

# Sound as healing. Trauma of the diaspora and community-based listening in Joe Sannicandro's performance in Colle Sannita (BN)<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

Il nostro paper intende indagare le potenzialità delle pratiche artistiche co-progettate con le comunità delle aree rurali nello stimolare la riflessione collettiva sul trauma della diaspora. Nello specifico, adottando la metodologia della ricerca-azione e il framework teorico del welfare culturale, il paper si è focalizzato sull'analisi della residenza artistica del performer italo-americano Joe Sannicandro nel borgo rurale di Colle Sannita (Benevento). Lo studio ha consentito di far emergere come, attraverso la pedagogia dell'ascolto, l'esperienza di Joe Sannicandro ha contribuito alla riappropriazione simbolica del territorio, in qualche modo colmando metaforicamente il dolore, causato dal trauma della diaspora connesso all'emigrazione di massa e allo spopolamento delle aree rurali.

Our paper aims to investigate the potential of artistic practices co-designed with rural communities to stimulate collective reflection on the trauma of diaspora. Specifically, adopting the action research methodology and the theoretical framework of cultural welfare, the paper focused on analysing the artistic residency of Italian-American performer Joe Sannicandro in the rural village of Colle Sannita (Benevento). The study revealed how, through the pedagogy of listening, Joe Sannicandro's experience contributed to the symbolic reappropriation of the territory, metaphorically healing the pain caused by the trauma of diaspora linked to mass emigration and the depopulation of rural areas.

## **Parole chiave/Key Words**

*Trauma della diaspora; Ruralità; Sound Art; Welfare culturale.*

*Diaspora trauma; Rurality; Sound Art; Cultural welfare.*

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## 1. Introduction. Sound-based artistic projects and listening technologies

Over the past two decades, sound-based artistic projects have become a significant field of enquiry within contemporary art and cultural research, positioning sound and listening at the intersection of aesthetic practice, social process, and cultural cognition. This shift is rooted in a growing recognition that sound is not merely an expressive medium but a 'mode of knowledge production' that unfolds through embodied, relational, and collective forms of engagement (Feld, 1990; Ingold, 2011). Listening, in this view, is not a passive reception of sensory input, but an active cultural practice that shapes how environments, memories, and social worlds are perceived and constituted.

Foundational work in sound studies has emphasized this epistemological role of sound. Steven Feld's *Sound and Sentiment* (1990) showed how sonic practices articulate relationships between environment, affect, memory, and social organization, proposing listening as a situated mode of knowing rather than a subordinate perceptual channel. Tim Ingold (2011) has further elaborated on the kinaesthetic and temporal dimensions of sensory engagement, situating sound within broader ontologies of dwelling and material engagement. Together, these contributions illuminate how sound-based artistic practices can make audible forms of social life that elude visual and textual representation.

Within artistic research and sound art theory, scholars such as Salomé Voegelin (2010) have argued that listening is inherently situated and performative, producing knowledge not by stabilizing meaning but through processes of co-presence, partiality, and emergence. This has underpinned a range of experimental practices that emphasize 'listening technologies' – from field recording and wearable microphones to collective listening formats – as socio-material dispositifs that structure attention, participation, and contextual understanding.

Contemporary scholarship has also foregrounded the political dimensions of sonic practices. Anja Kanngieser's work on 'political acoustemology' highlights how sound and listening can reveal relations of power, marginality, and exclusion by interrogating who is heard, under what conditions, and with what implications (Kanngieser, 2021). Similarly, recent sound studies contributions examine how listening becomes a 'technology of engagement' in social and ecological contexts, revealing tensions between presence and absence, continuity and disruption (Voegelin, 2010; Gallagher, 2017).

These perspectives are complemented by research on participatory and community-based practices. Walter Gershon's work on sonic studies and pedagogy (Gershon, 2011) situates sound-making and listening as forms of informal learning and cultural participation, where aesthetic experience is inseparable from social interaction. Such approaches resonate with broader sociological interests in how cultural processes become embedded in everyday life and how collective meaning is negotiated through shared sensory engagement.

From a sociological point of view, sound-based artistic projects are particularly relevant in contexts marked by social and territorial marginalization, where listening can help reconfigure participation and produce situated forms of knowledge grounded in shared experience. In these settings, listening technologies act not merely as tools of documentation, but as relational infrastructures whose effectiveness depends on their embedding in everyday practices, familiarity, and shared routines (Star and Ruhleder, 1996). Their infrastructural role does not reside in technical sophistication, but in their capacity to support situated forms of engagement with memory, space, and community. In the Colle Sannita residency, listening devices and practices became infrastructural insofar as they were appropriated by participants as ordinary and accessible tools, enabling heterogeneous forms of participation without requiring sustained commitment or specialized competence.

This article situates itself within this intersection of sound-based art, listening technologies, and cultural participation, examining how a rural sound-based project can activate collective reflection on memory, diaspora, and community through practices of shared listening. The case explored here – *Ritmi rurali (suonano ancora)*, developed in Colle Sannita in 2022 – is approached not as an isolated artwork, but as a situated dispositif that enacts listening as a social practice embedded in specific territorial, historical, and relational conditions.

## **2. Research questions, theoretical framework and methodology**

### *Research Questions*

Our paper stems from the need to verify whether media art practices are capable of reactivating public and collective reflection on the trauma of diaspora in rural areas of Campania. We can therefore summarize the main research question as follows: what role can sound-based artistic residencies in rural areas play in reactivating collective reflection on the trauma of diaspora?

The case study chosen to answer this research question, which will be analyzed in the following paragraphs, is the sound performance by US researcher Joe Sannicandro, co-designed with the community of the small town of Colle Sannita, in the province of Benevento, from where his ancestors left about a hundred years ago to seek their fortune in America. Four criteria guided the selection: 1) the theme of diaspora, with the consequent possibility of conceiving artistic practice as a form of ‘reparation’ for the trauma of emigration; 2) the co-design of the performance with the local community, located in a marginal area of Campania; 3) the active involvement of one of the authors of the paper (Leandro Pisano) in the action research as curator; 4) the possibility of analysing social and cultural impact of the performance.

### *Theoretical framework*

Our theoretical framework is based on the frame of “cultural welfare”, understood as a perspective that promotes networked cultural practices through forms of co-design with the communities of the territories concerned (Manzoli and Paltrinieri, 2021, Paltrinieri and Alonzo, 2023, Maino, 2023, Rigoni and Scalera, 2024, Paltrinieri, 2025, Allegrini *et al.*, 2025), also in relation to the concept of “heritage community” (Allegrini and Paltrinieri, 2024).

Cultural welfare is an innovative approach to the study and design of social and cultural initiatives and policies. This approach uses art, heritage and cultural activities as tools to promote cohesion, civic participation and social inclusion, transforming culture from a privilege for the few to a right for all, with benefits for individuals, communities and local systems. Initiatives and actions related to cultural welfare therefore aim to combat inequalities through organic collaborations between different institutions, social actors and performers, activists and other entities in the field of art and culture. This approach guided the research design on three levels: firstly, the decision to conceive the project as an experience co-designed with local communities (co-design); secondly, the choice to conceive the artistic residency as a practice of shared listening, involving multiple subjects from the local community, based on the idea that the pedagogy of listening can act as a powerful lever for community cohesion (social cohesion); thirdly, the provision of a direct and structural link with local associations and institutions, with the ambition of transforming sound performance into a tool for social well-being, to be integrated into a process of lasting innovation in territorial cultural policies (integrated approach).

## *Methodology*

The research methodology we have chosen is action research, in particular for its reflective practices (Schon, 1983, 1987) and participatory dimension (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005). Thanks to the contribution of pioneers such as Paulo Freire (1970), the action research methodology (Tripp, 2005) is widely practiced in the field of cultural heritage studies, as well as in the field of education. There are two main reasons behind the choice of this research methodology. Firstly, it is a qualitative and interpretative methodology: it does not aim to generalize the results statistically, but to provide relevant and concrete data for the specific context in which it is conducted. This makes this methodology particularly suitable for studying cases that are strongly linked both to the specificity of a practice (in our case, co-designed artistic residency) and to the peculiarities of a context (in this case, the community of the rural village of Colle Sannita). Secondly, action research involves a performative approach. The participants themselves are thus transformed into agents of change. According to Daniel (2010, p. 18), “performativity describes the process through which something that has been described in words is brought into existence”. The performativity of sociological research programs can be enhanced by focusing on the practices of social actors and an actor-network approach, capable of describing the uninterrupted flow of performance between human actors and non-human entities (MacKenzie, 2004). The performativity of action research acquires similar centrality in the case of projects based on artistic practices. In fact, this approach is oriented towards action and change, going beyond simple description or analysis and aiming at a change in the territorial context through various forms of “regeneration” (in our case, a culturally-based territorial regeneration). Art-based Action Research (ABAR) “is immersive, and participatory performance art acts as a trigger for dialogical artwork to evolve on site in real time, with the aim of enhancing creativity, creative expression, and interconnectedness between the participants” (Griniuk, 2021, p. 577). As we will see shortly, from a methodological point of view, this research approach also considers collective artistic performance as part of a process of actively involving individuals in local communities, with the aim of assessing the social and cultural impact of the actions promoted (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014).

The action research process is divided into specific phases: diagnosis (identification of the problem, collection and analysis of data relating to the context), action planning (design

of the intervention strategy, definition of objectives and actions to be taken, preparation of resources), implementation of the intervention (constant observation and collection of data in the field to monitor progress), evaluation and reflection (analysis of the data collected, evaluation of the actions taken, evaluation of the results in relation to the objectives), review (optimization of strategies for subsequent refinement of practices).

Action research is reflective, participatory, and contextual. Firstly, systematic reflection on one's actions and their effects is a prerequisite for improvement and potential change in the initial situation or problem. In fact, in action research, the virtuous circle between theory and practice is produced by the interconnection between "research in action" and "research for action." The first (the process) consists of data collection, analysis, and knowledge production while the specific intervention is taking place. The latter constitutes the objective of the action, i.e., the change generated through the involvement of participants, which contributes to the solution of an immediate problem and/or the transformation of a situation. This virtuous circle between theory and practice is made possible by the centrality of reflection in this research methodology.

Secondly, action research is also characterized by its participatory dimension. Researchers immerse themselves in the context (for example, in the community of reference) and collaborate with participants (stakeholders) as agents of change and co-producers of knowledge – in this specific case, through participation in artistic performance. Art is conceived as an active social practice: it is a tool for collectively addressing complex social and cultural issues – in this case, processing the trauma of diaspora caused by emigration. In other words, in our case, action research is based on art, which becomes an integral part of the research methodology. In fact, the co-design and implementation of creative processes (performances, workshops, digital storytelling, photography, and participatory filmmaking) are aimed at generating data, facilitating critical reflection, and stimulating collective learning. The artistic act is used to open up a space for curiosity and mutual learning through the direct involvement of the community.

Thirdly, action research is its rootedness in a specific context. This methodology allows attention to be focused on local situations and material and human devices that mediate the artistic experience. The specific, irrevocable, and performative moment of the artwork and

the aesthetic experience of the social actors involved are an integral part of the knowledge produced and the process of change.

### **3. Emigration from Campania and the trauma of the diaspora**

The case study we have identified concerns action research related to the trauma of the diaspora of southern migrants. The aim of our work is to try to understand how sound-based artistic performances can develop forms of collective awareness, through performance and participation, with regard to such a socially relevant issue as the wounds left in rural areas by mass emigration. The Campania region experienced a significant wave of emigration in two phases: during the first (1870-1920), the flow was mainly directed towards North America; during the second (1946-1980), the main destinations were Northern Italy and Northern Europe. Even if we take into account all the limitations of the statistical surveys used over the years, we can reasonably estimate that at least 46 million Italians emigrated between the late 19th century and the 2000s (Marucco, 2001). For reasons of space, we will now limit ourselves to summarizing some of the fundamental characteristics of this phenomenon, which has dramatically changed the social, cultural, and economic structures of the inland areas of South Italy (Sanfilippo, 2002) and Campania, particularly. Although experiences varied greatly, emigration from Campania to the United States was driven by push and pull factors (Rosoli, 1992). Among the former, we must mention the backwardness of the agricultural economy, the failure to reform large landholdings, oppressive taxation, and industrial backwardness. The United States guaranteed stable work in a rapidly growing urban society. Among the pull factors, we must include the promotion of American prosperity by returning migrants themselves (Pretelli, 2011). It is also worth mentioning the role played by the Italian press, which often published letters and stories written by emigrants in order to promote migration, supporting the pro-emigration stance held by various political circles in the Giolitti era (and beyond) between the late 19th century and the 1910s (Gibelli and Caffarena, 2001). Very often, emigrants from inland areas were adult men of working age who left their villages and towns with the idea of earning money, saving, and returning to their places of origin with enough resources to buy a house and land. They therefore fell into the category of “birds of passage”. In these cases, emigration means a separation within the family unit: wives almost always stay at home to look after the children and farm activities.

Emigrants are farmers and laborers, who are employed as unskilled labor in the construction sector and heavy industry (Carchedi, 2004).

We can identify at least four traumatic aspects of the migration experience – leaving one’s homeland (which most emigrants from inland areas of Campania had never left before), separation from family, the transoceanic journey (lasting more than a month), and adapting to the culture and society of the destination (Elefante, 2008).

Emigrants from Campania mainly settled in cities on the northeast coast (New York, Philadelphia, Boston) and in New Jersey. In a short time, partly due to the activities of intermediaries and various groups, immigrants from Campania created chain migration networks (Mac Donald and MacDonald, 1964), which remained active for decades and fueled the phenomenon of “campanilismo”. Emigrants from Campania often live in “Little Italies”, ethnically based neighborhoods where they try to keep alive the religious, cultural, and gastronomic traditions of their countries (Harney and Scarpaci, 1981; Garroni, 2001). Although stereotypes have developed around these cultural enclaves that need to be deconstructed (De Biase, 2012), they serve a dual function: on the one hand, they protect migrants from alienation and isolation, and, on the other, they delay integration into American society (Martelli, 1998) and often force migrants from Campania to live in conditions of degradation and overcrowding (Gabaccia, 2006).

The trauma of the diaspora was addressed with various symbolic “refuges”. Constant correspondence with relatives overseas (Bianco, 2016), songs (Frasca, 2014, Martellini, 2015), films (Schrader and Winkler, 2013), and, to a lesser extent, novels (Martelli, 1984) ensured that cultural ties with the homeland were maintained. However, beyond media representations and narratives, it is interesting to note how the trauma of diaspora is linked to highly complex cultural conflicts. These involve both distorted perceptions of the wealth of emigrants, influenced in part by the stories of migrants who have returned to their communities of origin, and stereotypes about the poverty of Southern Italy’s inland areas, which persisted even after the relative economic improvement brought about by the Marshall Plan and the economic boom of the 1960s. Furthermore, these cultural conflicts specifically affect second- and third-generation Italian Americans, who navigate multiple forms of belonging (the culture of their fathers, class culture, American popular culture, etc.), resistance or submission to cultural hegemony dynamics, processes of identification and assimilation.



In rural areas of Campania, the trauma of the diaspora has been less intense in recent decades, due both to the relative weakening of ties with second- and third-generation Italian Americans in the United States and, above all, to the depopulation of rural areas in the central and southern Apennines and, more generally, throughout southern Italy. Furthermore, in these marginal places, the imagination and memory of the diaspora are fragmented, as their story is entrusted to multiple voices and agencies, often poorly coordinated and ineffective, including museums, foundations, associations, local administrations, and so on.

#### **4. The case study: Joe Sannicandro's experience in Colle Sannita**

##### *Ecologies of the threshold: Colle Sannita between marginality and possibility*

Founded in 2014 as a platform for research and artistic production based on listening to and engaging with rural communities, "Liminaria" has developed over time into a mobile and widespread laboratory, capable of connecting aesthetic practices and territorial reflection. Its perspective, defined as a form of critical rurality (Chambers, 2010), is based on the rejection of a nostalgic or residual view of inland areas and on the enhancement of their cultural, political and symbolic complexity (Ferrara and Pisano, 2022). Through micro-residencies and research-action processes, the project explores the thresholds of contemporary rurality as places of tension and possibility, where artistic practice becomes a way of living and learning. The Fortore Beneventano represents the living centre of this experiment. A border area between Campania, Molise and Puglia, it constitutes a liminal territory in a geographical and social sense, marked by economic and demographic fragility but also by forms of resistance, cooperation and community invention. Liminaria's residencies operate in this area as ecosophical practices (Guattari, 1989), based on reciprocity, proximity and situated listening: not simply artistic experiences, but processes of shared knowledge, in which the aesthetic dimension is intertwined with the politics and pedagogy of the territory.

This is the context for the 2022 residency in Colle Sannita, a small town in the Sannio area which, although not fully belonging to the Val Fortore, shares its historical trajectories and socio-economic destinies. Located on the edge of the Fortore basin, the town finds itself in a threshold condition, suspended between belonging and distance, memory and transformation. This interstitial position, close to administrative and cultural boundaries, makes it a privileged observation point for understanding the dynamics that traverse the contemporary southern Apennines: de-

population, new forms of mobility and the changing productive and soundscapes. The choice of Colle Sannita responds to a specific curatorial logic. Since its first editions, Liminaria has favoured places considered 'marginal' as laboratories for critical investigation, spaces where rurality can be observed not as an archetype or remnant, but as a dynamic, relational and political condition (Woods, 2007). In this perspective, the work of artist and researcher Joe Sannicandro, entitled *Ritmi rurali (suonano ancora)* [Rural rhythms (still playing)], takes on the value of an experiment in listening to the threshold: an aesthetic and social gesture that questions the relationship between diaspora, belonging and collective memory.

The residency stems from a deep biographical relationship. Originally from Collesano but raised between Canada and the United States, Sannicandro conceived the project as a diasporic return: a symbolic and emotional journey aimed at reconnecting his family genealogy with the sounds, stories and rhythms of his country of origin. However, his approach does not indulge in nostalgia. The 'return' becomes rather an opportunity for research, a field of observation in which listening becomes a tool for ethnographic investigation and the construction of social bonds.

*Ritmi rurali (suonano ancora)* is, in its final form, a collective sound composition created from an extensive campaign of environmental recordings and interviews conducted during the residency. The project was divided into several stages: listening workshops with young people and residents, soundwalks to explore the acoustic landscape of the village, informal conversations in homes, squares and public spaces, and finally the construction of a shared archive of sounds and testimonies. The result is not a simple 'sound documentary', but a polyphonic weaving of voices, noises and silences that reflects the sensory and social complexity of Colle Sannita.

Participation in the residency took the form of an heterogeneous and intergenerational constellation, involving secondary school students and young residents, members of local associations, and long-term inhabitants of the village. A core group engaged continuously in the workshops and soundwalks, while a wider circle of participants contributed in more informal and episodic ways, through conversations, the opening of domestic spaces, and the sharing of personal memories and territorial references. Participation was therefore not limited to a clearly bounded group, but extended through a porous and situated process, in which listening itself functioned as a legitimate mode of involvement.

Some participants played a key role in sustaining continuity and trust, not through formal positions but through their embeddedness in everyday community life. The Municipal Library – managed by Linetto as an accessible and lived-in space – hosted the workshops and functioned as a light infrastructure of participation, enabling gradual and non-prescriptive engagement. Alongside this node, figures such as Tonino and Giorgio took part in sound-walks and collective discussions, contributing through their steady presence and relational proximity rather than through specific expertise. Their involvement helped frame listening as a shared, non-specialist practice rooted in ordinary social relations. The participation of Giovanni, president of the local Pro Loco association, further facilitated a climate of openness and legitimacy around the project, supporting broader community involvement without transforming the initiative into an institutionalized event.

The coexistence of younger and older participants made perceptible different ways of hearing, naming, and interpreting the village's soundscape, bringing to the surface both continuities and fractures between individual memories and collective narratives. In this sense, participation did not produce a homogeneous public, but a temporary listening community in which diverse social positions and generational perspectives were articulated through shared auditory experience.

The sound material collected reflects this layered social composition. The tracks feature the founding sounds of the village — bells, farm machinery, the wind blowing through the alleys — alongside the new noises produced by the wind farms that dot the surrounding landscape. The latter element, in particular, prompts reflection on the environmental and political transformations of the contemporary Apennines. The continuous, impersonal sound of the blades overlaps with the voices and echoes of everyday life, generating a sort of acoustic short circuit that translates the tensions of energy extraction into sensory terms. Sannicandro chooses not to erase this dissonance, but to include it as an integral part of the composition, bringing out the ambiguity of the landscape: a place where the promise of 'sustainable development' coexists with the perception of a new form of colonisation of the territory.

The work concludes with a public moment of restitution in which the sound work is shared with the community. The listening projection, hosted in the municipal library, becomes a collective ritual of recognition: many spectators identify with the sounds and voices that resonate in the space, commenting, recounting and adding other memories. The subtitle "suonano ancora"

(they still play) takes on a performative value here: not only an evocation of the past, but an affirmation of the continuity and vitality of the present. Sound thus becomes a tool for reactivating memory, but also for building a temporary and affective listening community.

### *Listening to build: preparatory practices and project relationships*

The design of the *Ritmi rurali (suonano ancora)* residency was preceded by a long period of preparation, built according to the participatory and relational methods that have always characterised Liminaria's approach. The action did not arise as an impromptu intervention or an isolated artistic experience, but as the result of a process of discussion and co-construction that involved the curator, the artist and the local community in a network of exchanges and collective micro-decisions.

The first phase of the work took place in the months leading up to the summer of 2022, through email exchanges and regular calls between the curator and Joe Sannicandro, during which the project's objectives, the timing of the residency and possible local partners were defined. Dialogue played a crucial role not only in operational planning, but also in clarifying the political and emotional meanings of the 'return' that the artist was preparing to make. From the outset, the aim was to avoid a documentary or celebratory approach to rural life, and instead to build a research project based on mutual listening and the emergence of plural narratives.

At the same time, contacts were established with the local network in Colle Sannita, in particular with the Pro Loco, the Municipal Library and a number of citizen groups involved in promoting local heritage. These interlocutors played a fundamental mediating role, facilitating meetings with residents, the availability of spaces and the circulation of information. The initial conversations made it possible to identify the key themes from which to start the investigation: the sound memory of everyday life, the sounds of emigration, the transformation of the landscape and the perception of the changes brought about by the installation of wind farms.

Starting from this participatory diagnosis, a map of possible sound paths was drawn up, identifying emblematic places to explore during the residency: the main square, the roads leading to the hills, the courtyards of the oldest houses, the industrial area and the surrounding rural areas. Each space was conceived as a relational node, where sound could become a pretext for an encounter, a conversation, a shared narrative. The methodological approach, in line with the tradition of sound ethnography (Gershon, 2011; Gallagher, 2017),

aimed to restore the atmosphere and social density of the places through the direct participation of the inhabitants.

From an operational point of view, the planning involved defining the recording tools and listening protocols. Portable microphones, digital recorders and binaural headphones were used to ensure an immersive experience that respected the acoustic conditions of the context. Particular attention was paid to linguistic and cultural mediation: although Sannicandro knew Italian, he had to deal with the dialect and forms of communication typical of the community. In this sense, the linguistic dimension became an additional threshold of listening, a space for negotiation in which translation became part of the artistic practice itself.

During the preparatory phase, reference materials and conceptual reflections related to the genealogy of rural sounds and the relationship between landscape and memory were also shared. Common readings and inspirations included texts by Tim Ingold, Steven Feld, and the most recent studies on political acoustemology (Kanngieser, 2021). However, the intent was not to transfer predefined theoretical models, but rather to construct a situated learning context in which theory could emerge from lived experience.

In this perspective, the planning of the action took the form of a collective learning process. Each step – from the selection of sound paths to the definition of workshop activities – was discussed in an atmosphere of open dialogue, in which the demands of the community and artistic needs were continuously renegotiated. The Pro Loco and the Library acted as platforms connecting the various parties involved, hosting preparatory meetings and encouraging the involvement of young people, students and the elderly. In this sense, from its inception, the residency took the form of a relational practice based on listening as a method, not just as a subject of research.

The preparatory work also made it possible to identify some critical issues to be addressed during the operational phase: the difficulty of acoustically representing the changing landscape without falling into rhetoric about loss; the need to involve different generations, avoiding the action being focused only on a limited audience of enthusiasts; and finally, the ethical management of the recordings, ensuring the consent and awareness of the participants. These aspects, discussed in the preliminary stages, helped to define the ethnographic and political framework within which the project would be developed.

Ultimately, the planning of *Ritmi rurali (suonano ancora)* can be seen as an exemplary case of low-intensity participatory design: a model of intervention that prioritises dialogue, slowness and the building of trust over the spectacularisation of art. The action was conceived as a process of gradual activation, in which listening precedes representation and in which the territory becomes a co-author of the research. From this perspective, the preparation was not only a preliminary phase, but the first moment of building the listening community that would give life to the work.

### *Listening bodies: field practices and collective construction of the work*

The implementation phase of the *Ritmi rurali (suonano ancora)* project took place in Colle Sannita in the summer of 2022 and represented the culmination of the long process of preparation and relationship building that had begun in the previous months. Joe Sannicandro's arrival in the village was not perceived as an external or exogenous event, but as the return of a member of the community: a gesture of identity re-crossing which, precisely in its affective dimension, made it possible to activate an authentic participatory process.

The residency consisted of a week of intensive activities, including listening workshops, sound walks, interviews and informal discussions. The Municipal Library was chosen as the operational space and reference point for the entire duration of the project, serving as a workshop and daily meeting place for the artist, the inhabitants and the young people involved.

### *Workshops and the pedagogy of listening*

The first part consisted of a series of introductory meetings on listening and sound recording, aimed at students, young people and members of local associations. Through acoustic perception exercises, moments of shared silence and collective discussions, Sannicandro guided the participants in a progressive familiarisation with the soundscape of the town. These workshops had a dual pedagogical function: on the one hand, they introduced technical tools (use of microphones, management of digital recorders, construction of acoustic maps); on the other, they promoted a pedagogy of listening understood as a social and political practice (Voegelin, 2014), a way to rediscover one's presence in space and the relational dimension of sound.

During the activities, listening was conceived not as a simple collection of data, but as a performative and reflective act. Participants, invited to walk slowly through the streets of the village or to stop at significant points, noted and commented on the sounds they perceived: the tolling of bells, voices echoing through the alleys, the sound of the wind on wind turbines in the distance. This act of collective listening allowed for the construction of a shared and plural perception of the territory, overcoming the distinction between observer and observed.

### *Soundwalk and mapping of the acoustic landscape*

The second phase involved collective soundwalks along routes chosen with the participants, crossing public spaces and marginal areas of the village. The stops included the main square, the alleys of the historic centre, the rural area towards the border with Val Fortore and, in particular, the hamlet of Decorata, an area of great historical and environmental value.

Decorata, an agricultural colony managed directly by the settlers according to a model of collective ownership unique in Italy, covers over eighty hectares of woods and pastures. At the centre of its territory is an artificial lake, surrounded by a lush ecosystem of fauna and spontaneous vegetation. This space, a rare example of rural self-management, represents a concrete form of sustainable relationship with the territory, where work, community and environment have been intertwined for generations.

The listening experience at Decorata was a decisive moment in the residency. Walking along the paths leading to the lake, the participants perceived the stratification of natural and anthropogenic sounds: the rustling of trees, the calling of birds, the murmur of water, the constant hum of wind turbines in the background. This acoustic contrast — between organicity and mechanisation, quiet and interference — became a key to interpreting the entire project. As is often the case in contemporary rural contexts, sound revealed the coexistence of different temporalities: the archaic one of farm work and the hypermodern one of energy extraction. During the day spent at Decorata, Sannicandro recorded sound samples at different points around the lake, inviting participants to experiment with forms of immersive listening. Some lay down on the grass to feel the vibrations of the ground, others immersed microphones in the water to capture underwater sounds. Listening thus became a bodily and situated experience, in which the environment itself seemed to respond.

Subsequent reflections, shared during the return to the village, highlighted how the soundscape of Decorata represented, for many inhabitants, a symbol of belonging, but also an 'other' place, where nature and family memory merge in a fragile and changing balance.

### *Collection and construction of sound material*

In parallel with the collective activities, Sannicandro conducted a broader environmental recording campaign, focusing on three types of sound:

1. Ritual and temporal sounds, such as bells and public announcements, which mark daily life;
2. Domestic and community sounds, voices, footsteps, conversations, mechanical noises from trades still present in the village;
3. Infrastructural and technological sounds, in particular the hum of wind turbines and background electrical noises, perceived as a 'new presence' in the landscape.

This acoustic stratification was organised as a listening archive, the basis for the subsequent construction of the work *Ritmi rurali (suonano ancora)*. The final composition, lasting about 15 minutes, is structured around a temporal sequence inspired by the interval between the tolling of bells: each sound segment represents a rhythm, a collective breath, a micro-history of the village.

A central aspect of the implementation was the direct involvement of the community, which took on the role of co-author of the process. The interest of the inhabitants, initially linked to curiosity about the presence of a 'returning' artist, gradually transformed into active participation: some offered their spaces for recordings, others collaborated on walks or lent personal stories.

This type of participation was not imposed from outside but developed organically, according to a logic of reciprocity that characterises Liminaria's practices. Art was transformed into a social device, capable of producing moments of proximity, comparison and collective recognition. The residency thus became a shared experience of learning and reflection, a temporary laboratory in which sound acted as a medium for relationships and a space for healing.

### *Listening together: public restitution and collective resonances*

The final phase of Joe Sannicandro's residency in Colle Sannita took place in the late afternoon of a Sunday in June, in the town's Villa Comunale: a symbolic place of socialising and meeting, located in the heart of the town and overlooking the Fortore landscape. The



event, conceived as a moment of public restitution, took the form of an open dialogue between the artist, the curator and representatives from the academic world and local associations. Rather than a presentation of the work, it was an opportunity for discussion and mutual listening, in which the artistic experience was interpreted as a device capable of connecting different languages, generations and knowledge.

The initial debate touched on themes central to Liminaria's journey: the role of art in territorial regeneration processes, the possibility of building communities through sound practice, and the importance of a situated approach based on reciprocity. In this perspective, *Ritmi rurali (suonano ancora)* was recognised as a gesture of symbolic restitution, in which sound becomes an instrument of reconnection between the memories of the diaspora and the present of a territory in transformation.

The second part of the evening was dedicated to collective listening to the work, broadcast in the open space of the municipal park. The choice to avoid any form of visual or frontal mediation allowed the listening experience to become immersive and choral, in which the acoustic landscape recorded during the residency intertwined with the live sounds of the place: the wind in the trees, the voices of those present, footsteps on the pavement, the sound of a car in the distance.

This overlapping of temporal and perceptual planes created a circular resonance effect: the sounds collected in the previous days — bells, the noises of work in the fields, conversations captured in the streets, wind turbines turning slowly on the hills — returned to the same space where they had originated, but transfigured by the artistic composition. The result was not a simple documentary rendering, but rather an act of collective recognition, in which the village listened to itself again through its own voice.

In the attentive silence that followed the listening, a new form of communication was created, made up of gestures, glances and brief words exchanged in low voices. The work seemed to function as a relational archive, capable of reactivating latent memories and generating a new awareness of the place. Many of those present recognised fragments of personal experiences — the tolling of a familiar bell, the rhythm of a farming tool, the rustling of the wind — but in a way that transcended nostalgia: not as a return to the past, but as a sonic reappropriation of the present.

This dynamic of mutual recognition showed how listening can take on a social function, acting as a form of community care. Not therapeutic care, but a practice that produces presence, recomposes fragments and allows us to collectively inhabit our own memory. The sound experience of *Ritmi rurali* thus functioned as a space for suspension and reflection, in which the boundaries between artist and audience, between production and reception, between work and context were temporarily dissolved.

The title chosen for the work — *Ritmi rurali (suonano ancora)* — encapsulates the interpretative key to the entire project. The subtitle ‘suonano ancora’ alludes to an underground continuity, a persistence that transcends time and restores vitality to a territory marked by departure and depopulation.

The sound of bells, a central element of the composition, becomes a metaphor for this resilience: a collective beat that marks the hours of the village, but also its history, its losses, its survivals. By bringing them to the fore, Sannicandro has made audible what everyday life tends to silence, transforming an ordinary gesture — listening to a familiar sound — into an act that is both political and poetic.

From this perspective, the work does not merely document a reality, but reactivates it: it shows how rural areas are not marginal spaces, but places where forms of acoustic resistance, shared memory and invention of the future are experienced.

The evening concluded with a collective conversation, in which the artist and curator invited the audience to share their impressions, observations and proposals. The voices that emerged outlined a participatory reflection: on the one hand, an awareness of the educational and community value of the experience; on the other, a perception of the need to continue along this path, to transform this restitution into a starting point for new actions.

Several strengths were recognised, such as the project’s ability to activate intergenerational links and to make part of the local intangible heritage visible (and audible). At the same time, concrete critical issues emerged — the brevity of the residency, the difficulty of translating listening into ongoing practices, the need for greater structural involvement of institutions. However, rather than a conclusion, this phase represented the opening of a dialogue: the idea that sound practice, once shared, can continue to produce effects, generating new connections between art, education and citizenship.

Overall, the listening experience in the Villa Comunale took the form of situated pedagogy, in which the aesthetic and political dimensions of art came together in the public space. The place itself played a decisive role: not a neutral container, but a porous environment, traversed by the sounds of the evening and the presence of bodies, in which the community was able to perceive itself as a collective subject.

On that evening, Colle Sannita was not simply the setting for an event, but the protagonist of an experience of mutual recognition. The sound, filtered by shared listening, brought out what distance and time had attenuated: the possibility of thinking of ourselves together again, of imagining, through resonance, new ways of inhabiting our territory.

## 5. Conclusions

The rural areas of Campania, and the Sannio region in particular, have long been shaped by migration processes that have profoundly affected social structures, family relations, and intergenerational memory. Within this context, Joe Sannicandro's artistic residency in Colle Sannita should not be read merely as a successful cultural intervention, but as a research situation that allows us to observe how sound-based artistic practices can activate collective reflection on the long-term effects of diaspora. Rather than framing migration as a closed historical episode, *Ritmi rurali (suonano ancora)* engages with its enduring social and affective traces, situating listening as a medium through which absence, loss, and continuity are collectively negotiated.

From a research perspective, the case makes it possible to qualify more precisely what "reactivation" means in the context of sound-based artistic residencies. The effectiveness of the project does not lie in the production of a stable or shared narrative about the community, nor in the symbolic resolution of the trauma of migration. Instead, its relevance emerges from the creation of a temporary space of shared attention, in which participants are invited to re-encounter familiar sounds as socially meaningful and open to reinterpretation. This process reveals that the impact of sound-based practices is not uniform, but differentiated according to generational position, personal biography, and degrees of involvement in local networks.

The reception of the project further supports this interpretation. Responses to the work, observed during collective listening moments and through video interviews conducted with young participants and local community representatives, did not take the form of ex-

plicit evaluation or aesthetic judgement. Rather, they were expressed through acts of recognition, recollection, and comparison, often linking individual experiences to broader reflections on place, migration, and change. These responses highlight how listening can activate reflective processes that are not necessarily verbalized in the moment of participation, but unfold over time through subsequent conversations and mediated forms of expression. In this sense, reception appears as a distributed and layered process, extending beyond the temporal boundaries of the event itself.

These findings allow for a more articulated conceptualization of *community-based listening*. In the case of Colle Sannita, listening did not function as a technique aimed at maximizing participation or inclusion in a normative sense. Instead, it operated as a shared social action capable of holding together heterogeneous positions—generational, biographical, and relational—without resolving them into a single interpretive framework. Participation was not defined by intensity, continuity, or co-production outcomes, but by the possibility of entering, inhabiting, and leaving a common auditory field. This challenges conventional models of cultural participation based on visibility, expressiveness, or sustained engagement, and foregrounds attention, proximity, and recognition as key dimensions.

From this perspective, *Ritmi rurali (suonano ancora)* contributes to a broader sociological understanding of the relationship between art, sound, and community. The project shows how listening technologies can function as relational infrastructures that temporarily reconfigure the public sphere, enabling forms of cultural participation grounded in shared sensory experience rather than discursive consensus. Importantly, the practice of listening does not “heal” the trauma of migration in a therapeutic sense, nor does it resolve the structural conditions of marginality affecting inland areas. Its contribution lies instead in making these conditions perceptible and discussable, transforming the soundscape into a site of collective awareness.

Rather than producing a symbolic closure or a form of reconciliation with the past, the shared sound practice activated through the residency operates as an open-ended space of collective self-awareness. Listening does not function as a reparative device, nor as a means of resolving historical fractures, but as a practice that renders such fractures perceptible and available for reflection. In this sense, the sonic dimension of the project does not offer symbolic compensation, but frames conditions of absence, loss, and transformation as shared objects of attention.

This framing function is central to understanding the project's relevance from a sociological perspective. The shared listening experience does not aim at consensus or at the construction of a unified narrative of place. Instead, it enables forms of participation based on critical attentiveness, where heterogeneous positions – generational, biographical, and relational – can coexist without being reduced to a single interpretive framework. Participation, here, is not measured in terms of intensity or continuity, but in the possibility of temporarily inhabiting a common experiential space.

Read through the lens of cultural welfare, *Ritmi rurali (suonano ancora)* does not operate as an instrument of social repair or inclusion in a normative sense. Rather, it contributes to the activation of reflexive capacities within the community, fostering forms of cultural participation grounded in awareness, recognition, and shared presence. The value of the project lies in its ability to support processes of cultural citizenship understood not as adherence to predefined models, but as the situated practice of engaging with collective imaginaries, memories, and futures.

From this perspective, sound-based artistic practices emerge as low-intensity but meaningful infrastructures of participation, capable of sustaining critical engagement without prescribing outcomes. The contribution of *Ritmi rurali* thus resides not in offering solutions to structural conditions of marginality, but in enabling a space where such conditions can be perceived, discussed, and negotiated collectively over time.

Ultimately, the case of Colle Sannita suggests that sound-based artistic residencies are particularly productive when understood not as instruments of representation or regeneration per se, but as processes that activate reflective capacities within communities. By mobilizing listening as a relational and cognitive gesture, such practices allow cultural participation to be rethought beyond attendance or consumption, emphasizing uneven engagement, situated experience, and the social production of meaning. In this sense, *Ritmi rurali (suonano ancora)* does not propose a transferable model, but offers a situated analytical contribution to ongoing debates on community-based listening, cultural participation, and the role of sound in mediating relationships between memory, place, and social change in rural contexts.

Although these dynamics are inevitably fraught with potential symbolic conflicts, they can ultimately take the form of community empowerment and the production of collective cultural capital, which is susceptible to further forms of development, dissemination and ex-

change in the future. In this perspective, we understand ‘collective cultural capital’ to be a form of common good that sound-based artistic practices are able to construct through full sensory involvement in the design, creation and, ultimately, restitution of the shared sound experience. Therefore, collective cultural capital is the product of cultural welfare projects. In such projects, through participation in artistic practices, the shared elaboration of social issues relevant to the community – in this specific case, the symbolic legacy of mass migration in rural areas – generates not so much an increase in the cultural capital possessed by individual members of a community, but rather a form of co-constructed knowledge. Furthermore, collective cultural capital can be both the cause and effect of practices of exchange and accumulation of social capital<sup>2</sup>: on the one hand, participation in such projects is reinforced by the social capital already possessed and exchanged by members of the community (in this case, collective cultural capital benefits from the social capital available to those involved); on the other hand, cultural welfare projects, through the experiences of production and distribution of collective cultural capital, can establish, strengthen, rediscover and reactivate social capital in the communities involved.

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<sup>1</sup> The two authors drafted the text together. Leandro Pisano wrote paragraphs 1 and 4, Mario Tirino wrote paragraphs 2 and 3. Paragraph 5 was written jointly.

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