

Sustaining Learning Beyond Boundaries: How RespectNET and DigiUPT Build a Coherent Competence Pathway for University Students

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Abstract

The sustainability of European-funded educational projects represents a persistent challenge in higher education research. This paper examines how the Erasmus+ project RespectNET — Respectful Communication through Media Education Network (2021–2024) — achieves long-term impact through its institutional and thematic continuation in DigiUPT, a PNRR-funded initiative at Universitatea Politehnica Timișoara (UPT). RespectNET developed a comprehensive framework for media literacy and respectful digital communication among university staff and students, yielding concrete outputs including a Matrix of Media and Respectful Communication Competences and a set of multimedia e-learning modules addressing hate speech, cyberbullying, and anti-scientific narratives. DigiUPT extends this foundation by embedding digital competence development into UPT's institutional infrastructure, aligning with the European DigComp and DigCompEdu frameworks, modernising study programmes, and establishing a dedicated Institute for Digital Transformation. This paper argues that the sequential, complementary design of these two projects constitutes a model of research sustainability: rather than concluding with deliverables, RespectNET's competency-building logic is absorbed and scaled within DigiUPT's structural transformation agenda. For students participating in both initiatives, this continuity translates into a coherent developmental trajectory — from critical media literacy skills to advanced digital competences required by emerging professions — reinforcing learning outcomes across funding cycles and institutional contexts. The findings offer transferable insights for designing sustainable, student-centred research ecosystems in European higher education.

Keywords: research sustainability, media literacy, digital competences,; higher education, Erasmus+, student learning outcomes