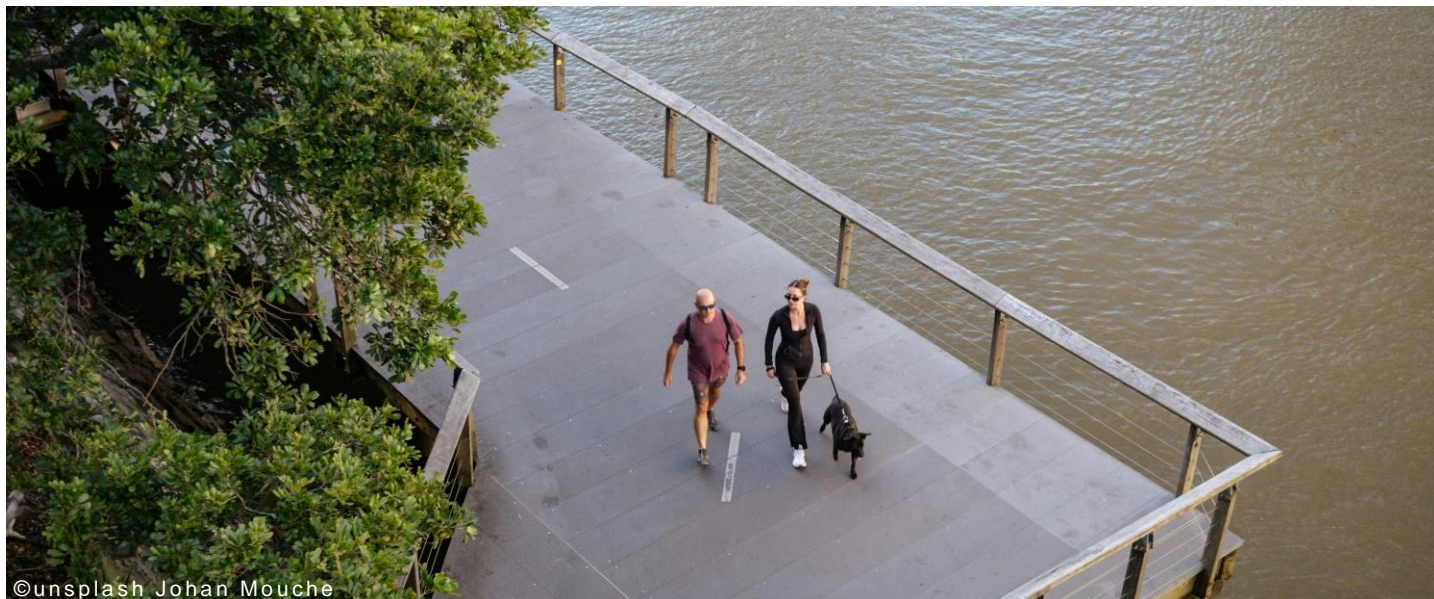


# PlaCES NEWSLETTER OF THE ERASMUS PLUS PROJECT

Improving Landscape Planning and Design with Cultural Ecosystem Services in HEIs



## Erasmus+ Project PlaCES Newsletter – 2/2025

Dear partners and friends,

Welcome to the second edition of our PlaCES project newsletter!

Over the past weeks, our project has continued to move forward with several important developments.

We experienced a few changes within our project team, which we are confident will strengthen our collaboration as we enter the next phase of our work.

In mid-November, we hosted a well-attended webinar that provided valuable insights and sparked engaging discussions among participants.

In addition, we are nearing the completion of our asynchronous learning materials on cultural ecosystem services, an important milestone that will support our upcoming activities and deepen participants' understanding of the topic.

### CURRENT TOPICS

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## Changes in the project team (I)

Our project team has undergone a few changes in recent weeks. First, we would like to share that Rieke Hansen from Hochschule Geisenheim University has left the project. We sincerely thank her for her valuable engagement and contributions, and we wish her all the best in her future endeavours. We are pleased to welcome Martina van Lierop and Nora Mehnen, who will be taking over Rieke's role within the Geisenheim team.



**Martina van Lierop**

**Short description of my background:** Before accepting the position of substitute professor for Open Space and Ecological Urban Design, I have worked as a research and teaching associate at the Chair of Strategic Landscape Planning and Management at the Technical University of Munich since 2016. After completing my bachelor's and master's degrees in landscape architecture and landscape planning in the Netherlands, I worked as a landscape architect on interdisciplinary and participatory projects in several countries. These international experiences have shaped my research interests, which focuses on the local implementation of nature-based solutions within cooperative and participatory design and planning processes, evidence-based design and planning, knowledge transfer, and qualitative research methods. Furthermore, I have been fortunate to enjoy bringing my experiences and knowledge into teaching for over ten years, within project courses, methodological seminars, lectures, and supervising final theses.

I am equally thrilled to bring my experience to the PlaCES project and help support its goals!

**Short description of my background:** I work in the Department of Landscape Planning and Nature Conservation at Geisenheim University, where I focus on the intersections between people, place and landscape. I studied Environmental Sciences and later completed my PhD in Cultural Geography in the Netherlands, a time that deepened my fascination for cultural landscapes and the ways communities interact with their environments.

My research interests span cultural landscapes, protected areas, urban and regional planning, and qualitative research methods. I truly enjoy working in international and interdisciplinary settings, as they offer space for creativity, new perspectives and meaningful collaboration.

I'm genuinely excited to bring my experience to the PlaCES project and to contribute to its development.



**Nora Mehnen**

# Changes in the project team (II)

## New partner TU Dortmund

In addition, our colleague **Aude Zingraff-Hamed** has transitioned from Ecole Nationale du Génie de l'Eau et de l'Environnement de Strasbourg (ENGEES) to **TU Dortmund**. Through this change, we are happy to announce that TU Dortmund has joined PlaCES as a new partner institution. With this addition, our project is now supported by five major institutes working together to advance PlaCES.



### Who we are...

TU Dortmund is a Technical University (Technische Universität). It is characterised by a broad disciplinary spectrum, integrating natural sciences, engineering, and social and cultural sciences under the motto: "Reason through Diversity". The university was founded in 1968 as the University of Dortmund. It was renamed TU Dortmund University in 2007. TU Dortmund is considered a medium-sized German university with 32,000 students and 17 faculties. It is a core member of the University Alliance Ruhr (UA Ruhr), a close strategic partnership with the Ruhr-Universität Bochum and the University of Duisburg-Essen, pooling resources and research strength across the region. The Faculty of Spatial Planning at TU Dortmund is the largest and oldest independent academic planning department in Germany. It is unique in Germany for being a separate, comprehensive faculty focused entirely on spatial planning, rather than being merged into architecture or geography departments.

The faculty's scope extends beyond traditional urban planning. It integrates social sciences, economics, environmental sciences, engineering, and law to address spatial problems at various levels: local (urban design), regional, national, and European/international. It focuses on shaping human living environments (Raumgestaltung) and balancing competing demands (e.g., development vs. conservation, mobility vs. health). The faculty is highly structured, typically encompassing around 15 to 20 different chairs/departments, which reflects its broad scope. These include Urban and Regional Planning, European Planning Cultures, Urban Design and Land Use Planning, Transport Planning, Environmental Planning, Socio-Economics of Spatial Planning and Landscape Planning. The Chair of Landscape Planning is 2025 newly founded and joined PlaCES Consortium.

### What we do in PlaCES...

We develop the PlaCES Methodology, combining theory and practice to integrate CES into landscape planning, and teaching. We also coordinate communication and networking, managing the website, social media, and outreach to promote the project across Europe.

### Find more about us:

[www.tu-dortmund.de](http://www.tu-dortmund.de)

[www.raumplanung.tu-dortmund.de](http://www.raumplanung.tu-dortmund.de)



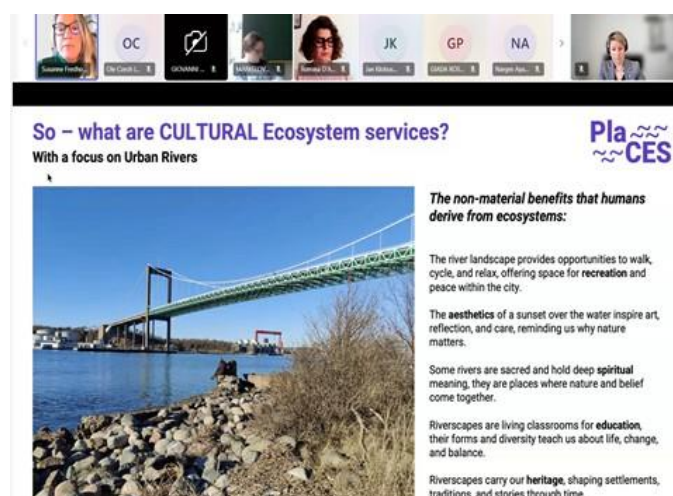
# PlaCES Webinar

On 17–18 November, almost 100 participants joined us for an inspiring introduction to the PlaCES project, which is co-funded by the EU and Erasmus+. The five institutions behind PlaCES are: the University of Gothenburg (UGOT), Geisenheim University (HGU), Roma Tre University, from Ecole Nationale du Génie de l'Eau et de l'Environnement de Strasbourg (ENGEES), and TU Dortmund University.

Over the course of two days, participants attended five thematic modules designed and presented collaboratively by the partner universities:

- Introduction to Cultural Ecosystem Services (CES) – prepared and presented jointly by UGOT, HGU, Roma Tre, and TU Dortmund.
- Spatial Planning – prepared and presented by Roma Tre.
- Heritage Conservation – presented by the UGOT.
- River Restoration – presented by TU Dortmund.
- Open Space Design – presented by HGU.

These sessions offered students a multidisciplinary overview of Cultural Ecosystem Services (CES) with a particular focus on urban riverscapes. Through concrete examples, they explored what CES are, how they can be assessed, and how they can be integrated into planning and design processes. To support continued learning, a set of asynchronous modules has also been created on Moodle, allowing students to revisit and deepen the material independently (further details on these asynchronous modules are presented in a dedicated section below). Handouts for all thematic modules are now available to support independent study. You find more information on the following page (Activities I & II, p5ff).



## Participant survey

We recently conducted a short survey among the participants of the webinar. The results show that, before attending, many students had limited familiarity with Cultural Ecosystem Services, river governance, heritage conservation, and open-space design. After the webinar, participants reported a better understanding of these concepts and expressed an interest in continuing with the asynchronous modules and future PlaCES activities. The feedback confirms that the webinar successfully helped bridge initial knowledge gaps and prepared students for the upcoming fieldwork.

# Activities (I)

We have developed asynchronous learning material designed to deepen knowledge on Cultural Ecosystem Services and the spatial planning of urban riverscapes. The material is open access and consists of **five modules**, each offering a focused introduction to key concepts, methods, and practical examples.

PlaCES Forum

You can ask any of your questions here

Overall progress % 11



Screenshot of the Moodle platform with all five modules

## Module 0: Cultural Ecosystem Services and Riverscapes

Module 0 introduces Cultural Ecosystem Services and riverscapes. It was prepared by all partners and provides an overview of the key concepts and material. Cultural Ecosystem Services (CES) are still poorly integrated or inconsistently taught in universities. And a shared European methodology for CES assessment is lacking. Yet, CES are central to planning, heritage, climate adaptation, and riverscape management.

CES refer to the intangible values that landscapes and ecosystems provide, such as sense of place and belonging, recreation and mental well-being, cultural heritage, identity etc.

## Module 1: Spatial Planning

Spatial planning is a coordinated process that guides how land and resources are used to achieve environmental, social, and economic goals. It helps us to understand and manage territorial changes by organizing land uses in a way that balances development needs with environmental protection and societal well-being. Rather than being a single method, spatial planning brings together a set of concepts, tools, and procedures that must be adapted to each specific context.

## Module 2: Heritage Conservation

Cultural heritage includes the places, structures, and landscapes that societies value and choose to preserve. While ecosystem services describe the benefits people gain from nature, human-made environments can also support and enhance these services, showing how cultural and natural systems are closely connected. Heritage conservation, therefore, focuses on the combined values of natural and cultural elements within landscapes. Integrating ecosystem services into heritage approaches allows for a more holistic understanding of how these elements interact and shape the benefits people receive.

## Activities (II)

### Module 3: River Restoration

River restoration focuses on returning rivers to more natural conditions and recovering the ecosystem services they provide, such as clean water, flood regulation, habitats for biodiversity, and recreational value. This can include reconnecting flood plains, improving water quality or reshaping river channels.

Restoration is needed because many rivers have been degraded by pollution, urbanisation, and heavy modification, reducing their ecological health and resilience.

### Module 4: Open Space Design

Open space design focuses on envisioning and reshaping townscape and landscapes by improving the spatial structure, functions and overall experience of outdoor spaces. It includes the design of public and private recreational areas. Its main goals are to integrate ecological and economic functions, such as protecting natural resources, while addressing the social and cultural needs of communities. Well-designed open spaces are accessible, usable, and attractive, and they promote social interaction and a high quality of life.



We are pleased to share that the PlaCES project will be part of the **6th ESP Europe 2026 Conference in Prague**. Hosted by the Ecosystem Services Partnership (ESP) in collaboration with the Global Change Research Institute CAS – CzechGlobe, the event is held under the theme “*Advancing ecosystem services knowledge for achieving a nature- and people-positive Europe.*”

The conference will bring together experts, practitioners, and policymakers from across Europe and beyond to exchange knowledge, foster collaboration, and contribute to a more just, resilient, and sustainable future. We look forward to presenting PlaCES and connecting with the broader ecosystem services community.

We invite you to be part of this important event by submitting an abstract. Please note that this is an in-person conference only - all sessions will take place on-site at Cubex Centre Prague. We will organize a session on Cultural Ecosystems of Riverscape (T8a - Cultural Ecosystem Services of Riverscapes, N. Mehnen & M. Darbi & M. van Lierop). So don't miss the chance to showcase your work and connect with the ESP network.

Further details about the conference and abstract submission process will be available on the event website. For any questions, please contact the ESP Secretariat at [conference@es-partnership.org](mailto:conference@es-partnership.org).

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