NIILS

New Approaches for Inclusive Informal Learning Spaces

INFORMAL LEARNING SPACES IN HIGHER EDUCATION:

GUIDANCE MATERIAL FOR STUDENTS

This brochure is prepared to support your learning activities and well-being 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.

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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.

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.

🌐 [NIILS web page](#)

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.**

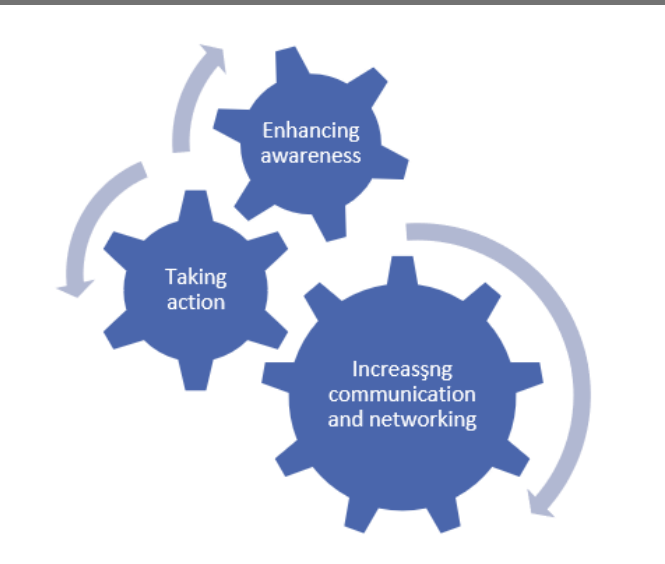### Let's improve INFORMAL LEARNING SPACES!

Key findings of NIILS project
for more information see NIIS 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 students 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

- Actively inform yourself about available ILSs and use them for various learning activities.
- Utilize ILSs for peer learning opportunities.
- Collaborate with users to establish inclusive usage rules and prevent space monopolization.
- Provide feedback to enhance accessibility and quality of ILSs.
- Utilize the NIILS platform to explore available ILSs and suggest additions.
- Organize student-led workshops within ILSs to foster collaborative learning.

2) Taking action

- Form study groups or project teams and utilize ILSs for collaborative learning.
- Take initiative in organizing student-led workshops within ILSs.
- Volunteer for focus groups aimed at improving inclusive ILS design and functionality.
- Establish learning communities on inclusive ILSs.
- Explore opportunities for experiential learning utilizing ILSs.
- Advocate for designated quiet zones within ILSs.

3) Increasing communication and networking

- Join learning communities and organizations focused on inclusive ILSs.
- Utilize social media or online forums to share experiences related to utilizing inclusive ILSs.
- Attend campus-wide events discussing topics related to ILSs and educational technology.
- Participate in surveys to voice opinions regarding inclusive ILSs.
- Collaborate with faculty members to explore research opportunities related to inclusive ILSs.

NIILS Mapping platform

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

🌐 NIILS mapping platform

What is inside 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