

Transforming Learning Environments: A Multi-professional Approach To
User-centered Space Design And Management, 6-8.05.2026, Helsinki



JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY
IN KRAKÓW

Inclusive learning spaces *for neurodiverse people?*

Reflections from the NEURO-INC project

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NEURO-INC - The information needs and behaviors of NEUROdivergent users in the context of designing INclusive academic library services for the physical library space – NEURO-INC Project funded by the National Science Centre, Poland under contract UMO-2024/55/B/HS2/00694.

The logo for neuro inc, with the word "neuro" in white and "inc" in white, set against a blue background. The letter "u" in "neuro" is yellow. There are yellow horizontal bars above the "u" and below the "i" in "inc".

neuro
inc

Inclusive library services — for whom?

An **inclusive library service** is one organised so that it is *accessible and welcoming to the widest possible range of users*.

NEURODIVERSITY

Naturally occurring variation in the structure and functioning of the brain and nervous system, manifesting in persistent cognitive, sensory and behavioural differences which do not in themselves necessarily constitute deficits, but may cause difficulties in an environment adapted to the needs of the majority of the population.



THE GAP IN THE LITERATURE

Adaptations of library services for users with motor or sensory disabilities are widely documented in LIS literature.

The adaptation of **physical library spaces** to the specific needs of **neurodivergent users** — by contrast — remains rarely addressed.



This project asks: *what does inclusion of neurodivergent users actually require — empirically, in real academic library spaces?*

NEURO-INC objectives

Neurodiversity may significantly affect the scope and method of meeting the information needs of academic library users including their information behaviours.



Describe the specific information needs, expectations and behaviours of neurodivergent academic library users.



Identify barriers: physical, sensory, communicational, organisational.



Co-design inclusive services with the participation of neurodivergent users.



Adapt the academic library offering - services, spaces, staff practice to better fit these needs.



Innovativeness · embedding a psychology-rooted construct (neurodiversity) within library and information science · interdisciplinary social-science methodology · alignment with UN SDGs 10 and 11.

Four questions guiding the inquiry

RQ1

How can the information needs and behaviours of neurodivergent users be effectively studied from a Library and Information Science perspective — and which methods and tools are best suited?

RQ2

In what ways does neurodiversity influence the information needs and behaviours of academic library users?

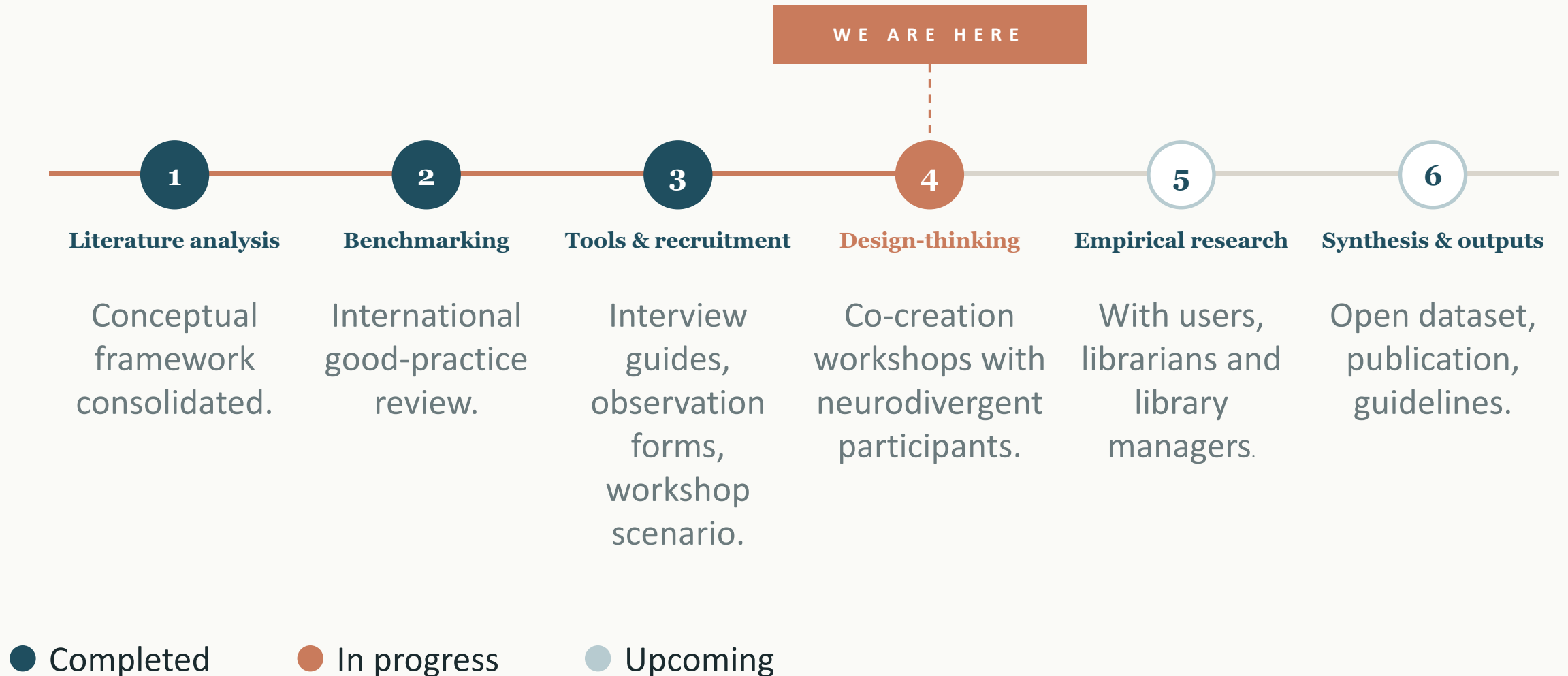
RQ3

How can academic library services delivered in physical spaces be made more accessible and inclusive for the entire academic community?

RQ4

Which recommendations and guidelines can support librarians, library managers and designers in adapting existing services to the needs of neurodivergent users?

Where we are right now



What the literature tells us

THE CORPUS

22

papers indexed in LISTA and Web of Science combining the terms “neurodiversity” and “library” (2019–2024).

None offered a methodological framework directly transferable to our project.

A research gap with epistemic consequences

Insufficient evidence on neurodivergent information-seeking and information-use experience produces a cognitively biased LIS scholarship (Cowell, 2024).

Voices missing from LIS research

Users with invisible disabilities are systematically underrepresented; inclusive recruitment must begin before the study and continue throughout (Muir & Coe, 2023).

Library spaces presume neurotypicality

Sensory and social environments default to neurotypical norms (Walton & McMullin, 2021).

Polish evidence base

First national interdisciplinary monograph on neurodiverse students documents library use and stresses sensory and cognitive needs (Pisula et al., 2024).

Design-thinking workshops with neurodivergent participants



Rationale

Co-creation positions neurodivergent users as experts of their own experience, not as objects of study. The workshop is itself an inclusive learning space, it must model the conditions we hope to recommend.

HOW WE ADAPTED THE WORKSHOP



Sensory-aware setting

Adjustable lighting, low-stimulation room, opt-out spaces.



Communicational clarity

Plain-language briefs, visual agendas, written + spoken prompts.



Predictable structure

Detailed timetable shared in advance; breaks signposted.



Consent and choice

Multiple expression formats; right to pause, withdraw, observe.



Mixed configurations

Solo reflection, pair work, small group, never forced sharing.

Towards inclusive learning spaces - emerging directions

WORKING REFLECTIONS · *Empirically grounded but not yet validated by the full data collection. To be revisited.*



The sensory layer

Light, sound, materials and crowding shape who can stay, focus and learn. Neutral defaults are not neutral.



The legibility of space

Wayfinding, signage and predictability matter as much as collections. Cognitive load is part of accessibility.



The relational layer

Staff posture and communicational style are part of the architecture of inclusion. Training is infrastructure.



Universal design ≠ uniformity

Inclusion requires plural offerings - quiet zones AND collaborative ones, scripted AND unscripted help.

What comes next



Empirical research

Interviews and observations with users, librarians and library managers in Kraków universities.



Recommendations

A catalogue of guidelines and good practices, distributed within the academic-library community.



Open science & SDGs

Open dataset, peer-reviewed publication; alignment with UN SDGs 10 and 11.

Thank you and which of these reflections resonate with your own contexts?

