MULTIMODAL, COMMUNITY-BASED AND DECOLONIAL METHODOLOGIES IN EXPECT_ART PROJECT: INSIGHTS FROM THE SLOVENIAN FIELDWORK

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Multimodal Research Methodologies with Children and Youth

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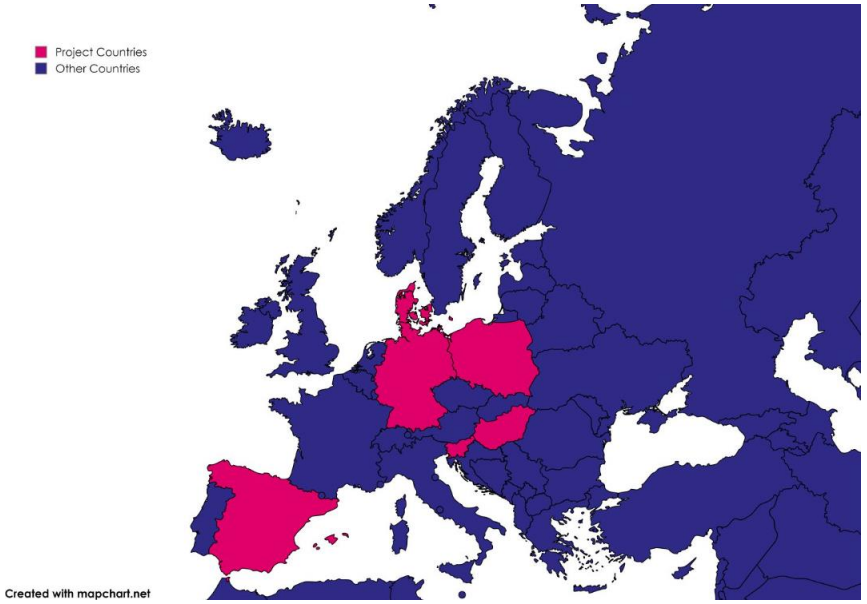
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Introduction

EXPECT_Art (EXPLoring 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 (wide conception)

Aim of the presentation: how multimodal, art-based, and community-based research approaches can highlight how critical cultural literacy (CCL) is negotiated in children's everyday environments



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Theoretical framework

architecture, drama, film, literature, painting, music, sculpture ....

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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EXPECT_Art

Theoretical framework



P: Maja Zadel

ARTS-BASED RESEARCH 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.

DECOLONIAL APPROACH coloniality of knowledge = the hierarchisation, imposition and suppression of knowledges, privileging Eurocentric knowledge and universalising it, while systematically silencing other ways of knowing (Mingolo 2007; Dussel 1993;)
+ power relations (teacher-learners)

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).

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Before starting

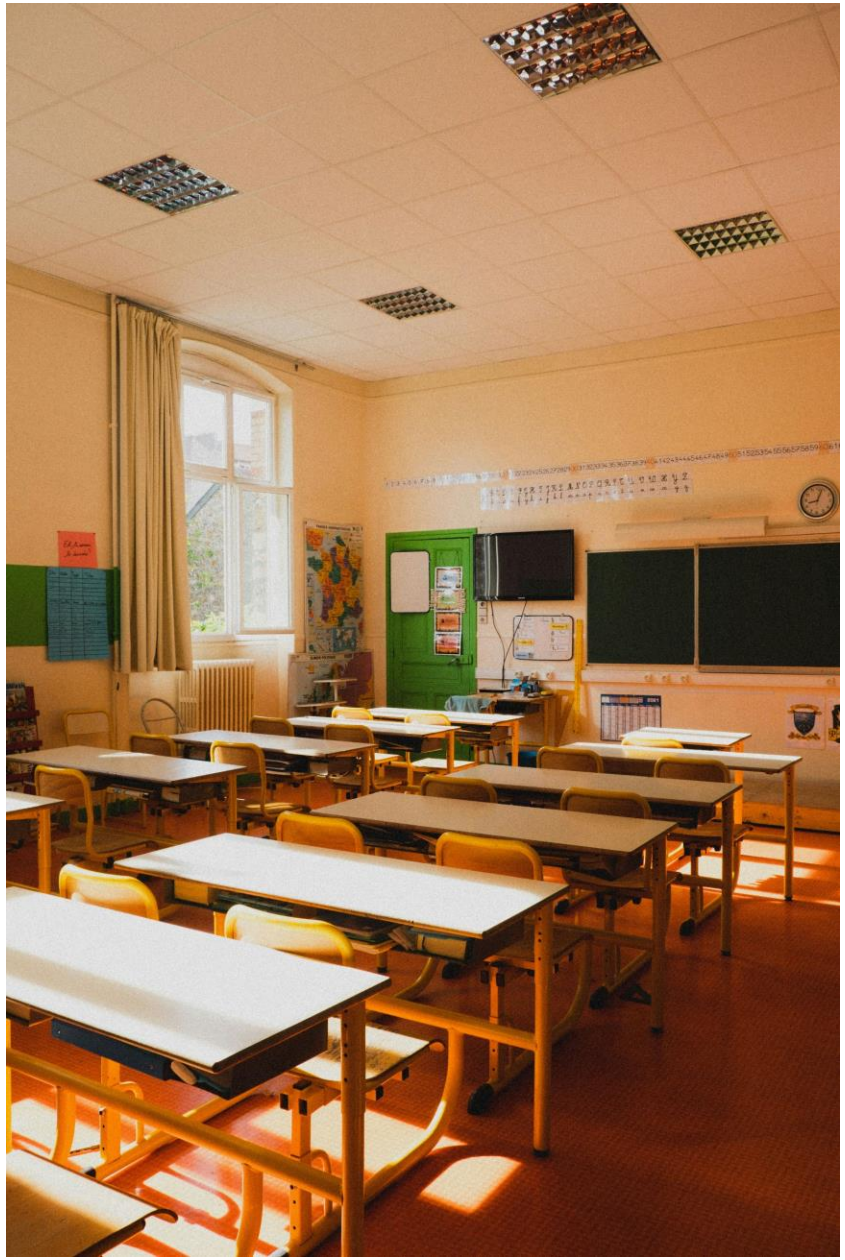
The educational environment – schools = static, fixed

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



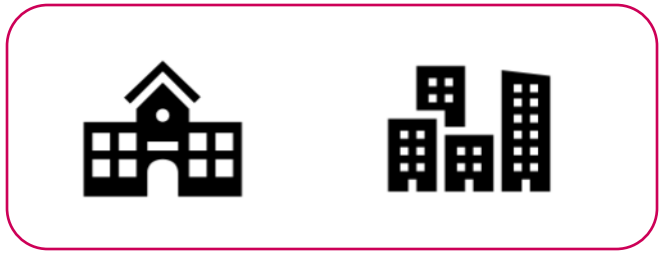
P: Camille Lemiale

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

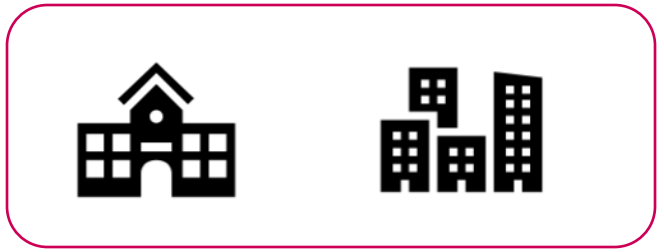
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Methodology

2 schools in Slovenia and their local environments



School and local environment 1



School and local environment 2

1) Entering the field (ethnographic): observations and field diaries
2) Observations and field diaries - continuing
3) Surveys
4) Interviews with children (in schools) and teachers (in school), youth and adults (in local community)

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Schools: Theatre clubs

Two theatre clubs – one in each school- lasting several months

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



Photo: Tina Rataj

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Survey co-design

1) Hand-written survey & photocopied – to convey the work in progress and not something that is already set

2) Aims:

2.1 to get information on t last week's implemented activities

2.2. to get information on how children themselves would design the survey: the options to add questions and answers, delete, rearrange

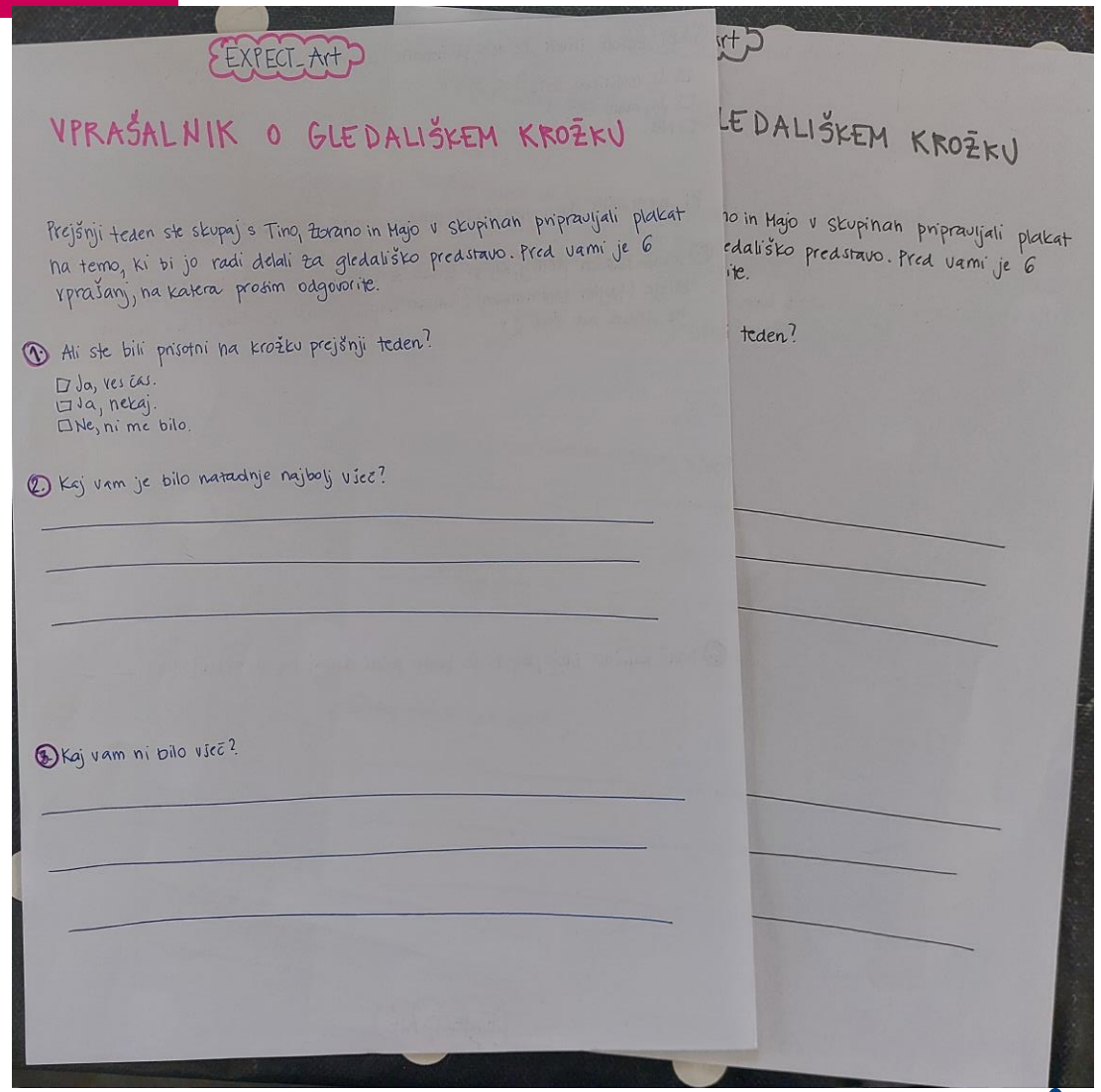


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Survey co-design - Content-wise

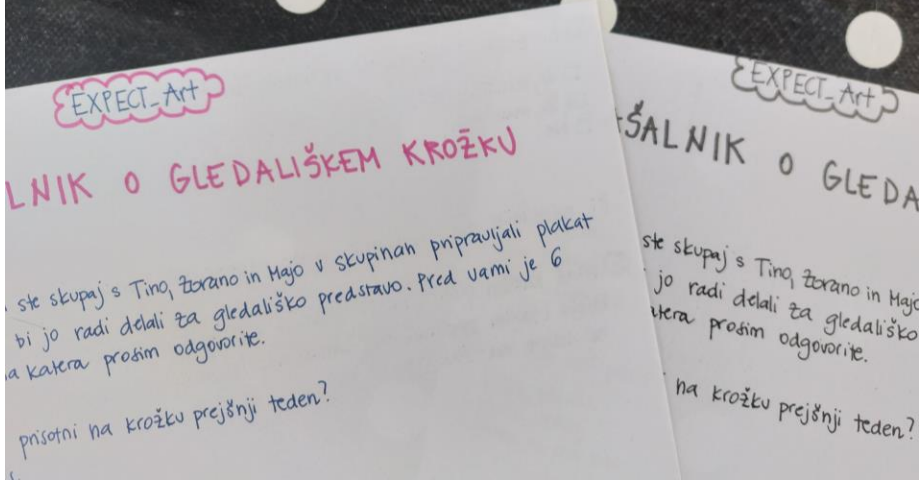


Photo: Maja Zadel

They suggested some improvements for the activities implemented the week before:

- extend the duration of the sessions or have more sessions per week (both)
- incorporating more structured activities, such as working with scripts or having a clearer framework
- adding more comedic elements and free-choice games
- building a stage set to enhance performances and performing at school events
- having a special day to work on ideas
- being outside in the fresh air

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Survey co-design - Content-wise

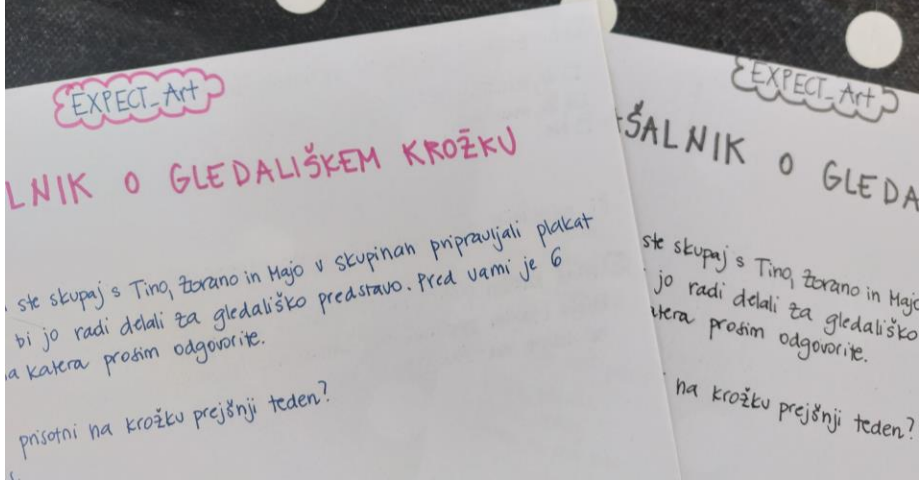


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-A constructive attitude and a desire for a structured planning

Cultural literacy: they have knowledge of how to make the activities on one hand enjoyable and successful (structured, enough time) on the other.

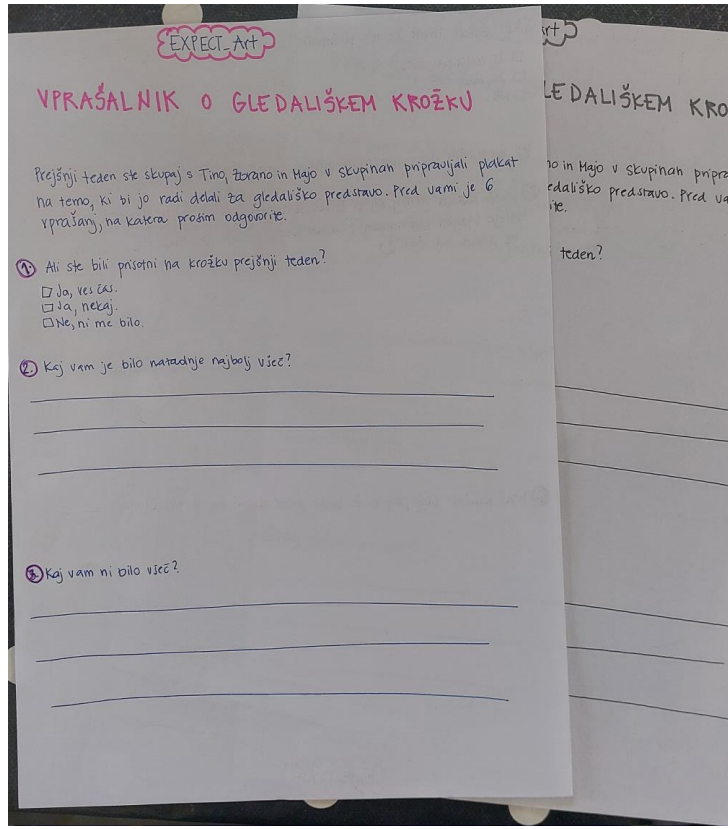
Some liked the collaborative character of the activities

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Survey co-design - Questionnaire design

Initially: “The questions make sense”

Further inquiry → pointed out some “deficiencies”: some questions were difficult to answer, or some were difficult to understand (to what do additional art activities refer, what does “being present” mean?



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Survey co-design - Questionnaire design

Children suggested either **changing the questions** (merging questions, adding questions, e.g. (well-being at the theatre club, etc.)

Answering options: **drawing answers** (strange, but nice to have the option, not everyone likes to draw, ...)

Alternative answering possibilities: smiles and having the option to colour them, cartoons, more colourful, include illustrations and patterns.

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Survey co-design - Questionnaire design

The older learners in school 1 (8th grade, cca 14 years old) present a specific group of respondents.

They had a “cool stance” (commenting to themselves some parts of the survey, e.g. the answer “a looooot more activities”, but didn’t want to write down or tell the researchers that they find it childish).

Moreover, they had almost no comments to the questionnaire

„We are used to answer questionnaires on activities“→ therefore found them okay; they did not miss any question or answer.

Probably the “indoctrination” into filling in evaluation forms made them less reflective and responsive to possible changes of the questionnaire → **habituated passivity**

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Reflections

Arts-based and multimodal methods can foster CCL, decolonial education and research

BUT:

There can be structural limitations (difficulty to navigate open-ended or less structured multimodal tasks) & limitations to adult‘s capacities/sensitivities to recognise children‘s (critical) cultural expressions

Arts-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

→ Survey co-design indicates an ability to critically evaluate the tool’s purpose and envision improvements that would capture more nuanced feedback on their experiences

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Reflections

Talking and discussing with children is important part of the process

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

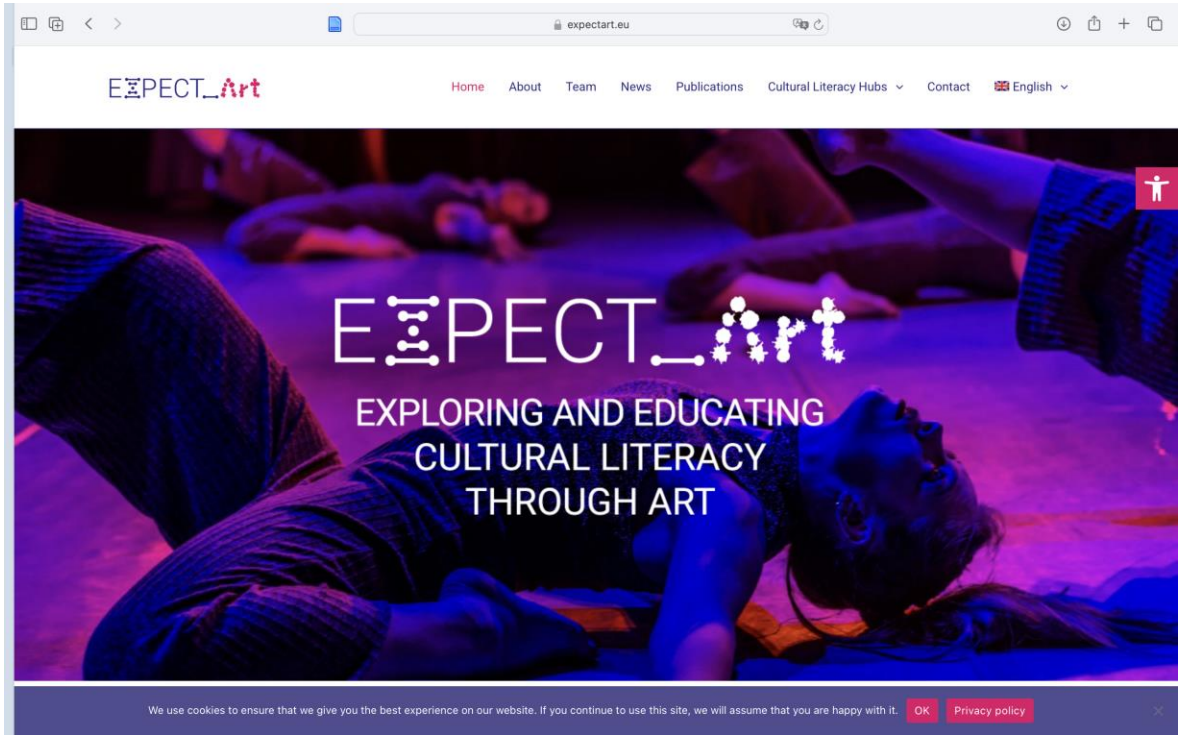
Continuous reflexivity of our own work (views, positions) – enables (at least small) changes power relations in our research process and understanding of children‘s voices

→ Complex process

→ Ongoing learning process

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Thank you!



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