

COHEHRE

Title: Stimulating inclusive attitude among students through the Universal design paradigm within living labs

Background: As the importance of inclusion and diversity continues to grow, it becomes crucial not only to build knowledge and understanding of the topic, but also to foster inclusive attitudes and mindsets for personal and professional development. Universities may play a key role in this by creating inclusive learning environments and raising awareness of inclusive attitudes among students, teachers, and within the broader community.

Aim: To develop an interdisciplinary course fostering inclusive attitudes and mindsets of students.

Method: The 'Occupational Therapy' and 'Architecture' programs at UHasselt collaborated to create an inclusive course using living lab methodology fostering an inclusive learning environment. Students developed skills in inclusive design, leveraging their combined expertise in human-centered design. The paradigm of Universal Design was used throughout the design process. Different steps were taken: 1) optimizing interdisciplinary design teams; 2) realizing an inclusive learning environment through principles of universal design for learning and installment of a network with different stakeholders; 3) developing a systematic and efficient methodology for inclusive co-creation within living labs.

Outcome: The course "designing with people" was first offered in the 2023-2024 academic year to 50 students. Feedback of students showed a notably positive learning experience in knowledge-sharing, approaches to inclusive working and thinking, a more nuanced view of people with disabilities, and the synergistic combination of diverse perspectives. The intensive collaboration with international students from diverse cultural backgrounds seemed to increase awareness of other cultures and identities. The outcomes suggest that promoting mutual learning experiences among students from diverse disciplines together with other stakeholders within living labs, can not only enhance educational settings, but also holds the potential to inform and improve inclusive attitudes in various professional contexts using the universal design paradigm.

Conclusion/future direction: This course opens up opportunities to significantly enrich the discourse on inclusion and universal design among students. A longitudinal study would be valuable to compare shifts in attitudes and knowledge among recurring stakeholders in the learning network.

Keywords: Living lab, inclusive attitude, universal design