

TAVROS

RESEARCH-CREATION

EVALUATION



Research-Creation and Territorial Impacts
Transformative Territories Programme (2024–2025)
Case study: Skylarking (Long Play & Short Play)
Artist: Nuno da Luz
Host site: Centre of Engraving Arts – Vasso Katraki Museum
Territory: Aitoliko Lagoon, Greece

1. Project Overview and Territorial Context

Skylarking is a research-creation project by sound artist and researcher Nuno da Luz, developed within the European *Transformative Territories* programme. The project unfolded through two complementary formats: *Skylarking* (Long Play), a 72-hour continuous listening station installed at the Vasso Katraki Museum, and *Skylarking* (Short Play), a participatory listening and vocal improvisation performance centred on bird calls and migratory soundscapes.

The project was situated in the Aitoliko Lagoon, a fragile lagoon ecosystem in western Greece characterised by its ecological vulnerability, low institutional visibility, and strong interdependence between human and non-human actors. The territory functions as a migratory bird corridor, a fishing area, and a lived landscape shaped by seasonal rhythms, climatic instability, and increasing acoustic and environmental pressure.

Nuno da Luz's artistic practice focuses on environmental sound, expanded listening, and the political implications of how territories are heard, inhabited, and represented. His work bridges sound art, ecological research, and sonic anthropology, with particular attention to non-human temporalities and vibrational phenomena. *Skylarking* extends this trajectory by positioning listening not only as an aesthetic gesture, but as a methodological and ethical mode of territorial engagement.

The project developed over nearly one year, from the artist's selection to its public activation. The timeline included preparatory research, remote collaboration, field investigation, production, and public presentation. Due to budgetary constraints, the artist's physical presence on site was limited; however, the extended timeframe allowed for sustained dialogue with local actors, including the Lagoon's Management Unit, fishermen's associations, environmental volunteers, and ornithologist Yiannis Roussopoulos.

This duration proved decisive. Rather than relying on intensive on-site production, the project privileged slow listening, repeated exchanges, and cumulative trust-building. The resulting works foregrounded long ecological temporalities and subtle transformations, aligning the artistic process with the rhythms of the lagoon rather than with extractive or event-driven logics.

2. Timeline, Methodology, and Territorial Diagnosis

The methodological approach of *Skylarking* was grounded in a sensitive, situated diagnosis of the territory. Consistent with *Transformative Territories* principles, the project did not aim to produce a technical environmental assessment, but to understand the lagoon as a living system of relations, vulnerabilities, and attachments.

As a non-Greek speaker, the artist began by engaging in a process of translation—linguistic, cultural, and epistemic. Environmental studies, archival material, and local documentation were translated and discussed with local partners to ensure accurate understanding while avoiding misinterpretation. This translation work functioned as a diagnostic tool in itself, enabling different knowledge systems

(scientific, vernacular, artistic) to coexist.

The diagnosis relied on multiple tools:

- extended field recordings during periods of heightened non-human activity,
- informal interviews and conversations with fishermen, volunteers, and residents,
- recurring exchanges with ornithologist Yiannis Roussopoulos to understand migratory patterns and acoustic changes linked to climate disruption and human intervention.

Rather than extracting data, the diagnostic phase unfolded as a relational process, emphasising attentiveness, reciprocity, and time spent in observation. This approach made audible tensions often overlooked: acoustic pollution, seasonal stress on bird populations, and the erosion of shared listening practices within the community.

The project's methodology deliberately privileged low-impact protocols: non-invasive sound recording, respect for noise thresholds, extended listening durations, and alignment with climatic and biological rhythms. These choices translated ecological fragility into concrete operative frameworks, embedding care directly into artistic decision-making.

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

The transformative intention of *Skylarking* operated across representations, practices, and—more indirectly—structures.

Transforming representations:

By amplifying the lagoon's soundscape within the museum space and through radio broadcast, the project reframed Aitoliko as a vibrant multispecies environment rather than a marginal or "silent" territory. Non-human presences—particularly migratory birds—became central reference points, shifting dominant narratives from economic utility to ecological cohabitation.

Transforming practices:

The *Short Play* format invited participants to engage in collective listening and vocal mimicry. These embodied practices encouraged attentiveness to non-human rhythms and fostered new ways of interacting with the environment. Listening was no longer passive but became an active, shared gesture of care and learning.

Transforming structures:

While the project did not directly intervene in governance frameworks, it subtly influenced organisational dynamics by strengthening collaboration between cultural institutions, environmental experts, and local communities. The museum became a space for ecological attention, and listening emerged as a legitimate mode of public engagement.

For the artist, the residency marked a deepening of his research into Mediterranean soundscapes and non-human agency. Working within a context of limited resources reinforced his methodology of low-tech production supported by dense local knowledge networks, consolidating a research-driven, long-term artistic trajectory.

4. Publics, Co-Construction, and Territorial Alliances

The publics engaged in *Skylarking* were diverse and multi-layered, reflecting the complexity of the territory. Participants included local residents, children and families, fishermen, environmental volunteers, cultural workers, scientists, and museum visitors. Quantitatively, several dozen participants were directly involved through workshops, listening sessions, and performances, while broader audiences were reached via radio broadcast and documentation.

Co-construction was central to the project's approach. Local actors contributed situated knowledge on bird migration, seasonal changes, and human impact on the lagoon. These contributions directly shaped both the sound installation and the participatory performance. The *Short Play* dissolved the distinction between artist and audience, enabling collective improvisation without requiring prior expertise.

Strong alliances were established with the Lagoon's Management Unit, volunteer environmental groups, and key individuals such as Yiannis Roussopoulos. These collaborations functioned horizontally, based on shared concern for the ecosystem rather than hierarchical commissioning. This coalition anchored the project within the territory beyond the formal duration of Transformative Territories. Although the artistic intervention has concluded, the relationships, shared methodologies, and materials produced (recordings, publication, documentation) continue to circulate. These alliances provide a foundation for future research-creation initiatives in Aitoliko and in other Mediterranean lagoon territories facing similar ecological challenges.

5. Research-Creation Effects and Evaluation

Skylarking can clearly be identified as a research-creation practice. Knowledge was not produced to illustrate predefined conclusions, but emerged through artistic experimentation, collective listening, and iterative engagement with the territory.

Symbolic effects:

The project reshaped representations of Aitoliko by foregrounding non-human acoustic identities. A shared lexicon around listening, migration, and coexistence emerged, accompanied by new affective maps linking sound, memory, and place.

Relational and organisational effects:

The project opened channels between cultural institutions, environmental services, and local communities. Participatory formats encouraged horizontal knowledge exchange and reinforced collective responsibility toward the lagoon.

Material and ecological effects:

While no physical infrastructure was altered, the project generated practices of care: attentive listening, reduced acoustic impact, and sensitivity to ecological thresholds. These subtle gestures influence everyday behaviours and perceptions, contributing to long-term territorial awareness.

Evaluation was embedded throughout the process, occurring through dialogue, adaptation, and collective reflection rather than external metrics. This ongoing evaluation allowed the project to remain responsive to the territory's ecological and social realities.

6. Legacy, Continuity, and Transferability

What remains after the artist's departure is not an object but a listening culture. The project leaves behind strengthened relationships, shared knowledge, and heightened awareness of the lagoon as a sounding, living territory. Sound recordings, publications, and broadcasts continue to circulate, extending the project's impact beyond its immediate context.

Future developments could include longer residencies, deeper engagement with schools, or comparative research with other Mediterranean lagoons. The methodology developed—slow listening, low-impact intervention, collaborative research—is transferable to other fragile territories.

While increased funding could enhance on-site presence and continuity, Skylarking demonstrates that research-creation can produce durable symbolic, relational, and ecological effects even under constrained economic conditions, when grounded in care, listening, and collective responsibility.



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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