

A THEORETICAL, PRACTICAL AND  
ADVOCACY DOCUMENT THAT ESTABLISHES  
A SET OF PRINCIPLES FOR THE  
PROTECTION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF  
ARTISTIC AWAKENING IN ALL EUROPEAN  
REGIONS

CO-WRITTEN BY

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CHILDCARE WORKERS  
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# EARLY CHILDHOOD PRINCIPLES FOR A EUROPEAN ARTISTIC AWAKENING



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2019 was an important year for the recognition of artistic and cultural awakening: the report, commissioned by the French Ministry of Culture, *A national strategy for cultural health - Promoting and perpetuating the cultural and artistic early-learning of children from birth to 3 years old in the bond with their parent* by French psychoanalyst Sophie Marinopoulos was a positive step in support of the artistic and cultural awakening of babies and young children.

It is in this context that we - four arts organisations who create work for babies and parents;

- Starcatchers - Scotland
- LaSala - Spain
- ACTA - France
- 2turvenhoog - The Netherlands

began working together to disseminate observations and learning from contemporary artistic practice for young children to professionals working within the social, health, culture, education and childcare sectors (hereafter known as “professionals”). Thanks to the support from Erasmus+ we were able to organise 2-day training visits in all four countries during 2021 to 2023 with the aim of raising professionals' awareness of artistic awakening and integrating artistic practice into their pedagogy.

**During the 3-year project, it was agreed that to share the emergent observations and reflections, we would create Principles for the protection of an authentic artistic awakening of very young children.**

The access to, and opportunities for culture and art in early childhood is a right enshrined within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and must be urgently recognised by European public institutions. One of the conditions for this is strong and dynamic relationships between artists, early childhood, education, social and cultural professionals, families, including public and private institutions. Unfortunately, the link between education, childcare, health, culture, social work and artistic practice is not always obvious for the professionals working within these sectors, nor is it widely highlighted in early childhood and education professional training. The latter is often based on a traditional pedagogy that does not connect strongly with art, but rather uses it as another discipline that can be observed externally. Our aim is to embed artistic practice within the core of social, health, culture, education, and childcare.

## WHAT DO WE MEAN BY “ARTISTIC AWAKENING”?

It is the ability to wonder, to be curious, to use our imagination and to experience art and culture from the day we are born.

***“Awakening precedes education. Culture and art, starting at the beginning of life, are much more than an introduction to cultural and artistic education. This is the moment where openness to art and culture takes root.”***

From: *A national strategy for cultural health - Promoting and perpetuating the cultural and artistic early-learning of children from birth to 3 years old in the bond with their parent*. Report by Sophie Marinopoulos

The French Government also defines artistic awakening as all the artistic practices which develop *“the relationship with the symbolic and with sensitive experience, the awakening of creativity, the discovery of culture as a space for exchange with others, for self-knowledge and knowledge of the world, as a means of expression and a vector for social cohesion,”* all considered *“essential issues for the future of our society. That's why artistic and cultural awareness, which meets babies' fundamental needs (cognitive, emotional, psychological, and expressive through language), helps to instil them with a culture that itself conditions the development and well-being of the child and, beyond that, that of every adult.”*

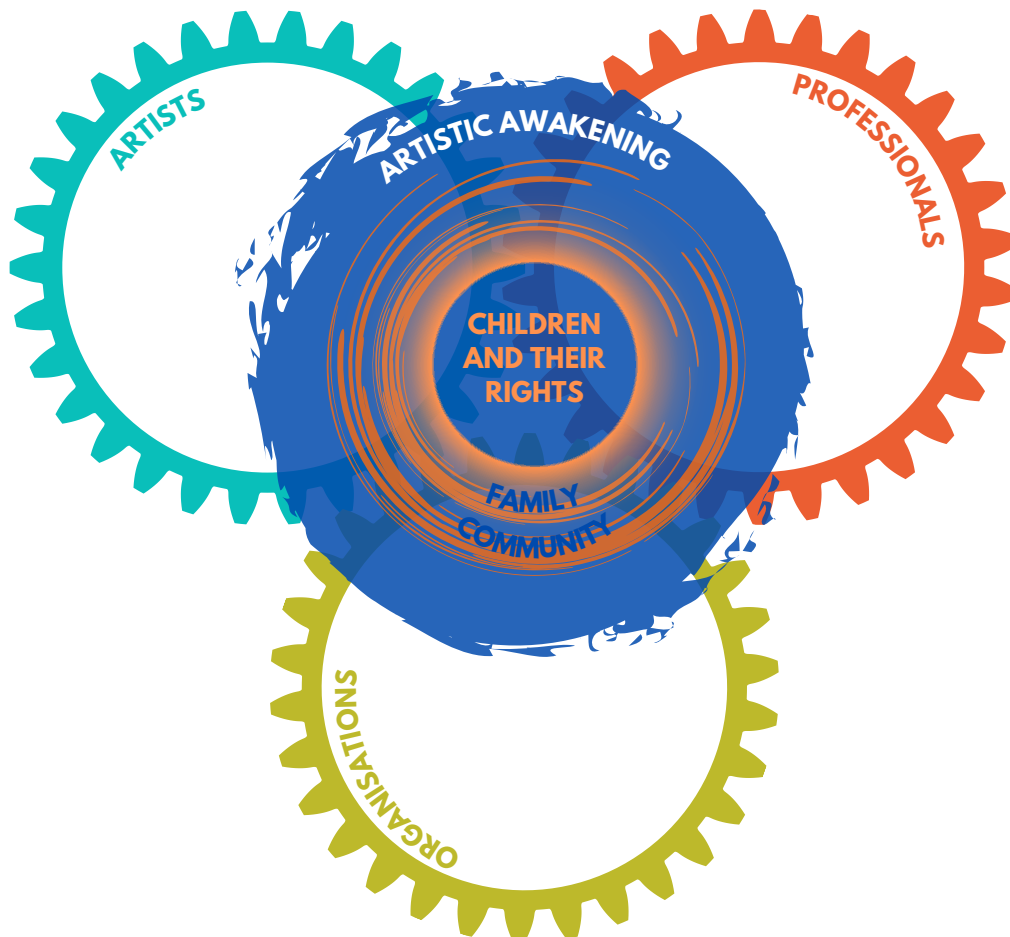
# INTRODUCTION

We expected several outcomes from this project. We hoped to bring about a better understanding of the impact of art and artistic practice on very young children's development, through observations of and encounters with artists specialised in early childhood. These enabled the professionals to gain the tools necessary for the implementation of a show, workshop, or another artistic practice in their respective professional settings. Taking part in these exchanges alongside other European professionals also meant sharing and understanding different visions and working methods. Visits of early childhood, education, social and cultural organisations together with presentations of their work were organised in conjunction with the artistic workshops. Professionals were encouraged to question, or at least examine the ways in which their methodology and pedagogy are put in practice with young children, thereby broadening the scope for reflection.

The training visits were initially designed to enable delegates to teach and learn from their counterparts and see what they could bring back to their respective countries. However, these engagements led us to realise the importance of reframing artistic awakening in a collective, European way.

**From then on, we decided to present the observations and reflections from this 3-year project through the Principles, as a collective response from all who engaged. This theoretical, practical and advocacy document establishes a set of principles for the protection and implementation of artistic awakening in all European regions, integrating the different communities' socio-economic realities into the process, and provides concrete examples that can act as inspirations, be reproduced and adapted.**

The diagram below, designed collectively in June 2023 in Scotland, illustrates the relationships we want and commit to within the network of those involved in artistic awakening, at local, national and European levels.



# PRINCIPLES

Based on our experience and observations during the specific context of our project, we have defined general principles that are fundamental for cultural health as a basic need of all human beings. We defend that it is urgent and necessary:

**TO WELCOME AND RECOGNISE THE BABY AND CHILD'S INNATE ARTISTIC GENIUS BY DESIGNING AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE THEY CAN EXPERIMENT AND DECIDE FREELY**

**TO CREATE SPACES FOR ARTISTS, BABIES, YOUNG CHILDREN AND PARENTS, AND PROFESSIONALS TO EXCHANGE AND EXPLORE THROUGH AN ARTISTIC PROCESS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE EDUCATIONAL, CULTURAL, AND SOCIAL SETTINGS RELATED TO EARLY CHILDHOOD**

**TO RECOGNISE THE RICHNESS OF THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE FAMILIES OF EACH COMMUNITY**

**TO GIVE EQUAL VALUE TO THE CONTRIBUTION OF BABIES, YOUNG CHILDREN, PARENTS, ARTISTS, AND PROFESSIONALS INVOLVED IN THE ARTISTIC PROCESS SO AS TO ENSURE AN AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCE.**

**TO PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES TO SHARE CROSS-SECTORAL KNOWLEDGE, AND ENGAGE WITH ACADEMIC RESEARCH, TO DEVELOP UNDERSTANDING AND AWARENESS, BRING NEW PERSPECTIVES AND ALLOW FOR LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY.**

**TO RECOGNISE THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ARTS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD AND THE EXPERTISE OF ARTISTS AND PROFESSIONALS IN THE DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF ARTISTIC AWAKENING ACTIVITIES.**

**TO INTERROGATE OUR ARTISTIC PRACTICE IN WORK FOR/WITH BABIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN IN RECOGNITION THAT WE MUST RESPOND TO THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY.**

**TO CONSOLIDATE AND GUARANTEE ARTISTIC AWAKENING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD THROUGH LONG-TERM AND SUSTAINABLE FUNDING.**

**TO RECOGNISE AND UNDERSTAND THAT ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION IN ARTS AND CULTURE HAS INTRINSIC VALUE AND ESSENTIAL PURPOSE IN THE CHILD'S OPTIMAL DEVELOPMENT AND IS A RIGHT OF EVERY CHILD FROM BIRTH: NOT ONLY A TOOL, FOR EDUCATION OR SOCIAL PURPOSES.**

*Let us imagine a Europe where children are at the centre and have the opportunity to explore their creativity, where art is an integral part of education and where respect and appreciation for cultural diversity are fundamental values.*

# EQUALITY BETWEEN CHILDREN, PARENTS, ARTISTS, AND PROFESSIONALS

Discussions and debates, active participation in artistic workshops, and attending performances created for very young audiences informed our reflection on the relationship we want to develop between babies, young children, parents, artists and professionals. During a workshop in France in November 2022, professionals agreed that **equality between all adults and children was fundamental to an authentic artistic awakening experience**. This equality can be achieved through:

- cross-sectoral sharing of expertise,
- the creation of a space where all feel safe, comfortable, and confident to give and receive,
- whilst recognising both adults and children's levels of engagement are equally respected, in particular those who choose to spectate as opposed to playing, but should have the opportunity to flow between roles.



# BUILDING EQUITY & EQUALITY BY SHARING EXPERTISE & RESPONSIBILITIES

The artistic vision and expectations are not always clear for those who have limited exposure to culture and artistic experiences. Adults make assumptions based on their own prior experiences and this is then imposed on their children. This was realised from the first visit in France, which took part during ACTA's European biennale **Premières Rencontres : Art, petite enfance et spectacle vivant** (First Encounters: Art, early childhood and live performance).

Both Scottish and Dutch professionals reflected on the discomfort and concern they shared when witnessing children being rigorously supervised, kept seated and silent throughout the performance. This is opposite to Starcatchers and 2turvenhoog's approach where children's reactions to and interactions with the artistic proposal are widely encouraged. French and Spanish professionals referred to their approach as a way of respect for the performance.

Hence, across several mobilities, **the need to share artistic codes, knowledge, and specific expertise between professionals and artists was highlighted as a condition for everyone to have an artistic experience for/with babies and young children based on equal grounds.** Below is an example of a training programme that helps build equity between all those involved.

## TRAINING FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONALS IN ACTA'S PREMIÈRES RENCONTRES FESTIVAL

To strengthen and develop professionals' understanding of an artistic proposal for very young children, ACTA runs three training sessions during the European biennale "Premières Rencontres". They aim to develop better mutual knowledge of the objectives and constraints of each partner (artists and professionals), to examine contemporary performing arts dedicated to babies and young children, and to generate discussions on the sensitive reception of a show.

ACTA also provides the professionals involved with a better understanding of the diverse cultural imaginations of the families in their local areas, and with the tools necessary to welcome and accompany very young spectators to the theatre (before, during and after the show). The long-term objective is to stimulate everyone's creativity and imagination and encourage the implementation of long-term projects in early childhood organisations.

The training sessions around the PREMIÈRES RENCONTRES festival take place in three stages. In 2022, the training sessions were the following:

- Before the festival: a one-day training session (15 February 2022) with Catherine-Juliet Delpy (education psychologist) and Eleonora Ribis (Artistic director of the Melampo Company) on how to accompany children before, during and after the show
- During the festival: presence at least one day of the European Forum and during the shows presented during that time (on 16 and 17 March 2022)
- After the festival: a final training day concluding the cycle (5 April 2022) with Laurent Dupont. An additional day was organised on 24 May 2022 with Pascal Bely, due to his unforeseen unavailability on 5 April, on project methodology for setting up an artistic project in a childcare facility.

# BUILDING EQUITY & EQUALITY BY SHARING EXPERTISE & RESPONSIBILITIES

A process of co-creation between professionals and artists is important in enabling everyone involved to understand the aims and how the artistic proposal will occur. For this to happen, **professionals must also be included in the creation and reflection stages of a project, not only to be able to fully understand the artistic proposition with its objectives, nuances, and impact, but also to be able to share their knowledge and expertise on the child.** When this partnership working is successful, the experience will lead to an effective framework for children's engagement of the experience.

Over the course of the project, participants learned about Starcatcher's framework, which outlines how they approach their partnership work, and proposed a new framework for artistic projects within an early childhood setting. Both examples illustrate a commitment to the inclusion of professionals and parents in all stages of the project and to working together on equal grounds.

## A NEW MODEL FOR ARTISTIC EXPERIMENTATION

In January 2023 in Sabadell, professionals from all four countries proposed a potential implementation model for an artistic encounter, which enables cross-sectoral sharing of expertise while respecting and valuing each sector's role and responsibilities and allows for a shared ownership of the project.

1. The professionals and the artists define specific periods of time during which they observe the children's behaviour in the childcare setting together. This helps to identify and better understand the children's needs, and curiosities to be encouraged. Parents are included in this observation process through discussions, where they share their own observations of their child in the more intimate, family setting.
2. After the observation stage, the two groups (artists and professionals) discuss and define the themes that will make up the artistic proposal, thought up together.
3. Once the proposal is clearly defined, the artists enter a pilot phase, to which the professionals give their feedback on.
4. Once the proposal has been tested and validated, a report summarising the findings including the reflections from the artists, professionals and parents involved, can then make it possible to further co-create either another stage of the proposal, or a completely new one based on the observations made.

# BUILDING EQUITY & EQUALITY BY SHARING EXPERTISE & RESPONSIBILITIES

## THE STARCATCHERS APPROACH

Starcatchers shared their approach to working with external partners in June 2023, highlighting the importance of involving professionals and artists together from the start. This was developed from the learning gained from working with a variety of external partners, artists and professionals and managing expectations whilst ensuring the artistic awakening is not lost or overlooked and keeping the child's rights and voice at the core.

### 1. Need is recognised

- a. Universal children's rights as the base. Is there a particular focus on marginalised group(s)? Is the need recognised by young children? For young children?

### 2. Partners Identified

- a. Arts organisations, Families, Education/voluntary/government, Funders, Artists: who has the relationship with the child? Who needs time to build relationships?

### 3. Shared ethos established

- a. Take a strengths-based approach: artists CAN and SHOULD bring inspiration and ideas. Adults who know children best have the role to support them to express their views and feelings and give due consideration when decisions are being made
- b. Creative experiences should be shared experiences for babies and young children and their adults
- c. Babies' and young children's voices, needs and interests should shape project as it develops

### 4. Commitment

- a. Who wasn't involved in the initial conversations? If young children / parents / carers / professionals weren't involved in early conversations, now is the time to.
- b. For young children: early introduction to experiences through exploration particularly important – observations are key, need to be free to participate (or not) in ways that are right for them, multiple opportunities to be involved
- c. For adults: training/discussions early on and regularly through the project, artists should be involved where possible – everyone needs to understand how the project links to shared values and outcomes, evaluation processes should be embedded throughout the project

### 5. Artistic Experimentation

- a. Artists need time separate from delivery with children
- b. Opportunities for re-engagement with young children and adults to explore/test out new ideas
- c. Where possible, be explicit/vocal about how young children have shaped the work and recognise them as creative partners
- d. What other experts might we need to engage?

### 6. Legacy

- a. What elements of the project will remain in the young child's life?
- b. Further training for staff to share artistic learning and reflect on process
- c. There does not need to be a "final product" – if there is, young children should be involved in development – trialling elements as they develop, as test audiences etc



# DEVELOPING CONFIDENCE IN TAKING PART IN ARTISTIC EXPERIENCES: THE ARTIST'S RESPONSIBILITY

We must be mindful of individuals' own past exposure to cultural and art experiences as these will have an impact on future engagements: they may feel unable to add to the creative process. Vulnerable adults carry all levels of emotions; for example, people in exile sometimes have migration-related trauma. Artistic spaces created for exploration can often become a place where emotions are expressed, and adults do not always feel able to deal with the emotions that may emerge when participating in an artistic experience. We need to be compassionate to those who may not want to engage as this could be a reason why refusal to participate occurs.

It is therefore crucial to **consider the responsibility of the artists in supporting their audience's feelings and ensuring a space is created where professionals and parents are confident to participate in the artistic proposition.** We will outline the example of such a space below, where the artists made a conscious effort to involve the parents and professionals in a compassionate way.

## ART OF THE FIVE SENSES WORKSHOP BY PROJETE NIUS

The Erasmus+ participants attended the workshop "[Art of the 5 senses](#)" in January 2023 in Spain, organised by Projecte Nius and laSala with the children, professionals and parents of a local nursery at the local public library. This music, movement and objects workshop invited children to experience art through their five senses, much like the show it is derived from, *Nius* (Nests). During the workshop, the artists proposed various objects to children and adults: carpets, foam cushions covered with tulle, embroidery and soft toys, balls wrapped in knitted wool with bells inside, bits of tulle fabric, an ocean drum, these were all to stimulate the senses, sight, touch, and hearing.

Several elements contributed to the creation of a space where parents and professionals felt confident to take part :

laSala had requested that the Erasmus+ participants sit around the edges of the room, leaving the central space for the families and professionals, and avoid discussions in order to create a calm and welcoming environment. Everything was designed so that the dynamics of the workshop were driven by the child. The families had also been informed of our presence beforehand, and they were comfortable with our presence in the room.

This was the very first experience of this kind for the children and parents present. laSala's aim was to integrate them fully, making them active participants in the workshop. Once the families had settled in, the artists defined the terms of the workshop with the parents. They were invited to remain seated and to let the children move, sing, dance and use the whole space as they wished. A highlight of the workshop occurred when the artists invited the adults to hold a large tulle veil together, creating a space underneath for children to play. At that moment, children and adults began to play together, and some parents who were initially withdrawn got really involved. There was a great sense of ease and freedom among both the children and the adults, who relaxed and played more freely.

The workshop concluded with a comfortable friendly interaction, supporting further connection between all the participants this time through food. laSala reported that at the beginning, the artistic team wanted to take full responsibility for the implementation of this moment. However, it was realised that the artistic team could not achieve this themselves and, driven by the desire for a project where all participants have equal decision-making power, they instead empowered everyone involved to take on responsibilities and create a sense of community during this moment of the workshop.

## THE ADULT AS A SPECTATOR

Spectators can sometimes be seen as passive, not engaging and this can have unintended impact on experiences, however it is important to highlight that a person may not appear to be actively spectating but in fact they are - it can be our own perceptions that determine what we expect active spectating to appear as.

Relationships during an artistic encounter are of great significance, and if the adult remains withdrawn, or is not included in the artistic proposal, a distant relationship will form between artist, proposal and adult. Children are aware of this newly established relationship and may not feel safe to engage, therefore not immersing themselves fully and confidently in the sensory artistic experience.

A term Starcatchers have come to use is **Significant Adults** which refers to the adult in that moment who holds the most meaningful relationship with the baby or young child. They are the child's primary reference point, and it is impossible for artists to gain the child's trust without first gaining the Significant Adult's. **We believe that our work cannot have an impact on the baby or young child if it does not first affect the Significant Adult.** As soon as the latter can let go of their reflexes of protection and surveillance to focus on the artistic work, the child can begin to feel valued and safe in this moment.

Starcatchers in collaboration firstly with researchers from the University of Exeter and University of Edinburgh and subsequently with the University of Strathclyde developed a list of engagement signals to recognise children's involvement. This research strengthened the importance of separating adult audience expectations and child audience. They should not be the same as appropriate engagement is and should be different. These engagement signals can be used to evaluate expressive arts experiences. Some babies and young children, for example, may not participate in the traditional sense of physically joining in - but are still engaged through signals like absorbed, attuned or even experimental. These engagement signals help us understand how those children can still be inspired by, or benefit from a creative experience.

### PERFORMANCES OF IGO AND UP! BY LAGUNARTE COMPANY



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The shows were programmed at the PREMIÈRES RENCONTRES Festival in March 2022, and at the 2turvenhoog Festival in April 2023. Both performances are a great illustration of what it means to consider both adults and children as spectators. *IGO* is a solo concert act for all audiences that examines and reveals the traces of childhood left in adults, and *UP!* is a musical performance for young children. Kristof Hiriart, artistic director and performer for LagunArte, combines the two on stage, moving seamlessly from one address to the other without losing the audience, and naturally including the child at the centre of the proposal. The combination worked perfectly, with the first musical and spoken part forming the first part of the show for an adult audience, then moving on to *UP!* before returning to the spoken and musical solo part. The transition is only possible by considering each person in the audience - adults and children- as forming a large group of spectators.

Without forcing participation, without changing the tone or address used to reach the different groups, Kristof Hiriart proposes his art erases the boundary between the person and the character and creates a relationship of trust between him and the audience. The adults can immerse themselves entirely, and the hierarchical relationship between children and adults quickly disappears to allow the audience to be collectively amazed. The universal aspect of the language chosen - music and mime - provokes various emotions and thoughts, including laughter and nostalgia. The audience is free to take what they wish from the performance: to be soothed, to analyse, to be moved, without anything being dictated or imposed on them.

## THE ADULT AS A SPECTATOR OF THEIR CHILD THE SPECTATOR

Another way in which significant adults can be moved by an artistic experience is by being spectators of their child being a spectator. For ACTA and 2turvenhoog, this is a way of creating a meaningful connection between adult and child: **if the artistic proposal creates a space where the child feels confident to express themselves and react freely, the adults, who witness that, can in turn free themselves from their fears** (around the child's safety, fear of the unknown and of not being legitimate, of ridicule, etc.) and see their child in a new light.

### BE KIND, BY EMILIE WEISSE CIRCUSTHEATER



*Be Kind* is an intimate theatre experience for babies from 6 to 18 months. In this sensory performance of sound, colour and movement, two artists take you on a sensory journey.

Babies sitting close to the performance are introduced to acrobatics and juggling. During the performance, a heart-warming dialogue develops between the artists and their young audience who are welcomed to join in if they choose to, thus creating a spontaneous interactive performance.

After the performance, the artists invite the babies to explore the stage together. They are allowed to crawl in, out, along and through the set to explore the special materials up close.

Emilie Weisse collaborated with Sabine Hunnius, a researcher at the Baby & Child Research Center of the Radboud University in Nijmegen/Netherlands, for the creation of the performance *Be Kind* to further understand baby and child development to incorporate this into the artistic creation. Research into babies' development and parenthood through artistic experiments with children and their parents was carried out with Sabine Hunnius offering an outside perspective throughout the creative process. For the artists involved, this was a mutually enriching experience, based on the principle that parents are experts on their children.

This artistic process is interesting as it focuses on the children's immersion and thoughts around how the stage is gradually opened up without chaos ensuing. Consideration was given to the negotiation that takes place, between artist and child as well as significant adult. This dual interest allows the adult to fully enjoy the experience and at the same time nourishes the artistic work on parenthood.

# ENVIRONMENT

The various visits, workshops and observations made by the professionals made it possible to establish four principles that we believe are essential for creating an environment conducive to genuine artistic experiences that serve to awaken artistic curiosity.

- 1. Adapt to a child's slower rhythm**
- 2. Indoor/outdoor circulation to develop their curiosity and exploration of the world around them**
- 3. Artistic proposition with the outdoors and nature**
- 4. Welcoming families : rethinking spaces used for the artistic experience**

Some of the places we visited provided highly relevant examples of basic environmental conditions conducive to artistic awakening. We therefore collectively defined a list of basics with a few examples that could illustrate them or be adapted to our European national realities.

## ADAPT TO A CHILD'S SLOWER RHYTHM

**We believe that it is necessary to modify the relationship to time and the rhythm of spaces used by children.** The current daily rhythms are based on adult systems which limit children initiating their own artistic experiences and to develop their own sense of agency where they make choices. An overly strict organisation of the day based on the adult's rhythm can be an obstacle to the implementation of activities. The specific times (for meals, naps, outdoor activities, games) imposed on the child should be questioned. Indeed, by setting a very strict timetable on a limited time slot, the organisation of the day leaves little room for activities that are not linked to basic needs or traditional pedagogy. Consequently, the possibility of including artistic awakening activities is limited.

Professionals who have been able to be more flexible and adapt the times and rhythm of the day noted a stronger bond forged with the child and have been able to improvise and experiment more freely within the activities offered to the children, without the stress of time expectations and deadlines.

### LESS CLOCKS, LESS STRESS - THE DAMMARTIN-EN-GOËLE MODEL

Since June 2022, the childcare centre Les Pitchouns in Dammartin-en-Goële (France) has made the choice to operate without clocks, or any kind of time-telling objects. After a trial week, the professionals noted that they had gotten rid of the superfluous and were focused on the core aspects of their work, and that their stress had reduced due to the lack of time-based imperatives. This method led to a genuine observation of the children's needs and therefore greater respect for each child's own pace. The conclusions were very positive and showed a general shift in the hours of meals and naps for children who finally manifested their hunger or sleepiness without the imperative of the professionals. It especially allowed children who generally ate very little during the fixed lunch time slot to rediscover their bodily needs, and make it known when they felt like eating. With the children being more autonomous and initiating meal and nap times, the professionals could stop chasing time. Now, meals do not occur in a dedicated room or at any specific time. Across all spaces of the childcare centre, and within a rather wide time slot, children who manifest hunger can gather in groups of up to 5 around a table of their choosing, depending on which space they are in, and the meal trays are brought to them.

To complete the reflection allowed by the visit previously presented, the European early years professionals have collectively manifested their interest in modifying the charters and texts governing the activity of early years organisations with regards to the relationship to time, to align more with the rhythm of the child.



# INDOOR/OUTDOOR CIRCULATION TO DEVELOP THEIR CURIOSITY AND EXPLORATION OF THE WORLD AROUND THEM

Following our various visits, particularly to Starcatchers (Scotland), we recognised the importance of stimulation through environment. Indeed, **both indoor and outdoor areas in the facilities used by the children are fundamental for their sensory development.** Stimulation through artistic practice is greatly enhanced when spaces are designed accordingly. Circulation between rooms, the furniture and objects used, and access to the outdoors are all decisive factors in stimulating children. The organisations we visited in Scotland illustrate this with practical examples that have proved their positive impact on the development of very young children. Scotland takes a child-led approach within the early years and their government guidance reflects this.

*'They learn best in environments that inspire them to be curious and creative'*

*- Realising the Ambition, Early Years Guidance (Scotland)*

## CANAL VIEW NURSERY (EDINBURGH - SCOTLAND)

The nursery consists of two large rooms with many different activity modules and a snack area, a garden with a vegetable garden and a rain shelter, and a small wooded area with a fence. There is also a space reserved for parents at the entrance of the nursery, where the children's productions are displayed and where they can reflect and connect with what their child has been experiencing within the nursery. In general, the activities offered to the children are not organised between indoors and outdoors according to a defined schedule. In fact, the premises remain open at all times, allowing the children to move freely around the garden and vegetable garden in the presence of professionals in each area.



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# INDOOR/OUTDOOR CIRCULATION TO DEVELOP THEIR CURIOSITY AND EXPLORATION OF THE WORLD AROUND THEM

## PARTNER PROVIDER SMILECHILDCARE UNDER 3s (EDINBURGH - SCOTLAND)

The visit of the Smilechildcare Under 3s nursery in Edinburgh was a real discovery for several professionals as it highlighted the stark differences in the various national models in terms of space, circulation and pedagogy.

The garden is accessible without constraint at any time of the day and throughout the year. The director of the centre stresses: "In Scotland, there is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothes". Clothes and blankets are provided for children who wish to go out in cold weather, and a room in the facility is dedicated to warming up children when they come back in (hot water bottles, heaters, etc.). The centre is organised in such a way that the garden can be used for several activities: children can choose to play there (a sheltered creative space is installed), but also to sleep and eat. There are books everywhere. The professionals' wish is that the child should not feel constrained in time and space to experience a moment of reading. They can pick up books throughout the centre, even outside, to play, create, and linger over the book or just its front cover as soon as their curiosity leads them to do so.

Spaces and obstacles are installed to stimulate children's physical and creative development: a stone path for balance, a slide made of ladders and pallets whose difficulty is readapted with the growth of the little ones. To a question from a French professional about the possibility of a child throwing one of the stones on the path at another child, the director explained that this rarely happens, and that when it does, they do not say "Stop" or "Don't do that" but show how to apply a "gentle/kind" touch to their peers. Children do not have to put things away after use. Adults put things away at the end of the day, and children are encouraged to help, but not forced.

***To support cognitive development the learning environment should be rich in opportunities for children to engage with concepts and foster skills for learning, such as reasoning, creativity and problem solving. The choice of experiences on offer should reflect an environment of open-ended possibilities in which children can feel intrinsically motivated to explore and investigate through play - including taking calculated risks and learning from mistakes.***

### - Realising the Ambition, Early Years Guidance (Scotland)

The space is set up so that all the children can climb on anything they want and crawl round: tractor wheels, overturned cots, chairs, in order to work on their motor skills. A space for the permanent stimulation of tastes and smells is set up, proposing the creation of dough (for cakes, to knead), games around herbs (basil plant, mint), and spices scent.

For meal times, everyone is seated at the same level thanks to adapted seats: 6 little ones in high chairs (3 months - 2 years), 4 children on benches (2 to 3 years) and the adults on low chairs. The aim is to connect with the children and support equality. An intermediate room is dedicated to the meals of the 6 older children. It is used so that they can prepare the installation of the tables, the chairs, the table by themselves.

The sand room is used for handling sand, distributed in several containers (tray, vase, pot, plate, in a glass table). This room was designed this way because the professionals consider that it is necessary to be able to offer several spaces to children under 3 years of age to stimulate them more. In a corner of the room, a space is dedicated to bottle time. It is built on the model of what a child can find at home to bring them back into a reassuring and comforting atmosphere (an armchair, a fireplace, frames and candle holders). Between lunchtime and 2pm, the room is swept and mattresses are set up to create a nap area. This space and the free movement allowed within it, like the whole facility, is intended to facilitate the transition from one place to another in the child's life: from home to the nursery, from the nursery to the kindergarten, from the kindergarten to the school. By providing reference points and freedom to explore, the child can more easily understand the sequence of developmental places.

# ARTISTIC PROPOSITION WITH THE OUTDOORS AND NATURE

With access to the outdoors, the artistic experience can be developed even further, stimulating the senses in a different way by allowing encounters with the natural environment from an early age. Being outdoors offers a sense of calm and wonder for both the child and adult.

## CANAL VIEW NURSERY (EDINBURGH - SCOTLAND) AND STARCATCHERS

During one visit, we were able to witness the implementation of an artistic workshop led by Starcatchers within Canal View Nursery. Led by two of the company's artists, the workshop took place in two stages: the first in the morning for half of the children in the facility, and the second in the afternoon for the other half. The artists had placed various modules in the small wood (paintings on suspended materials, a journey on wooden walkways, tractor tyres, huts, throwing light balls on adhesive, chalk and water, etc.) among which the children could wander independently. Artists and professionals remained present to help or guide them through the various stages of the workshop.



## EXPECTING SOMETHING PROJECT, STARCATCHERS

This project invites parents from the neighbourhood to meet weekly with their young and very young children in the gardens of Starcatchers premises. Around a campfire area, the artists set up paints, pencils, a play area, and offer lunch to families as part of the artistic proposal. Everyone is free to use whatever material they wish, without constraint, in this outdoor environment. Some families do not have access to safe outdoor spaces, this opportunity offers a different artistic experience for families.

# WELCOMING FAMILIES: RETHINKING SPACES USED FOR THE ARTISTIC EXPERIENCE

To fully integrate adults and children into a shared collective experience, we need to work on the layout so that they feel comfortable and ready to receive the artistic proposal. **If the audience is to be ready to share and receive the artistic performance, the environment in which it takes place needs to be a reassuring, trusting space.** Two examples, from Spain and the Netherlands, show the work on the environment created by the artistic teams to make space a strategic place for an artistic encounter.

## LASALA'S CENTRE AND HOW IT OPENED TO THE LOCAL COMMUNITY AND NEW AUDIENCES

LaSala's premises, located in Sabadell's District 3, consist of a 300-seat auditorium and a large entrance hall - a space for encounters and socialising, reading, and art exhibitions.

Driven by their value of equality, laSala want to make their premises a welcoming space where everyone can feel safe, valued, listened to and confident. The main hall is firstly designed as a space for exchange, rest and reading. Ottomans, armchairs and cushions occupy most of the space, and books on the themes covered in the programmed shows are available for all thanks to a recent partnership with the Biblioteca del Nord. This initiative was born from the shared idea that weaving a vast cultural network helps to promote culture among children, young people and their families, and the desire to extend and deepen the relationship between the spectator and the show. Visitors can also scan a QR code to obtain a reading guide, a selection of works that can be found in the city's libraries. Finally, for the sake of inclusion, the organisation offers a space dedicated to neurodivergent children, with noise-reducing headphones and a teepee in which children can isolate themselves in case of over-stimulation.

LaSala affirms their desire to be attentive to and open to the local community, and in particular to the surrounding neighbourhood. This desire for openness is materialised in the space by the choice to have large bay windows in the centre's main hall, in order to be seen by and to see the outside. Each window is dedicated to an intersectoral action organised by laSala.

## STUK IS EEN NIEUWE SITUATIE - CIE SQUEZZ

**A MULTIDISCIPLINARY IMMERSIVE PERFORMANCE SUITABLE FOR 2YRS+ / AGE : FROM 2 YEARS OLD**

Choreographer Anne-Beth Schuurmans, together with scenographer Elian Smits and sound artist Dennis van Tilburg, takes young children and the adults who take care of them along in a living composition full of new, unexpected situations.

Before the performances, Anne-Beth takes the time to organise workshops and encounters with the audiences who will be invited to the performance. It's a choice made to create a calm, reassuring environment, where the performers are no strangers to the children. So when they ask them to take part in the performance, the children are not surprised to be invited to the stage by strangers.

# RELATIONSHIP WITH ORGANISATIONS

Partners, Funders, Policy/Decisions Makers and Public Authorities (hereafter known as “organisations”) are integral to ensuring our European principles are recognised and observed to allow the necessary actions and projects to successfully happen. **In addition to the principles it is important to acknowledge the need to change the current hierarchical relationship between project organisers and project funders, going towards more trust-based partnerships.**

During the sixth learning exchange, in Spain in January 2023, we gave the floor to a group of artists and a group of professionals. Each group formulated their needs and expectations of organisations. Here are suggestions that would support an easier set up for artistic awareness projects:

- **Trust from Organisations to Professionals:** ensuring project management freedom on the basis of their expertise and closeness to the community
- **Trust from Organisations to Artists:** respecting all the steps for experimentation and creation, without the pressure of results, production, and outcomes
- **Organisations, Professionals and Artists working together** to enable access to arts and culture and embed this practice within early childhood from birth



# TRUST FROM ORGANISATIONS TO PROFESSIONALS: ENSURING PROJECT MANAGEMENT FREEDOM ON THE BASIS OF THEIR EXPERTISE AND CLOSENESS TO THE COMMUNITY

### **THE RECOGNITION OF THE NEED FOR ART IN THE CURRICULUMS AND CURRENT REGULATIONS**

Among the needs formulated by early years professionals, that of an inscription of artistic awakening in the curriculum was mentioned very frequently. Indeed, including the annual need for artistic awakening in the curriculum and regulatory texts of the cities would ensure its recognition and understanding. It would thus become a structural element of the early years and education organisations' activities rather than an ad-hoc thing that depends on the state of the activities calendar or public spending. To this end, the French model has defined a charter for artistic awareness, which is included in its circulars.

### **FREEDOM OF EXPERIMENTATION BASED THE SCOTTISH MODEL**

Based on their observations during the previous learning activities, the early years professionals all agreed on the exemplary character of the Scottish model, which allows early years organisations to push experimentation to much higher levels than their European counterparts. The very free entry of artists into the heart of early years organisations, the relationship with the outdoors and with nature, the sustainable use of recycled and/or second-hand objects are just as many elements that are free from the constraints imposed in the other Erasmus+ project partner organisations. This flexible framework, considered to be extreme by other professionals due to perceived risks, opens up a field of possibilities and offers an inexhaustible source of stimulation for artistic creation and propositions addressed to children and parents.

# TRUST FROM ORGANISATIONS TO ARTISTS : RESPECTING ALL THE STEPS FOR EXPERIMENTATION AND CREATION, WITHOUT THE PRESSURE OF RESULTS, PRODUCTION AND EVALUATION

### **SIGNIFICANT ADMINISTRATIVE AND LOGISTICAL REQUIREMENTS**

An artistic project has several administrative, logistical and material needs in order to become a reality. Indeed, its implementation involves several partners, thus requiring the project leader to have access to a network and more or less significant material and human resources for the administrative and logistical management of the project and for fundraising. Being financed by public funds also implies accountability, and therefore continuous evaluation work. Funding partners criteria's and expectations can limit the freedom that comes from authentic artistic awakening. To this end, the French model has defined a charter for artistic awareness, which is included in its circulars.

### **ACTION, REFLECTION, PAUSE**

Beyond basic project management, all countries agreed on the need for Artists to have time dedicated entirely to play and exploration embedded within the project timeline. An artistic project requires time for conceptualisation, preparation, implementation, and evaluation. This is separate to logistical and evaluation expectations and are necessary for the development of the artistic vision. We propose a format for the development of a project that would include times of action, reflection, and pauses.

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF ART FOR ART'S SAKE**

Finally, the idea of art as an end in itself, not as a tool or instrument to meet other needs, was again emphasised. Art brings its own benefits, apart from the sciences, especially educational and pedagogical ones, we would like this vision to be shared by everyone involved within an artistic project.

# **ORGANISATIONS, PROFESSIONALS AND ARTISTS WORKING TOGETHER TO ENABLE ACCESS TO ARTS AND CULTURE AND EMBED THIS PRACTICE WITHIN EARLY CHILDHOOD FROM BIRTH**

## **TRUST BETWEEN ALL PARTNERS**

More recognition of the skills and expertise of professionals is fundamental in the establishment of artistic and cultural experiences within their work place. Professionals request more trust on the part of the decision-makers in the design and planning of artistic projects with Artists. This reinforces the implementation of equality between everyone involved. The validation stages are very meticulous and require full approval from organisation representatives. Greater trust would enable the key players and on-ground experts to collaborate successfully in the implementation of artistic awakening projects. Trust allows for the creation of an environment where everyone can communicate their limits and boundaries. It is important that these are agreed at the very beginning of a collaboration.

# SUSTAINABILITY

Here, we draw from the European Union's definition of sustainability, "*Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs.*"

In this final part, we will particularly focus on **environmental and economic sustainability**, but we do not exclude social equity, which we chose to include in the first part of this document. We believe that guaranteeing the equality/equity of all participants and taking into account their specific needs, identities and economic realities is the foundation of an authentic artistic awakening practice.

# SUSTAINABILITY, ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITMENT : QUESTIONING OUR ARTISTIC PRACTICE IN LIGHT OF THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY

The younger generations are not responsible for the degradation of our ecosystems, yet they will most likely be the ones to face the worst of it. In light of the current climate crisis, **we believe it is urgent to interrogate our work with/for babies and children and re-examine our use of natural resources to provide alternatives that demonstrate the possibility of a more conscious, ecological artistic practice.**

During this project, we met several artists and childcare facilities, particularly in Scotland, that are already committed to this re-examination.

## RECYCLING & SECOND-HAND OBJECTS IN SMILECHILDCARE UNDER 3s NURSERY, EDINBURGH



The nursery demonstrates a strong commitment to environmental sustainability and ecology.

The garden is accessible without constraint at any time of the day, throughout the year, and like the indoor spaces of the facilities, it contains only recycled objects, tools and materials.

The laundry is only dried in the open air, throughout the year.

The water children play with outside is collected rainwater.

The objects are neither toys nor plastic reproductions: children use porcelain or ceramic plates, glass cups, real lamps, real vases, real cutlery. This is firstly due to the fact that plastic is banned from the facility, but it is also to enable children to better understand the real weight of objects from an early age and to grasp the risks of handling sharp or heavy objects. The objects are collected through either recycling or donations.



# SUSTAINABILITY, ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITMENT : QUESTIONING OUR ARTISTIC PRACTICE IN LIGHT OF THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY

## EXPO-OH!, NAT GRAS COMPANY

*“Expo-Oh! is a special exhibition. The installations consist of everyday recognizable materials, objects move and more installations appear. Performers change the installations; they direct your gaze and encourage you to take action. The result: an interactive visual interplay!”* This performance, created by Goele Van Dijck, Belgian artist and performer, took place in April 2023, in the heart of the Stedenwijk district in Almere, as part of the 2turvenhoog festival.

In 2020, the reduction of activities due to the COVID-19 crisis gave Goele Van Dijck more time to rethink her relationship with the performing space, with others, and with the outdoors. It also gave her time to do a deep clean of her warehouse. However, outings were restricted and it was necessary to create with available and nearby materials: she naturally turned to her warehouse and surroundings to collect wood, branches, trunks, bicycle wheels, kitchen objects, chairs, ropes, blankets, shutters, bedsprings, iron kitchen pots. Thus was born *Expo-Oh!*.

## FLOAT, BY KERRY CLELAND

Inspired by the healing qualities of water, *Float* is a show for babies from birth to 18 months and their adults, currently being developed by Starcatchers artist Kerry Cleland. Carpets and cushions welcome the audience, surrounding an “aquarium”, a rectangular tank filled with water. In shades of blue and metallic, the stage area immerses children and adults into the depths of the sea.

Set designer Alison Brown built the set elements and props entirely from recycled materials. The carpets on the floor are made from fabric scraps sourced directly from factories, and the large cushions and seats are second-hand and have also been covered in scraps. During a post-performance discussion, Kerry Cleland explains that she would have liked a larger and round water tank, but that the tank they used was the only one they had available. Until a better container can be sourced sustainably, the artists will continue to work with this one.

Starcatchers integrate and promote the consideration of environmental concerns and impacts into their decision-making and activities across the organisation and to partnerships. They have a sustainability policy where it is recognised that Starcatchers’ experiences should contribute to children having a greener, healthier environment to grow up in.

# PUBLIC FUNDING THROUGH TIME: SUSTAINABLE RELATIONSHIPS WITH FUNDERS FOR SUSTAINABLE PROJECTS

In order for authentic artistic awakening practices that ensure that all participants are valued and given the tools necessary to be on equal grounds, and create an environment which takes into account nature, the child's needs, and the inclusion of parents, to have an impact, they need to be economically sustainable.

Hence, in addition to integrating a commitment to environmental sustainability, **we recommend moving away from a “project-based” funding model to more sustainable, long-term funding for more sustainable work.** Rather than being an illustration of how long-term funding can lead to sustainable projects, the example of the Ouder en Kind festival demonstrates why it is necessary and what long-term funding *could* do.

## THE OUDER EN KIND FESTIVAL, ALMERE

The Ouder en Kind Festival (Parent and Child Festival) takes place every year in the Stedenwijk district of Almere, and offers parents and children aged 0-14 various activities to do together in the field of art, culture, sports, games and health. Vesna Dragojević, a social worker and long-time resident of the neighbourhood, founded the festival in 2017, driven by a desire to create something that would bring people in the neighbourhood together.

As part of her work, she asked the children in her care to think about the world they dreamed of for the future. Inspired by their answers, she invited them to share these dreams and ambitions with their parents, only to find that the majority of them did not want to do so because they felt that their parents would not pay attention or be interested. So she asked them what they would like to do with their parents: the desire to spend more time together was predominant. This gave her the idea to create the festival, offering fun and creative activities that bring parents and their children face to face and allow them to get to know each other better. For example, for several years the festival has offered a time when the parent and child have to draw each other's portrait. This requires them to look at each other for a long time, making this activity a real moment of connection between parent and child.

Having a local presence is essential for Vesna to be able to create for and with the local community. For her, having been in the area for a long time, not only for her work but also as a former resident, has been a factor in the success of the festival.

Despite a strong, sustainable relationship with the community, the Ouder en Kind Festival remains fragile due to funding uncertainty. This demonstrates the need for funders to recognise and support grassroots initiatives in the long term, going beyond project-based funding.

# CONCLUSION

The principles set out in this document are fundamentally about enabling access to arts and culture from birth and recognising the significance of embedding artistic awakening within early childhood practice, if we are to truly acknowledge the rights of children and babies, we must change tradition and incorporate early childhood artistic awakening authentically across Europe.



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# PRINCIPLES

Based on our experience and observations during the specific context of our project, we have defined general principles that are fundamental for cultural health as a basic need of all human beings. We defend that it is urgent and necessary:

**TO WELCOME AND RECOGNISE THE BABY AND CHILD'S INNATE ARTISTIC GENIUS BY DESIGNING AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE THEY CAN EXPERIMENT AND DECIDE FREELY**

**TO CREATE SPACES FOR ARTISTS, BABIES, YOUNG CHILDREN AND PARENTS, AND PROFESSIONALS TO EXCHANGE AND EXPLORE THROUGH AN ARTISTIC PROCESS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE EDUCATIONAL, CULTURAL, AND SOCIAL SETTINGS RELATED TO EARLY CHILDHOOD**

**TO RECOGNISE THE RICHNESS OF THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE FAMILIES OF EACH COMMUNITY**

**TO GIVE EQUAL VALUE TO THE CONTRIBUTION OF BABIES, YOUNG CHILDREN, PARENTS, ARTISTS, AND PROFESSIONALS INVOLVED IN THE ARTISTIC PROCESS SO AS TO ENSURE AN AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCE.**

**TO PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES TO SHARE CROSS-SECTORAL KNOWLEDGE, AND ENGAGE WITH ACADEMIC RESEARCH, TO DEVELOP UNDERSTANDING AND AWARENESS, BRING NEW PERSPECTIVES AND ALLOW FOR LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY.**

**TO RECOGNISE THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ARTS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD AND THE EXPERTISE OF ARTISTS AND PROFESSIONALS IN THE DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF ARTISTIC AWAKENING ACTIVITIES.**

**TO INTERROGATE OUR ARTISTIC PRACTICE IN WORK FOR/WITH BABIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN IN RECOGNITION THAT WE MUST RESPOND TO THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY.**

**TO CONSOLIDATE AND GUARANTEE ARTISTIC AWAKENING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD THROUGH LONG-TERM AND SUSTAINABLE FUNDING.**

**TO RECOGNISE AND UNDERSTAND THAT ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION IN ARTS AND CULTURE HAS INTRINSIC VALUE AND ESSENTIAL PURPOSE IN THE CHILD'S OPTIMAL DEVELOPMENT AND IS A RIGHT OF EVERY CHILD FROM BIRTH: NOT ONLY A TOOL, FOR EDUCATION OR SOCIAL PURPOSES.**

*Let us imagine a Europe where children are at the centre and have the opportunity to explore their creativity, where art is an integral part of education and where respect and appreciation for cultural diversity are fundamental values.*