

# Report on the BIP Program: "Participatory Tools for Urban Nature Planning and Management"

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**Program Dates:** Online sessions prior to June 30, 2025; Physical Activity: June 30 – July 4, 2025

**Location:** Salzburg, Austria

## Overview of the Program

The BIP (Blended Intensive Program) titled “*Participatory Tools for Urban Nature Planning and Management*” was an interdisciplinary academic initiative focused on sustainable urban development through public participation. The program was structured in two parts: initial online classes and a week-long physical activity in Salzburg, Austria, from June 30 to July 4, 2025.

The aim was to explore participatory methods and tools for urban nature planning, including GIS-based applications, stakeholder engagement, and collaborative fieldwork.

## Online Component

Before the physical meeting in Salzburg, we participated in several online classes. These sessions provided theoretical grounding in:

- Urban nature concepts
- Public participation frameworks
- Participatory GIS (PPGIS) tools
- Preparation for fieldwork and team collaboration

These virtual classes allowed us to build foundational knowledge and organize into teams for the project component.

## Physical Activity in Salzburg

The physical component of the BIP program was hosted at the University of Salzburg’s UNI Park. Over five intensive days, we participated in:

- Lectures and presentations by faculty and invited experts
- Workshops using participatory and geospatial tools

- Field visits and excursions
- Group-based project development

### **Daily Highlights:**

## **Day 1 – Monday, June 30, 2025**

### **Location:** UNI Park

The opening day focused on welcoming participants, introducing the program's structure, and beginning the exploration of participatory planning concepts.

- **Welcome and Orientation:**  
Professors from the University of Salzburg and Bucharest greeted participants and outlined the summer school agenda.
- **Institutional Presentations:**  
Prof. Stefan Lang introduced the Paris Lodron University of Salzburg, followed by a summary of the online course content by Prof. Cristian Ioja.
- **Team and Task Assignment:**  
Prof. Gavrilidis Athanasios explained the group structure and project expectations. Each team was assigned a study area in Salzburg (Volksgarten, Hans-Donnenberg Park, Waldgang, or NAWI site).
- **Local Governance Insight:**  
A representative from Salzburg's city administration presented strategies for public participation in urban planning.
- **Academic Lectures:**
  - Prof. Diana Onose discussed the use of participatory GIS (PPGIS) in monitoring urban nature.
  - Prof. Athanasios Gavridilis addressed how local perceptions can enhance participatory planning.



- **International Perspective:**  
Dr. Yazidhi Bamutaze (Makerere University, Uganda) gave a talk on the regional impacts of climate change, focusing on the IGAD region.
- **Fieldwork Kickoff:**  
In the afternoon, teams made their first site visits to observe and map urban nature, identifying users, stakeholders, and key environmental features.





## Day 2 – Tuesday, July 1, 2025

**Location:** Excursion to Berchtesgaden & Königssee (Germany)

The second day was devoted to an educational field excursion to explore nature conservation in tourism-driven landscapes.

- **Visit to Haus der Berge:**

The tour began with a guided session at the **Haus der Berge** (National Park Visitor Center), introducing the concept of integrating education and nature conservation.



- **Tour at Königssee:**

Participants enjoyed a scenic ride and packed lunch at **Königssee**, a pristine alpine lake. The visit highlighted sustainable tourism and environmental management.



- **Presentation at Hintersee – Klausbachhaus:**  
At the **Nationalpark-Infostelle Hintersee**, staff gave a detailed presentation on managing tourist influx and balancing conservation with recreation.
- **Evening Debrief:**  
After returning to Salzburg, each team met for a discussion session to reflect on insights from the excursion and relate them to their project areas.

### **Day 3 – Wednesday, July 2, 2025**

**Location:** UNI Park and Hellbrunn Palace

The third day focused on academic lectures, participatory tools, and site visits to explore diverse urban nature types.

- **Lectures and Tool Demonstrations:**
  - Prof. Angela Hof presented methods for **landscape analysis** in urban ecology.
  - Dr. Andrea Aragone shared a case study from Brussels on participatory design and the challenges of public engagement in experimental wetland sites.
- **Software Training:**  
Prof. Cristian Ioja introduced **SuperDecisions** software for multi-criteria decision-making. Participants were guided to install and register for version 3.2.



- **Project Work Session:**  
Teams spent time developing the structure of their group projects, beginning data collection and concept design.
- **Field Visit to Hellbrunn Palace:**  
Participants explored **Hellbrunn Palace and its gardens**, an example of multifunctional urban nature, blending heritage, ecology, and tourism.



- **Field Group Activity:**  
Teams continued with in-situ assessments, mapping features and recording observations.
- **Social Event – “What If” Icebreaker:**  
In the evening, a fun networking event was held at **Sternbräu**, fostering informal interaction among students and faculty.

## Day 4 – Thursday, July 3, 2025

**Location:** NAWI Building and multiple field sites

This day included formal academic exposure at a conference and practical project applications in selected urban areas.

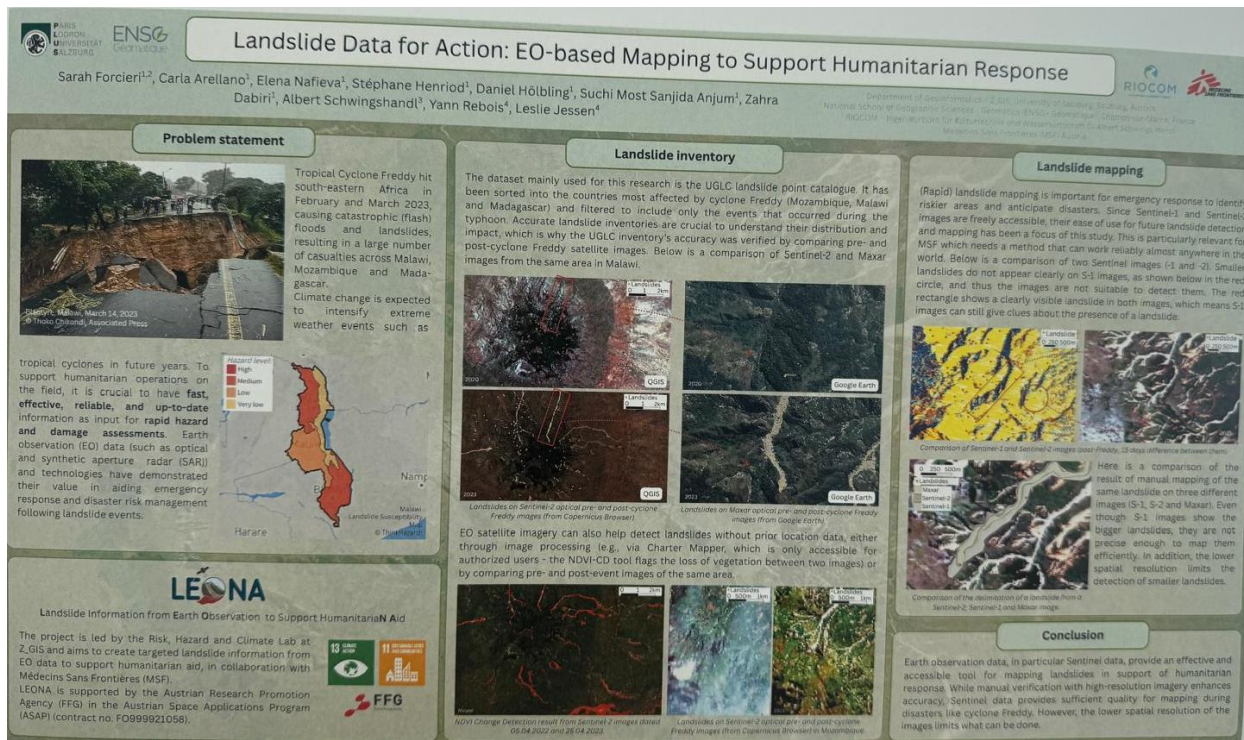


- **AGIT 2025 Conference Participation:**

In the morning, students attended sessions of the **AGIT 2025 Conference on Geoinformatics** at the NAWI building. This exposed them to current research and professional practices in GIS.



Also, I'm happy to share that my poster was presented at the **AGIT conference** as well.



**Afternoon Fieldwork:** Teams visited their designated project sites:

- Hans-Donnenberg Park
- Allotment gardens in Kleingartenverein Thumegg
- Natura 2000 site Kopfwiden am Almkanal
- Agricultural landscapes within Salzburg

They performed structured data collection and applied participatory assessment methods (e.g., surveys, stakeholder interviews, social media analysis).

- **Evening Team Work:**  
Group coordination continued to refine project structure, analyze data, and begin drafting maps and visual outputs.

## **Day 5 – Friday, July 4, 2025**

**Location:** UNI Park

The final day was dedicated to project completion and presentation.

- **Finalization of Group Projects:**  
Teams worked intensively to finalize their deliverables: maps, stakeholder diagrams, social participation strategies, and proposed tools.
- **Workshop – Team Presentations:**  
Each team presented their findings and concepts in a 15-minute presentation session. The audience included professors, organizers, and peers.



- **Evaluation and Feedback:**  
Professors gathered for a concluding session to evaluate the program and provide feedback on student engagement and output (not attended by students).



## **Group Project**

Our interdisciplinary group developed a project on enhancing public participation in urban nature management. The key components included:

- Mapping urban green spaces using GIS tools
- Conducting stakeholder analysis and interviews
- Survey design and public participation assessment
- Proposal of strategies to improve participatory engagement

Each group focused on a specific area in Salzburg (Volksgarten, Hans-Donnenberg Park, Waldgang, or NAWI site). Our output included digital maps, social network analyses, and recommendations for future participatory practices.

## **Learning Outcomes**

The BIP program enhanced our skills and understanding in:

- Participatory urban planning and management
- Geospatial technologies (GIS, PPGIS)
- Stakeholder analysis and community engagement
- Interdisciplinary teamwork and field-based research
- Critical evaluation of participatory tools in diverse urban settings

## **Conclusion**

The BIP Salzburg program provided a dynamic and practical learning experience, blending academic theory with real-world application. The combination of online preparation and immersive field activities enriched our understanding of participatory planning tools and fostered international collaboration among students and faculty.

I am grateful to the organizers and teaching staff for their guidance and support throughout the program.