Promoting Informal Learning Spaces with digital mapping

Project Result 3 - Mapping Platform
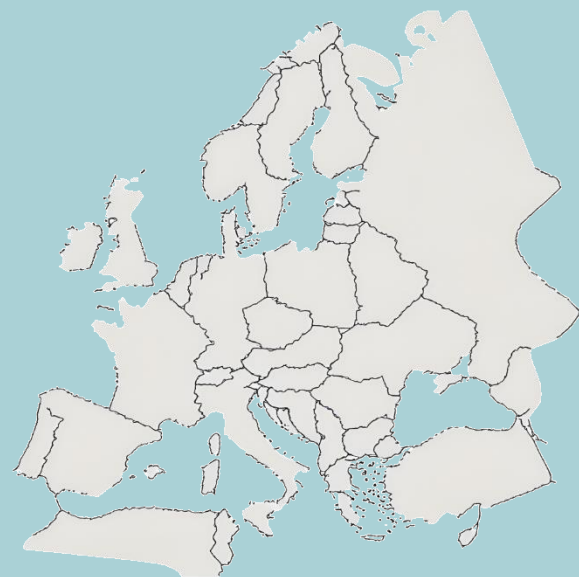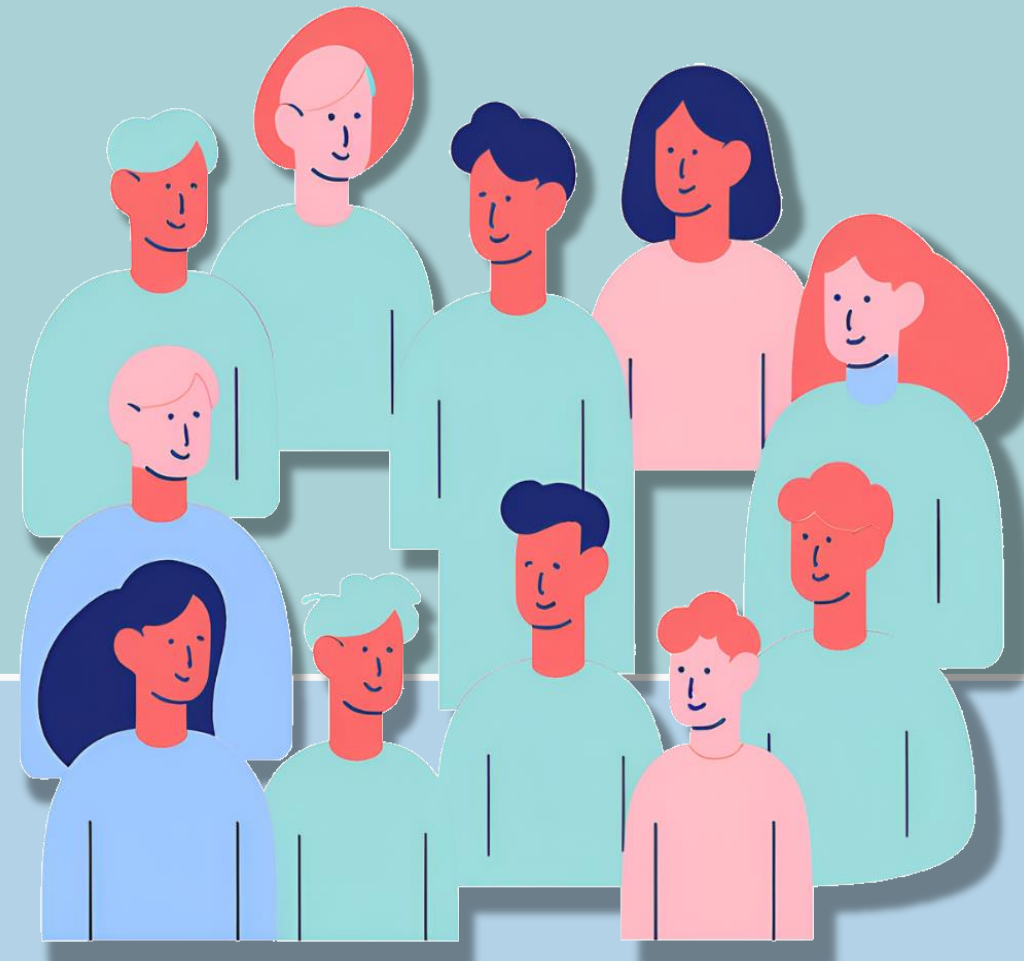## Collecting and sharing data on Informal Learning Spaces

Project Partners

Akdeniz University
(Antalya, Türkiye; AKD)
Hochschule für Technik und Wirtschaft
(Berlin, Germany; HTWB)
Mykolas Romeris University
(Vilnius, Lithuania; MRU)
Sapienza University
(Rome, Italy; SAP)
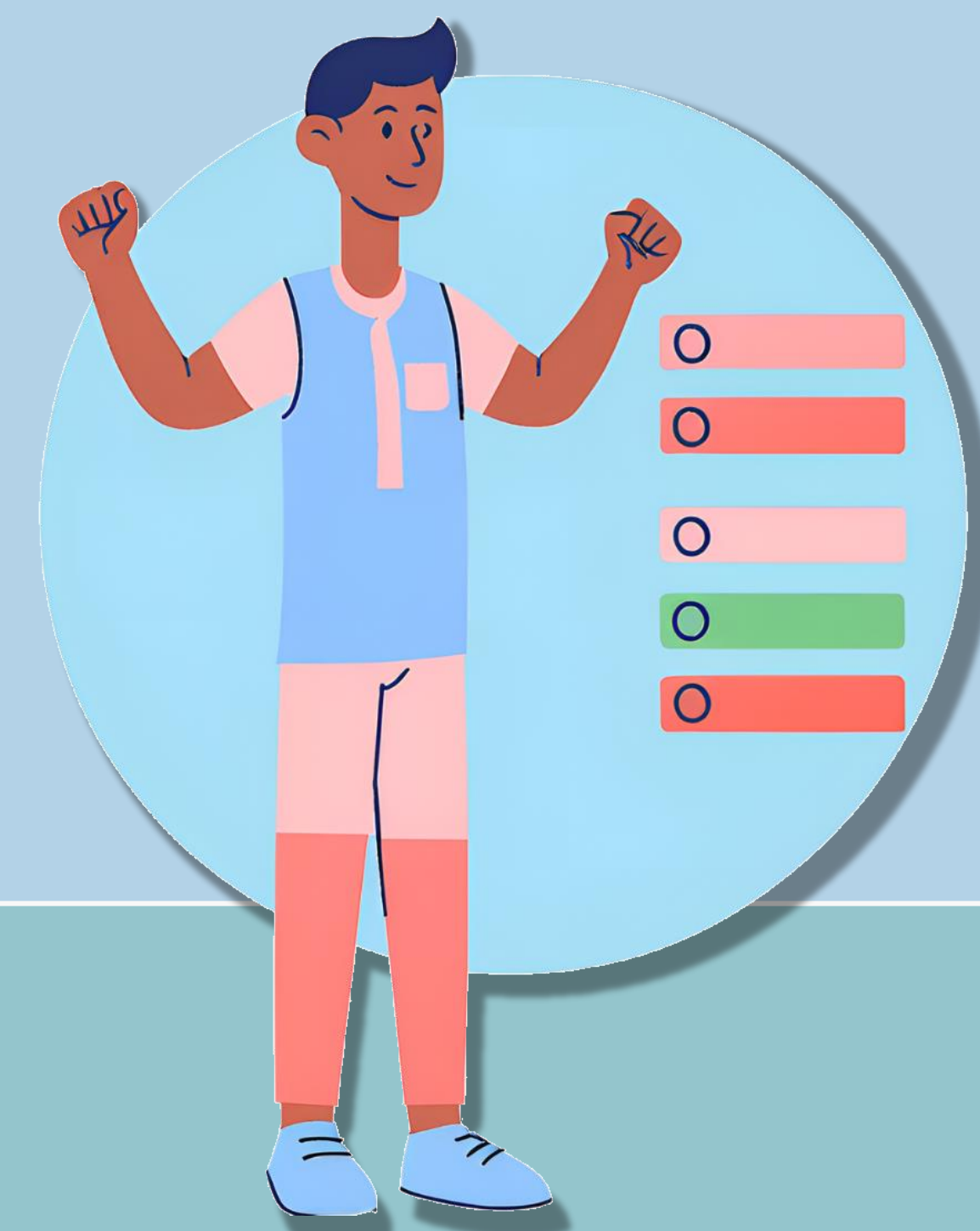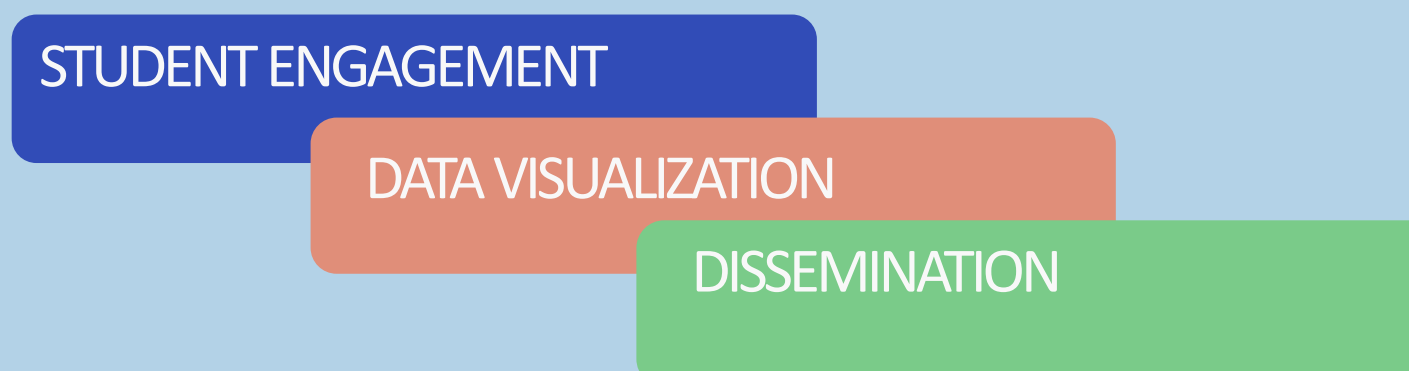University for Continuing Education
(Krems, Austria; UWK)

- Diverse countries with different cultures with different characteristics in terms of:
- Campus size: The size of the university campus can influence the availability and use of informal learning spaces.
- Population density: The number of students and people present on campus can affect the use of ILS and interpersonal dynamics within them.
- Number of students and staff: The size of the university population can influence the demand and competition for the use of ILS.
- Faculty: The different nature of faculties and study programs can determine different needs and preferences for learning spaces.
- Study programs offered: The type of courses and teaching activities can influence the way students use ILS.
- Fields of study: Disciplines of study may have specific requirements for spaces and equipment, influencing the configuration of ILS.
- Years of foundation: The age of the university and its history can condition the architecture of the campus and the availability of ILS

Walking interviews (WI)

Data Collection on Informal Learning Spaces
Interviews conducted as part of this study took place in informal learning spaces (ILS) identified by project partners and mapped for comprehensive visualization.
The map was presented to participating students and faculty, inviting them to select two ILS for the interviews.

Data collected on the spaces can be divided into four categories:
- **Physical characteristics**: Luminosity, acoustics, temperature, furniture ergonomics
- **Accessibility**: Defined as the elimination of architectural barriers and free access for all students without time restrictions or restrictive rules.
- **Functionality**: The layout of the spaces, technological equipment, and access to multimedia educational resources.
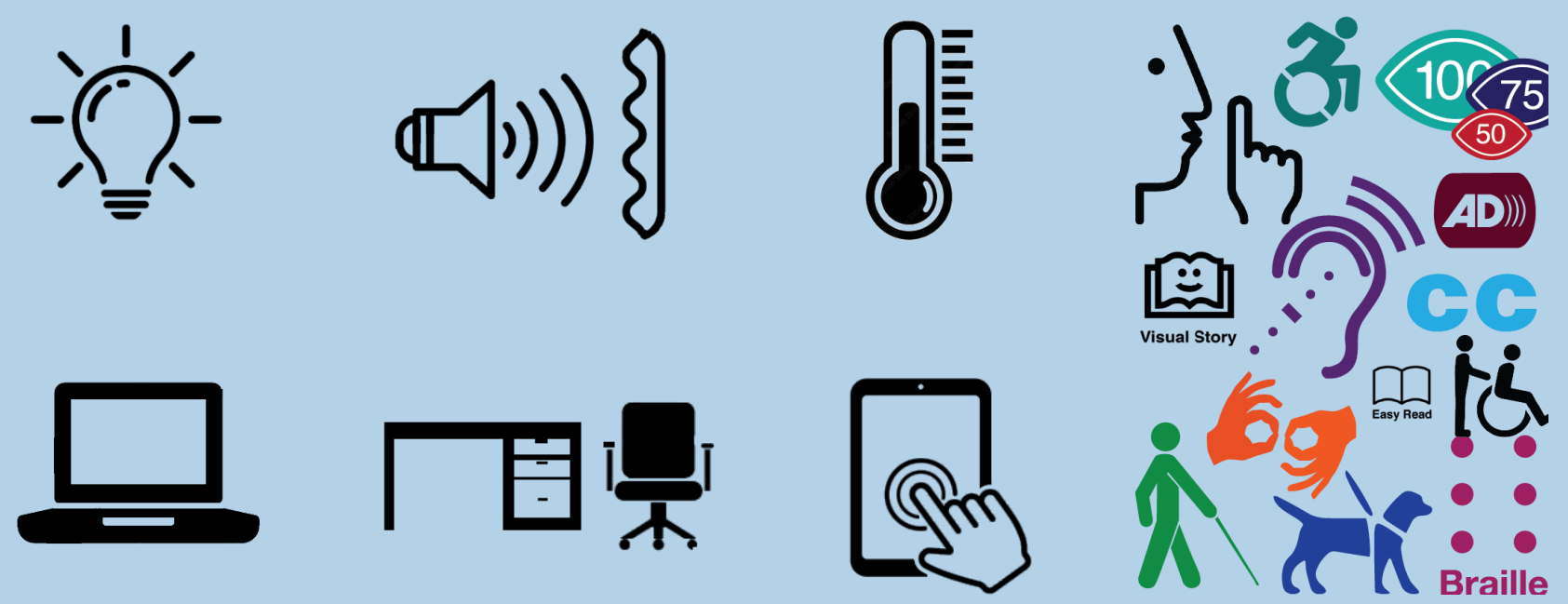- **Aesthetics**: The aesthetic appearance of an environment can influence students' mood and motivation.
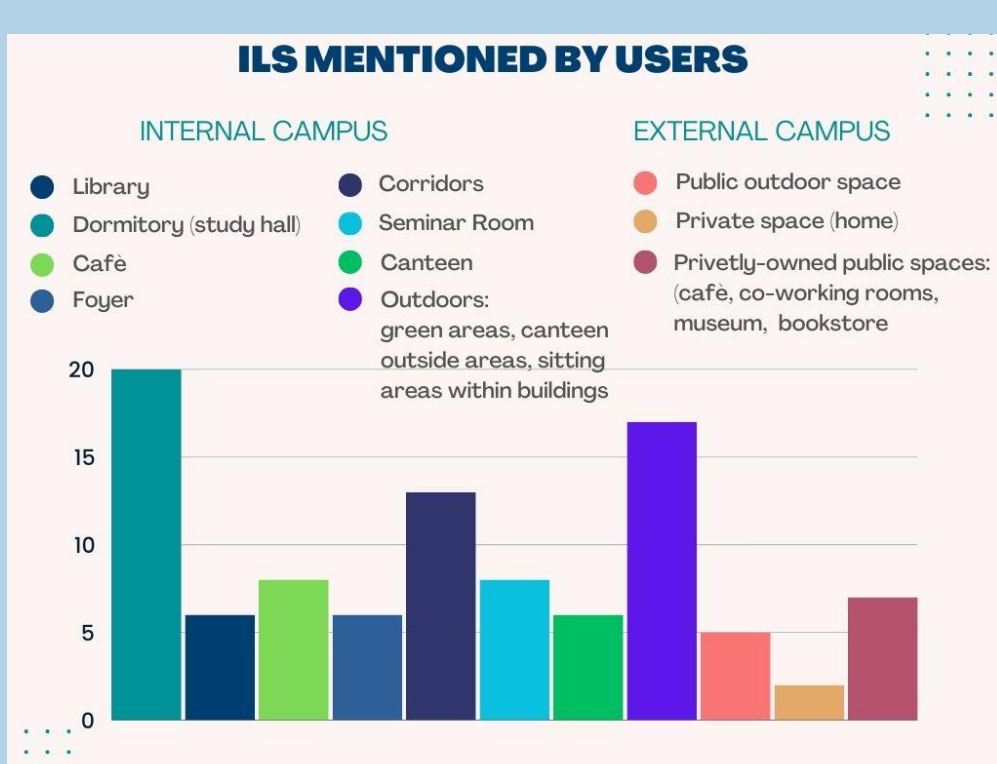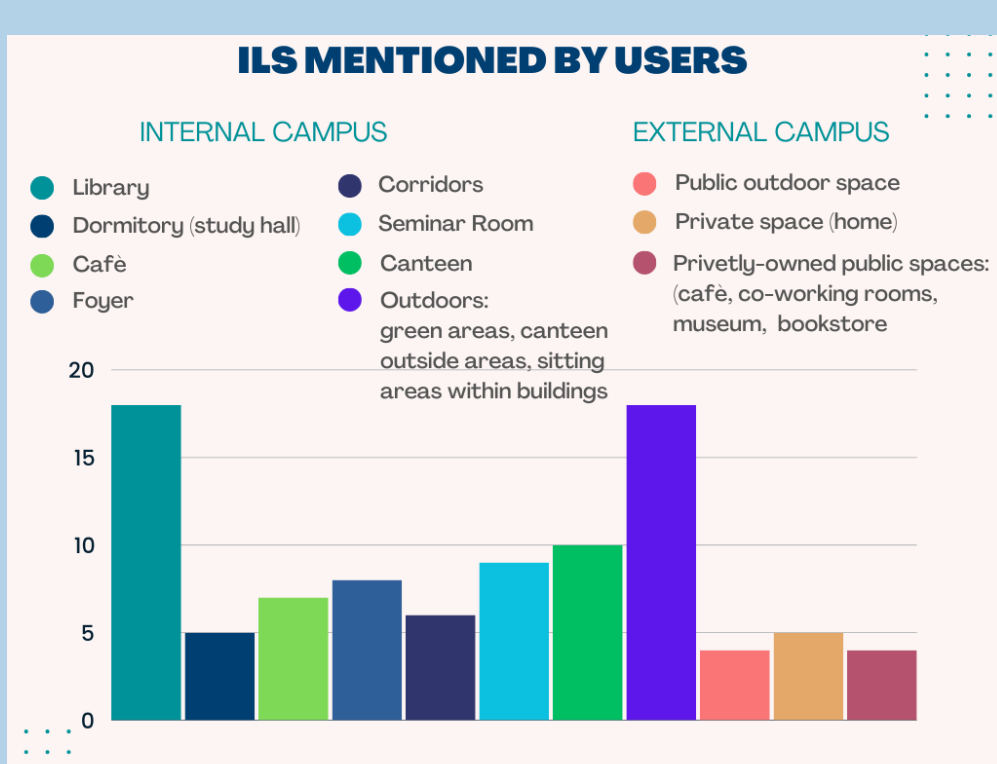
Feedback on the Mapping Platform
To gather feedback on the platform, the questions were structured based on the following:
- **Usability**: The degree of ease and satisfaction with which the interaction between the user and the platform's graphical interface takes place, in order to obtain the desired information about the ILS.
- **Application**: Intended as the effectiveness of achieving the goals for which the platform was designed.
- **Accessibility**: The platform's ability to deliver services and provide usable information, without discrimination, even to those with fewer opportunities.

I Round of WI

ILS MENTIONED BY USERS

INTERNAL CAMPUS
- Library
- Dormitory (study hall)
- Cafe
- Foyer
- Corridors
- Seminar Room
- Canteen
- Outdoors: green areas, canteen outside areas, sitting areas within buildings

EXTERNAL CAMPUS
- Public outdoor space
- Private space
- Privately-owned public spaces (cafe, co-working rooms, museum, bookstore

II Round of WI

ILS MENTIONED BY USERS

INTERNAL CAMPUS
- Library
- Dormitory (study hall)
- Cafe
- Foyer
- Corridors
- Seminar Room
- Canteen
- Outdoors: green areas, canteen outside areas, sitting areas within buildings

EXTERNAL CAMPUS
- Public outdoor space
- Private space (home)
- Privately-owned public spaces (cafe, co-working rooms, museum, bookstore

Mapping Platform

The initial version of the platform was successfully developed and received generally positive feedback from users regarding its usability and design. However, some critical points emerged that needed to be addressed, including the platform's aesthetics, the lack of representative images of the locations, the excess of filter options, and the quality of automatic translations.

Improvements Based on Feedback
Based on the feedback collected, the following improvements were implemented:

- **Aesthetics:** A new visual identity was created with a more modern and engaging logo.
Location Images: The image gallery was expanded with high-quality photos that accurately represent the study spaces.
- **Filter Options**: The filtering system was optimized for greater ease of use.
- **Campus Maps**: Interactive maps were implemented to improve the understanding of the location of learning spaces.
- **Language**: High-quality manual translations were provided in multiple languages.
- **User Feedback Form:** A form was implemented to allow users to report new learning spaces to be included on the platform.

https://www.niilsmappingplatform.eu/

QR to the mapping platform

Project Result 3

Project Goal:
- Develop a platform to map and share information on informal learning spaces used by students and lecturers at partner universities.

Importance of Informal Learning spaces:
- Research shows a growing need for informal spaces for collaborative, individual, and technology-supported learning, as well as peer and lecturer interaction.

Challenges:
- Availability of suitable spaces varies depending on campus layout, location, and student needs.

Platform Benefits:
- Increased visibility and accessibility of learning spaces for students;
- Data insights to help students and lecturers find suitable spaces and develop strategies to overcome limitations;
- Improved understanding of student preferences and spatial resource limitations.

Project Activities:
- Develop and implement the platform.
- Conduct walking interviews to map spaces and collect data (twice per semester, in different seasons).
- Engage users through testing and data collection via walking interviews and volunteers.
- Analyze collected data on the platform.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT
DATA VISUALIZATION
DISSEMINATION

Research Methodologies

Research methodology is based on an iterative process structured into the following steps, grounded in both quantitative and qualitative analysis, which places the users, their considerations, and their needs at the center:

1. Design of a prototype platform for mapping informal learning spaces.
2. Data and feedback acquisition (Round 1):
Conduct "walking interviews" to gather information on the landscape of informal learning spaces.
Gather feedback on the usability and usefulness of the prototype platform.
3. Mapping platform update:
Integrate data collected from the interviews into the mapping platform by creating detailed profiles for each informal space, including physical characteristics, accessibility, and features.
Refine the usability, aesthetics, and functionality of the platform based on user feedback.
4. Data and feedback acquisition (Round 2):
Conduct a second round of "walking interviews" to collect additional data on informal learning spaces.
Evaluate the new platform layout with users.
5. Final updates:
Integrate data collected from the second round of interviews into the mapping platform.
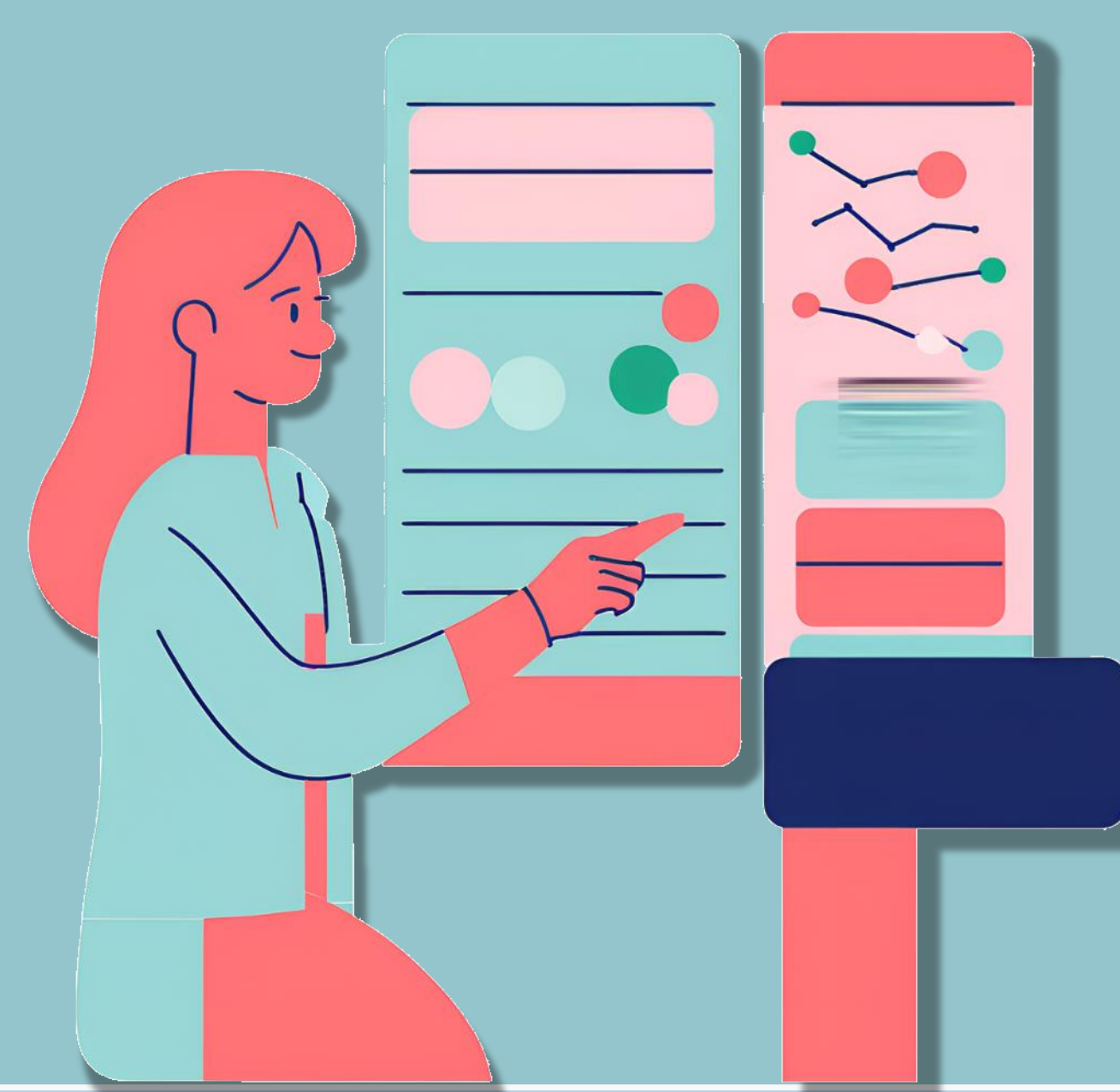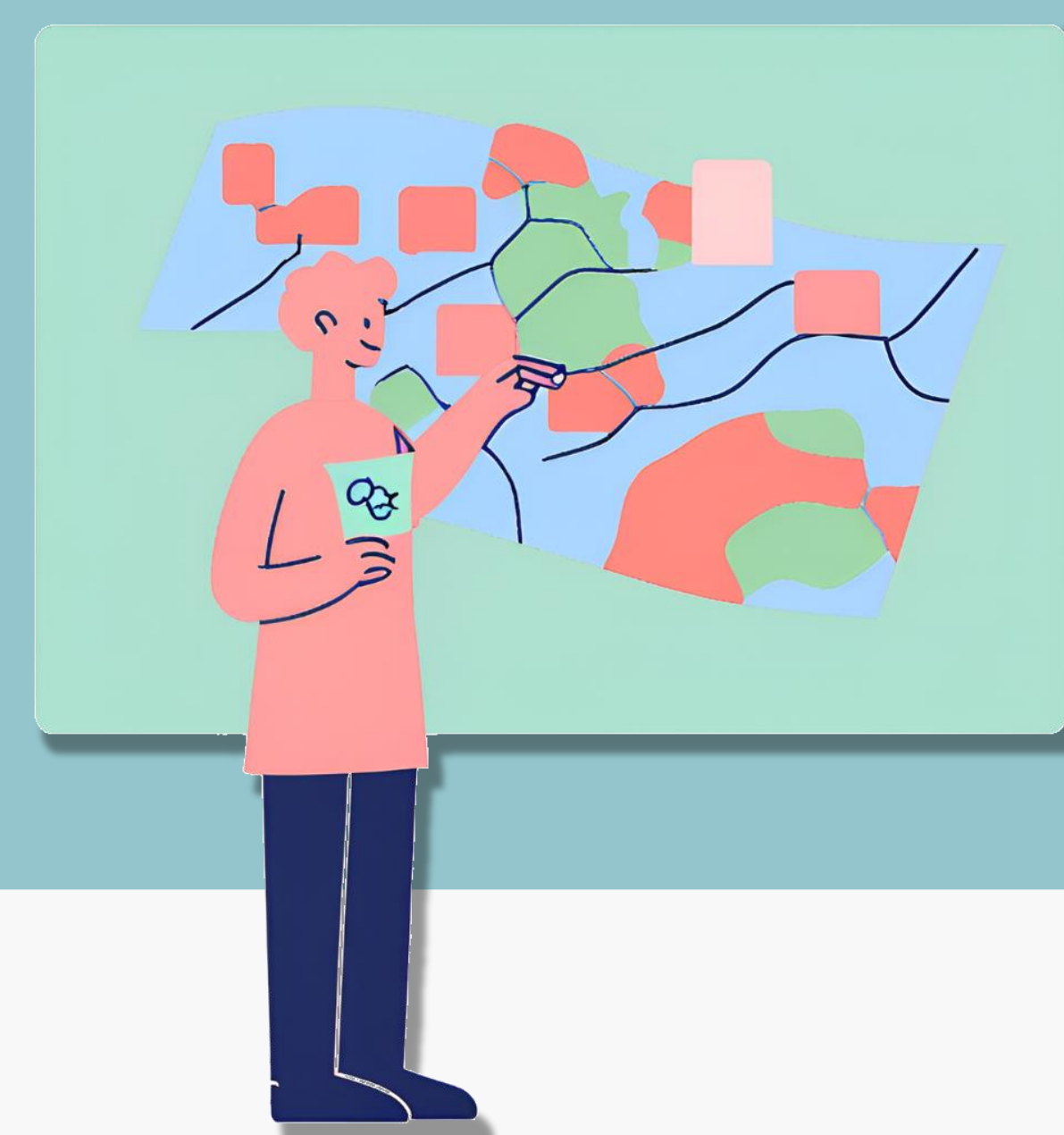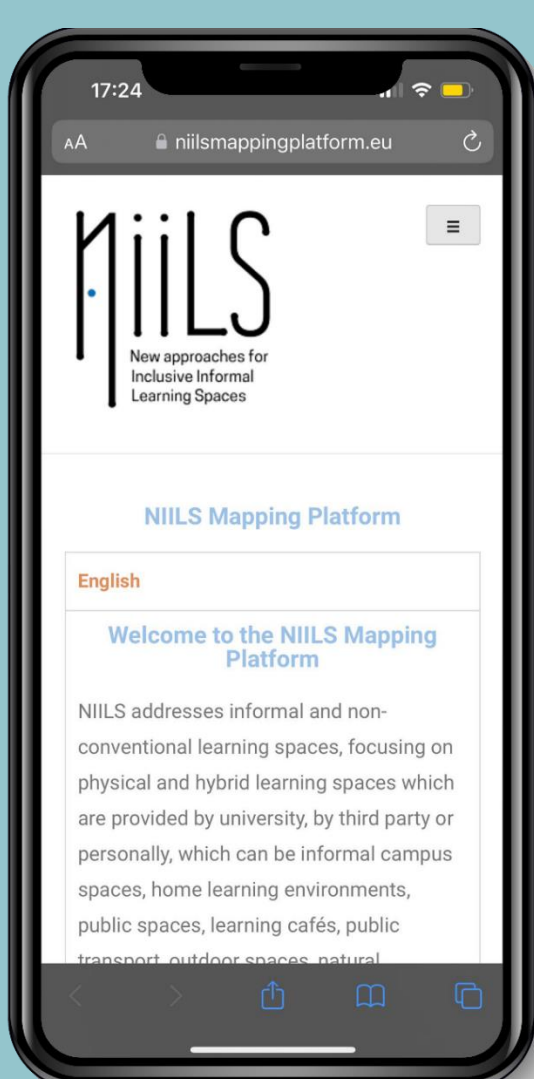Implement further modifications to meet user preferences and optimize platform functionality.

Walking Interviews
A walking interview is a method where the researcher and participant move within a predetermined context while the interview takes place. The interviews allowed us to understand how an individual interacts with their social and physical environment, highlighting behavior in everyday informal study activities.

Mapping platform
Mapping platform was designed using a User-Centered Design (UCD) approach, which is crucial in the development of interactive experiences. This technique recognizes that the effectiveness with which a design meets the requirements, preferences, and expectations of the people who will use it determines its success and adoption.

WALKING INTERVIEW
MAPPING PLATFORM

Conclusion

NIILS project highlights the significance of informal learning spaces (ILS) and their impact on student learning. It emphasizes the importance of user-centered design, continuous research, and international collaboration to optimize ILS and promote their effective utilization.

Key Points
- NIILS project and its mapping platform introduce a new perspective on ILS, emphasizing their role in student well-being and learning outcomes.
- Continuous research and data-driven practices are crucial to unlock the full potential of ILS.
- Further research is needed to understand optimal ILS characteristics, their impact on learning, and effective management strategies.
- User-centered design principles should guide ILS design and development, considering student needs and preferences.
- Mapping platforms can be valuable tools for students to locate ILS; however, accessibility, inclusivity, and user-friendliness are essential.
- NIILS project demonstrates the value of user feedback and technological innovation in enhancing ILS.
- International collaboration is key to addressing complex challenges in education and optimizing ILS.

Future Directions
- Promote ILS use among students, faculty, and administrators through learning communities, research networks, and collaboration.
- Continuously collect user feedback to identify areas for improvement.
- Explore emerging technologies like virtual and augmented reality to create more immersive learning experiences.
- Engage students, faculty, and administrators in ILS design and development.
- Promote and publicize ILS to raise awareness and encourage their use.
- Regularly evaluate ILS to ensure they meet user needs.

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For further information
check NIILS Website

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