



Reflection space activities

Instructions for lecturers

This guide provides detailed instructions for facilitating **Reflection Space** activities within virtual exchange programs. Reflection Spaces are structured, **self-guided learning activities** that serve as a bridge between theoretical content from lectures and practical application in afternoon workshops.

The activities presented here were originally developed for a virtual exchange course with doctoral candidates and master's students exploring research culture trends across European institutions. However, **these activities are designed as templates and inspiration** for educators facilitating virtual exchanges in diverse contexts and disciplines.



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Reflection Space 1

Overview

Title: Research Culture Heatmap: Mapping Impacts Across Institutions

Target Group: PhD candidates and master's students in a virtual exchange course

Time: 90 minutes (30 min Activity A + 60 min Activity B)

Learning Objectives

This reflection activity serves three core purposes:

1. **Translating Global Trends to Local Contexts:** Participants connect European research trends to their perceived institutional realities
2. **Building a Community of Practice:** Cross-institutional dialogue reveals shared challenges and diverse approaches
3. **Enhancing Learning Through Active Engagement:** Combining personal assessment, evidence collection, and critical evaluation

Preparation

Materials

- Research Culture Fact Sheet (distribute in advance)
- Digital or physical heatmap matrix with:
 - **Vertical axis:** Trends
 - **Horizontal axis:** Impact scale (0 = No impact, 1-5 = Increasing impact, 6 = Major impact, -1 = I don't know)
- Color-coded markers or digital dots (one color per institution)
- Digital whiteboard or shared document for sticky notes
- Breakout rooms for group discussions
- Timer

Before the Session

- Share the Research Culture Fact Sheet with participants at least 24 hours in advance
- Ask participants to review it and reflect on their institution's practices
- Assign each institution a unique color for the activity
- Set up the heatmap matrix (digital tool like Miro, Mural, or Google Jamboard works well)
- Prepare breakout groups ensuring representation from different institutions

Activity A: Individual Heatmap Assessment (30 minutes)

Introduction (5 minutes)

Explain to participants:



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- This activity maps how key European research culture trends are impacting their specific institutions
- They will create a visual heatmap showing patterns and differences across participating institutions
- The combination of individual assessment and collective visualization reveals both commonalities and institutional specificities

Phase 1: Preparation and Individual Reflection (10 minutes)

Instructions for participants on the white board (Figure 1):

Instructions

This individual activity (15 min) will map how key trends in higher education are impacting your institutions. Together, we will create a visual heatmap showing patterns across participating institutions.

Preparation (2 minutes)

- Review the Research Culture Fact Sheet - Reflect individually on your institution's current practices

Activity Instructions (10 minutes)

- Understand the Matrix Structure
- **Vertical axis (rows):** 8 Research Culture Trends
- **Horizontal axis (columns):** answer options from 1 to 5
- Consider: “How significantly is this trend impacting your institution?”
- Place one dot per trend with the color of your institution in the table according to your rating.



- 2-1 = Minor impact
- 0 = No impact
- -1 = I don't know

3. Place Your Ratings

- For each of the 8 trends, place ONE dot in the appropriate column
- Use your institution's assigned color
- Consider: 'How significantly is this trend affecting my institution?'
- Base your rating on concrete evidence and observations, not assumptions"

Facilitation Tips:

- Display the heatmap on screen so everyone can work simultaneously
- Monitor the emerging patterns in real-time
- Note interesting patterns (clusters, outliers, divergences) to highlight later
- Give a 5-minute and 2-minute warning

Transition to Activity B (5 minutes)

Before moving to groups:

- Show the completed heatmap to all participants
- Point out visible patterns: "Notice how Trend X shows high impact across most institutions, while Trend Y varies significantly"
- Preview the group work: "Now you'll explore WHY these patterns exist by sharing concrete examples"

Activity B: Collaborative Example Collection (60 minutes)

Introduction (5 minutes)

Explain the group activity structure:

- Groups will analyze the patterns from the heatmap
- Focus on trends with ratings of 3 or higher (significant impact)
- Collect specific, concrete examples from each institution
- Identify common themes and institutional differences

Send participants to their assigned breakout groups (ensure institutional diversity).

Phase 1: Pattern Analysis and Trend Selection (20 minutes)

Instructions for Participants:

Instructions for participants on the white board:



Instructions

Collaborative Example Collection (Group Activity - 60 minutes)

This is a collaborative group activity to identify concrete examples of trend impacts.

First phase (20 minutes):

- As a group, discuss the patterns that emerged from the heatmap activity
- Identify which **trends received ratings of three or higher**
- Note areas of convergence and divergence between different institutions

Second phase (40 minutes):

- For each high-impact trend (rated 3+), work together to collect specific examples from each represented institution
- Write each example on a sticky note using the color corresponding to your team
- Be concrete and specific - describe actual initiatives, changes, or challenges. Look on the general examples.
- Aim to collect at least one example per institution for each high-impact trend
- Group similar examples together on the white board to identify common themes

Facilitation Tips:

- Visit each breakout room to ensure groups understand the task
- Encourage discussion of “why” ratings differ, not just “what” they are
- If groups finish early, ask them to start thinking about specific examples
- Give time warnings at 10 minutes and 5 minutes remaining

Phase 2: Example Collection and Thematic Grouping (40 minutes)

Instructions for Participants (Figure 2):

“For the next 40 minutes, work together to document concrete examples:

1. Collect Specific Examples (25 minutes)

- For each high-impact trend (rated 3+), gather specific examples from each represented institution
- Write each example on a digital sticky note using your team’s assigned color
- **Be concrete and specific:** Describe actual initiatives, policies, changes, challenges, or practices
- Reference the general examples provided as inspiration, but share YOUR institution’s specific experiences
- Aim for at least one example per institution for each high-impact trend
- Include details: What happened? When? Who was involved? What was the impact?

2. Identify Common Themes (15 minutes)

- Group similar examples together on the whiteboard



- Look for patterns: Are different institutions responding to the same trend in similar or different ways?
- Label clusters with theme names
- Discuss: What do these patterns reveal about research culture changes across Europe?”

Example Format Guidance:

Good example: *“Our university introduced mandatory Open Science training for all PhD candidates in 2024. The training covers data management plans, preprint servers, and open peer review. Initial feedback shows confusion about which repositories to use.”*

Poor example: *“Open Science is becoming more important.”*

Task B	In how does the following trend affect research culture in your institution?			
	Example	Leuphana	Partner university 1	
Instructions	Trend 1: Institutional Strategy and Policy Developments	[Example text]	[Leuphana notes]	[Partner university 1 notes]
	Trend 2: Digital Transformation and Teaching Innovation	[Example text]	[Leuphana notes]	[Partner university 1 notes]
	Trend 3: Mission Integration and Third Mission Development	[Example text]	[Leuphana notes]	[Partner university 1 notes]
	Trend 4: Student-Centered Focus and Wellbeing	[Example text]	[Leuphana notes]	[Partner university 1 notes]
	Trend 5: Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)	[Example text]	[Leuphana notes]	[Partner university 1 notes]
	Trend 6: Internationalization and Collaboration	[Example text]	[Leuphana notes]	[Partner university 1 notes]
	Trend 7: Non-Degree Education and Micro-credentials	[Example text]	[Leuphana notes]	[Partner university 1 notes]
	Trend 8: Institutional Cooperation and Joint Programs	[Example text]	[Leuphana notes]	[Partner university 1 notes]

Figure 2. Activity B. Example from the Spring School 2025.

Facilitation Tips:

- Visit breakout rooms regularly to check progress
- Encourage specificity: ask “Can you give a concrete example?” or “What did that look like in practice?”





- If groups struggle, prompt with questions like: “What new policies were introduced?” “What challenges emerged?”
- Watch for groups that finish early and encourage them to add more detail or find additional examples
- Give warnings at 20 minutes, 10 minutes, and 5 minutes remaining

Plenary Debrief and Synthesis (15 minutes)

Bring all participants back together for a collective reflection:

Group Sharing (10 minutes)

- Each group briefly shares (2 minutes max):
 - Which trends they focused on
 - One surprising finding or pattern they discovered
 - One example that illustrates an important commonality or difference

Synthesis and Reflection (5 minutes)

Facilitate discussion:

- “What did we learn about how European research culture trends are playing out locally?”
- “Where do we see shared challenges across institutions?”
- “Where do institutional contexts lead to different responses?”
- “How might understanding these patterns help you navigate your own research culture?”

Connect to Course Themes:

- Link findings to upcoming workshops and lectures
- Preview how these insights will inform future activities
- Emphasize the value of cross-institutional dialogue



Reflection Space 2

Title: From Theory to Practice: Mapping Transformative Principles

Target Group: Participants in virtual exchange programs (adaptable to various disciplines)

Total Time: 90 minutes

Learning Objectives

This reflection activity serves four core purposes:

1. **Apply Theoretical Frameworks:** Connect theoretical concepts from keynotes to practical challenges in the field
2. **Transform Understanding Through Individual Theoretical Lenses:** Reimagine participants' own practices using new conceptual tools

Preparation

Materials

- Digital white board platform
- Pre-prepared template with sections for:
 - Key principles
 - Transformation potential for research culture
 - Questions for workshop hosts
- Text editing tools enabled for all participants
- Breakout rooms for group discussions
- Timer

Before the Session

- Set up the whiteboard with clear instructions visible at the top
- Create template sections for each group (or one shared template)
- Ensure all participants have editing access to the board
- Review keynote content and afternoon workshop topics to identify connections

Activity Structure: Theory Mapping to Critical Questions (90 minutes)

Introduction (5 minutes)

Explain to participants:

“This Reflection Space helps you actively process the theoretical content from the key notes and use it as a reflection of their content for the workshops. You'll identify key



principles that could transform research culture, then prepare questions to ask workshop hosts about how their methods facilitate the implementation of research culture and could be used as approaches that facilitate the transformation of research culture.”

The Bridge: “Think of this as preparation for being an engaged, critical participant this afternoon. You'll be able to ask: 'In how far are these practitioners' approaches designed to fit into a research culture that has already implemented the principles we've discussed today?’”

Share the white board link and ensure everyone can access it.

Phase 1: Individual Principle Identification (15 minutes)

Instructions for Participants:

“You have 15 minutes for individual work:

1. **Go to the white board and read the Instructions**
 - Navigate to the shared white board (link in chat)
 - Read the instructions at the top of the board carefully
 - Familiarize yourself with the template structure
2. **Use the Text Tool to Edit the Template**
 - Click on text boxes in your designated area
 - Use text editing features to add your contributions
3. **Identify 3-4 Key Principles from Keynotes**
 - Review your notes from the Keynotes
 - Select 3-4 principles total (combined from the keynotes)
 - Choose principles that are:
 - Conceptually significant for transforming the field
 - Potentially reshaping research culture
 - Applicable across different contexts
 - Format each principle clearly: “Principle name: Brief description (1-2 sentences)”
4. **Begin Considering Transformation**
 - For each principle, start thinking: “How might this principle transform academic research culture?”
 - Add initial thoughts in the template”

Facilitation Tips:

- Do a quick tech check to ensure everyone can edit the white board
- Monitor the board in real-time to see what principles emerge
- Note interesting patterns or framings to highlight later
- Give warnings at 10 and 5 minutes remaining
- If participants struggle, prompt: “What frameworks or concepts did the speakers present? What critiques did they make of current practice?”



Phase 2: Group Theory Mapping and Transformation Analysis (55 minutes)

Send participants to breakout rooms.

Instructions for Participants (Figure 3):

“In your groups, spend 25 minutes on collaborative analysis:

Step 1: Share and Synthesize (10 minutes)

- Each person briefly shares their identified principles (1-2 minutes per person)
- Identify overlaps and patterns across group members
- Select 3-4 principles that the group finds most transformative
- Update your group’s whiteboard section with these selected principles

Step 2: Deep Transformation Analysis (45 minutes)

For each selected principle, discuss:

“How might this principle transform academic research culture?”

Consider:

- **What would change?** Values, practices, structures, relationships, outputs
- **What would researchers do differently in your research/subject area? How would your institution change? How would the practices in your institution change?** Daily behaviors, work processes, priorities
- **What institutional shifts would be needed?** Policies, reward systems, training, resources
- **What barriers currently prevent this?** Existing norms, structures, incentives
- **What would success look like?** Concrete indicators that this principle is embedded in culture

Document your insights on the white board:

- Add detailed analysis for each principle
- Include specific examples from the keynotes or your own experience
- Note contradictions or challenges that emerge
- Use visual elements (colors, connections, sticky notes) to organize thinking”



Phase 3: Preparing Critical Questions for Workshop Hosts (15 minutes)

Keep participants in their breakout groups.

Instructions for Participants:

“Now use your transformation analysis to prepare critical questions for the workshop hosts:

Your Task: Generate 2-3 thoughtful questions for each workshop host/session that explore: **“In how far are the approaches designed to fit into a research culture that has already implemented the principles we’ve identified?”**”

The screenshot shows a digital workspace for 'Team A'. At the top, there is a blue header with the text 'Please edit this template by using the text tool.' and 'Team A'. Below this, there are two main activity sections:

- Theory mapping (50 min):**
 - 1. Individually identify 3-4 key principles from the keynotes.
 - 2. Share and select in your group 3-4 principles and discuss for each principle: "How might this principle transform research practices and culture?"
 - Prepare 2-3 questions exploring:** "In how far are workshop approaches designed for a research culture that has already implemented these principles?"
- Boundary-crossing innovation (30 min):**
 - 1. How do these principles change research practices and/or culture?
 - 1. Exploratory questions:

The 'Boundary-crossing innovation' section includes a list of principles: new forms, discipline big funding, barrier crossing (research lack of identity), and oriented (includes culture in academia). Below this, there is a list of 'Exploratory questions' with several bullet points.

Figure 3. Reflection space implementation example. Activity B from the Spring School 2025.





Plenary Debrief and Bridge to Workshops (5 minutes)

Bring all participants back together.

Question Sharing and Workshop Preview (10 minutes)

Facilitate brief sharing:

- “Let’s hear one strong question from each group”
- Each group shares their most compelling question (30 seconds per group)
- Note common themes or particularly insightful questions

