

## Master's Thesis Topic: Machine Learning-Based Detection of Urban Blight

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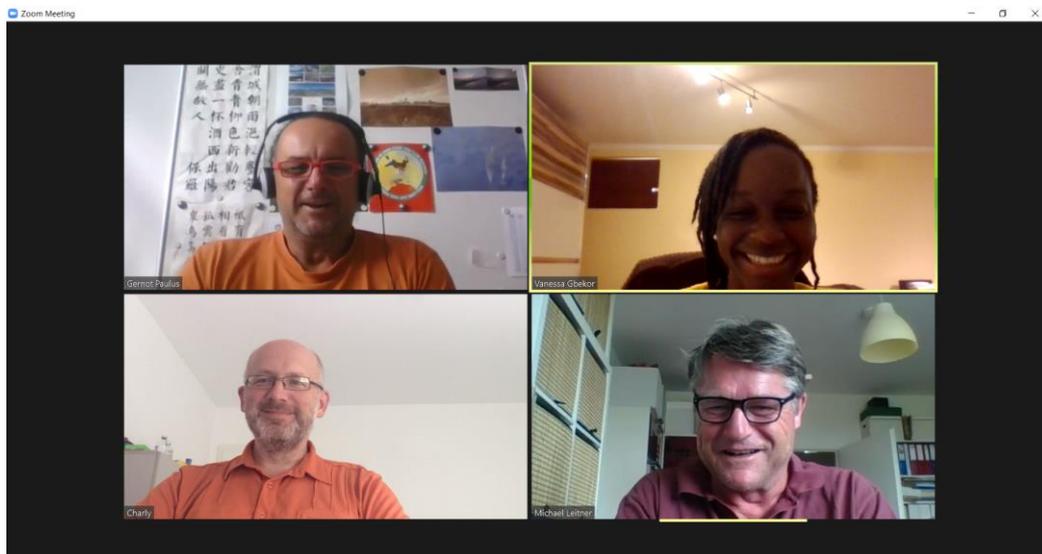
### Field Report – Research in Austria (Remote)

The news of having been selected as a Marshall Plan scholarship recipient was an exciting one. I was thrilled by the prospects of creating long lasting professional links, conducting collaborative research, and gaining exposure to different cultures, people and University life. However, due to the covid-19 situation, the plan to conduct the research abroad (at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, USA) was altered. Therefore, the research was conducted remotely in Austria.

Considering the covid-19 situation, it was recommended to work from home if possible. Since secondary data was to be used in the study, I conducted the research from my workspace at home. As a way of supervision, my supervisors held weekly meetings with me via zoom throughout the research period; 15<sup>th</sup> March 2021 to 16<sup>th</sup> August 2021. These meetings typically lasted for about an hour. The meetings consisted of different activities including presentations, discussions, feedback and recommendations. Each week, I presented the goals set for the previous week, provided a detailed description of the methods used to achieve the stated goals, the challenges encountered, the solutions attempted, the status of each task/goal, as well as the goals to be achieved prior to the next meeting. Each presentation was followed by diverse questions, a discussion, feedback from my supervisors as well as recommendations.

The discussions, feedback and recommendations often led to a revision of the goals to be achieved by the next meeting. This regular feedback was advantageous to me as it enhanced my understanding of the expectations for the project. The meetings also provided an avenue for my supervisors to guide me in a systematic manner. Each professor brought on board diverse expertise, ideas and experience, thus helping to enrich the research project. Although the weekly meetings were characterised by compliments, constructive criticisms, eye-opening discussions and recommendations, I must add that there was a healthy dose of laughter at several meetings.

Most certainly, I felt some pressure in certain weeks as I tried to achieve the set goals, especially when I encountered bottlenecks. However, my supervisors showed great support and even provided recommendations to help me to navigate the challenges encountered. Overall, I found this to be a valuable experience and I am grateful to my supervisors for their massive support and guidance.



During my research, I was privileged to meet Jiyoung Lee, a PhD student from Louisiana State University. She visited Austria as a Marshall Plan scholarship recipient. Although the covid-19 situation had greatly improved in Austria by that time, a lot of schoolwork was still being carried out online. As a result, our paths did not cross on the school's premises. Nonetheless, we made it a point to stay in touch via Whatsapp. We also hang out at different locations in Villach and went on trips to other cities in Austria including Salzburg and Innsbruck. We visited the ice cave (Eisriesenwelt) in Werfen in the Salzburg region, Swarovski Crystal World, Mozart's birthplace (a museum) and many other top tourist attractions. We shared our life experiences and future aspirations with each other and built a great bond within a short time. It was a wonderful experience.

My research experience as a Marshall Plan scholarship recipient is one that I would always remember. Although I did not travel to my host institution, it was worthwhile and taught me valuable life lessons pertaining to teamwork/collaboration, conducting quality research and greatly improved my problem-solving skills. Nonetheless, I believe that visiting Louisiana State University may have greatly added to my experience in terms of exposure to different cultures and international experience, as well as gaining a wider perspective. I would therefore encourage future Marshall Plan students and fellows to visit their host institutions if the situation makes it possible for them to do so. On the other hand, if the situation does not permit travel or make travelling safe, remember that remotely conducting research is a great option to explore.