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This intermediary short policy brief presents the ongoing country-specific and EU policy lessons and recommendations of the dialoguing@rts project in its mid-results. For the full overview of country, cross-country and EU recommendations, they will be available at the end of the project.

INTRODUCTION

dialoguing@rts is a funded Horizon Europe project, which aims to investigate how a dialogue-based and participative performing arts education advances cultural literacy, social cohesion and inclusion. Societies across Europe and beyond urgently need stronger social cohesion to respond to challenges such as right extremism, social fragmentation, inequalities and polarisation. Cultural literacy, understood as a dialogical practice, offers a means to engage with cultural diversity, fostering mutual understanding, democratic dialogue, and a shared sense of belonging. Through diverse cultural heritage and living arts practices, it can also help shape a post-colonial and inclusive European post-migration identity.

INTERMEDIARY RESULTS OF D@RTS

Analysis of educational and cultural policies, strategies and curricula across consortium countries (cf. project deliverable D1.1), as well as within the EU and Council of Europe frameworks, revealed that **cultural literacy is not yet an established** or clearly defined concept in these fields. While both **cultural and educational policy documents frequently express ambitions** for inclusion and social cohesion, **they often lack concrete implementation strategies**.

In addition, our research shows that **culture and education are divided into different ministries**, sections, and funding programs. Government entities are often isolated from each other, which makes cross-cutting fields like cultural literacy — dealing with both culture and education — particularly challenging to address. Although political strategy papers emphasise the link between culture and education in the context of social cohesion, it is clear that the **relevant authorities and ministries do not always work closely together**. This is also evident in the fact that **formats that promote cultural literacy are often not part of school curricula** but take place outside of them as non-formal education. Importantly, the role of the performing arts in education for cultural competence and social cohesion can still be expanded. Research in this field should reflect and analyse defined policy goals, too.

To move toward social inclusion, **cultural diversity should not be treated merely as an external goal but as an internal institutional practice in bottom-up structures**. Educational systems and policy frameworks must themselves embody diversity by engaging practitioners from varied demographic and cultural backgrounds and acknowledging multiple knowledge forms of the community. **Promoting equal participation of all higher education students and primary and secondary school pupils in school activities and in decision-making processes can further strengthen diversity, dialogue, and social cohesion in practice**.

In the following, we present country-specific intermediary policy briefs, involving the countries in the d@rts project, where the case studies and field research take place. As the situation across countries is highly diverse, the briefs differ in content and length. Finally, we present an intermediary policy brief at the EU level.

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In each country section, 'Voices from the Field' presents insights from interviews, observations, workshops, and case studies, illustrating how policies are experienced, interpreted, and negotiated in practice.

1. Finland

1.1 Conceptual Review

In the curricula of formal education, cultural literacy is mostly discussed indirectly through terms such as *Cultural competence* (including interaction and self-expression) and *Multiliteracy*, which are defined as transversal competence areas. Elements of cultural literacy learning are also included in *International Competence*, one of the areas that need to be covered in high school according to the law, and in *Cultural and Global Competence*, one of the transversal competences.

According to the core curricula, multiliteracy is needed in the interaction, interpretation, and production of culturally diverse messages in multimodal texts and the surrounding world. Culture produced by children, and cultural services appropriate for children, are mentioned as channels for developing multiliteracy in the curricula. There should be enough space in the curricula for both students' own creative cultural expression, and for experiencing culture provided by others, for example, concerts, dance performances, and theatre plays at school and during visits to cultural organisations and arts groups of different types and sizes.

While the ability of cultural practices to foster cultural literacy competencies is acknowledged in Finnish curricula, in the Finnish core curricula, cultural competence or multiliteracy is not directly connected to performing arts education. However, there is convincing evidence that performing arts, as interactive, embodied, and multisensory activities, provide opportunities for learning cultural literacy as a dialogical competence needed in a culturally diverse world. Performing arts education should be given a more prominent role in cultural literacy learning.

1.2 Strategic Policy Review

The most striking finding in the field of formal education is that education in the performing arts is very limited in quantitative terms. Art education experts in Finland have emphasised that the hours allocated to music in education should be increased, and that dance and theatre should be established as independent subjects in the curriculum of primary and general upper secondary education.

There is a positive development targeted for 2029: high school students will be able to take the matriculation examination in music, visual art and physical education, although the current political and economic climate is not favourable to formal and non-formal art education. Major funding cuts are directed to both the cultural sector and third-sector organisations, which are often key partners and experts in promoting accessibility. For example, the Finnish parliament decided not to continue funding for Art Testers [Taidetestaajat] as of autumn 2024. Art Testers is a broad cultural education programme in formal education, reaching all 8th graders. Similarly, *Culture for All* [Kulttuuria kaikille] faced funding cuts in 2025. The cuts have a severe impact on cultural literacy and transcultural interaction, as the *Culture for All* service provides activities and training on the accessibility of culture, equity, inclusion, and diversity. Policymakers should not risk equal access to culture or restrict opportunities for cultural literacy learning that offers learners tools for building a culturally diverse, inclusive, and cohesive society.

Culture and education are part of a single ministry, the Ministry of Education and Culture. The government submitted to Parliament an Education Policy Report in 2021 and a Cultural Policy Report in 2025. At the local level, cultural and educational policies are handled in separate sectors within municipalities.

1.3 Voices from the Field

There is a constant debate in Finland about children and young people not getting enough physical exercise. One solution could be to give dance an official status in the curriculum (or at least add dance to the school day), since statistics show that dance is a popular hobby and not accessible to all due to economic and other challenges. Another ongoing discussion concerns the lonely afternoons of children after their relatively short school days and the 'hobby rally' of families in the evening. As a solution, it has been suggested that school days could include afternoon activities. While this is worth developing, voluntary after-school activities should not replace education in performing arts within the curriculum. Performing arts education should be available for all throughout the school path as part of formal education. Since cultural literacy learning is a long and dynamic process, it needs to be promoted consistently at all levels of education.

Multiliteracy is seen in the curricula as a tool for participation, but *Participation and involvement* is also a competence area of its own. Skills of participation must be supported more – through the students' boards and beyond – for the school democracy to become fully operational and for it to provide training for influential and transformative activity:

- It is crucial to provide education and resources for schools and teachers to support students' agency, participation and influence in the school organisation, the surrounding community and in the wider world. The role of performing arts as a channel of participation and change-making must be emphasised, since performing arts education helps to imagine alternative worlds and futures and tackle challenges at different levels.
- Cultures of groups such as the Sámi and Swedish language minorities, as well as other groups present in the surrounding community, should have a greater role in education.

Cultural participation and extracurricular art education have the potential to both produce and prevent inequalities and exclusion. Therefore, the accessibility and inclusiveness of non-formal basic education in the arts must be advanced with regard to linguistic, regional, and economic factors, age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, ethnic, religious, or cultural background. Cultural diversity and intercultural relations should be addressed in basic education in the arts to prevent societal fragmentation and polarisation. The leadership, decision-making and staff recruitment in institutions responsible for arts, culture and education should be diverse in terms of age, ethnicity, abilities, disabilities, genders, languages, religions, cultures and sexual orientations.

1.4 Finland Intermediary Recommendations

- To support cultural literacy as a transformative competence fostering cultural democracy, **policies promoting equal opportunities of cultural participation and performing arts education must be developed together with various population groups, such as children and young people.**
- **Cross-sectoral collaboration can promote social inclusion and cohesion.** For example, the municipalities can make cultural education plans through cooperation between education, cultural and youth services. Furthermore, the opportunities for engaging in arts and cultural services should also be developed within the care and wellbeing services.
- **Direct enough financial and other resources to municipalities to make and implement cultural education plans for all levels of compulsory education. They should become a binding part of the curriculum in formal education.**
- **Promote cultural democracy** to ensure performing arts education is accessible to all backgrounds and actively involves diverse groups and forms of participation.
- **Strengthen cultural literacy as a collective competence at the organisational and societal levels** to support dialogic, collaborative learning in organisations, schools, and communities and to foster social cohesion, creativity, and future-oriented thinking.
- **Support anticipatory activities** such as cultural outreach work to offer opportunities for cultural participation to children and young people who are at risk of becoming excluded from the existing cultural services because of socio-economic or other reasons.

2. Germany

2.1 Conceptual Review

The German definitions in the context of cultural literacy varied through educational and policy analyses. D@rts researchers have taken the terms *Kulturelle Bildung* and *Kulturelle Kompetenz* to address cultural literacy (Deliverable 1.2). In the context of arts education, the term *Kulturelle Bildung* has been used in informal settings to enhance cultural competencies, self-reflection, and the ability to navigate the complexities of today's diverse society in Germany. The difference between *Kulturelle Bildung* and *Kulturelle Kompetenz* in the German case lies in the fact that *Bildung* focuses on cultural participation and self-formation through the arts, whereas *Kompetenz* focuses more on skills to manage cultural diversity and intercultural interactions. However, no systematic evidence of the use of *Kompetenz* or *Bildung* across different German Länder (states) was found (BKJ, 2024; D1.2).

Germany's early selection and tracking in education creates barriers for students and pupils with a migration history and often leads to segregation. The literature review states that some music and dance projects with young refugees can foster joy, empowerment, and belonging, while also highlighting the need for inclusive music education policies.

2.2 Strategic Policy Review

Germany's federal structure offers inclusive perspectives on federal, state, and municipal levels in the context of cultural literacy. It is interesting that not only cultural and educational ministries but also ministries from other branches, such as family, seniors, women, and youth, are involved in developing policies on inclusivity, inclusion and social cohesion. Non-governmental (third-sector) involvement is also evident in Germany regarding inclusive arts education and cultural literacy.

Cultural Literacy (as "translated" into *Kulturelle Kompetenz* and *Kulturelle Bildung*) is understood differently across the cultural sectors and formal/informal education. Cultural policy papers support and develop programs to implement cultural literacy formats; however, their integration into education policies and implementation in

the curriculum still lags behind. There are some initiatives, such as the “*Kultur macht stark*” program, to implement certain formats, but the strategies remain excluded from formal spaces (D1.2).

Local NGOs, cultural associations, and non-formal actors depend heavily on short-term project-based funding for *Kulturelle Kompetenz* and *Kulturelle Bildung* projects, which limits the strategic capacity and sustainability of inclusive local cultural programs. Formal education systems, including teacher education programs (specifically music education), show slow adaptation to transcultural and diverse approaches.

2.3 Voices from the Field

As a local exemplification, we have outlined some d@rts field activities that illustrate challenges and opportunities in performing arts education, for example:

- Artists and practitioners with migrant and refugee histories are often included only precariously (paid per concert), limiting the scope of inclusion and the sustainability of the diversity of voices.
- *Kulturelle Bildung* and *Kulturelle Kompetenz* terms function in policies to a certain degree to address cultural literacy from a German perspective, but in the communities, other terms such as *Musikverstehen* (understanding music), *Musikmachen* (doing music), or appreciating dance and music, are used to address the general public as a simplified version, as other definitions have created only further confusion in communities (Interview with Ronja Kampschulte and Christian Rolle, 2026).
- At the Lower Saxony State Theatre Hanover, “*Junges Schauspiel*” offers youth theatre clubs to enhance diversity and social inclusion. The clubs range from Bi–PoC-only to targeting only Turkish-speaking youth, to FLINTA* and multilingual refugee groups, to accessible, barrier-free theatre for people with any disability that can be adopted by every state theatre (Field research, WP7).
- Community managers argue that diversity of voices from communities, non-formal actors, and artists, which are not properly represented in decision-making, is even more important when developing inclusive policies. Different definitions of cultural literacy, *Kulturelle Bildung* and *Kulturelle Kompetenz* remain unclear at the regional and state levels.

Voices from the field show that the use of *Kulturelle Bildung* and *Kulturelle Kompetenz* seems out of place in the community practices as well, and is perceived as elitist and exclusive outside of professional contexts. For local communities, *Kulturelle Bildung* implicates confusion and creates reservations about community practices. One of the community managers that d@rts work with explains:

“In the professional context within our relatively small field of municipal cultural mediation, as well as in professional exchange at conferences and symposia, the term “Kulturelle Bildung” is used quite unambiguously. However, in cooperation with schools, associations, other non-specialist partners, and target groups, the term “cultural education” quickly becomes exclusive and elitist, which is why I use it cautiously or sometimes not at all in these contexts.” (Interview with Karl Philip Engelland, 2026).

Exclusive terminology, centralised programming, and institutional silos prevent different population groups from developing the cultural competencies that are essential for social cohesion. The cultural mediator model (*Kulturagent*innen*)—the involvement of trained mediators who work across the boundaries of education, arts, community, and administration—offers a proven path to building inclusive cultural competence, which might be a critical success factor for maintaining and developing a democratic culture. In an era of increasing diversity and social fragmentation, cultural actors represent an important infrastructure for participatory democracy. Their institutionalisation at the local, national, and EU levels is not a cultural amenity, but a necessity for social resilience.

Further policy interaction between culture and education from the field research input shows:

- Cultural programs in formal education should not only be part of the curriculum, but also be offered in the morning, not as “after-school care” or optional courses.
- There is a weak coordination between cultural and educational policies. Lack of dialogue challenges due to fragmented and separate ministerial responsibilities. 13 out of 16 States have divided ministerial structures, separating education from culture. For example, in Lower Saxony, culture and education are divided between the “*Niedersächsisches Kultusministerium*” and the “*Niedersächsisches Ministerium für Wissenschaft und Kultur*”.
- There is a clear disconnect between policy and academic terminology, and lived cultural artistic practices and community understanding of cultural literacy and its effects. Young people and communities are rarely involved in defining cultural literacy.

- Policy gap: Funding and policy frameworks do not support long-term, locally responsive, and embedded cultural literacy practices. Top-down funding mechanisms and traditional funding strategies favour large institutions that struggle to address local needs.

2.4 Germany Intermediary Recommendations

- **Cultural and educational institutions should integrate inclusivity and community engagement** into their core mandate.
- **Embed non-formal actors and NGOs in formal decision-making.** Include cultural associations, local artists, and local communities in the decision-making in policy design and strategies.
- **Cross-ministerial and cross-regional/national policy frameworks:** Establish a structured multidimensional coordination mechanism to create bottom-up structures and create objectives and definitions that are understood in the same way by different actors.
- **Shift from project-based funding to long-term funding models** (that favour local actors and diversity of the artistic fields and meanings).
- **Emphasis on *Kulturelle Bildung/Kompetenz*: Shift from “add on” to daily practice.** Ensure it is shared by local communities by embedding it in the formal curriculum.

3. Italy

3.1 Conceptual Review

For Italy, it should be noted that the term Cultural Literacy, translated into Italian as *alfabetizzazione culturale*, lacks a precise meaning and, if interpreted literally, conveys a meaning significantly different from that intended by the EU and from the one adopted in this project. The Italian translation tends to refer to the acquisition of very general and basic competences, concerning a minimum or adequate level of knowledge and interpretative tools that enable individuals to understand the cultural and social reality in which they live. It more closely refers to an idea of historical, artistic, and literary knowledge, familiarity with shared cultural references, and the ability to understand public and media communication.

This gap represents an important element to consider, as within national policies—particularly when connected or aligned with European frameworks or international reference points—the risk of misinterpretation and misapplication is present. Policy decision-makers may, in fact, interpret the framework in a manner that is not fully consistent with its intended meaning. What may be perceived as a merely linguistic issue instead highlights the necessity of ensuring that divergences in meaning do not generate problems or risks, especially for the primary addressees of policies (citizens). This issue is particularly evident in the present project, where communication with the citizens (including policy makers) in Italy continuously requires clarification of what is meant by *cultural literacy*. It therefore also raises a question concerning the right of access to knowledge and understanding for all. In the Italian context, the closest corresponding terms refer to *Intercultural Education* and *Intercultural Competences*.

3.2 Strategic Policy Review

Policy review represents an important premise for reflecting on the role of policies. The national level represents a central level that establishes general guidelines. With regard to certain aspects, this level defines a value framework of reference and primarily guides regional and local/municipal action in the fields of intercultural education, social cohesion, inclusion, and the value of the arts. Regional and local levels tend instead to focus more on practical or, in any case, more concrete guidelines. In itself, this does not necessarily constitute a limitation, as regional and municipal levels are more capable of taking local specificities into account and thus interpreting citizens’ needs more effectively, while also enhancing local resources. A weakness that has emerged in relation to certain policies—particularly those concerning culture and the arts—is fragmentation. Good practices are often developed across territories with limited communication and networking. This may also generate inequalities affecting specific territories or groups of individuals.

The issue of decision-making power is crucial. Policies generally are constructed with a top-down structure, particularly those adopted at the national governmental level. What is particularly relevant to reflect upon is the regional and, above all, the local level, where policy addressees may exercise greater influence, especially through the work of NGOs and social enterprises. The latter operate in direct contact with citizens and influence processes of interpretation and valorisation. This cannot be defined as a participatory or bottom-up approach. However, it is important to take it into account, as on-the-ground interpretative work concerning policies has,

and may continue to have, the capacity to influence policies related to Intercultural Education, Arts Education, and access to and engagement in the performing arts as an educational experience. It may generate particular influence on policy makers, as in Italy, territorially grounded work is especially influential, particularly in small- and medium-sized cities and territories.

Dialogue between those who implement and benefit from policies and those who design them is less frequently structured. In this regard, it is important to emphasise that structured practices of collaborative work and dialogue often exclude certain voices, particularly minors, vulnerable groups, and minorities. The representativeness of voices is a crucial concern that tends to remain underdeveloped within policy frameworks. Minors, minorities, and vulnerable groups are often the targets of policies; however, these policies do not always prioritise their inclusion; this attention is far less evident in decision-making processes, particularly in relation to the representativeness of those who hold power.

3.3 Voices from the Field

With regard to Arts Education and Performing Arts in both formal and non-formal contexts, it becomes evident that the primary focus is on the visual arts and, within the performing arts, predominantly on music. This generates a significant gap, relegating theatre—and especially dance—to a marginal position. Within policy frameworks, these fields are addressed mainly at the regional or municipal level. Within schools at all levels, theatre and dance do not have a structured place within the curriculum and are generally introduced through the initiative of individual teachers or through externally funded projects. In this regard, national-level governmental policies could play an important role in addressing these gaps.

Policies are frequently organised by thematic areas and target roles (for example, focusing exclusively on Intercultural Education or Arts Education; on formal or non-formal education). In policy documents addressing art and the performing arts, there is a more explicit reference to intercultural values and to the potential of art (including the performing arts) to foster the development of intercultural competences.

3.4 Italy Intermediary Recommendations

- **Standardise the cultural literacy** terms and understanding in municipalities. **National-level governmental policies could play here an important role.**
- **Theatre and dance should have a structured place in school curricula.**
- **Promote performing art as an important tool for social cohesion.**
- **Offer participatory governance approaches** to local institutions.
- **Enhance communication** between marginalised communities and policy-makers to tackle inequalities and social inclusion.

4. Norway

4.1 Conceptual Review

In Norway, cultural literacy is formally shaped through both cultural and educational governance, but the field research shows that *lived policy* often emerges outside formal structures. Actors involved include municipalities, schools, cultural schools (*Kulturskole*), theatres, and community-based initiatives. Responsibility is distributed, yet definitions are typically shaped top-down through national frameworks. The research indicates that cultural carriers, children, and marginalised communities are still under-recognised in decision-making, despite being central in practice-based cultural transmission. Cultural literacy, as a dialogic and collective practice, is particularly relevant in the Norwegian case. The understanding of cultural literacy as individual knowledge towards a dialogic, relational practice aligns with case studies as well (D1.1, D1.2).

The importance of embodied and non-verbal ways of knowing is visible through practice. Literature review highlights the importance and complexity of multiple literacies and embodied knowledge, whereas the fieldwork makes this tangible. Aspects of learning, belonging, and inclusion (or exclusion) are experienced bodily and relationally, sometimes before they are verbally articulated. Decolonial perspectives in the literature take on a greater significance once examined through lived practice. Emphasis on questioning whose knowledge counts and how power operates is explored and is especially relevant in the case studies (WP3).

4.2 Strategic Policy Review

There is an absence of an explicit concept of cultural literacy in policy, which becomes more significant in practice. This becomes a practical issue where the lack of clarity might shift responsibility onto local actors, who then need to interpret broad policy values without concrete guidance.

“Inequalities and power relations involved in both interaction and cultural diversity were usually not discussed in a comprehensive way, which constrains cultural literacy learning” (D1.2, p. 390).

Policy documents might promote dialogue, inclusion, and cohesion. In case studies, we can see how issues of voice, authority, and inequality are negotiated locally rather than structurally addressed. In practice, dialogue requires time, trust, facilitation and relational efforts. Without structural support, inclusive work depends heavily on individual educators and organisational cultures.

Terms such as cultural literacy can unintentionally function as barriers, appearing abstract or elitist to teachers who are already enacting its principles in practice, and yet the teachers value the intent of the words deeply. They may fail in achieving the competency outcomes and impact within the timeframes as requested in policy, but through their actions, their invitations to include the community, they may, in an unintended fashion, achieve more long-term success in fostering cultural literacy that has impact, albeit in a slower, more circuitous fashion. Sitting, sharing stories, making and sharing each other’s food and then dancing or singing together takes time, takes humility, takes curiosity, but it creates sustainable cultural literacy, if that is the term one wants to use to describe these outcomes.

4.3 Voices from the Field

Terminologies such as cultural literacy and social cohesion are not widely used nor consistently understood in the field. The term “belonging” was much more valuable as a descriptor of how the performing arts fostered cohesion and the opportunities to build literacy.

Colonial constructs of the languaging of policy, curriculum, and EU research agendas, and their supposed materialisation in community action, are creating a kind of friction or tension among local arts teachers, parents, and children as they grapple with their local realities. These grassroots realities include local histories, interests, biases, needs, weather, demographics, resources, food, arts practices, and happenings. When such lived, diverse and complex realities rub up against EU needs for political and educational validation and agendas, there is friction. This friction is not simply administrative; it is epistemological, reflecting different understandings of what counts as knowledge, success, and impact.

- The teachers are often the people who have to deal with this friction between agendas and realities in the moment of a lesson. Often, it is too much, and they resort to their own resources and expertise to survive and to achieve goals that meet the needs and dreams of those in front of them. The outcomes are aligned with the policy, the curriculum, and the literature; they have just constructed their own and local means of achieving success for those children in the room on the day.
- The team plans explicit dialogue with participants regarding recognizability and will use narrative strategies where needed to reduce identifiability without distorting meaning.
- In Huldance, cultural literacy is demonstrated through movement choices, group dynamics, and pedagogical approaches, often without naming these practices.
- At Nord University, embodied practices (e.g., joik) create alternative entry points for dialogue and learning (Interview with Kristie Mortimer and Runa Jenssen, 2026).

The most relevant findings concern how arts education practices generate forms of cultural literacy, inclusion, and policy-making that cannot be reduced to predefined outcomes or measurable competencies.

- Key insight is that cultural knowledge does not travel primarily through documents or frameworks, but through *lived encounters*—through bodies, stories, material relations, and trust.
- In Kulturbæring, policy emerged as something negotiated and “softened” in practice, carried through intergenerational artistic meetings rather than imposed as a prescription. This led to the concept of *policy as carrying*: an affirmative, porous mode of educational governance shaped through embodied listening and relational response-ability rather than institutional closure (from one of the case studies with Kulturskolerådet).
- The Trondheim school–theatre collaboration showed how arts practices open democratic spaces for children’s world-making, especially in contexts marked by inequality. Children’s sustained engagement revealed the transformative potential of arts education to cultivate belonging,

concentration, and agency beyond what formal schooling often enables, but these are not consistently translated into policy-level coordination.

- Relational ethics, sensitivities around Indigenous/Sámi perspectives, and reputational considerations in small professional communities directly shape how cultural literacy and decolonial commitments are enacted in practice.

Further policy interaction between culture and education from the field research input shows that there is policy dialogue between the education and culture sectors, but collaboration often depends on local relationships rather than integrated national structures. Cultural actors enter schools through projects rather than through permanent shared governance.

Policy and curriculum are required. Policy and curriculum, however, only have value when they are owned and seen as being relevant in the local contexts. Such documents are most valued when they provide space for locals to bring their expertise and concerns. Standardised policy and curriculum that focus on measuring competency outcomes of government paradigms do not sit well in local communities that live with much more fluid realities, the multiplicity of diverse people's needs, behaviours and day-to-day concerns.

4.4 Norway Intermediary Recommendations

- **Recognise cultural literacy as an emergent lived practice, not only a competency.** Policy frameworks should shift from outcome-driven models toward relational understandings of cultural literacy as participation, imagination, and embodied belonging.
- **Strengthen bottom-up inclusion of children, cultural carriers, and local communities in policy development.** Children's perspectives and community voices must be structurally included, not added symbolically, in cultural and educational governance.
- **Create durable cross-sector policy platforms between education and culture.** Arts-based collaborations should move beyond temporary projects and be anchored in shared structures connecting schools, municipalities, and cultural institutions.
- **Support community-based and participatory approaches as ethically grounded policy methods.** Participatory research shows the need for methodological humility and accountability; policy should value reciprocity and local relevance over standardisation.
- **Develop flexible policy translation mechanisms across EU–national–local levels.** Instead of one unified definition, policy should allow cultural literacy to remain locally adaptive, reflecting diverse contexts, identities, and cultural imaginaries.

5. Serbia

5.1 Conceptual Review

Cultural literacy is not often used as a common terminology, whereas interculturalism, intercultural dialogue, and cultural diversity play a more significant role in academic discourse and in educational and cultural policies in Serbia. The role of policies supporting arts festivals and cultural exchanges was highlighted for its significance in enhancing cultural literacy and the Serbian understanding of interculturalism as well as in fostering greater mutual respect and awareness among different communities in Serbia.

Despite initiatives to reform curricula after 2000, structural changes have largely failed to materialise, leaving formal arts education limited to literature, music, and visual arts. The lack of theatre, film, and media literacy, as well as the gradual disappearance of workshops and extracurricular activities, reflects a fragmented and underfunded system in Serbia. In non-formal settings, arts education depends primarily on municipal institutions and individual initiatives, which are often self-financed and receive no coherent state support. Although international and local networks such as the International Council of Museums (ICOM) and youth theatres dating back to the socialist era have attempted to revive participation, these efforts remain isolated (Dragičević Šešić & Dragojević, 2011).

From a local perspective, "Vojvodina" is a striking example of Serbia's multicultural structure and illustrates the institutional recognition of diversity through multilingual media, educational opportunities, and theatre in minority languages, such as the theatres in Serbian, Hungarian, Slovak and Romanian languages, financed from the state budget. Although this model promotes coexistence rather than intercultural dialogue, it highlights the gap between political rhetoric and participatory practice in arts and cultural education, and the dire need for effective social inclusion through arts education.

5.2 Strategic Policy Review

In Serbia, the policy strategies don't grasp the reality of the field, expectations of the communities and what the obstacles are, which results in making policies irrelevant and not accepted by bottom-up levels. Non-governmental organisations appear to have a rather limited role in policy development. The papers produced by NGOs consist solely of the self-defined narratives of those involved in these organisations. The limited civil society engagement in policy-making and political uncertainties in Serbia affects the further development of cultural and educational policies from NGO perspectives. Governmental papers also seem to ignore minority and migrant perspectives, and systematic exclusion from policy frameworks continues (D1.2).

5.3 Voices from the Field

Observations on Serbian institutions and expectations indicate that non-formal cultural education and cultural institutions are not connected to the formal curriculum. The lack of communication between schools and cultural institutions is repeatedly mentioned.

After interviews with various artists in Serbia, disappointments towards the EU and their own government dominate the expectations of the artistic and cultural field and actors. One should emphasise that the frustrations are mainly economic and that the challenges of maintaining the infrastructure of independent, local cultural institutions are evident and named as urgent. Marginalised communities have lost their spaces, and social inclusion seems to suffer through it. In academia, the funding problems are also evident. Due to the political situation, academics didn't receive state funding, so they began applying for more EU funding as a solution (Interviews by WP3, WP4, WP7).

Ongoing policy online workshops highlight urgent issues in guaranteeing cultural spaces for marginalised communities in non-formal arts education. Protection and keeping the funding channels open for cultural institutions have been made clear.

There is also an open critique of the EU funding system, which is very bureaucratic and complicated. Short-term funding is challenging for the arts and cultural sector. Normative EU calls are strongly criticised for not reflecting the needs of the local community and society in Serbia. This is one of the most critical views towards the EU.

5.4 Serbia Intermediary Recommendations

- **Connect non-formal cultural education with the formal curriculum.**
- **Guarantee and develop cultural spaces for marginalised communities in non-formal arts programs.**
- **Allocate EU structural funds** specifically for stabilising endangered cultural institutions in the transition context.
- **Simplify the EU funding procedures** to ensure accessibility for grassroots organisations.
- **Support institutional structures** while simultaneously strengthening independent cultural education initiatives.

6. EU-Level

6.1 Policy discourses on interculturality, social cohesion, cultural literacy in arts education and cultural policy context

In EU policies, the prominent way of promoting understanding of cultural diversity and inter-relations across perceived differences revolves around the notion of intercultural dialogue. While the notion of intercultural dialogue seeks to improve relations between different groups and build solidarity and inclusion, it is an ambiguous policy idea. It needs to be defined more precisely to avoid the risk of creating the impression that diversity and transformation are recent characteristics of Europe, when in fact culture is always hybrid and changing, rather than rigid and distinct. An example is the centralised development of the curriculum, which is inclusive of indigenous (Sami) perspectives from Norway. While the idea of this inclusion is welcomed, it has been observed that local teachers, parents and children don't know how to implement the curriculum and make local connections with local indigenous communities. A more locally focused, interactive, resourced, and inclusive process for policy and curriculum development and implementation is required for the sustainable development of social inclusion and cohesion, which reflects decolonial perspectives.

In doing so, equality must be a core principle in the concept and practice of intercultural dialogue, without making assumptions about the ethnic or religious backgrounds of those participating in the dialogue, and maintaining hierarchical power relations among them. Local expectations focus on inclusion, intergenerational encounter, and culturally safe spaces for children in diverse communities. Policies on intercultural dialogue must ensure that all participants are involved in making the rules and agenda. Such policies must make space for transcultural learning and mutual collaboration as transformative interaction, in which all partners and their positions may change. To break the rigid divide between Europe and the “Other” and to avoid Eurocentric ways of advocating intercultural dialogue from the perspective of the interests of the EU and its member states, they should be designed through a broad collaboration with diverse partners with different cultural histories. In this context, the ongoing problems of discrimination and power imbalances stemming from colonial legacies must be discussed openly through mutual listening, learning, and cosmopolitan solidarity.

Cultural participation and arts-based practices can make space for plurality, dialogue and new ideas. Participants of our interviews described goals that extend beyond artistic skill development and reflect broader educational, social, and civic orientations. Through the structuring of qualitative content analysis, four overarching categories of aims were identified: *personal development, inclusion, accessibility* and *social change*. Cultural participation and arts-based practices strengthen these categories and citizens' capacity to create new cultures and new public spaces in which perceived differences can be constructively negotiated. Through this transformative potential, arts and cultural participation advance democracy. The transformative potential of performing arts education and cultural participation must be promoted in cultural and education policies. Moreover, to make performing arts education and other cultural activities available for all demographic groups, accessibility and inclusivity of performing arts education and cultural participation need to be supported through concrete resources.

Although the influence of arts-based activities extends beyond the individual and group levels to organisational and societal levels, cultural and educational policies may still seem abstract and distant to practitioners and be interpreted differently in local contexts. When designing EU-level policies, national and local expertise on context-specific lived realities is needed. Cultural and educational policies must be designed through broad collaboration with representatives from different demographic groups, for example, children and young people, framing them as active agents, rights-holders and equal citizens rather than targets and service recipients.

6.2 EU Intermediary Recommendations

- **Define cultural diversity more precisely and place based** to avoid rigid understandings.
- **Develop policies and curricula on a community-driven, interactive way** and embed children and young people into these processes.
- **Equality** must be a core concept, but also **marginalised groups** should be supported in intercultural dialogues to have access in defining definitions, rules and agendas on equality.
- **Policies and concepts** of intercultural dialogue must be **designed through a broad collaboration with diverse partners with different cultural histories**.



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