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Creating Spaces for Student Participation: Practical Insights and Hints

UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW
UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES UPPER AUSTRIA
Palacký University Olomouc
ESU
Co-funded by the European Union

Participation space = Safer space

Why is it so important to create a safer space?

safer space → trust → participation → community → sense of belonging

A sense of belonging from a student perspective:

- *It is a feeling that you're a part of some community (e.g. family or institution) that you share the same values with. Community members need to take care of each other and create a sense of loyalty. For each member it is necessary to feel safe, creative and supported in the community.*

- *Feeling seen and heard, feeling and being included, having the chance to bond with other members of the community through informal activities.*

Why is it so important to create a safer space?

- **Space to experiment and make mistakes = Space of empowerment**
  The awareness that students can grow, develop their ideas, and make mistakes, learn from them, and prepare for professional and social life while **receiving support and guidance from the institution creates a sense of comfort and boosts young people's confidence**. **A higher education institution should be like an airbag.**

- **A good space for meetings = A space for engagement**
  According to the UNICOMM Report, one of the main reasons why students engage in academic life is the opportunity to connect with others. **So let's ensure friendly conditions for meetings and engagement.**

- **Space to relax = Student well-being**
  One of the key topics that came up during the development of the UNICOMM Project is student well-being and the support provided by HEIs in this area. In the busy student life, it is the role of institutions to **signal that it is okay to pause, do something for yourself, and simply be present together in the moment.**

How we explored meaning of safer space among students

Listening to students' needs, challenges and values

Students as experts

- Students acted as partners and co-creators of the results (e.g. publication, video tutorial)

Design and creative thinking tools

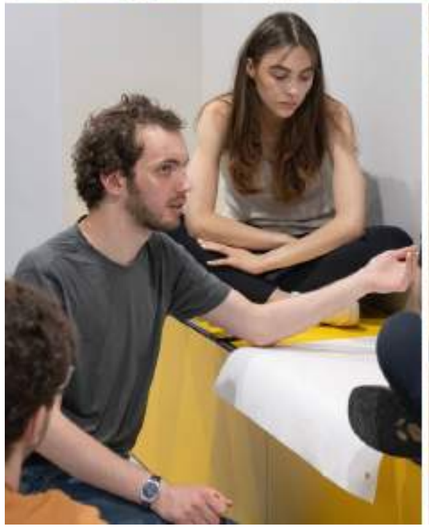
- Creative brainstorming using techniques such as collage making
- Moodboard creation
- Persona

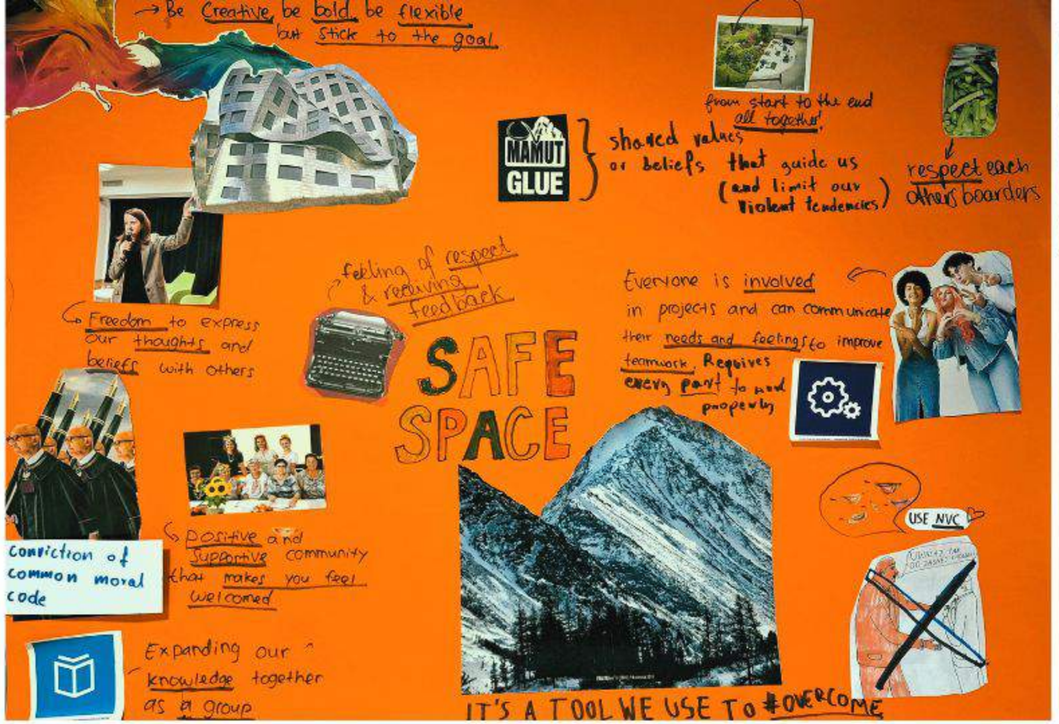
Video tutorial on safer space

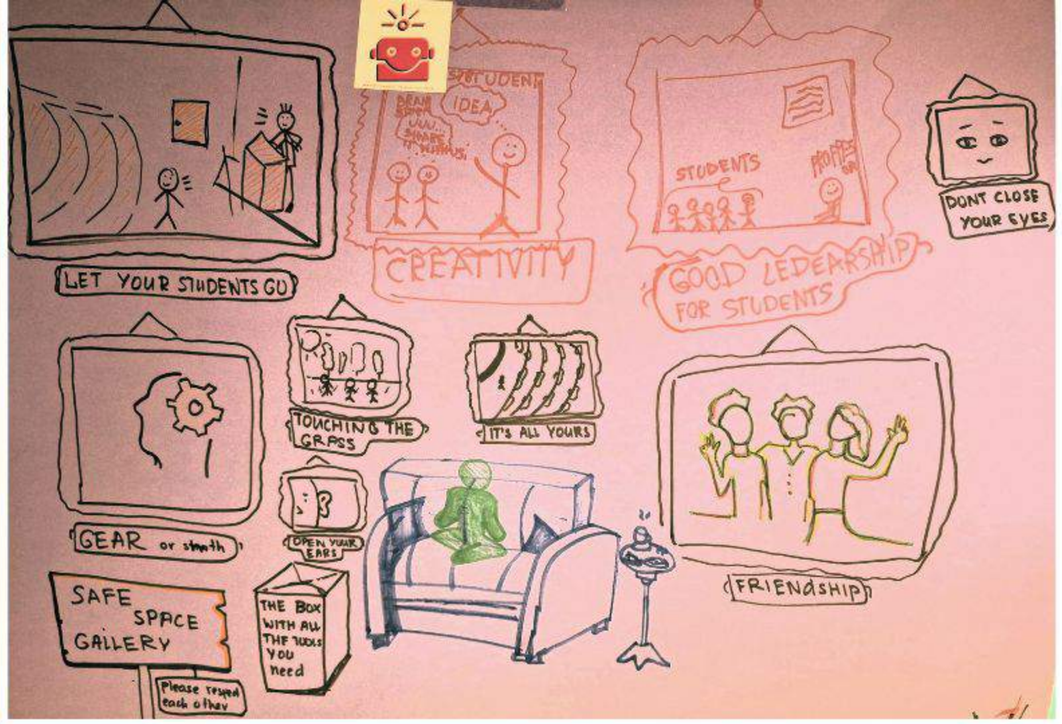
- Script outline created together with students
- Final version reviewed and approved by students

Evaluation

- Ongoing feedback and reflection integrated throughout the project




Be Creative, be bold, be flexible but stick to the goal
from start to the end all together!
MAMUT GLUE
shared values or beliefs that guide us (and limit our violent tendencies)
respect each others boarders
feeling of respect & receiving feedback
Freedom to express our thoughts and beliefs with others
SAFE SPACE
Everyone is involved in projects and can communicate their needs and feelings to improve teamwork. Requires every part to work properly
USE NVC
Conviction of common moral code
positive and supportive community that makes you feel welcomed
Expanding our knowledge together as a group
IT'S A TOOL WE USE TO #OVERCOME


LET YOUR STUDENTS GO
STUDENT
IDEA
CREATIVITY
STUDENTS
GOOD LEDEARSHIP FOR STUDENTS
DONT CLOSE YOUR EYES
GEAR or stamth
TOUCHING THE GRASS
IT'S ALL YOURS
OPEN YOUR EARS
FRIENDSHIP
SAFE SPACE GALLERY
THE BOX WITH ALL THE TOOLS YOU need
Please respect each other

NIE BÓJ SIĘ,
Dom
Feeling peacefull - having access to clean air, green, sunlight, quiet environment
being open to new experiences & being open-mind
Knowledge transition
Family - is your safest place on Earth!
ULGA
appreciating each other
Space for having new experiences and skills-discovering and broadening your horizon
Financialy secure - can afford safe space
Safe comfort
MOŻLIWOŚCI
respecting each other
be creative and supportive
Volunteer Center
BĄDŹ KREATYWNY - ZADZWOŃ DO BANKU!
relax!
new culture
books, being with animals, mass media, art,

seventeen
KOBIETY SPORT
KOBIETY NAUKA

Safer space for student participation

What does it mean for students?

Finding My Place: From a Newcomer to Feeling at Home

3 Years Ago: Moved to Warsaw → No friends, big city, big university

Volunteer Centre UW = My gateway to:

- ✔️ Like-minded people
- ✔️ Ideas & creativity welcomed
- ✔️ Cross-faculty friendships
- ✔️ Belonging & expression

Participation Space = Safer Space

Safer Space for me means

Seen *for all I am*: academic, artistic, personal
Growth *without* pressure
Creativity *embraced*
Confidence & soft skills
Support → Wings → *Inner Growth*

VIDEO

Safer space for student participation

How can we “arrange” it?

Safer space for student participation
How can we “arrange” it?

Important values → respect, honesty, equality, and freedom

- Let's listen to the needs and challenges of students.
- Let's listen to ideas and be ready to support them.
- Let's be flexible.
- Let's treat students as co-creators of this space.
- Let's take care of the friendly nature of the space – including its physical aspects (accessibility, arrangement of space, sounds, music).
- Let's create cooperation/participation agreements with participants.

Safer space for student participation
How can we “arrange” it?

- **Let's propose activities that connect diverse participants-** design initiatives that are genuinely inclusive, without asking any sort of eligibility questions or emphasising that a particular project is for group X, while another might be more suited for group Y.
- **Let's create initiatives with a “low threshold for entry”.**
- **Let's organize creative activities that allow students to relax and "clear their minds" without the pressure to improve themselves.**
- **Let's remember to provide snacks and coffee** 😉
- **Let's appreciate participants' willingness to engage and their participation.**
- **Let's maintain friendly and clear communication - let's adapt the medium and message to the recipients.**

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

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