



INFORMAL LEARNING SPACES IN HIGHER EDUCATION:

GUIDANCE MATERIAL FOR EXECUTIVES AND DECISION MAKERS

This brochure 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.



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Within the NIILS Project:

1. Focus groups were conducted with stakeholders, lecturers and students to learn more about ILSs at our universities.
2. Student survey was conducted to investigate the relationship between ILSs and various student factors (satisfaction with campus, sense of belonging, interpersonal relationships, and well-being).
3. An online platform providing information and photos about ILSs 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 ILSs.
6. Guidance materials were prepared to promote inclusive ILSs.

What is an 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. 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?

- 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.



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[NIILS web page](#)



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

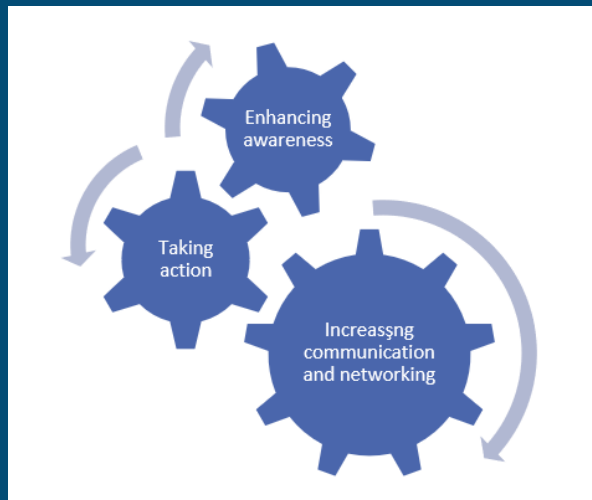
Key findings of NIILS project

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.

Recommendations

As executives and decision makers 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

- Conduct orientation sessions and campus tours for new students to introduce them to ILSs.
- Create promotional materials such as posters, brochures, and digital signage to raise awareness about ILSs.
- Organize informational sessions and workshops to educate students and staff about the features and uses of ILSs.
- Highlight specific examples of successful implementation of ILSs and their impact on student engagement and learning outcomes.
- Advertise NIILS mapping platform.

2) Taking action

- Establish task forces or working groups dedicated to implementing specific improvements or projects related to inclusive ILSs.
- Allocate resources and funding to support innovative projects and initiatives aimed at enhancing ILSs.

- Explore opportunities for public-private partnerships or philanthropic support to supplement institutional funding for ILS initiatives.
- Facilitate the establishment of learning communities on ILS with stakeholders.
- Encourage research and innovation in the design and utilization of inclusive ILSs.
- Recognize and celebrate individuals and teams that take proactive steps to improve and promote the use of inclusive ILSs.

3) Increasing communication and networking

- Partner with stakeholders to advocate for the importance of ILSs.
- Establish online platforms or forums where students and staff can share ideas, feedback, and best practices related to inclusive ILSs.
- Host regular networking events where stakeholders can connect, collaborate, and share insights about inclusive ILSs.
- Foster partnerships with external organizations, industry professionals, and alumni to broaden the reach and impact of ILS initiatives.

Barriers regarding accessibility and availability of ILSs and suggestions to overcome barriers

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

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)

Increase quality of ILSs

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

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



[NIILS mapping platform](#)