



INFORMAL LEARNING SPACES IN HIGHER EDUCATION:

GUIDANCE MATERIAL FOR LECTURERS

This brochure is prepared to support your teaching activities in relation to informal learning spaces. It 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.



Co-funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union.

Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or OeAD-GmbH. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.



Within the NIILS Project:

1. Focus groups were conducted with stakeholders, lecturers and students to learn more about ILSSs at our universities.
2. Student survey was conducted to investigate the relationship between ILSSs and various student factors (satisfaction with campus, sense of belonging, interpersonal relationships, and well-being).
3. An online platform providing information and photos about ILSSs at our universities was developed.
4. Walking interviews were conducted to develop and receive feedback about the online platform.
5. Workshops were organized to start learning communities about ILSSs.
6. Guidance materials were prepared to promote inclusive ILSSs.

What is an Informal Learning Space (ILS)?

A learning space is any location where learning occurs. Informal learning spaces (ILSSs) are defined as any areas students can freely choose for self-organized, uninstructed learning outside of scheduled teaching sessions. In this context, we focus on higher education institutions, emphasizing spaces on campus or within their spatial infrastructure. 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.

Why ILS is important for higher education institutions?

- ILSSs are places where students interact, establish network and support each other.
- ILSSs 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.



SAPIENZA
UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA



MYKOLAS ROMERIS
UNIVERSITY



[NIILS web page](#)



Let's improve **INFORMAL LEARNING SPACES!**

Key findings of NIILS project

for more information see NIILS synthesis report

- **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

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

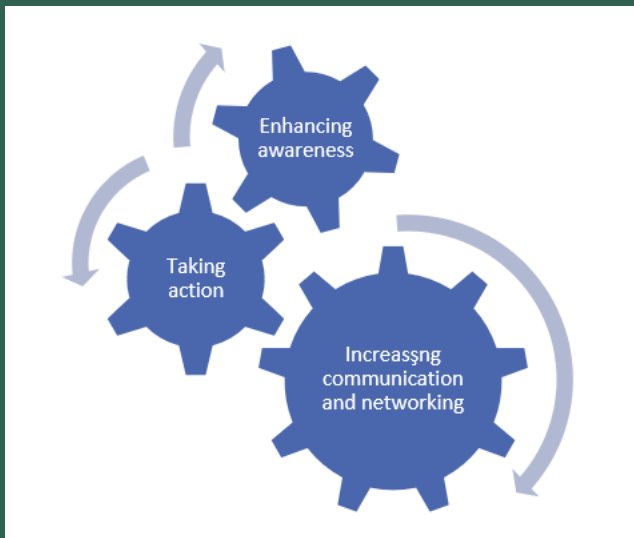
Increase quality of ILSs

- Locked spaces/controlled access
- Lack of information/transparency and knowledge (i.e. missing information about opening hours)
- 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)

- Occupation of spaces/overcrowded/too busy
- Limited technological infrastructure (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

Recommendations

As lecturers you can take the following actions to make better use of the ILS that caters for a more inclusive and healthy learning environment:



1) Enhancing awareness

- Recognize the significance of ILSs and advocate for their improvement.
- Familiarize yourself with available ILSs both on and off campus to inform teaching decisions.
- Recognize diverse student needs and guide them to suitable ILSs.
- Inform and motivate students to explore and utilize various ILSs.
- Advertise NIILS mapping platform.

2) Taking action

- Engage actively in the design, enhancement, and management of ILSs, and promote awareness among faculty and other stakeholders.
- Implement diverse teaching methods that encourage student engagement and interaction within ILSs, such as problem-based learning or flipped classroom approaches.
- Organize workshops or seminars to show the benefits of ILSs to stakeholders.

- Actively participate in research projects focused on inclusive ILSs.
- Facilitate the establishment of learning communities on ILSs with students and other stakeholders.
- Use NIILS mapping platform and carry out studies for its development.

3) Increasing communication and networking

- Collaborate with colleagues to share best practices and innovative ideas for integrating ILSs into teaching strategies.
- Establish an online platform or forum where lecturers can share experiences, resources, and recommendations related to ILSs.
- Encourage interdisciplinary collaboration among faculty members to explore new ways of utilizing ILSs across different subject areas.
- Initiate regular meetings or discussions with students to gather feedback on their experiences with ILSs.

NIILS mapping platform

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

What is in the NIILS mapping platform?

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