



**ISTITUTO TERRA
E MEMORIA
RESEARCH-CREATION
EVALUATION**

Research–Creation and Territorial Impacts

Transformative Territories Programme (2025–2026)

Case study: Regenerative Landscapes

Lead organisation: ITM

Territory: Mação, Portugal

Type of territory: Rural and peri-rural landscape affected by repeated wildfires and demographic decline

1. Project Overview and Territorial Context

Regenerative Landscapes is a research-creation project developed by ITM in Mação within the framework of the European Transformative Territories programme (2025–2026). The project addressed territories affected by repeated extreme events—particularly wildfires—and by long-term processes of rural abandonment. Its central intention was to explore how artistic practices can contribute to the ecological, social, and affective regeneration of such territories by intervening in the relationships between human and non-human communities.

Rather than proposing predefined solutions, the project sought to listen to the signals of the territory and to test protocols of attentiveness, hospitality, and repair through collaborative artistic processes. Stakeholders included ITM, local and invited artists, civic associations, schools, municipal authorities, residents, and researchers from the Geosciences Centre, forming a multi-layered constellation of actors concerned with territorial vulnerability and regeneration.

The project was conceived as an open and adaptive process. Its temporal structure combined an initial phase of intensive field immersion—lasting several weeks—with a series of follow-up sessions extending until March 2026. This mixed timeline enabled both depth of engagement and continuity. Adjustments to the schedule were required in response to unforeseen territorial conditions, including extreme weather events, which in turn generated unexpected short-term outcomes, such as intergenerational encounters and artistic actions carried out in areas recently devastated by fire.

In the longer term, the project aims to support the emergence of a local nucleus of “environmental sentinels”: residents, artists, and institutional actors capable of continuing to observe, document, and respond to territorial vulnerabilities beyond the formal duration of Transformative Territories. The project thus positioned itself not as a one-off intervention, but as a catalyst for ongoing territorial attention and care.

2. Timeline, Methodology, and Territorial Diagnosis

The methodological approach of *Regenerative Landscapes* was grounded in a sensitive and situated territorial diagnosis. In line with Transformative Territories principles, the diagnosis did not take the form of a purely technical assessment but emerged from a process of immersion and collective inquiry aimed at understanding the deep dynamics, fragilities, and potentials of the Mação territory.

The diagnostic phase combined multiple tools and practices: photographic surveys of landscapes and fire-affected areas, interviews with residents and local actors, collective walks, informal exchanges, and participatory mapping sessions. These methods allowed for the articulation of scientific knowledge, lived experience, and affective perception. Artistic practices functioned as mediating devices, enabling the circulation of narratives and the emergence of shared understandings rather than imposing expert interpretations.

The role of the artist was explicitly conceived as that of a mediator rather than a directive figure. Artists activated plural forms of listening—towards residents, institutions, and non-human elements of the

landscape—and facilitated horizontal exchanges. Tools ranged from mobile devices for environmental image capture to analogue techniques for drawing community maps and visualising shared memories of place.

The temporal flexibility of the project proved essential. Adjusting the schedule in response to territorial conditions allowed the project to remain attentive to real-time vulnerabilities and to integrate unexpected events into the research-creation process. This adaptability reinforced trust with local communities and ensured that the diagnosis remained grounded in lived realities rather than abstract planning frameworks.

3. Transformative Intention and Artistic Intervention (R / P / S)

The transformative intention of Regenerative Landscapes operated across representations, practices, and organisational structures.

Transforming representations:

The project contributed to the emergence of new affective and symbolic vocabularies for the territory. Through photographic inventories, exhibitions, and collective discussions, places marked by destruction were reframed as “cultural landscapes” and “places of hope.” Artistic outputs did not aestheticise damage but made visible the layered histories, attachments, and regenerative potentials of fire-affected areas.

Transforming practices:

Artistic workshops and assemblies generated new ways of acting and interacting within the territory. Residents and participants engaged in practices of attentive observation, collective mapping, and the recovery of traditional gestures linked to land care. These practices shifted the focus from immediate productivity to process, continuity, and shared responsibility, embedding care into everyday actions.

Transforming structures:

While the project did not aim to redesign formal governance mechanisms, it contributed to the reorganisation of relationships between actors. Channels of cooperation were opened between artists, researchers, associations, schools, and municipal services. Informal rules for collaboration, information sharing, and collective decision-making emerged, strengthening the territory’s capacity to respond to vulnerability in a coordinated manner.

The project also had a formative effect on participating artists. Many incorporated new conceptual and methodological dimensions into their practice, privileging process over product and embracing participatory, mediating approaches attentive to human and non-human voices. This artistic maturation reinforced the research-creation dimension of the project.

4. Publics, Co-Creation, and Territorial Alliances

Public engagement constituted the social and political core of *Regenerative Landscapes*. In accordance with Transformative Artistic Practices, the public was not approached as an audience but as an emerging collective formed around shared concerns for the territory.

Engagement unfolded through open cycles of participation, including creative workshops, performances in natural settings, public debates, and assemblies. Approximately 150 participants were directly involved across the project, including residents, municipal staff, youth, visitors, and members of local associations. These formats encouraged intergenerational dialogue and the circulation of knowledge between groups that do not usually interact.

Co-creation was central to the project's evolution. Workshops and practices were shaped by concerns expressed by the local community, who actively contributed to the design of activities. This co-design directly influenced materials, gestures, and forms used, including the recovery and reinterpretation of traditional practices linked to land use and memory.

Partnerships were consolidated with local associations, senior clubs, schools, and the municipality. These collaborations operated in a circular manner, with shared responsibilities and resources rather than hierarchical delegation. The existence of an already dense local network facilitated anchoring the project within the territory and strengthened the likelihood of continuity beyond the Transformative Territories programme.

In addition to local engagement, the project developed a transnational dimension through higher education collaborations and international exchanges. Training programmes, scientific exchanges, and internships involved ITM, the Instituto Politécnico de Tomar, and partner universities in Portugal, Spain, France, Cape Verde, and Brazil. These exchanges enabled the circulation of methodologies and reinforced the project's positioning within a broader European and international research-creation ecosystem.

5. Research-Creation Effects and Evaluation

Regenerative Landscapes functioned unequivocally as a research-creation project. Artistic practice was inseparable from inquiry, learning, and adaptation. The project prioritised tacit knowledge, peer learning, and contextual responsiveness, positioning research-creation as an open process rather than a finalised output.

The main effects can be grouped into three interrelated axes:

Symbolic effects:

New shared narratives and affective vocabularies emerged, allowing participants to speak about the territory beyond narratives of loss or risk. Visual exhibitions and photographic works played a key role in articulating these narratives and making them collectively negotiable.

Relational and organisational effects:

The project created durable channels of cooperation between researchers, associations, educational institutions, and local authorities. These relationships reconfigured how actors relate to one another and to the territory, reinforcing collective capacity for action.

Material and ecological effects:

Although the project did not primarily focus on physical transformation, it influenced material practices through attentive observation, micro-interventions, and the valorisation of gestures of care. These practices contributed to a heightened sensitivity to ecological thresholds and vulnerabilities.

Evaluation was embedded throughout the process. Rather than relying on external metrics, it occurred within each encounter through dialogue, feedback, and iterative adjustment. This approach allowed the project to remain responsive and ensured that evaluation functioned as a learning and governance tool.

6. Legacy, Continuity, and Transferability

The primary legacy of Regenerative Landscapes lies in the consolidation of good practices and inter-institutional relationships. Visual archives, affective maps, and shared methodologies remain active resources for the territory. Informal rules for collaboration and memory preservation continue to structure ongoing activities.

The strength of these connections enables both the continuation of the project—through new workshops and micro-interventions—and its potential replication in other territories facing similar conditions. The methodologies developed are adaptable to contexts affected by ecological disaster and demographic decline.

To reinforce future impact, the expansion and consolidation of partnerships is recommended, enabling the circulation of methodologies, artists, and residents between vulnerable regions. Such scaling would broaden learning processes while maintaining the situated, attentive ethos that underpins the project.



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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