Country Context Report & Situation Analysis

Project Result 1 - Country context analysis: availability and infrastructure of informal learning space

Institution: Mykolas Romeris university (MRUNI)

Country: Lithuania

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Introduction

Higher education institutions (HEIs) in Lithuania carry out three traditional missions. According to the Law on Higher Education and Research: "a higher education institution shall organize and carry out studies, award higher education qualifications set in this Law, conduct research, pursue experimental (social, cultural) development and/or artistic activity, apply results of the research and experimental (social, cultural) development, accumulate scientific knowledge, develop creative activity and culture, foster values and traditions of the academic community." (LR Seimas, 2009). Higher education in Lithuania is imparted by universities and colleges (Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education, 2022). Universities offer university-level degree-granting studies and award Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral degrees. Colleges offer college-level degree-granting studies and award Professional Bachelor's degrees. Both types of institutions can also provide non-degree granting studies.

At the beginning of the 2021-2022 academic year, there were **41 higher education** institutions in the country - 19 universities and 22 colleges - with 103,373 students, including 71.6 thousand in universities and 31.8 thousand in colleges (see *Table 1* below). Universities produced the largest number of graduates in business and administration (2,800 or 17.3% of all graduates), engineering (1,900), health sciences (2,200) and social sciences (1,600).

Table 1: Students at universities and colleges (at the beginning of the academic year)

	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Universities	113780	104923	98872	93524	87797	82345	77321	73011	71895	71566
Colleges	45685	43550	41485	39772	37571	35433	33938	32931	32452	31807
Total	*159465*	*148473*	*140357*	*133296*	*125368*	*117778*	*111259*	*105942*	*104347*	*103373*

Source: Statistics of Lithuania, 2022

Even though, Lithuanians have one of the largest numbers of people with a higher education degree in Europe (e.g. in 2020, 59.6% of Lithuanians aged 30-34 had a higher education degree), the decreasing numbers of students in higher education institutions is alarming. According to Martinaitis et al. (2020), part of the decline can be attributed to the increasing popularity of studies abroad, which became accessible after Lithuania joined the EU in 2004. However, the largest share of decline is the result of the significant drop in fertility rates since Lithuania regained independence in 1990. The outlook for the future looks bleak; as skilled workers retire, Lithuania will no longer be able to meet the demand for skilled labour in the near future (Spurga & Žalėnienė, 2021).

In order to mitigate the risks related to declining number of students a number of measures were introduced. Most notably the 2017 structural reform of higher education and the launch

of The National Strategy of Education 2013 – 2022 focused on strengthening of human capital in education, developing quality culture, ensuring accessibility and empowerment and lifelong learning.

The importance of **environment** in educational institutions (universities and colleges included) is highlighted in the National Education Strategy 2013-2022, the National Progress Programme, the Operational Programme for Investment of European Union Funds, and other strategic documents. The underlying premise of these documents is that both the right learning environment and quality of curricula are crucial for developing creative members of society and higher-level competencies needed for Lithuanian society to flourish.

Situation on National (Regional) Level in Lithuania

This section provides information on the national situation in Lithuania regarding stakeholders, existing networks and available resources addressing the informal and non-conventional learning spaces together with an overview of existing strategies of university administrations and public authorities to promote such spaces and mitigate existing or potential inequalities.

Key Stakeholders on National (Regional) Level

Provision, Management and Design of Learning Spaces in Higher Education

In general, Lithuanian higher education institutions enjoy broad autonomy. However, the Government can steer them by setting an overarching legal framework, establishing standards (such as quality assurance, and minimum requirements for entering), and setting the rules for the allocation of funding for studies and research (Martinaitis et al., 2020). The responsibility for the quality of education in Lithuania is shared between the parliament (which forms education policy at the national level and adopts laws on policy changes), the government and the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports (formulate and implement education policy and adopt and implement legal acts other than laws). The Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania is the main legal act which governs the services at all levels of education.

The learning spaces are mentioned to some extent in the Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania in the following articles:

- ➔ Article 17. Self-education. The purpose of self-education is to enable a person to engage in continuous self-directed learning by drawing on the **learning spaces** around him or her (such as libraries, mass media, the Internet, museums, etc.) and on the life experience of others.
- ➔ Article 34. Access to education for students with special educational needs. Access to education for students with special educational needs shall be ensured by the municipality in whose territory they live. Access to education shall be ensured by **adapting the school environment**, providing psychological, special pedagogical, special and social pedagogical assistance, providing technical aids for education at school and special educational aids, and other ways prescribed by law.
- ➔ Article 40. Material provision for education and teaching load. The learning environment in the school and the learning load of students shall c**omply with the hygiene standards and the safety and health requirements** for students laid down by law and shall ensure the implementation of the educational programmes.

Other than these overarching national principles, the institutions of higher education enjoy autonomy in making decisions regarding the creation and management of their learning environments. Currently, there are no networks or communities which focus on improving the learning spaces in higher education institutions.

More attention is given to learning spaces in primary and secondary educational institutions. For example, the Good Schools Concept adopted by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports in 2015, sets outs the principles of how the current school environment should look like. However, it provides only the broad outlines of how to bring the school environment or teaching organisation closer to the recommended modern educational spaces and objectives.

Promoting and Supporting Inclusivity in Higher Education

Since 2008, the strategic documents governing educational institutions in Lithuania have focused on improving the accessibility and quality of higher education for people with disabilities, and on increasing the flexibility of their employment and working relationships (Guščinskienė & Čiburienė, 2011).

Disability Inclusion Forum 2022 reached a conclusion that the number of students with disabilities has been declining steadily for several years now, a trend that points to the prevalence of systemic barriers in higher education, which create obstacles and lead to one of the main problems - the drop-out of students. According to the Department of Disability Affairs (2020), the number of students with disabilities dropped from 1,000 to 620 between 2015 and 2019 in Lithuanian higher education institutions. Despite the inclusivity aspects being highlighted in the Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania, the choice of institutions is limited since only a fraction of the universities and colleges have the physically adapted environments for mobility-impaired students and possibilities to personalise the study process (Education News, 2020).

However, some institutions are already working on universal design principles. Most notably, Vilnius university has a dedicated Coordinator of Disability Affairs and approved the guidelines for Open university in 2017. The following measures were taken to adapt the study process to persons with disabilities: (1) individual meetings with students; (2) assessment of individual needs arising from disability; (3) recommendations to faculties; (4) personalized plans for studies; (5) provision of advice to lecturers, administration and students. Vilnius University has been consistently striving to improve the accessibility of the physical environment for people with mobility and visual impairments. Each year, adaptations are made to the departments' infrastructure according to the expressed needs of persons with disabilities or the University's own plans (Vilnius University, 2022). However, the university highlights the difficulties in adapting the study process, especially when it relates to a disability which is not visible (e.g. mental health, internal diseases, learning difficulties, neurological, attention, autism spectrum disorders, intellectual disabilities). There is a lack of competencies and learning spaces (e.g. where students could work in silence) to adapt the study material to students with learning difficulties.

Engaging with Informal and Non-conventional Learning Spaces

The desk research shows that currently there are no networks, initiatives, or stakeholder communities explicitly addressing and dealing with informal and non-conventional learning spaces (in higher education).

State of the Art: Informal and Non-conventional Learning Spaces in Lithuania

Modern higher education is constantly changing, driven by academic, information, technological and economic developments. Based on the new learning paradigm and the concept of lifelong learning, universities in Lithuania are increasingly moving towards creating flexible learning environments (Jucevičienė & Tautkevičienė, 2004). However, there is no clear strategy as to what they should be. Despite the lack of a unified strategy, some institutions are aiming to create learning environments which are no longer confined within the walls of the university and are moving into the social and virtual sphere. The section outlines examples of such instances and research conducted on learning spaces in Lithuania.

Projects and Good Practice Examples

The analysis of learning spaces in Lithuanian universities showcases that one of the leading institutions in terms of the breadth of learning environments offered to students is Kaunas University of Technology (KTU). KTU has taken a number of steps in implementing learning space improvement projects. This is a good start, which is gradually becoming a systematic practice to foster research collaboration between students, students and lecturers, to enhance independent learning and to improve the quality of studies. Examples of innovative learning environments at KTU include:

KTU Campus Library hosts modern spaces for working and learning. The library is positioned not only as a learning space but a social space. Formal learning covers only part of our learning activities. We learn when we work when we interact with others when we engage in professional activities. Hence, the emphasis in KTU is placed on creating flexible, learner-centred learning environments according to the head of the library G.Tautkevičienė (Structum, 2021).

Student housing facilities at KTU include learning spaces where students can prepare for exams and lectures in peace. Students have access to study spaces in other dormitories as well as the dormitory in which they live. All dormitories have internet access, some of which also have wireless internet access.

VR Project Hub is the first co-working space in a Lithuanian university to have virtual reality equipment for testing projects. The space is accessible for both the professionals in the industry, start-up companies and the students at KTU willing to develop ideas related to virtual reality.

Design Thinking Laboratory which can be defined through the following elements: large spaces able to accomodote 2-5 people, easily transformed with sliding partitions, small modular furniture, includes both places for group work and individual reflections).

Other universities do apply similar approaches albeit to a lesser degree. Some more innovative examples include:

In addition to a few libraries and student housing facilities, Vilnius university has an open *co-working and leisure space* for their students. "Sorainen Space" is the name of the renovated and comfortably furnished space that invites students to relax, socialize, and prepare for seminars or lectures together. The space is also an example of close collaboration between business organization and university.

LinkMenų fabrikas at Vilnius Tech creativity space where students, researchers and entrepreneurs find each other and connect for creative projects.

Tools and Guidance Material

The desk research revealed that the guidance material on the design of educational spaces is more focused on primary and secondary education institutions. Examples of such guidance include Recommendations for new educational institutions (Vilnius Municipality, 2020) and Modernization of general education schools: creating modern learning areas (Ministry of

Education, Science and Sport). Guidelines are also prepared for accessible green learning spaces (Co-education in Green, 2020).

Tools and guidance are limited for higher education institutions. A related example of guidance is a course "Designing and developing educational environments"[1] (5 ECTS credits) at Vytautas Magnus University which considers that the development of educational environments encompasses the social, physical, psychological and pedagogical contexts in which learning takes place, and on which students' achievements and attitudes depend. This course focuses on creation of open, creative, intelligent and positive educational environments that meet the goals of the educational process, selection and adopting educational settings suitable for the needs of the students and the learning situation.

Scientific Publications

In the Lithuanian context, it is difficult to find authors dealing with the architecture of higher education institutions, let alone more specific principles for the design of educational spaces that would meet educational needs of contemporary students. The field is more focused on the design of spaces in primary and secondary education institutions (e.g. Brukstute, 2017; Nekrosius et al., 2018; Makarskaite-Petkeviciene, 2018; Vilbikiene, 2022)

The work of Burkšaitienė (2018) on creativity inducing environments and Bendžiūtė & Stanislavovienė (2019) on psichosocial aspects of learning spaces could be few notable examples dealing with a general approach of a university in terms of learning spaces. Valinevičienė & Starkutė (2018) examine educational spaces as part of curriculum and provides an interesting account on how the personal environments of students that emerge in real educational environments include both the elements planned in the educational environment and the knowledge, experiences, and unplanned sources of learning that emerge as learners interact, i.e. the hidden curriculum. Some authors choose to focus on specific aspects or spaces in higher education institutions: (1) Jucevičienė & Tautkevičienė (2004) focus on the synergies between learning and libraries and (2) Valinevičienė (2013) and Gulbinskiene et al. (2017) focus on education spaces in relation to digital technologies.

Analysis: Informal Learning Spaces & Inclusion

To summarize the analysis of national legislation and practice related to informal learning spaces and inclusion in Lithuania outlines in the sections above, following conclusions can be drawn:

- ➔ The key stakeholders in Lithuanian higher education ecosystem do not explicitly address the topics related to informal learning spaces. The inclusivity aspects are addressed more explicitly i.e. the accessibility of higher education institutions is highlighted in the strategic documents governing such institutions;
- ➔ There are no associations, work groups or communities promoting and supporting inclusivity in HE related to (informal) learning spaces;
- ➔ There is a limited number of initiatives, previous projects, good practice examples, tools, guidelines, publications, etc. which are dealing with informal learning spaces in Lithuania. The researchers and administration at the Kaunas University of Technology

[1] https://www.vdu.lt/lt/study/subject/9186/

seem to be the most advanced on this topic in the Lithuanian higher education ecosystem.

Situation on Institutional Level at Mykolas Romeris university

This chapter provides information about the spatial characteristics, availability, accessibility, equipment and infrastructure of informal and non-conventional learning spaces provided by Mykolas Romeris university in the consortium and in the university surrounding. Also, awareness and existing strategies at Mykolas Romeris university are discussed with a focus on promoting the inclusive and supportive technologically enhanced informal and non-conventional learning environments and to mitigate existing inequalities.

Institutional Context

General Information

MRU is the largest social sciences specialized university in Lithuania, whose most prominent studies and research areas are: Law, Public security and Public administration. The University conducts capable programmes in Educational Science, Economics, Humanities, Communication, Politics, Psychology, Sociology, and Management. Social science studies programmes dominate the MRU studies programme portfolio (95% of all studies portfolio – AIKOS database).

Four faculties operate at the University: (1) Law School; (2) Public Security Academy (Kaunas); (3) Faculty of Human and Social Studies; and (4) Faculty of Public Governance and Business. The university offers doctoral, Master's and Bachelor's Degree study programmes. The programmes operated by MRU are listed in the Table 2 below. Over 80% of them have international accreditation. The most popular study programmes are Law, Management, Public administration, Psychology, Social work, Public security and most recently Communication and Digital Marketing.

Table 2: Bachelor and Master studies at MRU

Bachelor studies			
Title of the programme	**Duration**	Title of the programme	**Duration**
Law and Global Security	3.5 years	English for Specific Purposes and Korean studies	3.5 years
Start-ups Building and Management	3 years	Communication and Digital Marketing	3 years
Digital Economy	3 years	Psychology	3.5 years
Global Business and Modern Marketing	3 years	English for Specific Purposes and the Second Foreign Language	3.5 years
Branding and Advertising Management	3 years	Social Work and Human Rights	4 years
Financial Management	3.5 years	Game Development and Digital Animation	4 years
Master studies			
Title of the programme	**Duration**	Title of the programme	**Duration**
Public Relations Management	2 years	Logistics Management	1.5 years
European Joint Master in Social Work with Children and Youth (ESWOCHY)	2 years	European Union Law and Governance (Double diploma programme)	1.5 years
Sport Industry Management	1.5 years	European and International Business Law (Joint study programme)	2 years
Cybersecurity Management	2 years	Financial Management	1.5 years
LegalTech (LLM)	1 years	Business Administration, MBA	1 years
English Language Minor Studies	1 years	E-Commerce Management	1.5 years
Mediation (LLM)	1 years	International Policy Studies	1.5 years
Law, Technology and Business	1.5 years	International Law	1.5 years

For International Students the University offers Bachelor, Master and Doctoral study programmes in English language in the field of Social Sciences and Informatics. For Lithuanian students a broader spectrum of programmes is offered including the Law and Financial Technology (FinTech) (Specialization in the Law Program), Law and customs activities, Law and pre-trial proceedings, Law and Criminalistics (Specialization in the Law and Pretrial Process Program), Law and penitential activities, Law and police activities, Law and state border protection

Currently MRU enrols **7500 students** including **600 international students** and employs over **400 academic staff**. In addition, approx. 200 PhD students are enrolled in the studies at MRU in the fields of Law, Management, Psychology, Philology, Economics, and Educational science.

Physical Infrastructure and Learning Spaces

MRU has a modern and **innovative infrastructure**: recently built premises surrounded by green areas, the latest research and educational ICT equipment, one of the most modern academic libraries in Europe, open access to research resources, research and innovation management platforms, online studies facilities, etc. According to the latest data of Rotten WiFi the quality of WiFi places MRU in second place among universities in the world. Due to university infrastructure, managerial experience and broad cooperation networks international organizations tend to choose MRU for organization of their academic events. A virtual map illustrates the premises and infrastructure[2].

MRU has a **modern library** with an area of 3,338 m². The premises of the Central Library have 375 workplaces, 288 places for readers, including 87 computerized workplaces. The library's collection of printed publications consists of 228,000 copies (66,000 titles). About 2,000 new units are added every year. The library is located in the Central building and is open 6 days a week and at night from 8:00 p.m. until 10 o'clock The library has 9 reading rooms where students can work and use all library resources: computer workstations, electronic resources, scanners, printers and copiers. Most of the library's electronic resources can be accessed over the local network, MRU academic members have remote access to the library's subscribed resources using an EzProxy connection.

In 2015, the Mykolas Romeris University unit - **Social Innovations Laboratory Network MRU LAB** was opened. MRU LAB hosts interdisciplinary laboratories whose mission is to adapt the latest social, humanitarian, technological research and achievements to the needs of society and business. There are about 600 scientists and researchers employed at the laboratories. The MRU LAB is equipped with public spaces with mobile workplaces, two auditoriums (80 and 30 seats) having all the necessary equipment for seminars, meetings and conferences.

MRU infrastructure is **adapted for people with mobility and visual disabilities:** elevators, specialized computerized workstations in the library. The central building of the University is perfectly tailored to meet the requirements of persons with specific needs. The entrances to the University are equipped with ramps, which automatically open the entrance door of the building. A person in a wheelchair can enter the building independently without the help of others. Lifts are installed in the Central building and the adjoining building. The 4-story building has an elevator for easy movement between the floors. There are no obstacles to moving

[2] https://my.matterport.com/show/?m=jJ7K79jytFk

around within the University – auditoriums, conference halls, library reading rooms, toilets (adapted to the needs of persons with special needs on the second, third and fourth floors of the building) and also other places accessible by a wheelchair that can be reached independently. The MRU Library is well-equipped and adapted for persons with special needs – it is equipped with lifts that help those in wheelchairs to easily get to reading rooms and other Library premises. Using compensatory equipment for persons with special needs, computerized workplaces have been set up on the lower level of the Library. Those who are visually impaired can use workplaces equipped with the stationary electronic image magnifier TOPAZ XL XD 24, which has artificial lighting and a video camera that allows you to enlarge the text on the screen to the required size, to select the right colour combination and adjust the required contrast. This machine magnifies the readable text from 2 to 50 times.

Stakeholder Focus Groups / Interviews

Methodology

In this part of our project, we followed a qualitative data collection procedure based on interviews/focus groups with the stakeholders. Stakeholders could include persons involved in providing, managing, operating and supporting learning spaces from university administration (e.g., facility management, technical support, students' contact points, study coordinators, department heads, librarians, student representative councils /unions, etc.), as well as from public authorities and other key stakeholder groups.

Focus groups or single interviews aimed to investigate two main issues regarding the informal learning spaces in our campus:

- **Spatial characteristics, availability, accessibility, equipment, and infrastructure of informal and non-conventional learning spaces** provided by the institutions in the consortium and in the university surrounding, as well as
- **Awareness, perception, and existing strategies** within the involved stakeholders to promote inclusive and supportive technologically enhanced informal and non-conventional learning environments, as well as established approaches to mitigate existing inequalities.

Interview guidelines were developed by UWK as the work package (PR1) coordinator in English, and they were revised two times following the suggestions and comments of the project partners in a participatory process. Final guidelines including interview questions and some instructions concerning the interview process were translated into Lithuanian language and adapted to our campus situation (See Appendix A). Following themes were the main issues discussed during the interviews:

- Spatial characteristics of the informal learning environment at the university
- Availability, accessibility, usability, equipment, and infrastructure of informal and non-conventional learning spaces
- Awareness and perception related to inclusivity (problems, challenges, measurements taken)
- Role of digitalization in using learning spaces
- Future perspectives and plans

We aimed for conducting one focus group with at least 3-5 stakeholders or individual interviews with 3-5 stakeholders.

Data was transcribed and analysed according to guidelines developed by the UWK in cooperation with the partners (See Appendix C).

Implementation

In total we conducted 1 individual interview (2022-07-11) and 1 focus group, where 5 stakeholders were involved (2022-07-15). The characteristics of the focus group / interview participants can be seen in the Table 3 below.

Table 3: Focus Group and Interview Participants

Participants	Institution	Department / Division	Tasks / Responsibilities
Participant 1	MRU – Mykolas Romeris University	Center for Academic Affairs, Digital Studies Group	Digital facility management, Student's consulting for digital studies and support
Participant 2	MRU – Mykolas Romeris University	Division of Infrastructure, Library	Facility management
Participant 3	MRU – Mykolas Romeris University	Information resources formation group	Informational facility management, Student's consulting for information resources and support
Participant 4	MRU – Mykolas Romeris University	Information Services and Education Group	Information services facility management
Participant 5	MRU – Mykolas Romeris University	Library, Customer service and consulting group	Library and university archives, Student's consulting and support
Participant 6	MRU – Mykolas Romeris University	Library, Science Data Formation Group	Library and university archives

Results

Existing Informal Learning Spaces

Figure 1 below demonstrates stakeholder awareness of the availability of ILS in MRU. The most mentioned areas by the interviewees are presented within the green dots on the map. In addition, Table 4 presents the most important informal learning spaces at Mykolas Romeris university as identified by stakeholders.

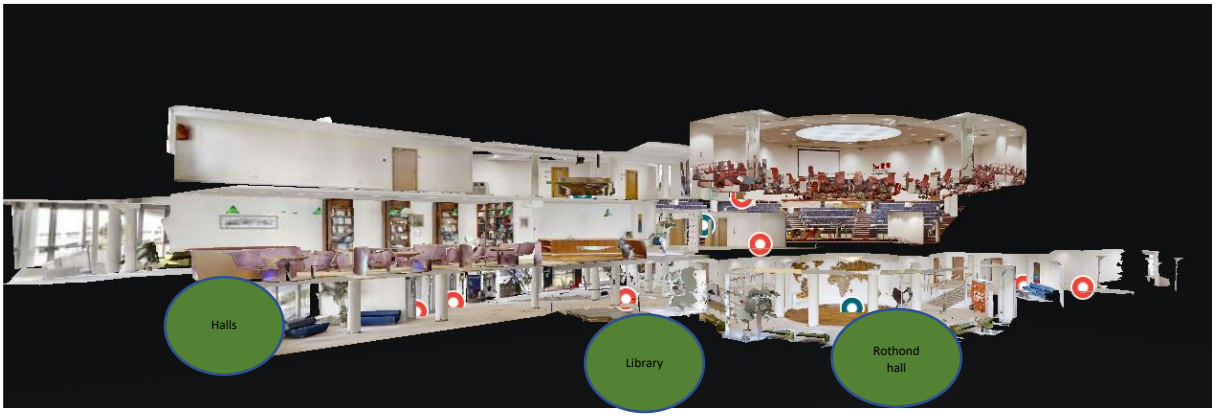

Figure 1: Details Stakeholder Awareness of Informal Learning Spaces Availability on MRU Campus

Table 4: Important informal learning spaces at Mykolas Romeris university as identified by stakeholders

Label	Notes/description	Indoor	Outdoor	Off-campus	Focused learning	Collaborative learning
Library	*The biggest space for informal learning at MRU*	x			x	x
Study rooms & halls at dormitories	*Available for all, who lives at dormitories, always working*	x			x	x
Lecture halls that are free/empty/ available	*Students needs to be let in to lecture halls, when they are free*	x			x	
MRU LAB building	*Special building near university, has restricted entering*	x			x	
Corridor spaces in the faculty buildings that are designed for studying	*Many corridor spaces with comfortable furniture*	x				x
Canteens	*There are 3 main canteens at MRU*	x				x
Rothond Hall	*The main hall with comfortable furniture*	x				
Inside Yard	*Available when weather is good*		x		x	
Green areas (Campus area as a whole)	*Not too many selections of comfortable places in campus despite inside yard*		x			x
Libraries at town	*A lot of selection, far from university*			x		
Book cafes nearby	*There can be found a few nearby*			x		

The stakeholders mentioned the following informal learning spaces:

- *Indoor*: the main areas of informal learning at MRU are the Library, Study rooms & halls at dormitories, Lecture halls that are free/empty/available, MRU LAB building, Corridor spaces in the faculty buildings that are designed for studying, Canteens, Rothond Hall. The stakeholders mentioned, that they know the main areas listed and focus their main attention on the library: “I know the main areas for informal learning: Library, Corridor spaces in the faculty buildings that are designed for studying, Green areas (Campus area as a whole), canteens, LAB building. I know that the Institute of Communication additionally equips a podcast studio, which can also be used for non-formal education." **(SH 1);** “All university can be defined as the area for informal learning. I can see students everywhere – in the library, corridor spaces in the faculty buildings that are designed for studying, Rothond hall.” **(SH 2);** “Although all university can be used for informal learning, but library is the most popular.” **(SH 5)**.
- *Outdoor*: the main areas of informal learning at MRU are Green areas (Campus area as a whole), Inside Yard.
- *Off campus*: the main areas of informal learning at MRU are Libraries in town, Book cafes nearby.

- *Collaborative learning*: the main areas at MRU would be: Library rooms, Green areas, Corridor spaces in the faculty buildings that are designed for studying, Study halls in dormitories, Canteens, Focused learning. Stakeholders mention those areas during interviews: "Library rooms are the most popular for collaborative learning in groups." **(SH 5);** "At the library we have 3 closed rooms for a collaborative learning." **(SH 2)**
- *Focused learning*: the main areas at MRU include the study rooms in dormitories, lecture halls that are free/empty/available, the library, MRU yard and MRU LAB: "We had more closed places at the library for individual learning, now we have prepared an open space and students really like it." **(SH 5)**

Characteristics of informal learning spaces

Stakeholders stressed that the physical characteristics of the ILS are appropriate. In general, the students do not have any important complaints: "We have a good contact with the students and they would tell if something was wrong. We do not have any complaints." **(SH 5).** The interviews with the stakeholders provided insights on the quality of the following characteristics of the learning spaces at the Mykolas Romeris university:

- *Basic needs* (i.e. food & hygiene). Stakeholders define the level of basic need fulfilment as acceptable: "For the food, we have seen the need for students to have a place, where they can eat their brought food, so we asked the university to find the space, where students can bring and heat their food. Now they can have the place near the library to eat their own prepared food and not to use automats or cafeteria)." **(SH)**
- *Infrastructure* (sockets/plugs) (available / not available) - infrastructure is appropriate, there are enough plugs available.
- *Technology*: "Sometimes we have the information, that computers or software are not working. Then we are trying to fix it as soon as possible." **(SH 1);** "Since we have good internet everywhere, students can use many places for informal learning." **(SH 2)**
- *Temperature & ventilation*: "If someone is having a complaint about temperature and ventilation, we are fixing it by regulating the temperature." (**SH 5**); "I think we have problems with temperature during winter time – it is not warm enough in some informal learning places, like some library rooms" **(SH 6)**
- *Lighting*: "We have one reading room at the library with the best lightening, for other rooms and other informal learning places lightening can be regulated by lamps individually" (**SH 5**)

Usability of ILS

Inclusivity and physical accessibility of ILS and learning spaces, in general, was extensively discussed during the stakeholder focus group. But from the results it can be stated, that the situation is evaluated as positive i.e. students have access to informal learning places and can use them under equal conditions.

- *Inclusivity*: "We are a small university, students can feel like at home. Informal learning spaces can be used by everyone equally." **(SH 5);** "We are focused on students with disabilities needs. MRU infrastructure is adapted for people with disabilities: elevators,

specialized computerized workstations in the library. We had the project where material for people with visual disabilities were created." **(SH 2)**

- *Accessibility*: "We are trying not to ask students to register in order to use library or other informal learning spaces rooms. So far the spaces are not crowded so everyone can come and study." **(SH 5)**; "Students with disabilities do not like to be noticed, we are prepared to allow them use informal learning spaces, but we cannot see a lot of people with disabilities at those spaces." (**SH 5)**
    - Administrative accessibility, Physical accessibility: "In order to enter the library students do not need an ID. They need to show ID just if they want to take a book at home." ***(SH 3);*** "Other university students also can use our library, everyone can use it an informal learning space. We are focused on flexibility." **(SH 2**)
- *Capacity*: "We have enough space for all students who wants to use library for informal learning." (**SH 5)**
- *Problems and challenges*. Most of the problems identified can be connected with financial and administrative issues.
    - Financial and administrative: "From the library point of view, there always can be more financial support" (**SH 5);** "There is also a need for something. We need more spaces for informal learning at the library based on individual learning. (**SH 2);** "We could have more financial support in order to have more study literature for preparation for lectures" (**SH 3**); "For the databases subscriptions we have quite a limited financial support, but it is enough to subscribe the most important databases. It is enough for such a small university" (**SH 4)**

Awareness and Strategies on ILS

The participants of focus group appeared to be well aware of the topic and value of ILS on campus. They have knowledge on the existing strategies. However, the participants of the focus group expressed an idea to conduct a university-wide survey to get to know their preferences better and develop new, adjusted strategies.

- *Existing strategies*: "I know that the strategies on ILS are based on improvements of technologies and software of informal learning places." **(SH 1);** "All strategies focused on informal learning spaces are based on informational education. That is the most important role – to educate informational literacy." **(SH 2)**
    - *For well-being*: "We need to do a students survey in order to find what should be included in the strategies on informal learning spaces." ***(SH 2)***
- *Use of formal learning spaces as ILS*: "Formal learning spaces such as seminar rooms and auditoriums should be more used for informal learning. As we have more free rooms since some courses are still online." **(SH 1)**
- *Pandemic and Digitalisation*: The pandemic has changed the digitalization level at the university. Stakeholders are mentioning, that all learning spaces are digitalized now. Also, the library representative shared that they also could observe that it seemed like most students benefitted and became more independent while studying mainly virtually and from home.
    - *Role of digitalisation in use of Learning Spaces*: "All Learning spaces are digitalized. During Covid pandemic new Moodle were being established with

non-formal education possibilities." **(SH 1);** "We had work 24/7 at the library earlier, but now after the pandemic, we do not see the need – students are used to do informal learning at home by signing in to university information" **(SH 2);** "Less students are coming to use library as informal learning space after pandemic, they prefer to find library information, databases online." **(SH 6)**

  - *Impact of pandemic on teaching*: "Teachers have started to use Moodle, Zoom, Teams and other platforms for informal education, consultations with students. It is still happening and after pandemic. The situation is not going to be the same as before pandemic. Digital literacy of teachers are highly increased". **(SH 1)**

- *Future expectations and plans*: While asked about future expectation and plans, the stakeholders were mentioning the attention to digitalization. In addition, the university management is aware of the currently inefficient use of campus space due to predefined term times, leading to the campus being very vacant on weekends, and during the summer holidays, so they are planning to take some action of how to use university informal learning spaces during summer.
  - *Inclusivity*: "All technical base will be even more renewed in informal learning places." **(SH 1);** "Digitalization will pay the most important role in the future taking into account informal learning spaces." **(SH 6).;** "There should be more specific plan of the creation of new informal learning spaces – the architects should be involved in this process." **(SH 2)**
  - *Use of ILS*: "There should be more specific plan of how to use university informal learning spaces during summer, when university is almost empty – now we are doing summer schools, but there can be more initiatives." **(SH 2)**

Conclusion

Currently, there are no networks or communities which focus on improving the learning spaces in higher education institutions in Lithuania. More attention is given to learning spaces in primary and secondary educational institutions. The key stakeholders in Lithuanian higher education ecosystem do not explicitly address the topics related to informal learning spaces. The inclusivity aspects are addressed more explicitly i.e. the accessibility of higher education institutions is highlighted in the strategic documents governing such institutions. There are no associations, work groups or communities promoting and supporting inclusivity in HE related to (informal) learning spaces. There is a limited number of initiatives, previous projects, good practice examples, tools, guidelines, publications, etc. which are dealing with informal learning spaces in Lithuania. The researchers and administration in Kaunas University of Technology seem to be the most advanced on this topic in Lithuanian higher education ecosystem.

The focus group and interview analysis of stakeholders at MRU showcase that MRU has plenty of spaces for collaborative and focused learning. Inclusivity and physical accessibility of ILS and learning spaces, in general, is evaluated as the positive -students have access to informal learning places and can use it equally. The participants of focus group appeared to be well aware of the topic and value of ILS on campus, they know about existing strategies, but the preparation of students' survey could be a great idea in order to develop new strategies. The pandemic has changed the digitalization level at the university - all learning spaces are digitalized now. Also, it seemed like most students benefitted and became more independent while studying mainly virtually and from home. Future expectations and plans of informal

learning spaces will be connected with digitalization and planning of how to deal with currently inefficient use of campus space due to predefined term times – weekends and during the summer holidays, when the university is almost empty.

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Appendix A – Websites and Links

Key Stakeholders in Lithuania

Provision, Management and Design of Learning Spaces in Higher Education

- Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education: https://www.skvc.lt/default/en/
- Ministry of Education, Science and Sport: https://smsm.lrv.lt/en/

Promoting and Supporting of Inclusivity in Higher Education

- The State Studies Foundation: https://vsf.lrv.lt/en/

Informal and Non-conventional Learning Spaces in Lithuania

Projects and Good Practice Examples

- CoEducation Green (2022) CoEducation green. Accessed via: https://coeducationingreen.eu/en
- Kaunas University of Technology (2022) Bendrabuciai. Accessed via: https://bendrabuciai.ktu.edu/apie-mus/
- Sorainen (2020) Nauja bendradarbystes erdve. Accessed via: https://www.sorainen.com/lt/sorainen-atvere-nauja-bendradarbystes-erdve-teises-studentams/
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- Vilnius Tech (2022) Linkmenu Fabrikas. Accessed via: https://vilniustech.lt/linkmenu-fabrikas/linkmenu-fabrikas/about-linkmenu-fabrikas/104261?lang=2

Tools and Guidance Material

- Vilnius City Municipality (2020) Rekomendacijos naujai statomoms svietimo istaigoms. Accessed via: https://vilnius.lt/lt/savivaldybe/miesto-pletra/rekomendacijos-naujai-statomoms-svietimo-istaigoms/

Scientific Publications

- Burkšaitienė, N. (2018). How can university learning environment contribute to students' creativity? Lithuanian students' perspective. Creativity studies, 11(1), 162-171.
- Gulbinskienė, D., Masoodi, M., & Šliogerienė, J. (2017). Moodle as virtual learning environment in developing language skills, fostering metacognitive awareness and promoting learner autonomy. Pedagogika, 127(3), 176-185.
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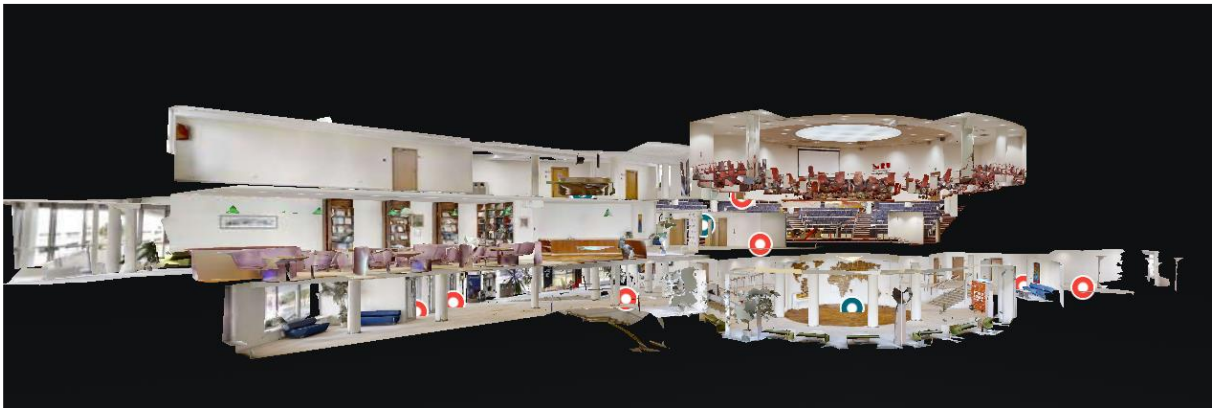
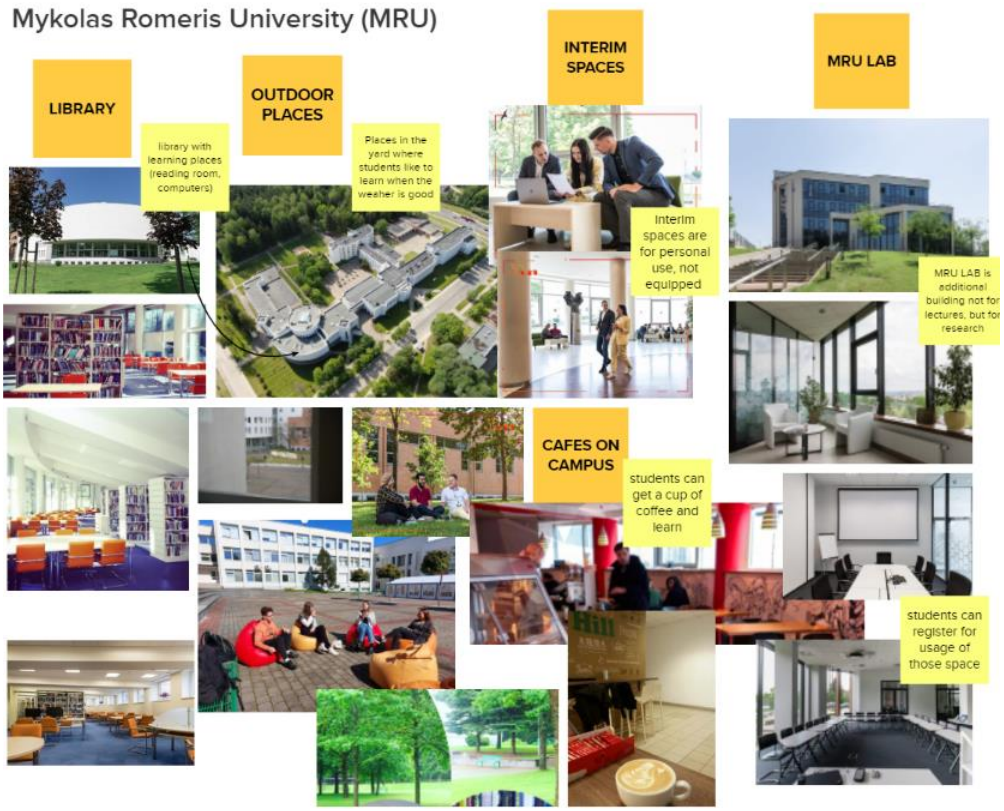
MRU Campus situation





Appendix B – Guidelines for Focus Group Interviews with Stakeholders (in Lithuanian)

Interviu gairės

Projekto rezultatas Nr.1: Šalies konteksto analizė

Versija: 2022m. gegužės mėn., LT

Co-funded by
the European Union

Interviu vadovas: Nauji požiūriai į įtraukias neformaliojo mokymosi erdves

Prieš interviu išsiųsti dalyviams "Sutikimo dalyvauti formą".

Kontrolinis sąrašas:

- Interviu vadovas;
- Garso įrašymo įranga;
- Sutikimo formos (kiekvienam dalyviui);
- Pagrindiniai klausimai (kiekvienam dalyviui);
- Universiteto miestelio žemėlapis (su pagrindiniais klausimais arba atskirai)
- Spalvoti pieštukai ir (arba) lipdukai vietoms miestelio žemėlapyje pažymėti.

Kontrolinis sąrašas interviu atliekamiems nuotolinėmis priemonėmis:

- Interviu vadovas;
- Skaitmeninė lenta su miestelio žemėlapiu ir informaciniais klausimais;
- Paprašykite dalyvių atsiųsti pasirašytą sutikimo formą prieš pradedant interviu.

ALTERNATYVA: sutikimas gali būti įrašytas pokalbio pradžioje ir transkribuotas (tokiu būdu nereikės rinkti ir saugoti parašų)!

Vos pradėję tyrimą, surinkite pasirašytą sutikimo formą.

Įžanga (5 min.):

Gerbiami dalyviai,

Dėkojame, kad sutikote dalyvauti ir skyrėte laiko pasidalinti savo įžvalgomis ir požiūriu. Šiame interviu norime sužinoti daugiau apie neformaliojo mokymosi erdves ir jų naudojimą jūsų universiteto miestelyje. Kalbėdami apie neformaliojo mokymosi erdves, turime omenyje vietas, kurias studentai pasirenka savarankiškai įvairioms (individualioms ar bendroms) mokymosi veikloms ne paskaitų metu. Paprastai tai būna vietos, esančios už auditorijų ribų (pvz.: studentų poilsio kambariai, fojė ir koridoriai, bibliotekos erdvės, kavinės ar lauko vietos). Šiame interviu siekiame sužinoti daugiau apie:

- aplink universitetą esančių neformaliojo ir netradicinio mokymosi erdvių erdvines charakteristikas, prieinamumą, pasiekiamumą, ten esančią įrangą ir infrastruktūrą;
- jūsų požiūrį į įtraukią bei technologijomis patobulintą neformaliojo mokymosi aplinką bei strategijas leidžiančias sumažinti nelygybę tarp studentų.

Mūsų interviu truks nuo 30 iki 90 minučių. Siekdami užtikrinti jūsų privatumą, norėtume priminti, kad:

1) Ši sesija bus įrašinėjama, o įrašas bus saugomas konfidencialiai;
2) Jūsų vardas ir pavardė nebus naudojami, juos užkoduosime;
3) Prieiga prie interviu įrašų bus suteikta tik projekto komandai;
4) Interviu galite nutraukti bet kuriuo metu.

Jūsų dalyvavimas yra labai vertingas mūsų tyrimui. Jei turite daugiau klausimų apie mūsų tyrimą arba interviu procesą, nedvejodami kreipkitės.

Pradėti garso įrašymą

Klausimai:

Pagrindinės žinios (10 min.): Jei interviu vykdysite kontaktiniu būdu, pateikite universiteto žemėlapį ir šiuos pagrindinius klausimus. Jei interviu vykdote nuotolinėmis priemonėmis, pasidalinkite nuoroda į internetinį puslapį su miestelio žemėlapiu ir šiais pagrindiniais klausimais.

1. Ar galėtumėte prisistatyti?

    a. Kokia jūsų pozicija šioje darbovietėje?
    b. Kuriame skyriuje dirbate?
    c. Kokios yra pagrindinės jūsų užduotys ir atsakomybės?

Neformaliojo mokymosi erdvės (30 min.): Šioje dalyje nagrinėsime neformaliojo ir netradicinio mokymosi erdvių jūsų institucijoje erdvines charakteristikas, prieinamumą, įrangą ir infrastruktūrą.

Žemėlapiuose lipdukais pažymėkite dažniausiai naudojamas / svarbiausias neformaliojo mokymosi erdves.

2. Kokios neformaliojo mokymosi erdvės, kuriomis gali naudotis studentai, yra jūsų universitete ir jo apylinkėse?

3. Kokios yra šių mokymosi erdvių charakteristikos, susijusios su

   a. šviesa, akustika, temperatūra, vėdinimu;

   b. baldais (pvz.: spalva, medžiagiškumas), technologinė infrastruktūra (pvz.: elektros kištukai, bevielis ryšys);

   c. galimybe įsigyti maisto ir gėrimų, higienos aspektais (pvz.: sanitarinė infrastruktūra, švara)?

4. Kaip studentai naudojasi šiomis erdvėmis? Kurios erdvės naudojamos tikslingai mokymosi veiklai? Kuriose erdvėse vyksta mokymosi bendradarbiaujant/grupėmis veiklos?

   Pastaba: čia galime pasakyti dalyviams, kad jie šias vietas žemėlapyje arba sieninėje lentoje pažymėtų skirtingomis spalvomis

5. Šioje dalyje norėtume išgirsti jūsų nuomonę apie universiteto neformaliojo mokymosi erdvių pritaikomumą, susijusį su jų *patogumu, prieinamumu, judėjimu, įvairove, lankstumu*:

   a. Ar yra reikalavimų (administracinių, finansinių, teisinių) dėl šių vietų naudojimo?
   b. Ar studentams pakanka neformaliojo mokymosi erdvių?
   c. Ar šios vietos yra patogios ir palankios studentų savijautai bei mokymuisi?
   d. Kiek šios vietos yra prieinamos fiziškai ir administraciniu požiūriu? Kaip manote, ar visi studentai turi vienodas galimybes patekti į šias erdves ir jomis naudotis? Jei ne, kodėl?
   e. Kiek lanksčios ir lengvai pritaikomos yra šios neformaliojo mokymosi erdvės?
   f. Kokia yra vidutinė buvimo/naudojimosi šiomis neformaliojo mokymosi erdvėmis trukmė per dieną?

6. Mus domina jūsų nuomonė apie problemas ir iššūkius, susijusius su minėtomis neformaliojo mokymosi erdvėmis, atsižvelgiant į jų reglamentavimą, valdymą, finansinę ir administracinę perspektyvą bei studentų požiūrį.

   a. Kokių problemų ar iššūkių, susijusių su šių erdvių reglamentavimu ir valdymu, žinote?
   b. Kokios problemos ar iššūkiai, susiję su finansiniais ir administraciniais klausimais, yra jums žinomi?
   c. Kokias problemas ir iššūkius pastebite iš studentų perspektyvos?

Strategijos, kaip padidinti šių vietų patrauklumą, naudojimą ir prieinamumą (30 min.): Kitoje diskusijos dalyje norėtume sužinoti jūsų požiūrį į įtraukią neformaliojo mokymosi aplinką, bei

metodus leidžiančius sumažinti nelygybę tarp studentų. Taip pat norime padiskutuoti apie ateities planus.

7. Ar universitete turite strategijų, kaip padidinti šių vietų patrauklumą, naudojimą ir prieinamumą?

    a. Jei taip, kokios jos? Ar galite papasakoti daugiau apie šias strategijas?
    b. Jei ne, ar turite planų, kaip padidinti prieinamumą, naudojimą ir patogumą, kad padėtumėte studentams mokytis ir užtikrinti gerą savijautą?

8. Pandemijos metu daug mokymosi veiklos vyko nuotoliniu būdu. Pamatėme, kad skaitmeninimas yra formaliojo ir neformaliojo mokymosi ateities pagrindas. Kokie jūsų lūkesčiai ir pageidavimai dėl neformaliojo mokymosi erdvių naudojimo, atsižvelgiant į laikotarpį po pandemijos ir vykstančią skaitmenizaciją?

    a. Ar tikitės, kad mokymosi ir mokymo būdai vėl bus tokie, kokie buvo prieš pandemiją? Kokių pokyčių tikitės?
    b. Tikėtina, kad ateityje kai kurie kursai vis dar bus dėstomi internetu. Tai reiškia, kad auditorijos bus naudojamos mažiau. Kaip manote, ar auditorijos gali būti naudojamos neformaliojo mokymosi veiklai?
    c. Kokios yra jūsų ateities prognozės (vizijos), susijusios su neformaliojo mokymosi erdvėmis?

9. Ar norėtumėte ką nors pridurti prie to, ką jau aptarėme?

Uždarymas (5 min.): Dėkojame už jūsų laiką ir indėlį į mūsų tyrimą. Tai buvo praturtinanti diskusija. Jei norėtumėte susipažinti su transkripcija, mielai ja pasidalinsime. Taip pat pasidalinsime su jumis galutine tyrimo ataskaita.

Sustabdyti garso įrašymą