PREFACE: PROCEEDINGS OF THE FOSS4G 2023 ACADEMIC TRACK – PRIZREN, FUTURE NOSTALGIA

M. Minghini [1][†], M. Ciolli [2] *, G. Neziri [3]

[1] European Commission, Joint Research Centre (JRC), 21027 Ispra, Italy – marco.minghini@ec.europa.eu
[2] Department of Civil, Enviromental and Mechanical Engineering, University of Trento, 38123 Trento, Italy – marco.ciolli@unitn.it
[3] SpaceSyntaKs, Rexhep Luci, 10000 Prishtina, Kosovo – gresaneziri@spacesyntaks.org

[†] The views expressed are purely those of the author and may not in any circumstances be regarded as stating an official position of the European Commission.

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PREFACE:

In this volume of *The International Archives of the Photogrammetry, Remote Sensing and Spatial Information Sciences*, we are honoured to present the proceedings of the 2023 Free and Open Source Software for Geospatial international conference (FOSS4G 2023, https://2023.foss4g.org), which was jointly organised by the Open Source Geospatial Foundation (OSGeo) and the International Society for Photogrammetry and Remote Sensing (ISPRS). Since the first edition in Thailand in 2004, every year the FOSS4G conference has been held in a different location across the world. 2023 is the year of Kosovo, a first-time host of the conference. FOSS4G is a well-established conference that is annually hosted by OSGeo and focused on building awareness and collaborations in the use and development of open source geospatial software, cementing existing bonds and creating new ones to address the ever-increasing challenges our society has to face. After the Covid-19 crisis, only in 2022 the FOSS4G conference came back as a face-to-face event happening in Florence, Italy, with a massive participation from a community that was so much willing to meet again after some years. As an established tradition within the international FOSS4G conferences, the Academic Track has transformed the annual conference into a well-known appointment also for academics, researchers, scientists and community members that leverage open source geospatial technologies in their day-to-day scientific activities. The research topics presented at FOSS4G events have become, year after year, more varied and interesting, showing that FOSS4G is trans-disciplinary by nature, fosters collaborations and stimulates innovation.

As a newly established country, Kosovo stands at the forefront of progress, including the formation of new communities. Among them, the open source community is rapidly growing and gaining recognition. With numerous organisations dedicated to promoting open knowledge and technologies, and a large number of individuals actively involved, Kosovo is steadily advancing towards the adoption of FOSS. Additionally, the geospatial declination of open source is already well-known and supported within the community, continuously attracting new enthusiastic advocates. The genesis of these communities can be traced back to challenging times for Kosovo. In the 1990s, the universities in Kosovo underwent significant upheavals, both in terms of curriculum and physical infrastructure. Despite being forced out of academic buildings, students became increasingly driven by their curiosity for knowledge and advancements. It was during this period that Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology was introduced to the region, mostly by visiting professionals of the field and in the theory aspect. During the early 2000s, the University of Prishtina, which was and continues to be the largest university in Kosovo, played a crucial role in pioneering GIS training for students. This group of students went on to become the first local GIS Specialists, making ongoing contributions to Kosovo's body of work in the geospatial field. They established initial associations and groups with a strong focus on promoting open source GIS and its integration within the community. As a result, the advocacy for utilising open platforms like QGIS in local and national institutions has gained significant momentum.

In more recent years, professionals involved with the global open source community part of FLOSSK (Free Libre Open Source Software Kosovo) established the local chapter of OSGeo in Kosovo towards the end of 2019. Since then, numerous professionals and groups have joined FLOSSK and the community has been actively participating in FOSS4G events and conferences worldwide. Despite being a young nation, Kosovo's cities, particularly Prizren, embody a rich history where tradition intertwines with the present and the future. Nostalgically, the future of Open Geospatial in Kosovo and the surrounding regional communities is on the verge of a breakthrough, encompassing regional communities. The conference will propel the community beyond small gatherings at FLOSSK's Hackerspace Prishtina and SpaceSyntaKs' Geotaggers mapathons, elevating it to a global platform of friends, advocates, enablers, and trustees. Prizren, Kosovo, and the entire region will receive invaluable support through the connections and networking opportunities offered by the FOSS4G 2023 conference. Just as Prizren tenaciously builds upon its historical communities, FOSS4G 2023 in Kosovo will empower the community to forge a future that proudly establishes itself as a formalised platform for Open Geospatial within the region and beyond.

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* Corresponding author

The proceedings of the FOSS4G 2023 Academic Track published in this volume include 36 papers, which were all presented in oral talks by the authors during the conference. These papers were selected after a peer-reviewed process performed by the members of the Scientific Committee, starting from more than 60 contributions initially submitted.

We close this editorial by expressing our gratitude to Lena Halounova (ISPRS President), Sisi Zlatanova and Maria Brovelli (President and Vice-President of ISPRS Technical Commission IV) for approving, on behalf of ISPRS, this Academic Track event in collaboration with OSGeo. Finally, we thank all the authors of the papers and the 42 reviewers and members (together with us) of the FOSS4G 2023 Scientific Committee, coming from all over the world and all listed below in alphabetical order.

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