INFORMAL LEARNING SPACES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

- This poster aims to inform you about the importance of informal learning spaces at higher education institutions.
- The guidance material you are reading is a result of 30 month international and interdisciplinary project (NIILS) work conducted by 16 researchers from 5 different universities from 5 countries in Europe.

NI ILS
New Approaches for Inclusive Informal Learning Spaces

Informal learning space (ILS)

A learning space is any location where learning occurs. Informal learning spaces (ILSs) are defined as any areas students can freely choose for self-organized, uninstructed learning outside of scheduled teaching sessions.

Examples include student lounges, interim spaces such as stairwells, hallways, niches, and auditorium vestibules, university libraries, working areas, canteens, cafeterias, seminar rooms, lecture halls, and outdoor areas on campus.

The importance of ILSs for higher education institutions

- ILSs are places where students interact, establish network and support each other.
- ILSs increase commitment, satisfaction and success in studying as well as health and well-being.
- Social integration leads to the establishing relationships and enhances similar attitudes and values to personal development.
- Social integration also decreases dropout rates and increases commitment and satisfaction of students.

Key findings of NIILS project

Check out the NIILS synthesis report (link)

- Availability and Social Integration: Increased availability and accessibility of informal learning spaces (ILSs) correlate with higher social integration among students.
- Social Integration and Well-being: Higher social integration is linked to improved student well-being.
- Availability and Well-being: Greater availability and accessibility of ILSs are associated with enhanced student well-being.
- Disparities for SWFO: Students with fewer opportunities (SWFO) report significantly lower availability and accessibility of ILSs, social integration, and well-being compared to students without fewer opportunities.
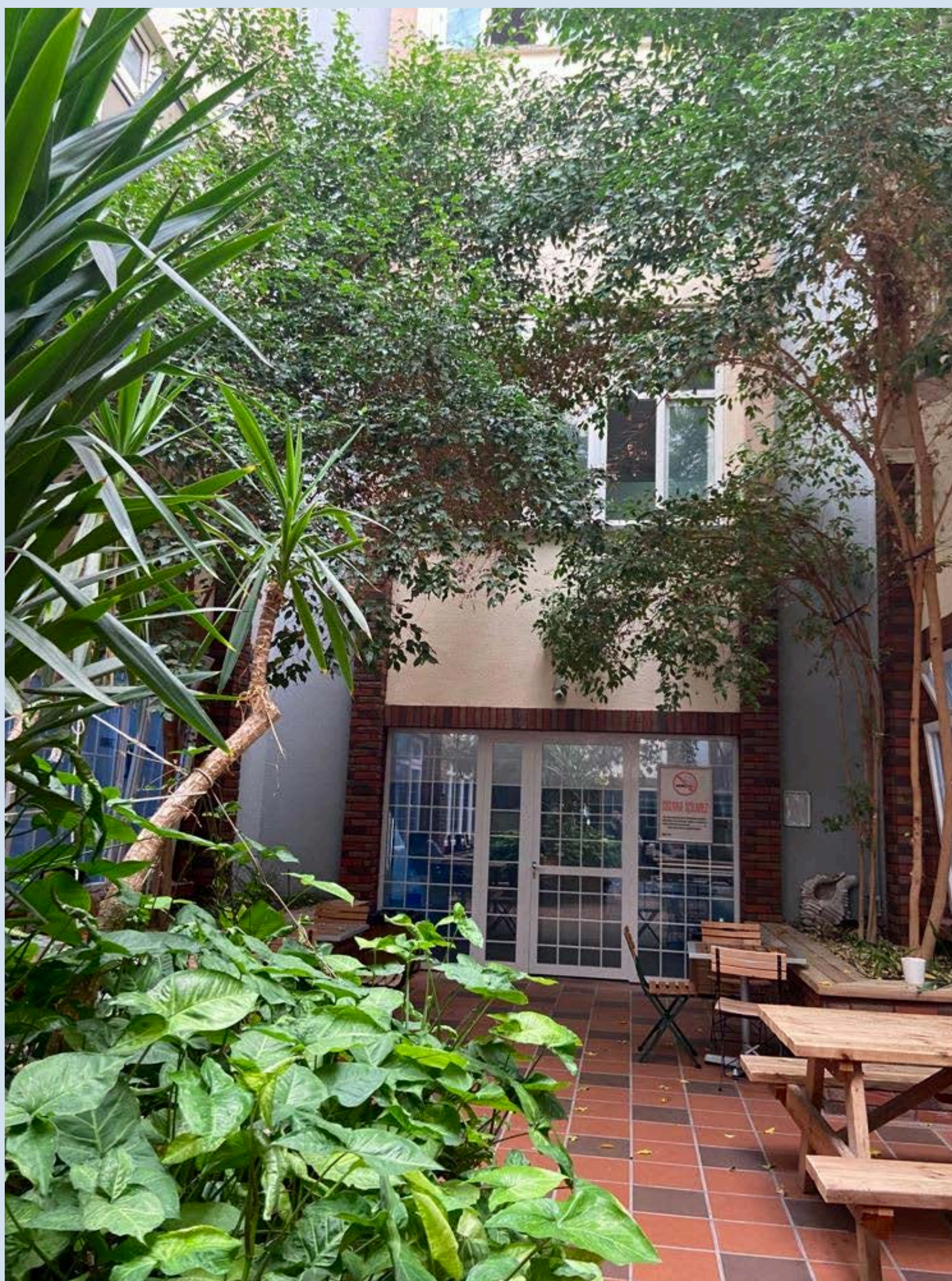
Barriers regarding accessibility and availability of ILSs and suggestions to overcome barriers

Availability of ILSs

Locked spaces/controlled access (i.e. library, seminar and computer rooms)

Lack of information/transparency and knowledge (i.e. missing information about opening hours, knowledge how to unlock spaces)

Poor overview of spaces (i.e. absence of ILS maps, informative signs, and room booking system)

Restrictive rules of the use (i.e. concerning consumption of food and drinks, permitted noise level, bring along belongings)

- Improve organisational aspects (i.e. information and knowledge)

Accessbility of ILSs

Occupation of spaces/overcrowded/too busy

Limited technological infastructure (i.e. lack of power plugs, weak WiFi)

Limited weatherproof (i.e. missing roofing for shadow or rain)

Lack of sound proofing (i.e. high noise level)

Inadequate temperature

Lack of privacy/ subjective security

- Increase quality of ILSs

Recommendations about ILSs

Decision makers & Enablers

- **Enhance awareness**
  - Conduct campus tours to introduce ILSs.
  - Use promotional materials (i.e. posters) to raise awareness about ILSs.
  - Organize workshops to educate students and staff about features and uses of ILSs.
- **Take action**
  - Create working groups to implement ILS improvements or projects.
  - Allocate resources to support projects aimed at enhancing ILSs.
  - Seek public-private partnerships or philanthropic support to boost ILS funding.
  - Encourage research and innovation in the design utilization of ILSs.
  - Facilitate the establishment of learning communuties on ILSs.
- **Increase communication and networking**
  - Host regular networking events where stakeholders can connect, collaborate, and share insights about ILSs.
  - Forge partnerships with external groups, professionals, and alumni to amplify ILS initiatives.
  - Set up online platforms for students and staff to share ILS information, ideas, and feedback.
  - Use and advertise NIILS mapping platform.

Enhance awareness → Take action → Increase communication and networking
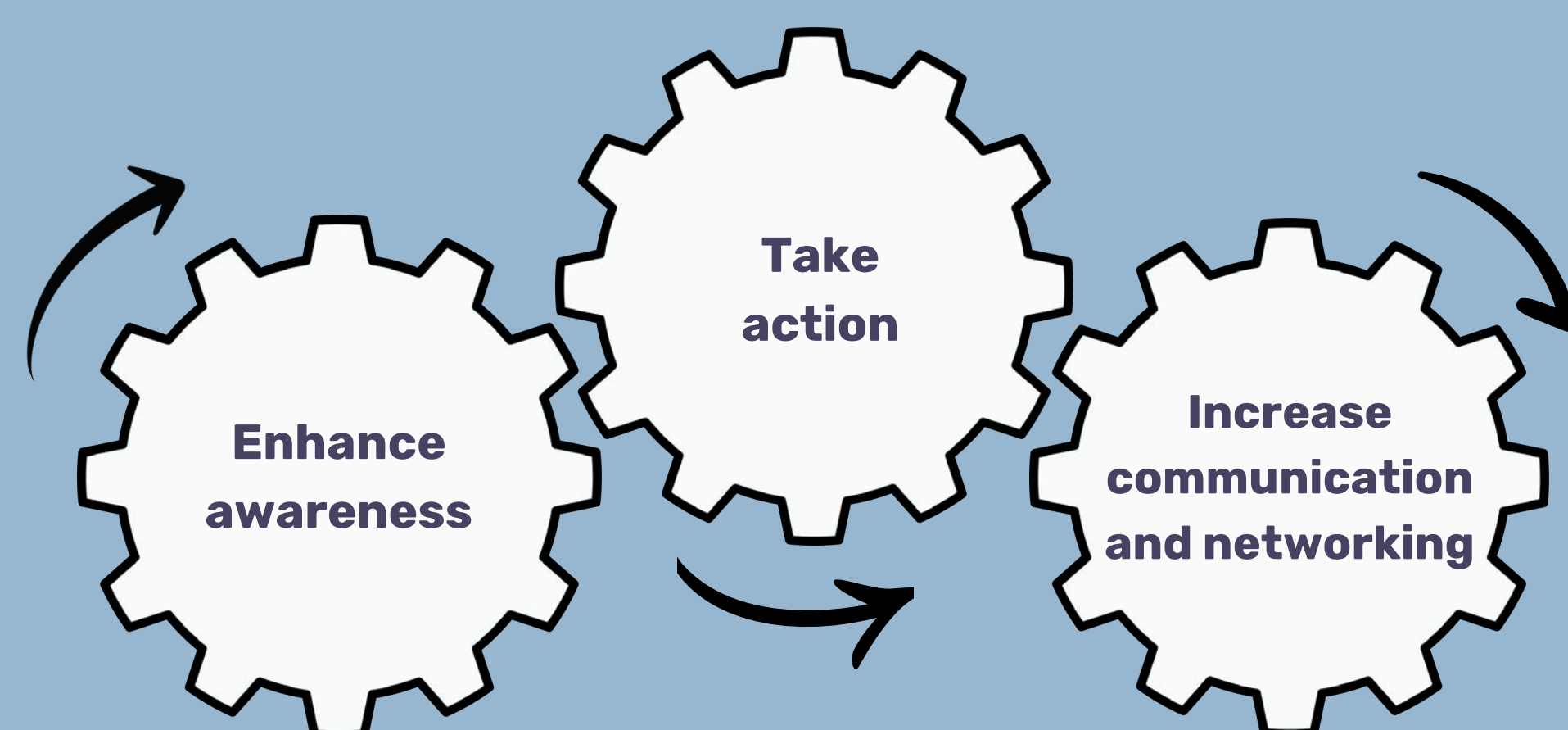
NIILS mapping platform

- is a searchable directory, listing the features of some of the ILSs on the campuses of NIILS partner universities.

Accessibility info about ILS	Location of the ILS
	Operating hours of ILS
	Accessibility of ILS
Features of ILS	Usage (suitable for focused &or collaborative learning)
	Availability of WIFI
	Availability of catering facilities
	Availability of restrooms
	Furniture features
	Building climatic
	Photos of the ILS
Suggest an ILS	The NIILS platform also allows users to suggest new ILSs on campus that can be added to the platform

Lecturers & Students

- **Enhance awareness**
  - Stay informed about available ILSs and use them purposefully for various learning & teaching activities.
  - Inform and motivate students and lecturers to explore and utilize various ILSs.
  - Recognize diverse student needs and guide them to suitable ILSs.
  - Advertise and use NIILS mapping platform.
- **Take action**
  - Implement varied teaching methods within ILSs to enhance student engagement, like problem-based learning or flipped classrooms.
  - Utilize ILSs to benefit from peer learning opportunties.
  - Collaborate with users to establish inclusive usage rules and prevent monopolization of spaces.
  - Provide feedback to enhance accessibility and quality of ILSs.
  - Facilitate and/or take part in the establishment process of learning communutes on ILSs.
  - Conduct and/or participate research projects on ILSs.
- **Increase communication and networking**
  - Encourage interdisciplinary collaboration among faculty to explore new ways of utilizing ILSs in different subject areas.
  - Collaborate with colleagues to share best practices for integrating ILSs into teaching.
  - Join organizations focused on ILSs, educational technology, and innovation to connect with like-minded peers and proffesionals.

NIILS mapping platform