NEWSLETTER OF THE ERASMUS PLUS PROJECT

Improving Landscape Planning and Design with Cultural Ecosystem Services in HEIs



Getting to know the Wellritz river during the fieldwork in Wiesbaden.

Erasmus+ Project PlaCES Newsletter – 2/2026

Dear partners and friends,

Welcome to the fourth edition of our PlaCES project newsletter!

Over the past months, our project has continued to move forward with our two last River Fieldworks in Germany and Italy. It's time to reflect on what we've accomplished and prepare for our last major student project: the Intensive Course in Strasbourg.

The project was also part of some conferences, such as IALE-Germany 2026. In addition, we plan to look back on the year 2026 and compile our insights and progress.

Finally, we look forward to a successful rest of the year and to getting back to work with your support next year!

With that in mind, we already wish you a peaceful holiday season and a great start to the new year!

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Fieldwork HGU (I)

Wiesbaden und Geisenheim

From 27–31 July 2026, the second PlaCES fieldwork took place in Geisenheim and Wiesbaden, Germany, hosted by Hochschule Geisenheim University. Thirteen students and ten teachers from four European countries came together to explore how Cultural Ecosystem Services (CES) can be integrated into landscape and urban planning.

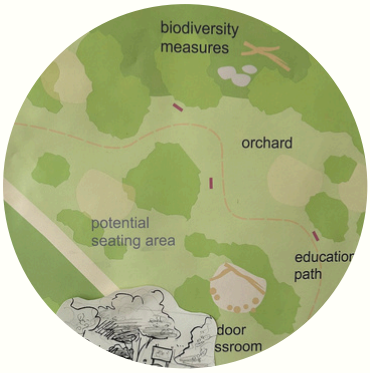


The **Wellritz river** has undergone a long process of transformation and renaturalisation. Today, the valley provides recreational opportunities while also supporting ecological functions and contributing to the identity of the surrounding urban landscape.

Following the interactive PlaCES online learning activities, students received interdisciplinary input and applied their knowledge to an in-depth analysis of the Wellritz stream in Wiesbaden. The stream provided a valuable case study for exploring the relationship between natural restoration, urban transformation, and human activities.

Working at this smaller spatial scale allowed students to investigate how different uses and values can coexist and shape a landscape over time. At the same time, ongoing challenges such as recreational pressure, private land use, and sewage overflows highlighted the complex tradeoffs involved in planning urban water landscapes. The fieldwork followed a step-by-step process, moving from analysis to synthesis and finally to concept and design. After an initial exploration of the Wellritz valley and interdisciplinary inputs on spatial planning and heritage conservation, students worked in groups to analyse the site and its different characteristics. On the following day, exchanges with local stakeholders provided additional perspectives on river ecology, nature conservation, cultural landscapes, and community gardening. These insights were then brought together through a Cultural Ecosystem Services analysis and SWOT exercise.

On the final day, the three groups translated their findings into concrete design interventions and presented their concepts, receiving feedback from the PlaCES team and fellow participants. Each group approached the site from a different perspective, experimenting with creative ways to make CES more tangible and relevant for future planning.





Fieldwork HGU (II)

From CES to Planning Concepts

The fieldwork highlighted several important lessons for integrating CES into planning practice:

Creative communication matters

The groups experimented with new ways of communicating planning ideas. One group used role-play to explore the landscape through children's sensory experiences, while another developed a co-creation approach involving future users in the planning process.

CES need to remain at the centre

A key insight was that planning processes can easily fall back into conventional approaches if CES are not consciously revisited throughout the design process. Continuous reflection helped the students develop concepts that more explicitly addressed people's experiences, values, and relationships with the land-scape.

A focused approach strengthens results

Working within a limited timeframe showed the importance of selecting a specific target group, fo-cusing on particular CES, and carefully considering how these can be communicated. This helped trans-form broad observations into more focused and pra-ctical planning ideas.

Rethinking Small Urban Streams

One of the key takeaways from the fieldwork was the potential of small-scale water landscapes as drivers of restoration and urban transformation. The Wellritz river demonstrated how natural pro-cesses and human activities can coexist within an urban landscape.

Understanding the long-term process of renatura-lisation also made clear that river restoration is a continuous and urgent task – even at the scale of a small urban stream. At the same time, the Wellritz renaturalisation project can serve as a valuable example for other contexts, illustrating how CES can become a central element in shaping urban and territorial policies and supporting the development of more sustainable riverscapes.

The fieldwork therefore provided not only an opportunity to apply the PlaCES methodology in practice, but also to reflect on how restoration and cultural values can be considered together in future planning processes.









Fieldwork RomaTre (I)

Rome

From 20–22 October 2026, 22 students of architecture and the PlaCES team gathered in Rome, Italy, for a three-day international fieldwork focused on the transformation of urban riverscapes and the role of Cultural Ecosystem Services (CES) in sustainable planning and design. The fieldwork took place along the Tiber River in the Ostiense-Marconi area. This fieldwork was a European Climate Pact Satellite Event.





The **Tiber** is an integral part of Rome's urban identity, yet its relationship with the surrounding city has been strongly shaped by human intervention and urban infrastructure. In the Ostiense-Marconi area, the river remains relatively disconnected from many surrounding urban spaces, despite its potential to provide ecological, recreational and cultural benefits.

This provided an interesting starting point for the students' work. Rather than focusing exclusively on the river itself, they explored how the surrounding built environment could be used to strengthen the connection between people and the river. Existing parks and green spaces offered opportunities to create new connections, while the need for ecological improvement encouraged students to think about how the river corridor could become a more integrated part of the urban landscape.

Five Perspectives on Reconnecting the Tiber

Working in five groups, the students developed different concepts for the future of the river landscape. Each group approached the relationship between people and the Tiber from a different perspective, exploring creative ways to enhance the cultural ecosystem services (CES).

Experiencing the river through the senses

One group focused on the sensory qualities of the riverscape. Their concept explored the different experiences that can emerge along the river, considering how people perceive and interact with their surroundings through their senses. By drawing attention to sounds, visual impressions and other sensory experiences, the group highlighted the potential of the river landscape to create connections between people and nature.

Bringing the city to the river

Another group proposed developing a green street as a way of guiding people towards the Tiber. The idea was to create a more visible and inviting connection between the surrounding urban neighbourhoods and the river. By strengthening green connections through the city, the concept aimed to make the river more accessible and bring it back into people's everyday experience of the urban landscape.

Fieldwork RomaTre (II)

Connecting art and nature

A third group explored the potential of working with artists to transform terraces along the river. Their concept aimed to combine artistic interventions with opportunities for experiencing nature. Bringing art into the riverscape could create new reasons to visit and spend time along the Tiber, while offering alternative ways of engaging with the landscape and perceiving its cultural values.

Learning from nature

Education was at the centre of another group's concept. The students explored opportunities for creating outdoor learning spaces, such as green classrooms, where people could experience and learn about the river landscape. These formats could offer opportunities to raise awareness of local ecology, natural processes and the importance of urban green and blue spaces, while bringing environmental education into the everyday urban environment.

Rediscovering historical routes

The fifth group focused on the historical relationship between the city and the Tiber. Their concept aimed to make former historical pathways visible again and reconnect them with the present-day river landscape. In addition, elevated pathways were proposed to make the different water levels of the Tiber more tangible and accessible to visitors.

Urban Rivers as Opportunities for Transformation

The fieldwork demonstrated how heavily modified urban river landscapes can offer considerable scope for new planning approaches. The Tiber provided an opportunity to explore the potential of combining CES enhancement with existing urban structures and the needs and values of city residents. The students' concepts highlighted the importance of considering river landscapes not as isolated spaces, but as integral parts of the wider urban environment.

For the students, the fieldwork also provided an opportunity to think outside conventional design approaches and become familiar with landscape-planning perspectives. By engaging with Cultural Ecosystem Services, they explored how ecological processes, cultural values and human experiences can be integrated into urban design, opening up new ways of thinking about the relationship between people, nature and the built environment.

It was a privilege to be part of this fieldwork as a European Climate Pact Satellite Event and to contribute to the exchange on more climate-resilient and liveable urban landscapes.

Find more about our fieldwork:
www.places-erasmus.eu









Recap Fieldworks (I)





Three Fieldworks, Five Key Learnings: Bringing Cultural Ecosystem Services into Riverscape Planning

Between April and October 2026, the PlaCES project brought students and teaching staff together for three international fieldworks in Gothenburg (Sweden), Wiesbaden (Germany), and Rome (Italy). Working in three very different urban riverscapes – a transforming industrial harbour, a renaturalised urban stream and a heavily modified major river – students explored how Cultural Ecosystem Services (CES) can inform landscape and urban planning.

While each location offered different challenges and opportunities, the fieldworks shared a common methodology and objective: connecting ecological, cultural, social and spatial perspectives to develop new approaches to more sustainable urban landscapes.

Five Key Learnings from the Fieldworks

1. Every riverscape requires a context-specific approach.

The three locations demonstrated how strongly the characteristics of a waterbody influence planning approaches. In Gothenburg, students worked with predefined spatial units (topoi) within a transforming harbour. In Wiesbaden, they explored the Wellritz valley as a connected landscape, while in Rome, existing parks and green spaces provided starting points for reconnecting the Tiber with the surrounding city. A shared methodology therefore needs to remain flexible and responsive to local conditions.

Recap Fieldworks (II)

2. Interdisciplinary perspectives enrich planning.

All three fieldworks began with four complementary inputs from the participating universities: heritage conservation, open space design, spatial planning and river restoration. Combined with the diverse academic backgrounds of the students, these perspectives encouraged participants to look beyond their own disciplines and understand riverscapes as complex social-ecological systems.

3. CES encourage creative approaches to design and communication.

The student concepts ranged from biodiversity-oriented waterfront interventions and community spaces in Gothenburg to role-play and co-creation approaches in Wiesbaden, and sensory experiences, outdoor classrooms and historical pathways in Rome. Particularly in Wiesbaden, students experimented with innovative ways of communicating planning ideas and involving future users.

4. Making less tangible CES visible remains a challenge.

While recreation and nature experience were relatively accessible starting points, integrating aspects such as spirituality and sense of place into concrete planning concepts proved more difficult. These dimensions are often unfamiliar in conventional planning processes and require further reflection and creative methods to make them tangible.

5. Exchange and collaboration are essential to learning.

The close, open and equal exchange between students and tutors was highly valued across the fieldworks. Although the interdisciplinary input initially introduced many unfamiliar concepts, continuous discussion, feedback and collaborative work helped students translate different perspectives into their own planning ideas.

One Common Goal: Connecting People and Nature through Planning

Across all three locations, students developed concepts that brought together aspects of ecology, heritage conservation, urban and spatial planning, connected through the perspective of Cultural Ecosystem Services. The fieldworks demonstrated that CES can provide a common framework for interdisciplinary planning while encouraging students to think beyond conventional design approaches. Despite the different riverscapes and outcomes, all three fieldworks contributed to a shared ambition: making the relationships between people and nature more visible and meaningful in future landscape and urban planning.








Activities





Sharing Insights on Cultural Ecosystem Services

Over the past weeks, the Erasmus+ project PlaCES has been represented at several events. At the **Long Night of Science at Geisenheim University** on 25 September, the PlaCES team presented student-created comics and posters exploring cultural ecosystem services (CES). The programme also featured a lecture by Dr. Martina van Lierop, highlighting the cultural values of river landscapes and their relevance for land-scape planning.

PlaCES was also represented at the **IALE-Germany Conference in Hildesheim**, providing an opportunity to share current project activities, exchange ideas with colleagues from the landscape ecology community and reconnect with familiar faces.

Both events helped raise awareness of the importance of cultural ecosystem services in education, while strengthening professional exchange and collaboration.

Outlook





Intensive course in Strasbourg

Building on the experiences and lessons learned during the three international fieldworks, the PlaCES project will bring students and teaching staff together once again for an **Intensive Course in Strasbourg**, France, from **27 February to 6 March 2027**, hosted by ENGEES. The course will provide an opportunity to bring together the knowledge, methods and ideas developed throughout the project and put them into practice in a new riverscape context.

Good to read

- **Sarca, D.; Onescu, I.** (2026): From Riverbank to Region: Green–Blue Infrastructure, Cultural Heritage and Ecotourism Spatial Integration in Bihor County, Romania. Sustainability 2026, 18, 11204. Available at: https://doi.org/10.3390/su182111204
- **Palazzo, A. L. & D'Ascanio, R.** (2026): Ecosistema ostiense. Spazio di reti e relazioni. Available at: https://romatrepress.uniroma3.it/libro/ecosistema-ostiense-spazio-di-reti-e-relazioni/
- **Pan et al.** (2026): A Systematic Review of Place-Based Cultural Ecosystem Service Assessments: Categories, Methods, and Research Trends. Sustainability, 18(2), 644. Available at: https://doi.org/10.3390/su18020644
- **Park et al.** (2026): Operationalizing Cultural Ecosystem Services in Urban Green Planning: A Systematic Review. Exploring how cultural ecosystem services can become more integrated into urban planning and design. Front. Sustain. Cities 8:1768123. Available at: https://doi.org/10.3389/frsc.2026.1768123
- **"Roma città verde"**: is Rome's online platform presenting urban greening initiatives since 2021 through project updates and interactive maps, covering tree planting, depaving and the creation and renewal of public green spaces. A dedicated section explores the city's relationship with its rivers, showcasing the projects and the features of the eight river parks along the Tiber, that combine ecological restoration, biodiversity protection and public recreation. Available at: https://www.romacittaverde.it/
- **Sousa, M.C., Martins, R., Simões, N.E. et al.** (2025): Ecosystem services of urban rivers: a systematic review. Aquat Sci 87, 10 (2025). Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/s00027-024-01138-y

Happy reading!



As the year ends, we would like to thank everyone who has accompanied, supported and contributed to PlaCES throughout the year. We wish you a wonderful holiday season, relaxing days with family and friends, and a happy start to the New Year!

We look forward to continuing our collaboration and sharing new ideas and experiences in 2027.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

For more infomation visit our website and follow us on our socials



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