EXPECT_Art

CHILDREN AS CO-CREATORS: ARTISTIC PRACTICES AND CRITICAL CULTURAL LITERACY IN SCHOOLS IN SLOVENIA

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Science and Research Centre Koper

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ZRS

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Introduction

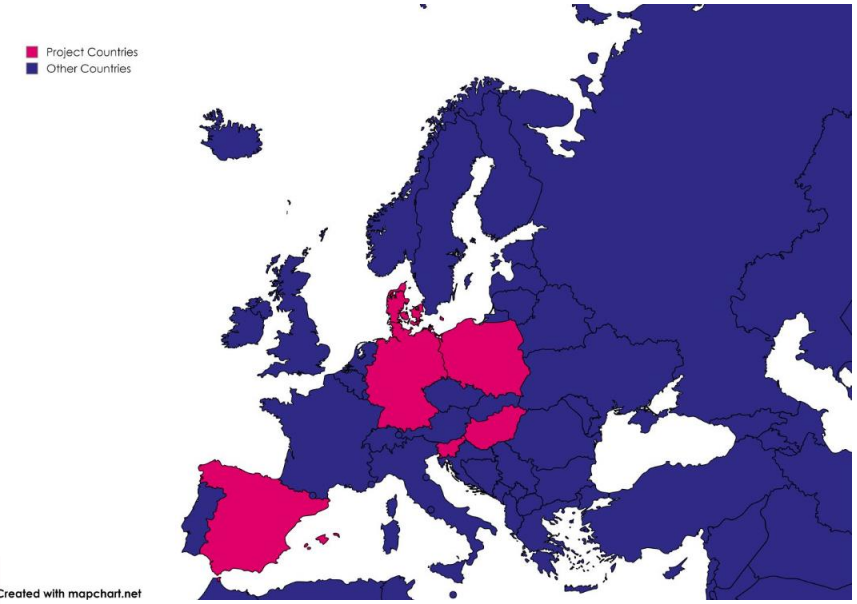
EXPECT_Art (EPLoring and Educating Cultural literacy Through Art) project, Horizon Europe, January 2024-December 2026

The aim of EXPECT_Art is to identify current barriers and potentials for promoting critical cultural literacy through education through art

ARTS EDUCATION

EDUCATION THROUGH ARTS

USES OF ARTS IN EDUCATION



Aim of the presentation: to present the initial phases of participatory community- and art-based research in two Slovenian elementary schools & local communities with the focus on art as a medium for expression and engagement

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Theoretical framework

CULTURAL LITERACY

the ability to decode, understand, and use signs within art and culture with a focus on the art forms in approaching the knowledge of practice generated through fieldwork in schools and local communities

AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE, LEARNING & BILDUNG

Everybody is culturally literate

CRITICAL CULTURAL LITERACY

the concept of critical in EXPECT_Art reflects the adoption of a power-critical perspective on societal and artistic phenomena.

e.g. Balancing recognition of children as already culturally literate with the aim of expanding their critical engagement (Lähdesmäki et al., 2022)

COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH

aims “to connect academic researchers with individuals, groups, and community organizations to collaborate on a research project to solve community-identified and community-defined problems” (Boyd 2014, p. 501)

e.g. Following students' perspectives while maintaining awareness of broader social power relations (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008)

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Theoretical framework

ARTS-BASED RESEARCH



P: Maja Zadel

can be defined as research that “involves adapting the tenets of the creative arts to research projects.” (Alanen, Baraldi, de Coninck-Smith, Laoire, & Tisdall, 2018, p. 206 in Jensen and Hellesdatter Jacobsen, 2025).

Children create (express) knowledge in the process of research through drawing, painting, photography, creating videos, role-playing, acting etc.

Different arts-based methods may enhance children‘s agency and foster their own particular ways of expression – hearing their voices (James et al., 1998) as the children decide for themselves “how to represent their worlds to themselves and others” (White et al., 2010, p. 144).

More familiar and enjoyable for children (Moskal, 2010)

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Before starting

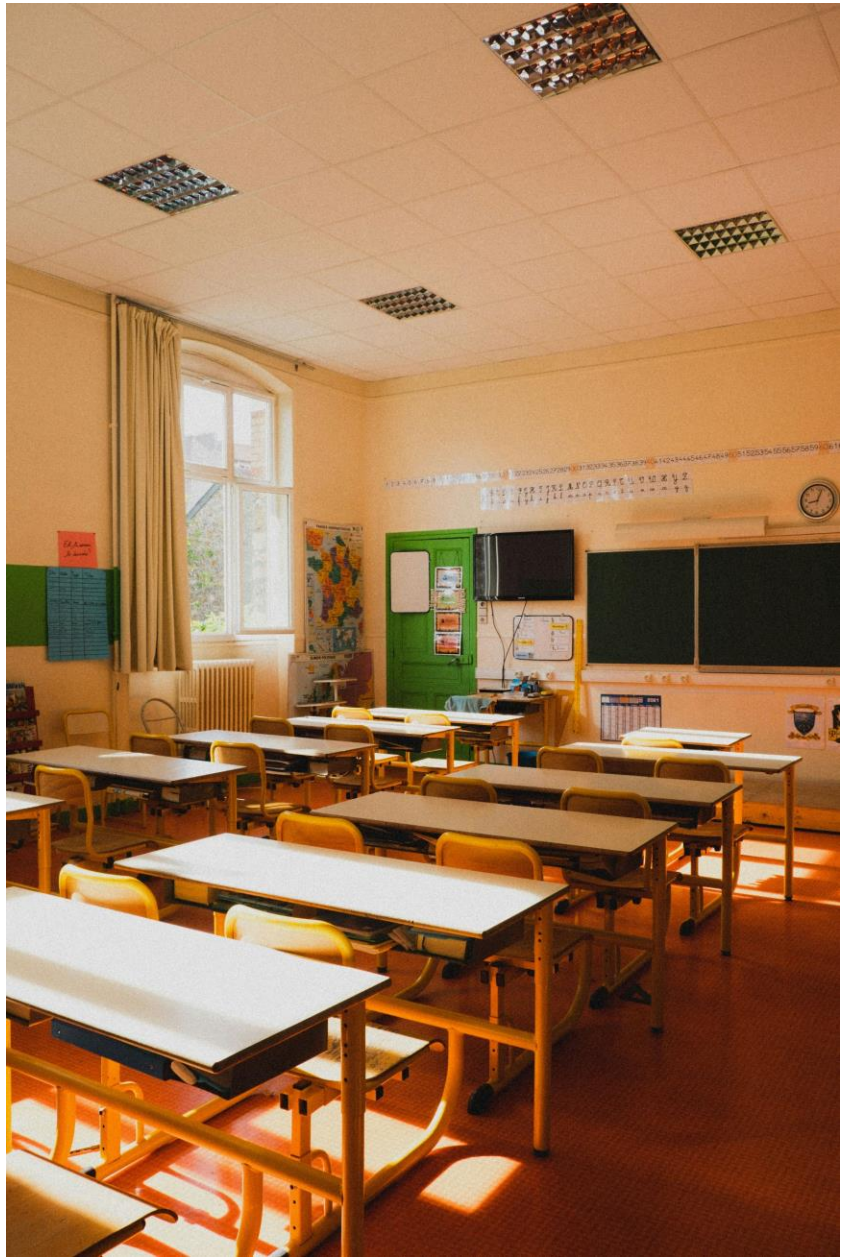
The educational environment – schools = static, fixed

Teachers teach, children learn

School curricula = determined at the state level

→ reflecting national ideology

→ focusing on high and national culture + mirroring the European supremacy in different art disciplines



P: Camille Lemiale

pexels.com/photo/an-empty-classroom-10036827/

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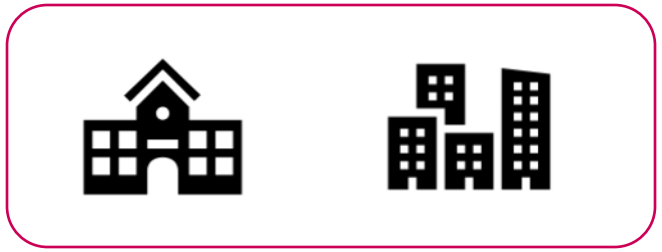
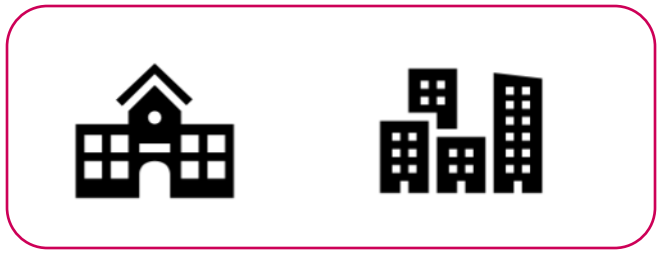
Methodology

2 schools in Slovenia and their local environments



School and local environment 1



School and local environment 2

Entering the field (ethnographic): observations and field diaries
Surveys
Interviews with children (in schools) and teachers (in school), youth and adults (in local community) (conducting & in transcription)

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School: Education through Art

Observation: School 1 (7th grade), Geography class (November 2024)

Background: The teacher of Geography was discussing the theme of colonialism of the Western European nations in the past. The teacher used an excerpt from a documentary or news piece showing what teenagers in a country in Africa would like to be when they grow up. when it is finished, the teacher added: “Can you imagine that they have similar wishes as you?! Well, they’re from Afrika, not the moon!“ When speaking of colonialism, the teacher shows a cartoon depicting the exploitation of Africa and Latin America – art is being used to point to exploitative practices contributing to uneven positions and hierarchies. Art is being used to point to exploitative practices contributing to uneven positions and hierarchies.

From interview N. (girl, 12 years old)

„Who wants to be a geo millionaire?“

N: „Yes, lots of interesting videos, I mean, he does this very well with computers, and we also have worksheets with him, I think that’s what we like the most, besides the fact that it’s an interesting subject, we don’t have to write in notebooks like in English, where we write a lot. At geography we write – nothing, we just fill them in … And he shows us, he also makes some recordings himself, and they’re really funny. He somehow knows what’s popular now, I don't know how, but he knows, he knows very well what we like and how to explain it to us, he makes recordings that would attract us and also teach us.“

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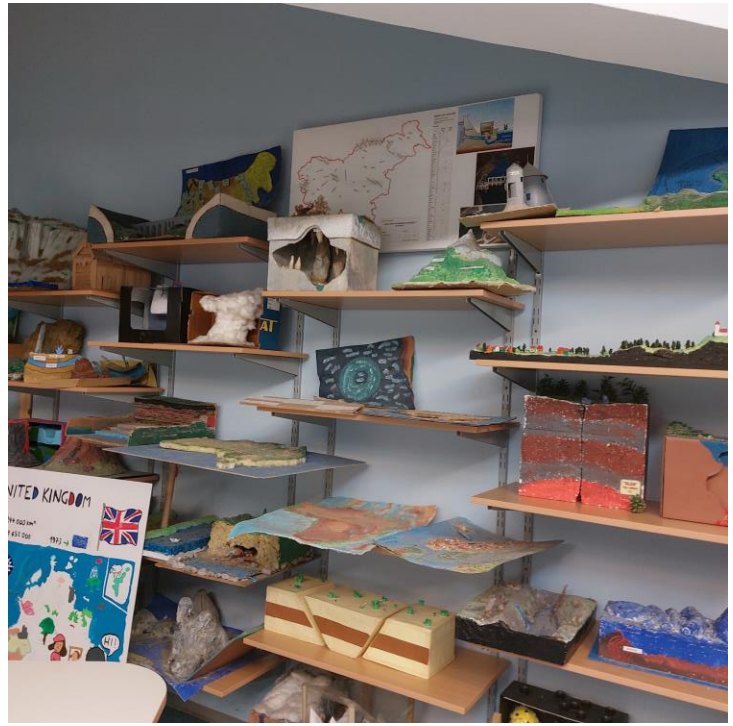
School: Education through Art







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Schools: Theatre clubs

Two theatre clubs – one in each school- lasting several months, ongoing (school 1: grades 6-8, school 2: grades 3-6; Children aged between 10 and 15)

Implemented by artistic partner Portret

Collaborative development of school plays – from topic selection to performance



Photo: Maja Zadel

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Children as co-producers of knowledge and ABM enhancing their participation and expression

Topic selection – use of drawing and mapping, discussion, cutting and pasting from magazines – in groups

Discussions with children: a place to socialise, play, express their voices, interests, identities

Observations: Art-based activities as enjoyable, spontaneous (& bodily)



Photo: Tina Rataj

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Reflections

Art-based methods alone do not equal involvement or participation –considering issues of power and asymmetrical power relations (Jensen and Hellesdatter Jacobsen, 2025)

Art-based methods can be possible means of expressing knowledge and skills children have, originating from their own experiences and preferences

Theatre play: Children express cultural literacy and self-organise in the process. Some more active role, some prefer to assist in different ways. Some children may not feel seen or heard. Whose voices are being heard? Some children disengaged or dropped out. Adult‘s role?

Spatial aspects: activities conducted within institutional settings (schools) significantly shaped by the established rules and power structures (researched referred as „teachers“) – nevertheless trying to create spaces for creativity

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Aligning practices with children's lifeworlds, identities and interests

Topics related to violence (horror story, crime story, bullying) - their own way of expression: through pop culture, crime series, action movies

→ The children show what matters in their own cultural universe – their cultural literacy enhancing their agency

→ The children's cultural language form their cultural world

→ What is important to children? Horror/crime**? --> Humour?**

As adults we try respecting their cultural knowledge, trying to de-centre our adult authority – avoid interpreting children's expression through our lenses – **their** cultural references– even if commercial or popular (and from our perspective colonial) → re-creative consumption?

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Reflections

The interpretations & assumptions

Talking and discussing with children is important part of the process

→ To better understanding of their voices, addressing their interests and identities

Continuous reflexivity of our own work (views, positions) – enables (at least small) changes in our research process and understanding of children‘s voices

→ Complex process – we must be aware of the complexity

→ Ongoing learning process

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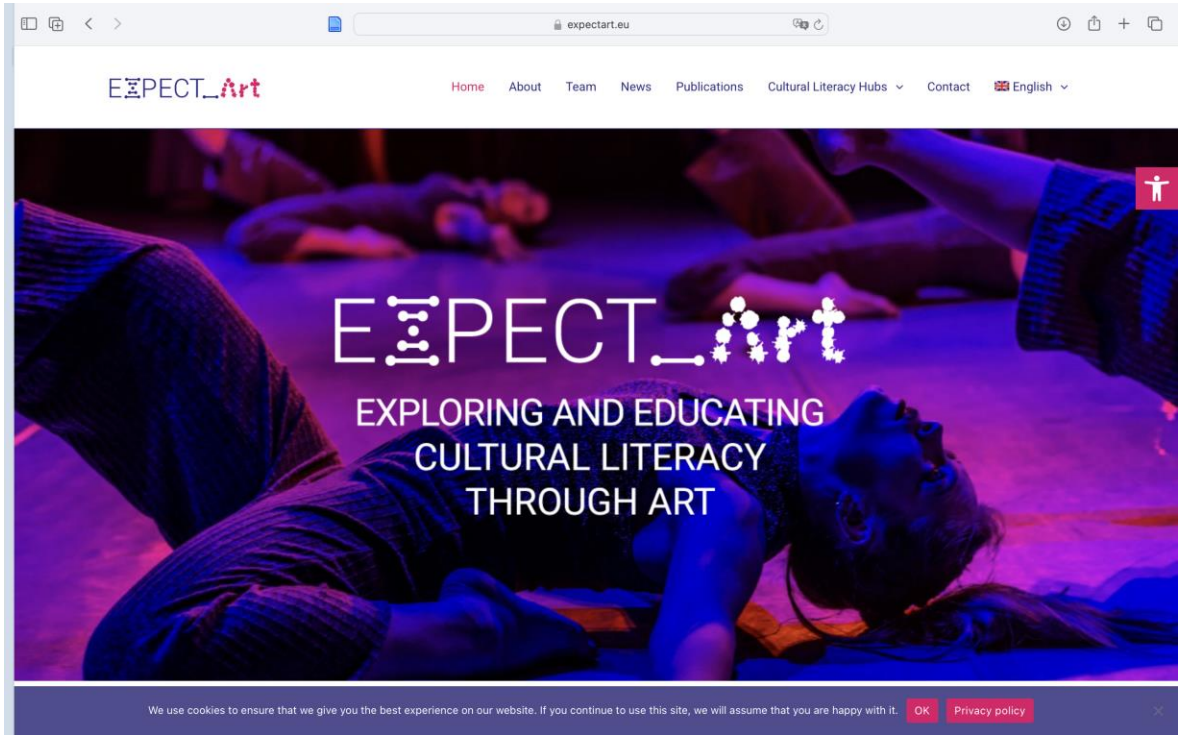
Thank you!



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