



**ARTMILL - ARTDIALOG
RESEARCH-CREATION
EVALUATION**

Research–Creation and Territorial Impacts

Transformative Territories Programme (2023–2025)

Case study: Inter–Species Refuge (ISR)

Lead organisation / mediator: ArtDialog (ArtMill Living Lab)

Territory: ArtMill site and surrounding rural landscape (Czech Republic)

Type of territory: Mixed agricultural and semi-rural landscape under climate stress; living lab combining regeneration, care practices, and community refuge

1. Project Overview and Territorial Context

Inter-Species Refuge (ISR) is a multi-year research-creation project initiated within the Transformative Territories programme and designed to continue beyond it. ISR is not a single artwork but a living lab and seasonal public sanctuary developed at ArtMill, integrating regenerative and alternative agricultural practices, interspecies cohabitation, queer ecology, and regenerative pastoralism. The project positions the territory as a more-than-human community and treats “refuge” as both an ecological function and a social practice: a space for holistic care for humans and other-than-humans, and a place open to communities of struggle, people seeking respite, and artists working with participatory and multispecies methodologies.

ISR is situated at the intersection of science, art, and social practice, with an explicit ambition to function as a site for research, adaptation, and experimentation in response to local climate impacts. Stakeholders included ArtDialog/ArtMill’s internal team (as long-term stewards of the land), invited artists and researchers, scientific collaborators (ecological studies and agroforestry research), local residents and farmers, schools and students, municipal actors, and international participants (artists, students, volunteers). In addition to human stakeholders, the project framed plants, animals (including resident horses), and habitat dynamics as active agents shaping the process and its ethics.

The project unfolded over two years (2023–2025 within TT), with a clear intention to move from diagnosis to iterative prototyping and long-term stewardship. Importantly, ISR’s “outputs” are partly infrastructural (site design, planted trees, community protocols) and partly cultural (assemblies, exhibitions, participatory works, documentation, and evolving shared language). This dual register is central to the project’s relevance for Transformative Territories: it tests how research-creation can generate durable territorial effects without separating ecological intervention from cultural practice.

2. Timeline, Governance, and Territorial Anchoring

ISR’s timeline was deliberately long, reflecting the project’s commitment to non-anthropocentric temporality and seasonal land processes. The duration enabled an extensive territorial assessment and diagnosis during the first year, followed by an implementation and consolidation phase in the second year. This approach aligned with the seasonality of ArtMill’s activities and enabled public moments that functioned as “checkpoints” for collective learning rather than event-based deliverables.

Two milestone moments structured public visibility and accountability:

- Summer 2024 opening event: designed as an introduction to research-creation methodologies and plans, presenting site design concepts, ecological studies, and the research base underpinning transdisciplinary work.
- Follow-up exhibition and closing celebration: presenting progress and consolidating learning; initially planned to start with tree planting, but administrative and funding constraints delayed it. The tree-planting became the official closure/celebration: 60 trees were planted with volunteers from Prague and local participants.

Administrative constraints (municipal and Ministry of Environment procedures) significantly affected sequencing. However, rather than weakening the project, these delays clarified the project's core logic: care and regeneration required institutional negotiation, patience, and adaptive planning. ISR's timeline therefore functioned as a learning device—testing how a living lab navigates governance friction while maintaining ecological intention.

From a Transformative Territories perspective, the timeframe's key contribution was the capacity to let slow relations mature: sustained observation, shifts in perception, repeated community encounters, and the gradual embedding of protocols and habits. The project's long duration also enabled unplanned but critical outcomes (e.g., student researchers becoming long-term stewards; stakeholders shifting from "attendance" to durable involvement).

3. Territorial Diagnosis, Artistic Mediation, and Tools

ISR's diagnosis did not treat the territory as a "site to activate" but as an already-active assemblage requiring careful entry. ArtDialog played a decisive mediating role between land history, ecological studies, community relationships, and invited artists. In practical terms, the organisation functioned as an enabling infrastructure: onboarding artists into an existing diagnostic corpus (site analyses, ecological studies, historical context), while keeping the diagnosis open to new perceptions brought by external participants.

Diagnostic methods combined:

- pre-existing ecological studies and site design research;
- long-term local knowledge held by the ArtMill team and key custodians (including historical and spiritual knowledge of the site);
- collective observation sessions and iterative decision-making processes;
- artist-led practices that produced additional "sensitive data" (listening walks, slow observation, participatory mapping, scanning/recording practices, and speculative fabulation).

The project's methodological specificity lies in its cyclical movement between practice and theory: rather than "applying" theory to a site, ISR moved from on-the-ground work into conceptual articulation, and back into practice, making research-creation a loop of situated learning. The diagnosis therefore evolved over time—remaining anchored in the organisation's initial concepts (climate adaptation, more-than-human needs, and belonging), while expanding through collective observation and new artistic inquiries.

Tools were intentionally mixed and accessible: digital devices (phones for scanning and image capture; drone/3D scans; documentation media), analogue mapping and drawing, textile/weaving practices, sonic walks and foraging, and low-impact land stewardship protocols. This toolbox aimed to keep the project transmissible and avoid dependence on expensive technological infrastructures, while still producing legible traces for evaluation and transfer.

4. Transformative Intention and Intervention (R / P / S)

ISR's transformative intention operated across representations, practices, and structures, with notable depth in the latter two due to the community and land-based nature of the work.

Transforming representations (how the territory is perceived and narrated):

ISR systematically subverted human exceptionalism by designing the site “for the territory itself,” treating humans as participants rather than owners. Artistic processes generated new representations of the land and its beings across media (drone imagery, 3D scans, drawings, photographs, writings), producing a mirrored “digital and narrative territory” that increased collective awareness of the site as an entity. Projects such as ISR SF developed speculative, feminist fabulation that invited participants to perceive the hill as a multispecies storyteller and time as relational rather than linear. Installations such as khipu-inspired textile works introduced ritual, storytelling, and cosmological framings that re-situated ecological practice within broader epistemic traditions.

Transforming practices (how people act, care, and relate):

Participatory formats encouraged slow observation, sensory attunement, and reciprocal engagement. Jakub Tulinger’s work with students explicitly trained a shift from “using objects” to recognising agency: participants spent extended time alone observing and listening before producing digital scans of more-than-human presences associated with resilience. Tree planting and agroforestry activities translated ecological knowledge into hands-on care; the cohabitation with horses (as visible, relational beings with distinct personalities) reinforced an interspecies ethics not limited to symbolic gestures but embedded in daily land practice.

Transforming structures (how cooperation and governance are organised):

ISR’s structural transformation is primarily organisational and community-based. The project required durable onboarding and stewardship pathways, since co-creation at ArtMill is inseparable from community life. Over the project, the team refined governance practices combining role-based responsibility (holacracy-influenced domains and rotating roles) with hierarchical leadership tied to accountability, seniority, and care obligations. This resulted in operational clarity (a “path to responsibility”), necessary for sustaining ethical relationality among humans and—by extension—more-than-humans.

A key structural motif that emerged was the problem of fences: repeatedly encountered in site design as both a practical and ethical question (boundaries, safety, permeability, hospitality, and cohabitation). Rather than resolving this as a purely technical matter, *ISR* treated it as a recurring governance and care dilemma, shaping how refuge is defined and maintained.

5. Publics, Co-Construction, and Alliances

Across 2024–2025, ISR engaged approximately 150–200 participants through workshops, open days, fieldwork, and Creative Assemblies. Publics included local residents, farmers, teachers, youth, students, Czech artists, international artists and scientists, and long-term volunteers. Importantly, the project did not assume a pre-existing “public of concern” for climate or regenerative practice. In a conservative local context where climate change and art-led regeneration are not always recognised as priorities, ISR evolved toward becoming a crossroads: a space where local oral histories and attachments could be hosted (including stories ranging from everyday memory to mythic/cultural narratives), while also presenting artistic work addressing climate crisis, queer ecology, and more-than-human cohabitation. Co-construction was not organised around a fixed artwork but around an evolving system. Over time, ISR became less a set of distinguishable contributions and more a shared practice field where activities such as building a stable, hosting assemblies, planting trees, and exhibiting works formed one continuous ecology of care. This blurring is a core feature (and evaluation challenge) of living labs: the “artwork” becomes the set of relations and the evolving capacity to host transformation.

Alliances developed across scales:

- locally: residents, neighbours, schools, farmers, municipal interfaces, and volunteers;
- nationally: the wider Czech arts community;
- transnationally: international students, artists, and volunteers (e.g., Prague volunteer mobilisation for tree planting).

These alliances strengthened continuity beyond TT. In practice, *ISR*'s coalition is maintained through repeated seasonal openings, long-term residency possibilities, shared stewardship tasks, and ongoing collaboration among participants who formed durable bonds rather than event-based contacts.

6. Research–Creation Effects, Evaluation, and Legacy

ISR is unequivocally research-creation: knowledge emerged through iterative practice, site-based inquiry, and continuous adjustment rather than predetermined outputs. Evaluation was embedded as a collective learning process, tracking how practices, language, and organisational capacity evolve.

Symbolic effects:

A shared lexicon emerged around refuge, kinship, motion, holding space, and entanglement. Participatory mapping methods (string-linked contributions in *ISR SF*) materialised interdependence as a collective archive. Planting practices were reframed through species-specific intentionality (e.g., trees planted for shade corridors for horses, or to invite pollinators), shifting participants' perception of trees from "resources" to collaborators. Oral histories contributed by neighbours re-inscribed local memory into ecological design (fruit/berry gathering traditions influencing species selection).

Relational and organisational effects:

A major outcome was the formation and stabilisation of a durable community capable of sustaining the site. Expected stakeholder connection evolved into deeper bonds, friendships, and ongoing collaborations. Notably, an agroforestry student researcher became a permanent community member, contributing to other ecological projects, school presentations, and academic research anchored in *ISR*.

Material and ecological effects:

The planting of 60 trees constitutes a long-term material transformation with decades-scale implications. More broadly, *ISR*'s site design and stewardship practices—combined with community protocols—constitute a living infrastructure for regeneration and refuge.

Legacy and next steps:

ISR's legacy is both social (belonging, long-term stewardship, cross-community alliances) and ecological (tree planting, habitat diversification, seasonal care systems). Many collaborators remain connected to the territory, some experiencing it as refuge after displacement. The project has already catalysed future work: KlimaHouse will extend the living lab by exploring climate adaptation of local flora through a greenhouse simulating predicted 2050 conditions, linking to a Serbian site where such climate conditions already occur. This next phase reinforces *ISR*'s role as a seed programme for a broader network of living labs sharing methods for regeneration, community resilience, and hope-based communication.



THE TRANSFORMATIVE TERRITORIES PROGRAMME

Transformative territories: Performing Transition through the Arts is a **European laboratory uniting a network of actors and artists who work to promote new ways of inhabiting the Earth.** Throughout the duration of the program, over a dozen field experiments combining **arts, sciences, and citizen participation, collective experiences, artistic performances, exhibitions, educational actions, training sessions, and meetings** will bring together artists, thinkers, farmers, scientists, political actors, cultural project leaders, and local and European citizens to **demonstrate the potential of culture-based solutions in transforming territories.**

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