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POIESIS

AUSTRIA • ROMANIA • ITALY

Erasmus+ Cooperation Partnership

METHODOLOGY DOCUMENT

Co-created Principles, Foundations, and Practice

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Project Partners



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Abstract

The POIESIS project (2024–2026) is an Erasmus+ KA2 Cooperation Partnership between IRARU (Austria), Alba Eglisea Foundation (Romania), and Creative Art Farm APS (Italy). It explores how Expressive Arts principles can be adapted for non-formal education, community arts practice, and participatory contexts, working with diverse communities across three different European settings.

The methodology was co-created through a collaborative process that included partner dialogues, an in-person kick-off meeting in Italy with a full day of shared experiential practice, virtual facilitator training sessions across the three countries, and community baseline surveys (29 responses collected in total). It was subsequently tested through pilot implementations between November 2025 and February 2026: in Vienna (Austria), with Latin American migrant women in collaboration with LEFÖ; in Transylvania (Romania), with young people from disadvantaged rural and semi-urban contexts; and in Montepulciano, Tuscany (Italy), with a mixed community group at the public library, led by Creative Art Farm APS.

The pilots demonstrated that the methodology functions as a flexible, principled framework rather than a fixed programme. Across Austria, Romania, and Italy, participants worked with a range of artistic modalities, including photography, collage, natural pigments, creative writing, movement, clay, music, monotype printing, and painting, adapted to local communities, contexts, and facilitator expertise. Shared themes (migration and belonging in Austria; cultural identity and participation in Romania; ecology and material awareness in Italy) functioned as entry points into artistic exploration, not predetermined outcomes.

A central finding of the pilot phase is that methodological coherence can be maintained without standardisation. Different organisations, communities, and thematic focuses produced distinctive practices that remained grounded in shared principles: process orientation, aesthetic presence, intermodality, and resource-oriented facilitation.

This document presents the conceptual foundations, methodological principles, and contextual contributions that underpin the POIESIS approach. It is intended for artists, facilitators, educators, and organisations interested in developing participatory artistic processes in community, educational, and non-formal settings. It should be read alongside the POIESIS Facilitator Guide and the Replication Toolkit, which document facilitation practice and pilot implementation in greater detail.

How to Read This Document: This Methodology explains the why behind Poiesis, its theoretical foundations and shared principles. The companion Facilitator Guide translates these into practice: the how. The Replication Toolkit documents what was actually implemented in the three pilots: case studies, session designs, and cross-cutting learnings. Readers seeking conceptual grounding should start here; readers seeking facilitation guidance may prefer to begin with the Facilitator Guide and return to this document for context; readers seeking concrete replication detail, case studies, and session-level documentation may consult the Replication Toolkit alongside either document.



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CHAPTER 01

Introduction

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Project Background and Context

The Poiesis project was born out of the shared intention among partners from Austria, Romania, and Italy to explore how Expressive Arts can foster inclusion, well-being, and cultural belonging within communities navigating complex social realities. Each organisation brings a distinct perspective to the collaboration, grounded in its local work and sociocultural context. Together, they initiated this partnership with the goal of co-creating a flexible, participatory methodology grounded in experience and tailored to different realities.

Communities across Europe are increasingly engaging with questions related to migration, cultural heritage, rural isolation, social inclusion, and collective memory. In this context, the role of arts, particularly participatory and expressive forms, has gained renewed relevance. The Poiesis project acknowledges that meaningful engagement often begins with creative and embodied processes, and aims to harness the generative power of artistic expression to build bridges, strengthen connections, and support community belonging.

1.2 Research Question and Structure of the Document

This document was developed to explore the central question:

How can Expressive Arts be used as a participatory methodology to foster emotional well-being, social inclusion, and cultural belonging in communities across different European contexts?

To respond to this question, the document brings together theoretical foundations, methodological strategies, contextualised practices from the three partner organisations, and a shared framework that can be adapted by facilitators and institutions working in the field.

The document is organised into eight chapters. It begins by establishing the theoretical and methodological foundations, followed by three chapters describing the contributions and approaches of each partner country. It then presents the co-created methodology, and concludes with retrospective reflections and sustainability recommendations.

This revised version of the Methodology Document reflects the actual implementation of the project, including pilot implementation completed between November 2025 and February 2026. Where relevant, it references the Facilitator Guide for practical application and the POIESIS Replication Toolkit for detailed documentation of pilot processes.

1.3 The POIESIS Partnership

This Erasmus+ project was developed by three partner organisations, based in Austria, Romania, and Italy, with different trajectories in the fields of art, education, and community development. While their contexts differ, they share a common belief: that art can be a generative force for connection, inclusion, and cultural participation.

Austria: IRARU

IRARU leads the development of the theoretical and philosophical framework of the methodology. Working at the intersection of migration, art, and community building in Vienna, IRARU brings expertise in Expressive Arts facilitation, aesthetic presence, and intermodal practice. Their contribution is grounded in non-formal education and community arts practice, drawing on EXA concepts such as poiesis, liminality, and aesthetic responsibility to create accessible, process-oriented spaces of dialogue and inquiry.

Romania: Alba Eglesia Foundation

The Alba Eglesia Foundation, based in the village of Viscri in Transylvania, brings a strong focus on community development, cultural heritage, and interethnic dialogue. Their work centres on participatory and place-based creative activities with children and young people, particularly from Roma and Romanian communities in rural areas. Their contribution to the project centres on inclusion through art, particularly in engaging with cultural identity and community participation through creative practice.

Italy: Creative Art Farm APS

Creative Art Farm APS, based in Montepulciano, Tuscany, links artistic practice with ecological sustainability and rural community engagement. Their work explores how Expressive Arts can support community resilience in rural contexts, integrating ecological awareness, locally sourced materials, and intergenerational participation. Their contribution enriches the methodology by grounding creative practice in place, materiality, and environmental consciousness.

Together, these three organisations provide a complementary set of perspectives that allow the methodology to address emotional, cultural, and ecological dimensions of well-being, while remaining open and adaptable to other contexts and organisations across Europe.



CHAPTER 02

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Chapter 2: Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

2.1 What Do We Mean by Art?

Within the scope of this methodology, art is primarily understood as a means of expression, connection, and meaning-making, rather than as a product subject to aesthetic or technical judgement. We adopt a broad and inclusive definition of art that embraces all forms of sensory and symbolic creation: drawing, collage, photography, movement, sound, clay work, writing, storytelling, among others. Its value lies in the process and its ability to evoke meaning, rather than in formal perfection (Levine & Levine, 2011).

This inclusive understanding allows people from various backgrounds to access the creative process without fear of judgement or failure, turning art into a powerful vehicle for community building, emotional exploration, and intercultural dialogue (McNiff, 1992).

2.2 Who Is a Facilitator?

In this project, facilitators are those individuals who, regardless of formal training, create spaces for creative engagement, support the expression of others, and cultivate aesthetic sensitivity. Some partners work with professional artists; others with educators or community practitioners with artistic interests.

We draw on the principle of "low skill, high sensitivity" (Knill, Levine, & Levine, 2005), which prioritises presence, empathy, and openness over technical mastery. This makes the methodology accessible to facilitators from various fields, as long as they are committed to ethical, inclusive, and participant-centred practices.

2.3 What Are Expressive Arts?

Expressive Arts (EXA) is an interdisciplinary field that draws on visual arts, music, movement, drama, and writing within a process-oriented and phenomenological framework, open to moving between these languages as time, group needs, and resources allow. Unlike traditional art education or art therapies, EXA keeps the art itself, not diagnosis or technique, at the centre of the process, focusing on inner experience and personal meaning-making as they unfold through making (Levine & Levine, 2017).

In this project, facilitators are not required to be certified therapists. Instead, we incorporate EXA principles as philosophical anchors for designing and facilitating creative encounters in community and non-formal education settings.

2.4 Community, Inclusion, and Participation

Community is not treated as a static entity, but as a network of evolving relationships grounded in shared space, culture, and lived experience. Our methodology seeks to strengthen these relational ties through co-creation, listening, and visibility.

Inclusion, in this framework, is not limited to access: it involves active participation, cultural recognition, and relational safety, especially for historically marginalised groups. Participation is not mere presence, but co-agency: participants are encouraged to shape the process, contribute their voices, and engage with the experience through their creativity.

Contemporary theories of culture and identity inform this approach. Appadurai (1996) proposes that culture is no longer strictly tied to geographical territory but is formed through global flows of people, media, and ideas. Hall (1990) adds that identity is constructed through historical processes and future possibilities, not a return to the past, but a positioning shaped by difference and imagination. These perspectives are particularly relevant in contexts of migration, where identity and cultural belonging travel with people and continue to evolve in new environments.

2.5 Philosophical Foundations

This work challenges dualistic views that separate body and mind, emotion and reason. Instead, it embraces a holistic, process-oriented understanding of creativity, drawing from the philosophical roots of Expressive Arts. The Poiesis methodology rests on two philosophical foundations: poiesis, an ontological claim about how meaning comes into being, and phenomenology, an epistemological orientation toward how that emergence is perceived and known. Together, they inform the working principles developed throughout the methodology, several of which are presented in Chapter 3.

Poiesis *

From the Greek "to bring forth," poiesis refers to the generative process through which something new (an image, insight, or connection) emerges through artistic expression. This creative unfolding is not instrumental but emergent: meaning is not imposed, but revealed through the art-making process itself.

The concept draws on a much older distinction, developed by Aristotle, between poiesis (making: the bringing into being of something that did not exist before) and praxis (doing: action valued for its own sake, independent of any product). Where praxis is judged by the quality of the action itself, poiesis is judged by what it brings forth: an image, a form, a made thing that did not

* Gold icons mark concepts also developed practically in the Facilitator Guide. This chapter presents the two philosophical foundations from which several practical principles are derived; those principles are introduced with their theoretical grounding in Chapter 3, and developed operationally in the Facilitator Guide.

exist a moment before. Levine (2019) extends this distinction into psychology and therapeutic practice, arguing that poiesis names a fundamental human capacity, prior to and generative of meaning itself, rather than a specialised artistic skill reserved for the few.

This is why the project takes poiesis as its name and starting point. It names a conviction shared across all three partner organisations: that meaning-making through art is not a technique to be taught, but a capacity already present in every community, waiting for the conditions that allow it to unfold.



Phenomenology

Phenomenology in the context of Expressive Arts emphasises the importance of direct, lived experience and aesthetic presence. Instead of interpreting or analysing a participant's creation from an external framework, facilitators attend to what appears: what is visible, heard, felt, or intuited, in the present moment (Levine & Levine, 2017; Estrella, 2005).

Phenomenology, as a philosophical method, originates with Husserl's call to attend to phenomena "as they show themselves", suspending inherited theories, categories, and interpretive frameworks in favour of direct description. Merleau-Ponty later extended this attention to the lived, sensing body, arguing that perception and meaning first arise not in abstract thought but in embodied experience. Expressive Arts draws directly on this lineage: aesthetic response is understood as a disciplined form of phenomenological attention, staying with what appears rather than moving quickly to interpretation.

This stance took a different, concrete form in each pilot. In Austria, it meant witnessing participants' images and memories without filtering them through external clinical or cultural assumptions, consistent with the project's explicitly non-clinical stance. In Romania, it meant privileging non-verbal, observable moments, the instant a print was pulled, a composition revealed, over verbal explanation that variable literacy and confidence made harder to access. In Italy, it meant opening sessions through movement and sound rather than visual production, so that participants could enter through sensation before facing the demand to perform. Across three very different communities, the same phenomenological commitment, staying with what is directly given rather than what is assumed or expected, took three different shapes.

2.6 What This Methodology Is and Is Not

This methodology is an intermodal, co-created approach to working with diverse communities through artistic expression. It serves as a practical guide for facilitators seeking to promote connection, cultural participation, and well-being through creative processes in non-formal and community settings.

It is not a clinical or therapeutic protocol, nor a closed manual with a fixed sequence of activities. It offers tools, principles, and reflections that can be adapted and interpreted based on each facilitator's expertise and each community's reality, translating across different sociocultural

contexts. While its foundations are inspired by Expressive Arts, the methodology recognises: the varied backgrounds of facilitators, the importance of local knowledge and materials, and the unique needs and capacities of each community.

This chapter presents the theoretical and philosophical foundations shared across the Poiesis approach. These foundations functioned as a common starting point, not a fixed protocol: each partner organisation developed its own version of practice from this shared base, shaped by its own context, expertise, and community. What each partner brought back from that practice, the adaptations that worked, the difficulties encountered, the resources each context revealed, became, in turn, part of the methodology itself. Chapter 7 traces how this process consolidated into the methodology's own original contributions, including the Relational Landscapes framework, which emerged from this iterative, practice-based development rather than from theory alone.



CHAPTER 03

Methodological Foundations and Facilitation Principles

Chapter 3: Methodological Foundations and Facilitation Principles

3.1 Overview of the Methodological Approach

The methodological approach developed in the Poiesis project is rooted in co-creation among the partner organisations and participatory inquiry with the communities involved in the pilots. The methodology emerged from an iterative, context-sensitive process shaped by partner dialogue, a facilitator training, and a community baseline survey, and was then tested and refined through pilot implementation.

The methodology's two philosophical foundations, poiesis and phenomenology (Section 2.5), inform seven working principles. Four develop directly from these foundations: ecopoiesis and process over product extend poiesis's emphasis on emergence over outcome; aesthetic presence and facilitator as witness apply phenomenology's attentiveness to lived experience. Three carry their own independent theoretical grounding within Expressive Arts and related fields: intermodality, liminality, and relational landscapes (Section 7.4).

DERIVED FROM POIESIS

Ecopoiesis *

Extends poiesis to nature, place, and materials.

Ecopoiesis expands the notion of poiesis to encompass ecological consciousness, viewing the earth and natural systems not only as context but as co-creative agents. Developed in part by Levine and Kopytin (2022), ecopoiesis emphasises sustainability, ecological dialogue, and ethical responsiveness to the environment. In the Italian pilot, this concept was central: participants used natural pigments, clay, and organic materials as artistic media, creating a dialogue between the creative process and the local landscape.

Process over product

Extends poiesis's emphasis on emergence over outcome.

Process over product refers to the commitment to prioritising the unfolding of creative experience over any fixed outcome. Rather than focusing on a final product, facilitators guide participants through an open-ended journey of expression, exploration, and discovery. This principle affirms that the value lies not in perfection, but in participation and presence (Levine, 2019; Rogers, 1993).

* Gold icons mark concepts also developed practically in the Facilitator Guide. The two philosophical foundations from which these principles are derived, poiesis and phenomenology, are introduced in Section 2.5.

DERIVED FROM PHENOMENOLOGY

Aesthetic presence

Applies phenomenology to the facilitator's own attention.

Aesthetic presence refers to a mode of presence in which one is deeply attuned to the sensory, emotional, and symbolic qualities of an artistic encounter. It is not about evaluating beauty but experiencing resonance: what touches, surprises, or calls for attention. This mode of knowing emphasises openness, empathy, and the non-verbal layers of meaning (McNiff, 1992; Levine, 2019).

Facilitator as witness

Applies phenomenology to how facilitators relate to participants' work.

Facilitator as witness describes the ethical and relational stance through which facilitators accompany the creative process without directing, interpreting, or imposing meaning. This does not mean passivity: at times the group or the process itself calls for the facilitator's active presence and participation, entering the artistic field alongside participants rather than observing from its edge (Section 7.4 develops this distinction through the Facilitation I / Facilitation II framework). Whichever position is called for, the same ethical care applies: attention remains with what the process and the people being accompanied need, not with the facilitator's own expression (Knill, Levine, & Levine, 2005).

STRUCTURAL AND METHODOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES

Intermodality

Intermodality refers to the movement between artistic modalities (such as visual art, movement, sound, storytelling, and collage) in a way that allows expression to deepen and transform. It is already present whenever a session moves from verbal exchange into an artistic language, in the shift from talking to making. Within the art-making act itself, movement between several artistic languages is a further possibility, not a fixed requirement: whether and how far a session moves between modalities depends on the time available, the group's needs, and the resources at hand. What matters is depth of engagement, not the number of art forms used. When it does occur, this crossing of modalities can deepen the imaginal and poetic dimensions of the work (Knill, Levine & Levine, 2005; McNiff, 1998).

Liminality

Liminality speaks to the threshold space in which change becomes possible. Borrowed from ritual studies (Turner, 1969), liminality characterises the in-between moments of identity, time, and space. In Expressive Arts, this might occur when a participant shifts between modalities and uncovers new associations that open fixed perspectives. The facilitator's role in holding this ambiguity is central to supporting emergent processes.

Relational Landscapes

Relational Landscapes is a framework, developed within the Poiesis project itself, for observing how individual and collective dimensions of experience coexist and influence one another throughout a session or series. It offers facilitators a way of tracing pathways between personal and shared meaning-making without forcing integration or interpretation, and of locating their own position, witnessing from a threshold or participating within the artistic field, in response to what a given moment calls for. Because of the extent of this framework, its full development, including the diagrams that make it usable in practice, is presented in Section 7.4.

3.2 Development Process: Co-Design, Training, and Pilot Implementation

The development of the Poiesis methodology unfolded in three interconnected phases: co-design among project partners, facilitated training with facilitators from each country, and pilot implementation with diverse communities.

The co-design process began with an internal dialogue in which each partner organisation shared their expertise, working contexts, and community-based practices. These exchanges revealed both convergences and differences: the Austrian team brought a background in Expressive Arts facilitation and work with migrant communities; the Romanian team focused on cultural inclusion and community participation with Roma youth and intergenerational groups; while the Italian partner emphasised ecological art practices and rural community engagement. These distinct approaches were seen not as obstacles, but as sources of richness that inspired a flexible, transdisciplinary methodology.

The project began with an in-person kick-off meeting in Italy, attended by two representatives per partner organisation. The first day was dedicated to formal introductions: each partner organisation, its participant communities, and its working context. The second day was fully experiential, with each country leading a session drawn from its own expertise. This exchange allowed partners to see, first-hand, how each organisation worked, what it understood by art, and how it brought artistic practice to its communities, laying the ground for developing the methodology from a shared Expressive Arts base: a common framework on which each country would build its own approach and resources.

Facilitator training followed as a separate process: five sessions with two facilitators per country, largely the same people who had attended the kick-off meeting, with two exceptions where a change in project staffing brought a new facilitator into the training partway through (Romania and Austria). Maintaining this continuity was a deliberate choice, intended to keep experience and understanding accumulating within the same team rather than dispersing across new people at each stage.

The training moved from direct experience to application: an initial fully experiential Expressive Arts session; two sessions processing that experience and connecting it to theoretical foundations; a session of collective feedback and closing; and a final offline session in which each facilitator designed their own Expressive Arts session, adapted to their own context. This structure reflected the logic that shaped the methodology's development as a whole: facilitators situated themselves within the shared EXA framework, proposed how they might make it their own, designed and piloted that approach, and then reflected on what was integrated, what proved difficult, and what might improve future practice. It was through this cycle that the methodology's own original contributions, including the Relational Landscapes framework, took shape.

Prior to implementation, a community baseline survey was designed and adapted into each country's local language. A total of 29 responses were collected across Austria (8), Italy (12), and Romania (9). While not a representative sample, it offered an early, exploratory sense of context: participants were primarily women living in urban and rural areas, with strong participation in local activities; cultural expression was highly valued, especially music, dance, local festivals, and crafts; and barriers such as language, limited access, and emotional insecurity were identified across contexts. These exploratory findings informed three working priorities for pilot design: creating emotionally safe and welcoming spaces, using accessible art forms, and facilitating community-building through shared creation.

The relatively low response count also reflected structural barriers to reaching the communities involved, rather than limited interest alone. Outreach coincided with the year-end period, November and December, when engagement with a new initiative tends to compete with festive and family commitments across all three contexts. Language also played a role: surveys were administered in each local language, which required additional internal translation into English, a step that is more efficient when built into the survey design from the outset (for example, bilingual from the start) rather than added afterwards. This experience carried directly into pilot design: partnering with organisations that already held established relationships and trust within a community proved consistently more effective for reach and engagement than open calls addressed to individuals.

Pilot implementation took place between November 2025 and February 2026 across all three countries. These pilots provided the primary evidence base for the methodology's adaptability, and are documented in detail in the POIESIS Replication Toolkit.

3.3 Principles of Artistic Facilitation

Facilitation within the Poiesis methodology is grounded in ethical presence, aesthetic sensitivity, and cultural humility. Drawing from the field of Expressive Arts (Knill, Levine, & Levine, 2005), facilitation is seen as a relational and creative act where the role of the facilitator is not to interpret or direct, but to hold space and accompany participants in their meaning-making processes.

Three foundational principles inform this role:

1. Presence and aesthetic responsibility. Facilitators pay attention to what is happening in the session: a shift in the room's mood, a colour someone chooses, a gesture, a change in rhythm. They notice what emerges, support what is needed, and hold back from interpretation. This attention is a responsibility that belongs to the facilitator, not the participant: it is the facilitator who understands why an activity is designed the way it is and how to guide it, so that participants do not need any artistic or theoretical background to take part (Section 2.2, "low skill, high sensitivity").

From that attention, facilitators can also name aloud what they notice, as an invitation for the group to perceive it too, without forcing or imposing it. This is why it is called presence: being present with all the senses, not observing from outside.

2. Intermodality and flexibility. Facilitators are encouraged to offer multiple expressive modalities and to support participants in moving fluidly among them. The choice of modality is not fixed in advance: it responds to the community, the context, the facilitators' own expertise, and what emerges within each session (McNiff, 1992).

3. Ethical humility and cultural awareness. Facilitators are invited to reflect on their own assumptions, respect symbolic language, and be aware of cultural context. This involves creating emotionally safe environments that honour participants' identities and lived realities, and remaining attentive to power dynamics within facilitation relationships.

In this model, the facilitator becomes what Knill and colleagues describe as a "midwife of expression", not shaping content, but supporting the emergence of something authentic and relational.

3.4 Session Architecture

At the heart of the Poiesis methodology is the architecture of a session: a flexible six-stage structure that provides orientation throughout the creative process. It functions as a map rather than a rulebook: when facilitators or participants feel lost, overwhelmed, or blocked, the session architecture helps reorient and re-ground the work.

This six-stage architecture is consistent across all three project documents and reflects actual implementation practice:

Stage	Purpose and Characteristics
 1. Check-in	Opening the space. Creating relational safety, grounding presence, introducing the session intention and agreements.
 2. Awareness-raising	Poetic or symbolic prompts to awaken imagination and sensory attentiveness. May involve soundscapes, guided observation, movement, or aesthetic objects.
 3. Art experience	Free or guided engagement with artistic media. Intermodal transitions may arise organically. Facilitators maintain witnessing presence.
 4. Aesthetic analysis	Participants witness their own or others' expressions. Sharing can be verbal, gestural, written, or visual. Facilitators practise non-interpretive aesthetic response.
 5. Reflection and integration	Grounding and clarifying what emerged. Supporting participants to integrate their experience before transition. May include journalling, dialogue, or collective reflection.
 6. Check-out	Ritualising the ending. Honouring what emerged. Preparing for reintegration into everyday life.

This structure is complemented by a range of artistic tools and strategies, which are described in detail in the Facilitator Guide.

3.5 Tools and Practices

The tools integrated into the Poiesis methodology reflect the values of accessibility, flexibility, and intermodality. These are not rigid protocols but creative invitations designed to adapt to different cultural, material, and emotional contexts. Across the three pilot implementations, facilitators drew on a wide range of modalities:

- Photography and photo-based composition (Austria, Italy)
- Collage with recycled materials (magazines, newspapers, printed images) (Romania, Austria)
- Drawing, mark-making, and painting (Austria, Italy, Romania)
- Monotype printing and linocut with water-based inks (Romania)
- Clay work and tactile materials (Italy)
- Movement, embodied warm-ups, and rhythm work (Italy, Austria)
- Creative writing and poetry (Austria, Italy)

- Natural materials: pigments, leaves, organic elements (Italy, Romania)

The selection of modalities was never fixed in advance. In each context, facilitators chose tools appropriate to the community's needs, the available resources, their own expertise, and what emerged within the session. This flexibility is fundamental to the methodology's transferability: the approach does not depend on any specific artistic discipline, but on the quality of facilitation and the coherence of the six-stage structure.

Additional tools include creative journalling, visual storytelling, symbolic object-making, collective compositions, and reflective circles. For detailed facilitation guidance and session examples, see the POIESIS Facilitator Guide and Replication Toolkit.

3.6 Situating the Methodology within the Wider Field

The principles developed in this chapter are not unique to Poiesis. Related commitments appear across the wider field of community and ecological arts practice: land-based and environmental art that treats natural materials as co-creative agents rather than resources for extraction (Levine & Kopytin, 2022); participatory mural and collective image-making projects that build cultural belonging across generations; and movement- and theatre-based practices used in community contexts to process shared experience through embodied, aesthetic means. What these approaches share with Poiesis is not technique but stance: presence, non-interpretive witnessing, and process over outcome.

How these same commitments took concrete shape in the three pilots, through photography, personal collage, and movement in Austria; collage, monotype, and linocut in Romania; and clay, natural pigments, and rhythm in Italy, is documented in full in Chapters 4 to 6, and in the case studies of the Replication Toolkit.



CHAPTER 04

Emotional Well-Being and Expressive Arts (Austria)

Chapter 4: Emotional Well-Being and Expressive Arts (Austria)

4.1 Local Context and Target Population

IRARU is a Vienna-based non-profit organisation founded by migrant artists and professionals who have lived and worked in Austria. Its team is multilingual, interdisciplinary, and committed to using the arts as a catalyst for social inclusion and participation. IRARU's programming has evolved over time to work primarily with migrant communities, reflecting the backgrounds and lived experiences of its founders.

Vienna is home to a dynamic, mobile population: 44% of its residents have a migration background, and 30% hold foreign citizenship (Statistik Austria, 2023). This plurality contributes to Vienna's identity as a cultural and demographic crossroads, while simultaneously creating layers of social complexity. For many newcomers, particularly those navigating precarious residency situations or language barriers, participation in civic and cultural life can feel inaccessible. IRARU focuses on fostering spaces of belonging and expression for individuals navigating cultural transitions.

4.2 Philosophical Positioning

IRARU's work is grounded in a philosophical perspective that views art as an innate human capacity and a vital channel for meaning-making, connection, and community building. This aligns with the foundational principles of Expressive Arts, which emphasise creative engagement as a way of exploring identity, processing experience, and building relational presence (Levine, 2019).

The organisation adopts an ethics of care centred on creating safe and accessible spaces for individuals regardless of their cultural background or migration status. This commitment is expressed through inclusive and equitable practices: low-cost or zero-cost workshops, sessions in different languages, and formats designed to be accessible to people without prior artistic experience.

The Expressive Arts principles informing IRARU's practice are applied within a non-formal education and community arts framework: facilitators are not therapists, and sessions are not designed as clinical interventions. The work draws on EXA philosophy, particularly the concepts of poiesis, aesthetic presence, and intermodality, as foundations for facilitation that is attentive, relational, and participant-centred.

4.3 Poiesis Pilot: "Roots in Motion" (Vienna, 2025–2026)

Within the Poiesis project, IRARU implemented a series of seven sessions in Vienna between November and December 2025, working in two interconnected contexts: in collaboration with LEFÖ (an organisation supporting Latin American migrant women) and through an open-call process hosted at VBKÖ, a cultural institution dedicated to women and FLINTA artistic practices. The overall title of the series was "Roots in Motion."

Two partner organisations shaped access to the Austrian pilot, chosen deliberately to combine reach through an already-established community with openness to people not currently linked to any organisation. LEFÖ, founded in 1985 by Latin American women living in exile in Austria, offers a broad spectrum of counselling and support for migrant women, built on participation, empowerment, and self-organisation. Given the scarcity of Spanish-language creative spaces of this kind, the offer met clear existing interest and an established audience.

Alongside this, an open call hosted at VBKÖ (Austrian Association of Women Artists) extended the pilot's reach to migrants not necessarily connected to LEFÖ, including people who had recently arrived, mothers, or those whose work commitments limited their capacity to join an existing community. Founded in 1910, VBKÖ has in recent years actively engaged with the more complex and contested parts of its own history, including its entanglement with National Socialism and with class-specific and colonial structures, and today positions itself as a space for contemporary feminist, queer, and decolonial artistic and activist practice. This made it a coherent host for an open call oriented towards migrant, BIPOC, and FLINTA communities beyond IRARU's own network. Both partnerships needed to be finalised before the end of the calendar year, which shaped the pilot's compressed timeline between November and December 2025.

Sessions were approximately three hours each, totalling 21 hours across the pilot. Participants were primarily adult women and FLINTA participants with diverse migratory, cultural, and professional backgrounds, aged mainly between 18 and 30. Sessions took place in both Spanish and English depending on the context and participant composition.

A small number of participants fell outside this age range: among them, women who had themselves migrated as young people and later joined sessions with their own daughters. This was a deliberate choice rather than an inconsistency: IRARU chose to welcome this age diversity as a resource for intergenerational dialogue, while the group's composition remained majority youth throughout, in line with the project's aims.

The sessions explored themes of migration, memory, belonging, and collective presence through intermodal artistic practices. Modalities included movement, personal photography, mixed-media collage, natural pigments, coloured inks, oil pastels, creative writing, and poetry. Each session followed the six-stage architecture (check-in, awareness-raising, art experience, aesthetic analysis, reflection and integration, check-out), adapted to the rhythm and needs of each group.

A central facilitation intention was to support movement between individual artistic exploration and collective creation. In the individual landscape sessions, participants created mixed-media compositions using personal photographs, pigments, and collage as tools for exploring memories, roots, and belonging. In the collective closure session, these individual artworks were brought together into a shared large-scale composition, creating new relationships between images, stories, and perspectives while preserving the distinctiveness of each contribution.

The process was originally planned as two parallel groups, each followed by its own collective closure. During implementation, attendance patterns varied and one planned closure had to be adapted. The facilitation team responded by reorganising the design, bringing together participants from both groups in a single collective closing session. This adaptation, guided by methodological principles not a fixed plan, became an important part of the process itself.

Key observations from the Austria pilot are documented in detail in the Replication Toolkit (Section 5.3). These include: the role of multiple entry points into participation (some participants engaged primarily through image-making, others through movement or written reflection); the emergence of shared metaphorical language (roots, pathways, water, home) across diverse migratory experiences; and the way collective artistic creation supported connection without requiring consensus or personal disclosure.

4.4 Challenges and Opportunities in Working with Migrant Communities

Working with migrant communities in Vienna has revealed complex intersections between emotional needs, systemic barriers, and the generative potential of Expressive Arts. The community survey and field experience highlighted key challenges: language barriers, limited confidence to participate in public activities, and a perceived absence of welcoming spaces that acknowledge participants' resources and identities.

Migration involves navigating a continuous stream of bureaucratic and social demands: learning a new language, managing residency documentation, handling employment and housing precarity. These external pressures often leave little space for the internal needs that are equally vital: connection, rest, creative engagement, and the experience of being seen.

As cultural theorists like Appadurai (1996) and Hall (1990) emphasise, the identity of a migrant does not suspend upon crossing borders: it travels with the person. In this context, Expressive Arts sessions offer not just creative tools, but spaces for cultural affirmation, emotional continuity, and the exploration of belonging. They become thresholds in which participants can explore who they are and who they are becoming through the languages of image, movement, and symbolic expression.

4.5 Contributions to the Shared Methodology

Austria's contribution to the Poiesis methodology is rooted in the experience and perspective of IRARU, working at the intersection of migration, art, and community building. Its work reinforces the importance of aesthetic presence, intermodality, and ethical attunement, values that underpin the methodology's foundations.

IRARU's key contribution lies in its capacity to balance intuitive artistic flow with methodological coherence. The session architecture functions here as a map not a mandate: a flexible guide that supports orientation and continuity, especially when a process takes an unexpected turn or when group composition varies between sessions.

IRARU also contributes an ethical-political lens to the shared methodology, advocating for expressive practices that are not only inclusive but also reparative: creative expression understood as a right and a resource for people whose voices are often marginalised. Their practices illustrate how Expressive Arts can foster collective belonging, challenge invisibility, and create symbolic spaces of recognition and presence.

Seen through the Relational Landscapes framework (introduced in full in Section 7.4), the IRARU pilot shows something specific about the movement between the individual and the group. In the early sessions, participants worked mostly with their own inner images and memories, alongside others but not yet in dialogue with them (the SELF configuration, in Section 7.4's terms). In the final collective session, these individual works were brought into a shared space and entered into dialogue with one another (a shift from GROUP toward GROUP + ART). IRARU's contribution to the framework is to show what it means for individual inner worlds to meet one another, and how a facilitated space can hold that meeting without forcing it.



CHAPTER 05

Cultural Identity and Minority Inclusion (Romania)

Chapter 5: Cultural Identity and Minority Inclusion (Romania)

5.1 Local Context: Alba Eglesia Foundation

The Alba Eglesia Foundation, based in the village of Viscri within the commune of Bunești (Brașov County), operates in a culturally rich but structurally under-resourced rural area of Romania. This region includes a significant Roma population, where many families face barriers to educational access, social participation, and cultural recognition. Founded in response to these needs, Alba Eglesia promotes educational inclusion, cultural heritage, and interethnic dialogue through arts and community engagement.

The foundation's work centres on building relationships with children and youth through participatory and site-specific creative activities. It designs informal learning environments that encourage co-operation, expression, and identity-building, particularly among Roma and Romanian children. Its practices embrace values of inclusion, process orientation, and relational creativity.

5.2 Artistic Expression and Cultural Heritage

Alba Eglesia's educational programmes integrate the arts as a way to reconnect children and young people with the cultural heritage of their communities. Children explore decorative motifs, traditional architecture, and local visual references through drawing, painting, and collage. These exercises not only enhance cultural awareness but encourage personal expression rooted in a shared history.

Working in a region with a significant Roma community, the foundation welcomes mixed groups without asking participants to identify their background: each person decided what to share, and how, or whether, to be named or represented. This creates shared ground for cultural expression and dialogue rooted in participants' own histories, rather than in categories imposed from outside.

5.3 Poiesis Pilot: Transylvania, February 2026

Within the Poiesis project, Alba Eglesia implemented four sessions (20 hours total) across multiple localities in Transylvania, primarily in Ticușu Vechi and Sighișoara, during February 2026. Participants were young people and young adults from disadvantaged rural and semi-urban contexts, aged 12–35, typically in groups of 12–14 per session.

The sessions used a range of accessible, low-barrier artistic modalities: object-based collage using recycled magazines and newspapers; line drawing and monotype printing with natural elements and water-based inks; linocut carving and manual printing with colour exploration; and an intuitive collage and monotype session in Sighișoara. The title of the first session, "Share a Table: Collage of Belonging", captures the relational spirit of the pilot: participants were invited to bring objects connected to food, home, and memory, and to compose these into collective visual conversations.

The pilot was implemented in contexts marked by significant access constraints: limited arts education, variable literacy, caregiving responsibilities, distance, and economic precarity. Facilitation prioritised a clear, predictable arc with multiple non-verbal entry points. Reflection was offered through pointing, choosing one word, or silent witnessing rather than requiring written responses. When participants attended with their children, the pace and spatial organisation were adjusted to accommodate this without disrupting the overall process.

A key observation across the Romanian sessions was that engagement increased consistently once the process was framed as non-evaluative. The "reveal moment", when a print was pulled or a composition displayed, reliably shifted the group energy toward confidence, curiosity, and a desire to continue. Familiar, locally available materials (recycled paper, water-based inks, natural leaves) supported a sense of ownership and reduced performance pressure.

The case is documented in detail in the Replication Toolkit (Section 5.2), including specific process insights and learnings for replication in similarly constrained contexts.

5.4 Challenges and Lessons Learned

Alba Eglesia's long-term engagement with marginalised communities has revealed both the potential and the complexity of using the arts to promote inclusion. Building trust is a persistent challenge: due to longstanding exclusion from educational and cultural programmes, many families express low confidence in institutions. Participation cannot be assumed; it must be earned through consistent presence, relational care, and embedded community collaboration.

Logistical constraints also shape implementation: unreliable infrastructure, inconsistent attendance, and economic precarity influence participation. The foundation has learned to remain flexible and adaptive, often locating workshops in familiar, accessible environments. Facilitators frequently act as bridges, translating expectations, managing tensions, and ensuring that programmes reflect the dignity and agency of participants.

5.5 Contributions to the Shared Methodology

Romania's contribution to the Poiesis methodology demonstrates how arts-based practice can support inclusion in under-resourced and access-constrained contexts. Key contributions include: the importance of multi-modal reflection (not dependent on literacy or verbal sharing); the value of care-compatible session design (flexible pacing, re-joinable steps, quiet

accommodation of practical interruptions); and the insight that confidence often emerges through concrete aesthetic thresholds, such as seeing a print pulled or a composition revealed, rather than through verbal reassurance.

The Romania pilot also confirmed one of the project's central learnings: that POIESIS does not rely on a single context. It relies on principles and design conditions. When methodological integrity is maintained (clear arc, witnessing stance, multiple entry points), the same process can function across locations and communities.

Seen through the Relational Landscapes framework (Section 7.4), the Alba Eglesia pilot reveals something about the conditions needed for someone's inner world to become accessible at all, in contexts of structural disadvantage (what Section 7.4 calls the SELF configuration). When confidence is fragile and participation carries risk, that inner space only opens once external pressures are sufficiently set aside. The "reveal moment" described above, when a print is pulled or a composition displayed, is a threshold: the moment when something interior becomes visible and shared with others (a first step toward the SELF + ART configuration). Romania's contribution is a reminder that access to that inner space is not a given. It depends on the quality of the container the facilitator holds.



CHAPTER 06

Ecology, Creativity, and Rural Engagement (Italy)

Chapter 6: Ecology, Creativity, and Rural Engagement (Italy)

6.1 Local Context: Creative Art Farm APS

Creative Art Farm APS is a non-profit organisation based in Montepulciano, Tuscany. Its mission is to include, empower, and engage people through the arts, culture, and ecological practice. The organisation focuses on building inclusive artistic communities and implementing community-oriented initiatives that respond to local needs, particularly in rural and underserved areas.

Creative Art Farm's approach integrates principles of ecological sustainability and circular economy into artistic practice, fostering awareness of material cycles, place, and environmental responsibility. Their work encompasses artistic laboratories, community events, and participation in initiatives such as the New European Bauhaus, linking creativity with sustainability, inclusion, and aesthetic innovation.

6.2 Nature-Based Creativity and Material Consciousness

Creative Art Farm promotes an approach to creativity deeply connected to ecological awareness. Their work encourages participants to explore local materials and natural elements through art-making: organic pigments, clay, paper pulp, recycled materials, in workshops that are often site-specific and community-oriented. The emphasis on "material consciousness" is a defining feature of their pedagogy: participants learn to source, prepare, and repurpose materials found in their environment.

This approach aligns with the eco-poietic vision of Expressive Arts, which understands creativity as a relational act grounded in ecological interdependence (Levine & Kopytin, 2022). Making art becomes an act of care, not only for oneself and the community, but for the earth. In eco-poiesis, the materials used, the rhythms followed, and the relationships formed are all part of a co-creative ecosystem.

6.3 Poiesis Pilot: Montepulciano Library, November 2025–February 2026

Within the Poiesis project, Creative Art Farm implemented four sessions (20 hours total) at the Montepulciano Public Library in Tuscany between November 2025 and February 2026. Each session was approximately 4–6 hours. Participants were a mixed community group of young adults, including three participants with South American migrant backgrounds and others from outside the Tuscany region. Group size was typically 11–15 per session.

The four sessions followed a thematic arc:

- **Session 1: "Tracing the Landscape Within"** (November 2025): Slowing down, attentiveness, and transforming natural elements into personal visual narratives. Modalities: charcoal, music, and photography.
- **Session 2: "From Rhythm to Color"** (November 2025): Activating emotional expression through embodied intermodality (movement → sound → abstract painting). Modalities: painting, music, charcoal.
- **Session 3: "Shaping Silence"** (December 2025): Grounding through tactile engagement with clay, combining rhythm and meditation. Modalities: clay, rhythm, meditation.
- **Session 4: "Embodied Earth"** (February 2026): Strengthening the body–earth connection through movement and clay, emphasising collective belonging within a rural community context. Modalities: movement, clay, meditation.

The Italian pilot demonstrated the power of embodied entry into the artistic process. Opening sessions with music and movement, rather than visual production, allowed participants to enter through sensation rather than performance, reducing self-judgement and activating internal awareness before facing the blank page or the clay. A characteristic feature of this pilot was the presence of natural elements (leaves, pinecones, organic materials from the local environment) as visual and tactile references, grounding the abstract process in the landscape of Montepulciano.

One of the most significant observations from the Italian sessions was the speed and depth of relational connection that developed despite the one-off format of each workshop. In the final sharing circle, several participants articulated feeling "free to make art without fear." The pilot confirmed that even within a single-session process, it is possible to generate relational depth and intercultural dialogue when the structure is clear, facilitation remains non-interpretative, and the emphasis stays on embodied experience rather than artistic output. This case is documented in detail in the Replication Toolkit (Section 5.1).

6.4 Challenges and Opportunities in Rural Implementation

Working in a rural context such as Montepulciano presents both logistical and social challenges. Limited public transportation, digital infrastructure gaps, and seasonal constraints can affect participant attendance and programme continuity. Engaging diverse age groups with heterogeneous artistic experience requires flexible facilitation strategies and a consistent emphasis on accessibility and invitation over performance.

Despite these challenges, the rural setting offers distinctive opportunities: the slower rhythm of life, strong place-based identities, and proximity to nature create fertile ground for creative exploration. The absence of professional arts infrastructure can also be an advantage:

participants arrive without the hierarchies or expectations associated with formal arts contexts, making the non-judgemental, process-oriented approach of the Poiesis methodology particularly resonant.

6.5 Contributions to the Shared Methodology

Italy's contribution to the Poiesis methodology brings a rural and ecological lens that enriches the project's conceptual and practical foundations. Creative Art Farm demonstrates how circular economy values, material consciousness, and ecological attentiveness can be embedded in participatory art practices, and how these dimensions strengthen, not complicate, the facilitation process.

The Italian pilot also contributed an important insight about format: even single-session workshops can generate relational depth when the facilitation arc is coherent and the space is held consistently. This expands the methodology's potential reach to contexts where sustained group continuity cannot be guaranteed.

Seen through the Relational Landscapes framework (Section 7.4), Creative Art Farm's practice illuminates the anima mundi dimension most directly. Their use of organic pigments, clay, natural elements, and site-specific sessions is not simply a material choice: it is a relational one. Section 7.4's diagrams place the wider context and the natural world as an outer ring around every configuration, not a passive background but an active field that responds to what is made within it. When participants in Montepulciano used pigments from the local soil or leaves gathered from the surrounding landscape, they were entering into a reciprocal relationship with the world that already inhabited their process. This is what anima mundi names in practice: a concept rooted in Platonic philosophy, developed within depth psychology by James Hillman (*The Thought of the Heart and the Soul of the World*, 1992). Not an abstraction, but a lived and material encounter: the world that already inhabits the creative process, and that receives what is made within it.



CHAPTER 07

The Co-Created Methodology

Chapter 7: The Co-Created Methodology

7.1 Shared Foundations and Structure

The Poiesis methodology is grounded in the principles of Expressive Arts-based inquiry: art-making as a process through which knowledge and meaning emerge through the body, senses, and imagination. Facilitators and participants become co-inquirers, generating insight through engagement with materials, symbols, and relationships.

Built collaboratively by partners from Austria, Romania, and Italy, the methodology integrates diverse traditions (Expressive Arts facilitation, community arts practice, ecological creativity, and cultural storytelling) into a coherent yet flexible structure. The table below summarises the core principles:

Principle	Description
Ecopoiesis	Extends poiesis to nature, place, and materials as co-creative agents, not passive resources.
Process over product	Prioritises the unfolding of creative experience over any fixed outcome.
Aesthetic presence	Attunement to the sensory, emotional, and symbolic qualities of the creative encounter, without evaluating quality.
Facilitator as witness	Accompanying the creative process without directing or interpreting, entering the artistic field only when it is called for.
Intermodality	Openness to moving between artistic languages as time, group needs, and resources allow.
Liminality	Holding the threshold space in which change and new perspectives become possible.
Relational Landscapes	A way of tracing how individual and collective experience coexist and influence one another (Section 7.4).

7.2 Adaptability Across Contexts

The Poiesis methodology does not prescribe a single model, but invites each partner to interpret its principles in ways that resonate with their local context. Adaptability is not an afterthought, but an ethical stance, affirming that artistic processes must emerge from place, people, and purpose.

While each partner operated within a specific social and territorial reality, the methodology recognises that identity and culture are no longer bound strictly to geographic location. The artistic processes proposed by Poiesis encourage a dialogue between the inner landscapes (imaginal worlds, personal narratives, sensory experiences, memories) and the outer landscapes: the literal and social realities in which individuals live.

Each country adapted this dialogue according to local needs. Austria focused on the intersection of individual memory and collective belonging in the context of migration. Romania worked with cultural identity and community participation across generations and across contexts of disadvantage. Italy explored ecological awareness and embodied connection to place through material practice.

Three transversal themes emerged as shared axes for the pilots:

- **Emotional presence and aesthetic witnessing:** creating spaces for non-verbal expression that honour each participant's own rhythm of engagement.
- **Cultural heritage and symbolic co-creation:** engaging with local references, memories, and traditions as material for artistic exploration.
- **Ecological sensitivity and material consciousness:** using locally sourced, natural, and recycled materials as part of the artistic process.

7.3 Session Architecture and Facilitation Tools

The six-stage session architecture and the range of artistic modalities used across the three pilots are described in detail in Chapter 3 (§3.4–3.5). What follows here is a comparative view: what proved distinctive about how the same shared tools were used differently across contexts.

Across the three pilots, the same six-stage architecture and shared principles were expressed through markedly different toolsets, shaped by each community's context, resources, and facilitators' expertise. Austria worked primarily through photography, personal collage, and movement, in service of migration and belonging; Romania relied on low-barrier, non-verbal-friendly modalities (collage, monotype, linocut) suited to variable literacy and access constraints; Italy centred embodied and material practice (clay, natural pigments, rhythm) tied to place and ecological attention. What remained constant was not the toolset but the underlying commitments: process over product, aesthetic presence, and a session arc that opens, deepens, and closes with care. This is the coherence without standardisation described further in Chapter 8.



7.4 Relational Landscapes

One of the significant conceptual contributions emerging from the Poiesis pilot phase is the framework of Relational Landscapes, a way of understanding how individual and collective processes coexist and influence one another throughout a project or session series.

Collective processes rarely unfold in linear ways. Groups evolve through multiple relationships: between people, memories, materials, places, questions, artistic responses, and shared experiences. The Relational Landscapes framework offers facilitators a way of observing and navigating these relationships, tracing pathways between individual experience and collective meaning-making without forcing integration or interpretation.

Relational Landscapes was not derived from an existing theoretical school. It emerged from the project's own practice: preparing, delivering, and reflecting together on the three pilots, in ongoing dialogue and feedback across the partnership, drawing on facilitation experience already present within the partnership and sharpened through the shared training. Only in hindsight did this accumulating practical knowledge take the name and form presented here. In this sense, the framework's own emergence is itself an instance of poiesis (Section 2.5): not a theory applied to practice, but something brought forth through the making.

It resonates with wider traditions of relational thought, such as field theories of behaviour and experience in psychology, and philosophies of dialogical encounter that locate meaning not within either person but in what happens between them, though it does not claim descent from them. It names what became visible, and useful, through practice.

In the Austria pilot, this framework was most explicitly applied: participants first worked with individual artistic landscapes, and then, in a collective closure session, these individual compositions entered into dialogue within a shared visual environment. Personal artworks became part of a larger collective landscape, creating new connections between images, stories, and perspectives without dissolving the uniqueness of each contribution.

The framework is relevant in contexts where individual and collective dimensions of experience coexist, which includes most community and group-based participatory work. Rather than positioning the facilitator as someone who must resolve the relationship between individual and collective, the Relational Landscapes framework invites an observational, accompanying posture: noticing what connections emerge, what remains separate, and what the group is generating together through the artistic process.

The following diagrams form a visual grammar for understanding how individual and collective dimensions coexist, interact, and transform throughout an expressive arts process. Read in sequence, they trace a movement from the individual self through pair encounter, group process, and the facilitator's varying positions within the relational field. Each pair shows a configuration without and with an artwork present, making visible how the entry of artistic form changes the relational landscape.

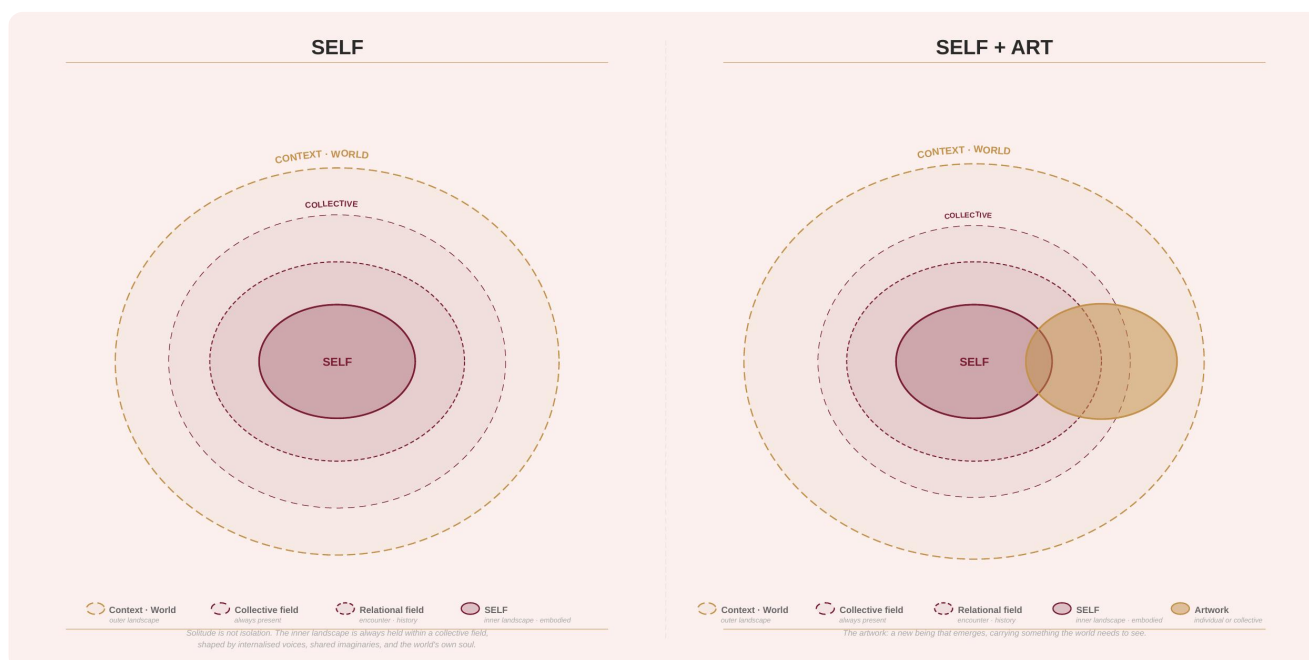


Figure 1. SELF / SELF + ART. Inner landscape, with and without an artwork.

Before encounter with others, there is encounter with oneself. The SELF configuration shows the individual as an inner landscape already held within wider fields: a tenuous Collective, made up of the internalised voices and cultural imaginaries that shape self-experience, and the broader Context and World. When an artwork appears alongside the self (SELF + ART), it arrives as a third presence, carrying its own necessity, its own need to be seen (drawing on the depth-psychological tradition of James Hillman and its extension into expressive arts practice by Natalie Rogers and Paolo Knill, among others).

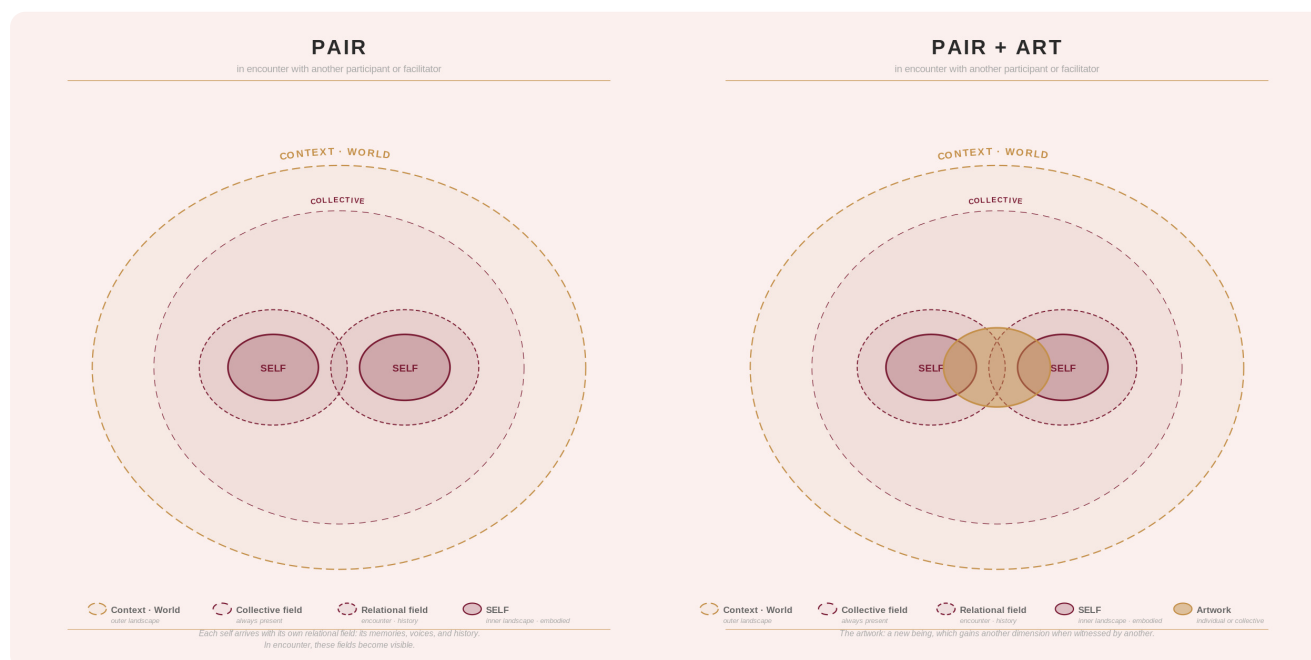


Figure 2. PAIR / PAIR + ART. Two relational fields in encounter, with and without an artwork.

Encounter changes the field. When two people enter into creative relation, their relational rings meet: each carries its own history, its own bodily memory, its own landscape of accumulated encounters. When an artwork appears at the intersection of two selves (PAIR + ART), it does not belong entirely to either: it emerges from the encounter itself, materialising the quality of what has passed between them.

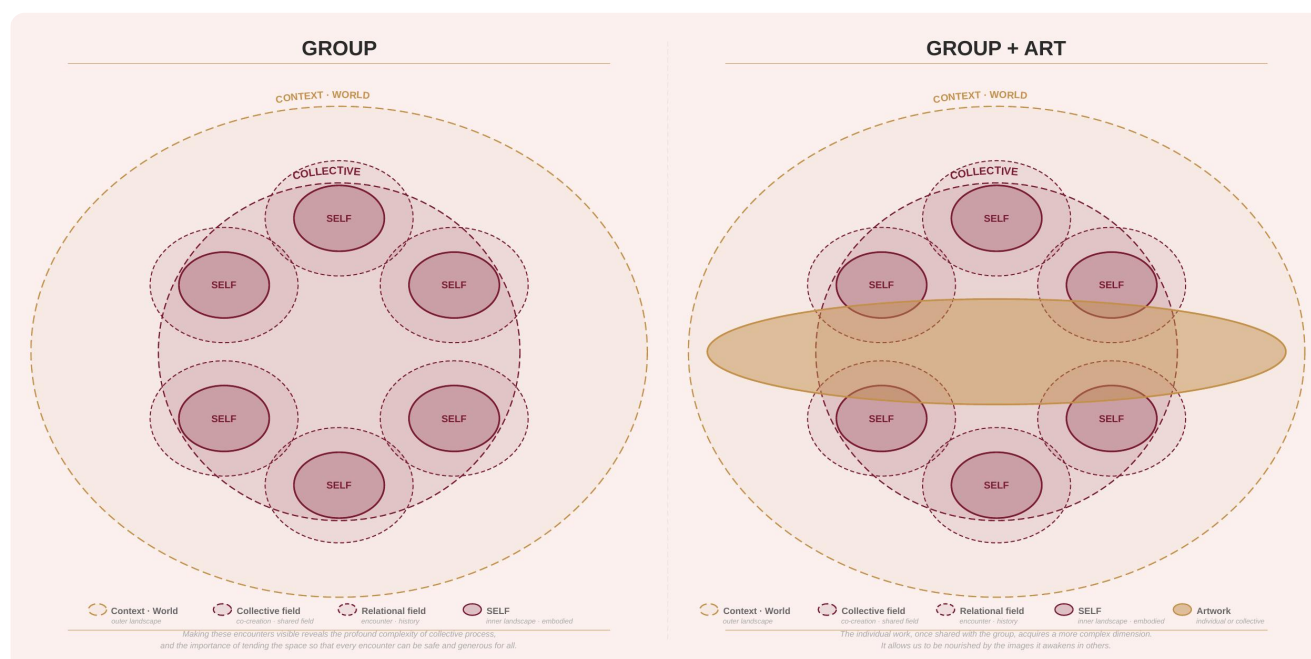


Figure 3. GROUP / GROUP + ART. Six participants within the shared Collective field, with and without an artwork.

A group generates a density of relational fields that is never fully visible in real time. When an artwork crosses into this shared field (GROUP + ART), it reaches beyond the Collective into the broader Context and World, what Hillman called *anima mundi* (see Chapter 6, in relation to Creative Art Farm's practice): collective artistic production does not only express what the group has lived, it contributes something back to a world that is already listening.

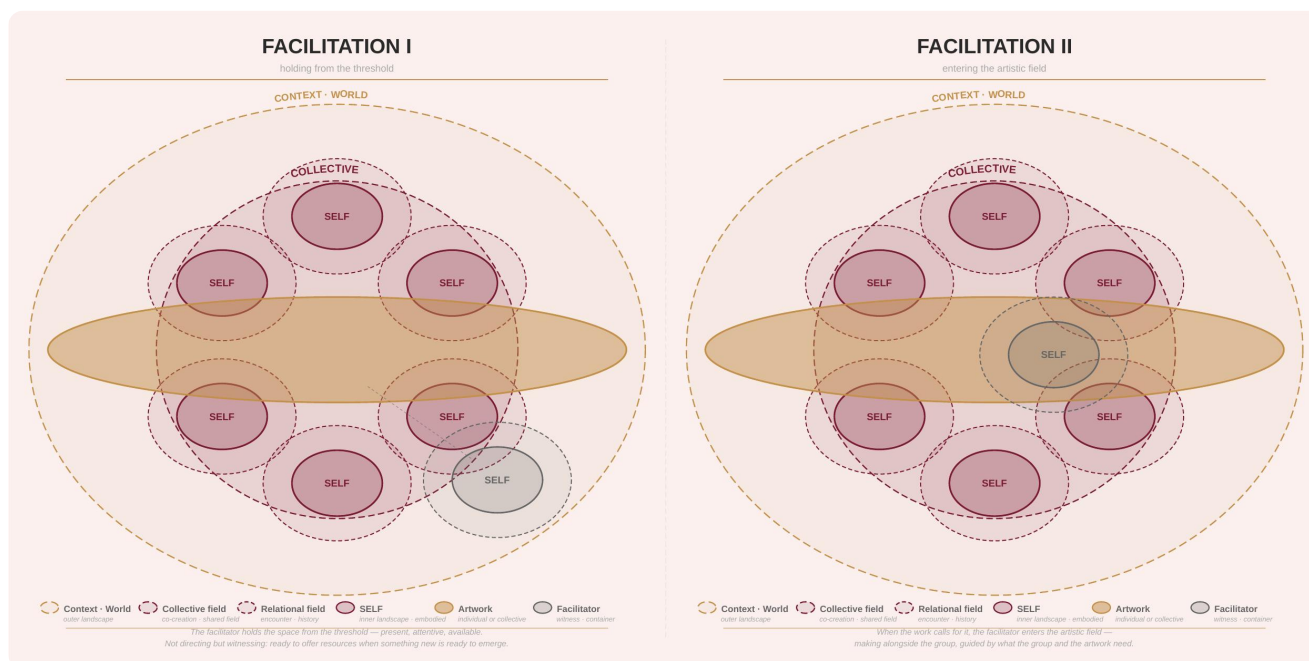


Figure 4. FACILITATION I / FACILITATION II. The facilitator at the threshold and within the artistic field.

The facilitator is not outside the relational field but holds a specific position within it, one that shifts in response to what the group and the work need. In FACILITATION I, she holds from the threshold: present and attentive, perceiving the whole group field without entering it. In FACILITATION II, she enters the artistic field, making alongside participants, guided by what the artwork and the process are calling for. The choice between these two stances is one of the most refined decisions in expressive arts facilitation: it requires reading the group field in real time and following what the work needs rather than what would feel comfortable for the facilitator.

In practice, FACILITATION I might mean noticing, once the group is underway, that something is opening in some processes while others feel stalled, and naming aloud what is emerging across the room as a possibility, without entering to make: each person then takes from it what they need. FACILITATION II might mean joining a movement invitation directly when naming it alone remains too abstract, so the facilitator also feels the rhythm of what is proposed and the rhythm of the group; or responding to a direct invitation into a collective drawing or painting, contributing from what is heard and felt, closer to an aesthetic dialogue than an intervention. Both remain safe when they stay rooted in the art itself, without interpretation or force: they ask for careful listening and imagination in equal measure.

7.5 Guidance for Implementation

Implementing the Poiesis methodology requires sensitivity, adaptability, and a deep respect for community dynamics. Facilitators are holders of space, accompanying a process where creativity, personal meaning, and group connection can emerge organically.

Key considerations for implementation:

- **Context listening:** understanding the rhythms, histories, languages, and lived realities of the community involved. This often requires collaboration with local partners who can help build trust and bridge perspectives.
- **Flexible design:** adjusting not only the content of a session but also its pacing, duration, format, and facilitation style based on the group's needs. The six-stage structure offers guidance, not prescription.
- **Emotional safety and containment:** activities should always be invitational, never forced. Facilitators should be prepared for the full range of participant responses, including silence, hesitation, or emotional intensity. Simply showing up and witnessing can be transformative.
- **Accessibility:** select materials and formats that are accessible without prior artistic training. Familiar, locally available materials reduce performance anxiety and support ownership.
- **Documentation:** document the process as a methodological practice, not only as a reporting obligation. Session notes, facilitator reflections, and participant responses are all valuable sources of learning and evaluation.

The Relational Landscapes framework described above functions not only as a conceptual map but as a working tool for facilitation. During a session, facilitators can use these diagrams as an internal orientation point: a way of locating themselves, their co-facilitators, and participants within the relational field at any given moment.

This is an internal reading, not a diagnostic label to be communicated to participants. Its value is in sharpening the facilitator's perception and informing real-time decisions: whether to intervene or wait, whether to open space for individual work or collective exchange, whether an artwork needs to be witnessed by the group or allowed to remain with its maker a little longer.

The threshold between FACILITATION I and FACILITATION II is among the most significant moment-to-moment decisions a facilitator makes. As a working orientation: FACILITATION I serves the group when creative processes are underway and what is needed is witnessing and containment rather than contribution. FACILITATION II becomes appropriate when the group or the artwork is calling for a response from within the field, when something is stuck, or when the facilitator has something specific to offer from her own creative or relational experience. This shift can happen multiple times within a single session, following the needs of the field rather than a predetermined plan.

A practical implementation checklist is included in the Facilitator Guide.



CHAPTER 08

Retrospective Evaluation and Sustainability

Chapter 8: Retrospective Evaluation and Sustainability

Chapter 7 presented the methodology as it now stands: the principles, tools, and frameworks the partnership arrived at together. This chapter turns to the pilot phase itself, evaluating what worked, what proved difficult, and what the experience of implementation revealed about the methodology's transferability. As throughout this document, the focus here is conceptual: what these findings mean for the methodology as a shared framework, not a narrative account of the pilots themselves. The Replication Toolkit documents that narrative in full, with detailed case studies and learnings drawn directly from practice; this chapter distills what those experiences mean for anyone seeking to understand, adapt, or replicate the approach.

8.1 Pilot Implementation Overview

Between November 2025 and February 2026, all three partner organisations completed their pilot implementations of the Poiesis methodology. Each pilot was developed in a distinct social, cultural, and geographic context, working with different participant groups, artistic modalities, and thematic focuses.

The number and length of sessions varied across countries: Austria delivered seven shorter sessions (21 hours total), while Romania and Italy each delivered four longer sessions (20 hours total). Even so, all three partners worked within a comparable total commitment of facilitation hours. Each organisation administered that time according to its facilitators' expertise and its community's needs: partners working with practising artists (Italy, Romania) used longer sessions to allow deeper engagement with artistic technique alongside the EXA framework, while IRARU narrowed the range of artistic techniques in order to work more intensively with individual and collective process across a greater number of shorter sessions, a distribution that drew on IRARU's own facilitation expertise and would not necessarily suit organisations newly implementing the approach.

Country	Partner / Setting	Participants	Sessions / Hours	Main Theme
Austria	IRARU / LEFÖ + VBKÖ, Vienna	Adult women, FLINTA, Latin American migrant women	7 sessions, 21 hours	Migration, memory, belonging
Romania	Alba Eglesia / Ticuşu Vechi + Sighişoara	Young people 12–35 from disadvantaged contexts	4 sessions, 20 hours	Cultural identity, participation

Italy	Creative Art Farm / Montepulciano Library	Mixed community, young adults incl. migrants	4 sessions, 20 hours	Ecology, materiality, rural life
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The implementation demonstrated significant variation in format, modality, and thematic emphasis across the three countries. Section 8.3 returns to what this variation reveals about the methodology as a whole.

8.2 Evaluation: Approach and Key Findings

The evaluation approach used across the three pilots was qualitative and process-oriented, reflecting the values of Expressive Arts-based inquiry. Rather than reducing outcomes to quantifiable metrics, the evaluation privileged participant engagement, facilitator reflection, and observed group dynamics.

Evaluation tools used across the pilots included: facilitator journals and reflective notes, group feedback circles (verbal sharing at session end), visual or symbolic evaluation (drawing a response, gesture-based feedback), peer observation among facilitators, and informal dialogue with community partners and host organisations. In Austria, this was complemented by brief anonymous surveys in accessible language; in Romania and Italy, language, logistics, and participant-trust considerations made individual surveys impractical, and feedback was gathered through the group-based tools above.

Key findings across the three implementations:

Themes as Entry Points, Not Predetermined Outcomes

Across all three countries, the designated themes (migration and belonging in Austria; cultural identity and heritage in Romania; ecology and materiality in Italy) functioned primarily as invitations into artistic exploration rather than fixed outcomes. Participants did not arrive at predetermined conclusions. Instead, the artistic processes created opportunities for questions, perspectives, and connections to emerge that were often broader, more nuanced, and more unexpected than the original point of departure. This reflects one of the central intentions of the Poiesis approach: not to validate predefined ideas, but to create conditions in which new understandings can emerge.

Multiple Forms of Participation Supported Engagement

Offering multiple expressive modalities allowed participants to engage according to their own preferences, comfort levels, and communication styles. Meaningful participation occurred through artistic action, observation, listening, and presence, not only through spoken language or verbal reflection. In Romania, this was particularly significant: multi-modal reflection (pointing, choosing one word, silent witnessing) widened participation among groups with variable literacy without reducing the depth of the process.

Aesthetic Safety as Foundation

Across all three contexts, the non-judgemental, non-interpretive frame established at the beginning of each session was foundational to engagement. When participants experienced the space as genuinely process-oriented and free from evaluation, engagement increased consistently, including among those who arrived with hesitation or emotional intensity. In Italy, a participant articulated this explicitly: "Free to make art without fear."

Relational Landscapes and Collective Meaning-Making

The movement between individual and collective experience was present in all three pilots, though it took different forms. In Austria, this took the form of individual artistic landscapes brought together into a shared composition. In Romania, it appeared through collective display and witnessing. In Italy, it emerged through shared spatial presence during and after the art-making process. In each case, the collective dimension was not forced or structured as a group activity in the conventional sense, but emerged through the shared aesthetic space and the facilitated witnessing practices.

8.3 Central Learning: Coherence Without Standardisation

Perhaps the most significant conclusion emerging from the pilot phase concerns the nature of transferability itself.

The Poiesis methodology demonstrates that methodological coherence can be maintained without standardisation. Different organisations, communities, modalities, and contexts can produce diverse practices while remaining grounded in shared principles.

The artistic activities implemented in Austria, Romania, and Italy differed considerably. Partners worked with different communities, materials, themes, durations, and facilitation approaches. Yet common patterns remained visible across all contexts: participant agency, phenomenological observation, process orientation, intermodal exploration, resource-oriented facilitation, and contextual adaptation were present throughout the pilots.

This finding has important implications for replication. The transferability of the Poiesis approach does not depend on reproducing specific activities. It depends on maintaining core facilitation principles while adapting them to local realities, participant needs, organisational structures, and cultural contexts. Organisations can work from a shared methodological foundation while developing responses that are appropriate to their specific communities, themes, and conditions.

8.4 Sustainability and Recommendations for Future Implementation

Based on the experiences and reflections gathered throughout the Poiesis project, the following recommendations emerge for organisations interested in implementing or adapting this approach:

- **Build from local strengths.** Begin by identifying existing artistic, social, and cultural resources in the community. Leverage the knowledge of local artists, educators, and community members to ground the work in relevance and long-term sustainability.
- **Train and support facilitators.** Offer training in the principles of the Poiesis approach. Create reflective spaces for facilitators to share challenges, learn from each other, and evolve their practice. The Facilitator Guide and Replication Toolkit provide accessible entry points.
- **Design for access from the start.** Consider structural realities (caregiving responsibilities, literacy variation, transportation, language diversity, work schedules) as design conditions rather than obstacles. The pilots demonstrated that small adaptations in pacing, materials, and reflection formats significantly expand participation.
- **Document as a methodological practice.** Encourage ongoing documentation through session notes, facilitator observations, and participant reflections. Documentation is not an administrative requirement but a tool for learning, quality development, and transferability. The POIESIS project tools (session planning sheet, observation template, facilitator reflection sheet) are available as separate downloadable resources.
- **Foster intersectoral partnerships.** Connect with schools, cultural institutions, community organisations, and other stakeholders to broaden reach and diversify implementation contexts. Cross-sector collaboration enhances impact and sustainability.
- **Embrace iteration.** Avoid rigid replication. Allow time for iterative learning, feedback loops, and creative adaptation. The methodology is designed to evolve through practice, not to remain fixed.

This lesson began before the pilots themselves. The project's own baseline survey, conducted during the year-end period across all three countries, reached a modest and uneven number of respondents: a reminder that working with vulnerable or under-resourced communities demands a level of flexibility and problem-solving that needs to be anticipated from the outset; reaching a community meaningfully is rarely as simple as sharing a digital link. Two practical lessons followed: surveys benefit from being designed bilingually from the outset rather than translated afterwards, and standardising response options where possible, rather than relying on open text for questions with a limited range of answers, considerably eases analysis, freeing time and attention for the open-ended responses that carry the most contextual nuance.



BACK MATTER

Annexes and References

Annexes

Annex 1: Glossary of Key Terms

Term	Definition
Poiesis	From the Greek "to bring forth." Refers to creative becoming and the emergence of meaning through artistic process. Not a controlled outcome, but a discovery: something that arises through the act of making. Philosophical foundation of the methodology, alongside phenomenology.
Phenomenology	The methodology's epistemological foundation, alongside poiesis: attending to direct, lived experience as it appears, without imposing external interpretation or analysis.
Expressive Arts (EXA)	An interdisciplinary field integrating various art forms within a process-oriented, phenomenological framework. Not art therapy; a philosophical and practical approach to facilitating creative exploration in community, educational, and non-formal settings.
Aesthetic presence	A facilitator's capacity to remain attuned, open, and responsive to the artistic and relational field, without imposing interpretation or directing outcomes.
Aesthetic responsibility	The facilitator's responsibility for the theoretical and technical dimension of the creative process, so that participants do not need any artistic or theoretical background to take part ("low skill, high sensitivity", Section 2.2). Distinct from aesthetic presence, which concerns the quality of the facilitator's attention rather than who carries this responsibility.
Intermodality	The possibility of moving between different art forms (from image to sound, from movement to word) when time, group needs, and resources allow, to deepen insight and widen access to experience — not a fixed requirement to use multiple forms in every session.
Facilitator as witness	The ethical and relational stance through which facilitators accompany the creative process without directing or interpreting it. Includes both attentive presence and, when the process calls for it, careful, participatory involvement within the artistic field.
Session Architecture	The six-stage structure that guides the flow of a creative session: Check-in, Awareness-raising, Art experience, Aesthetic analysis, Reflection and integration, Check-out.
Relational Landscapes	A conceptual framework for understanding how individual and collective processes coexist and influence one another throughout a project. Supports facilitators in observing and navigating the relationships between participants, artistic processes, contexts, and emerging meanings.

Relational Safety	The conditions under which participants feel emotionally secure and free to express themselves within a group. Created through non-judgemental framing, clear structure, and respectful facilitation.
Ecopoiesis	An extension of poiesis that encompasses ecological consciousness, viewing the earth and natural systems as co-creative agents. Emphasises sustainability and the relational dimension of creative practice.
Facilitator	A guide who supports the creative process, holds space, and encourages group flow, without directing or interpreting outcomes. Not a therapist or teacher in the conventional sense.
Liminality	The in-between threshold space where change becomes possible. The moment when one artistic form transitions to another, or when experience moves between individual and collective dimensions.
Process over product	The commitment to prioritising the unfolding of creative experience over any fixed outcome or final product. Value lies in participation and presence, not perfection.

Annex 2: Community Survey: Key Findings

A community baseline survey was designed and adapted into each country's local language prior to pilot implementation. A total of 29 responses were collected across Austria (8), Italy (12), and Romania (9): an early, exploratory sense of context rather than a representative sample. Key findings:

- Participants were primarily women living in urban and rural areas, with strong participation in local activities and community events.
- Cultural expression was highly valued across all three contexts, especially music, dance, local festivals, and crafts.
- Barriers identified: language, limited access to arts spaces, emotional insecurity, and a perception that existing artistic programmes were oriented towards professionals and not accessible to everyday participants.
- 93.1% of respondents had previously participated in artistic activities. Anticipated formats varied widely, reflecting personal interest and local context.
- Key priorities identified: creating emotionally safe and welcoming spaces; using accessible art forms; facilitating community-building through shared creation.

The survey results informed the design of the pilot sessions and the adaptation of the methodology to each local context. They also confirmed the relevance of the Poiesis approach to the communities involved.

Annex 3: Project Technical Sheet

Title	POIESIS – Expressive Arts for Youths
Programme	Erasmus+ KA2 Cooperation Partnership
Duration	1 September 2024 – 30 June 2026
Coordinator	IRARU (Austria)
Partners	Alba Eglesia Foundation (Romania), Creative Art Farm APS (Italy)
Objectives	Co-create a flexible, participatory methodology grounded in Expressive Arts principles; test it across three European contexts; produce transferable documentation for replication.
Artistic modalities used in pilots	Photography, collage, mixed-media composition, monotype printing, linocut, drawing, painting, movement, clay, music, creative writing, poetry, natural and recycled materials.
Target groups	Latin American migrant women (Austria); young people from disadvantaged rural and semi-urban contexts (Romania); mixed rural community group including migrants (Italy).
Contact	info@iraru.org

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