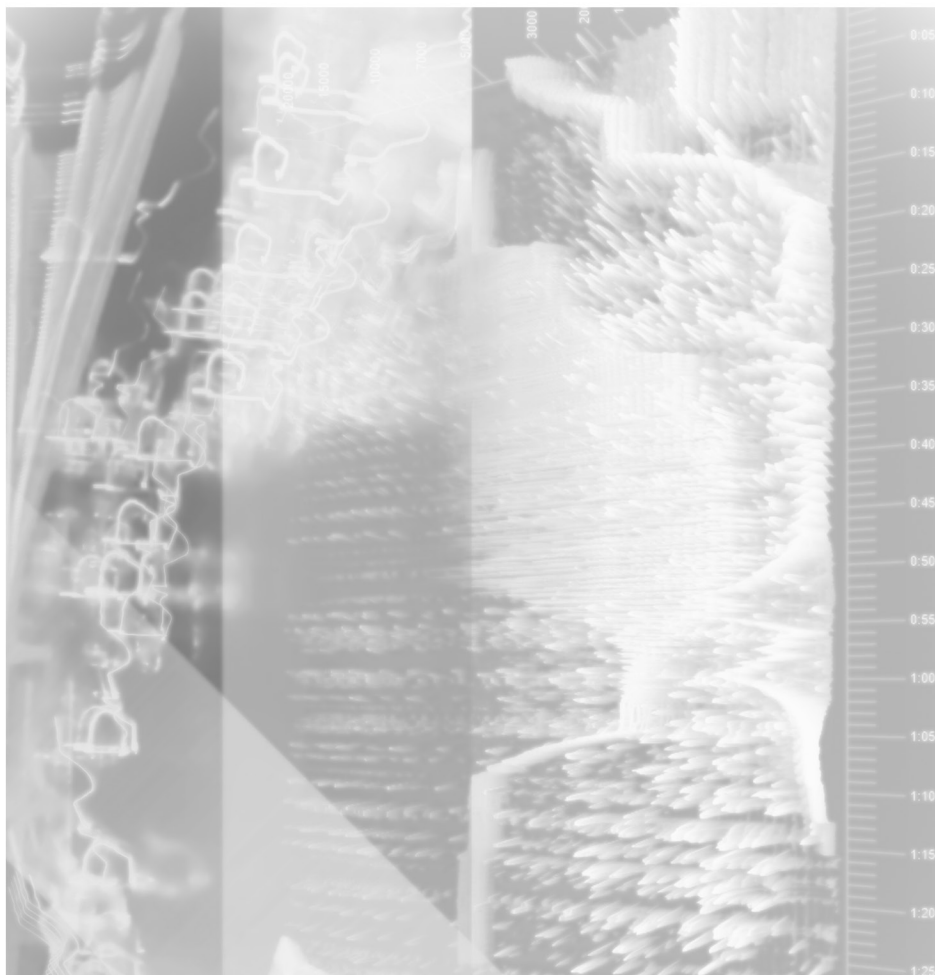


# I N S Δ M

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## **Tuning in the Valley of Sounds: Exploring Collaborative Professionalism in Radiophonic Art**

Ana Čorić

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ANA ČORIĆ

*Academy of Music, University of Zagreb, Zagreb, Croatia*

# TUNING IN THE VALLEY OF SOUNDS: EXPLORING COLLABORATIVE PROFESSIONALISM IN RADIOPHONIC ART

## KEYWORDS

acoustic ecology,  
community, documentary  
radio drama, listening,  
radiophonic art,  
soundscape, sound  
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## ABSTRACT

This study explores collaborative professionalism through a participatory case study focused on sound-based art situated in the Lož Valley, Slovenia. Drawing on sonic studies and sound pedagogy, the project involved school children, elderly citizens, and professionals in sound and music, aiming to map local soundscapes and create a documentary radio drama. Methodologically, the study used ethnographic observations of the process and focus group interviews with participating professionals. It unfolded in two phases: live encounters in school and community settings, followed by online workshops. The inquiry was structured around four guiding questions related to the: (1) specifics of collaborative participatory sound work in Lož Valley; (2) connection between sound, space, identities, and communities; (3) professionals' understanding of collaborative processes; and (4) evolving relationship between children and sound. Findings reveal that children and elderly participants, recognised as experts in their lived experience, enriched the creative process and fostered new intergenerational connections rooted in everyday acoustic environments and technologies. Additionally, the results indicate that listening and sound-making exist on a continuum of participation, where peer collaboration and a relational approach to education enhance children's listening capacities. The study contributes to debates on participatory art, collaborative professionalism, and collective authorship in contemporary education and cultural production.

## Introduction

Technology and digital culture in education are primarily examined through the lens of visual engagement, given that we live in an increasingly visual era. Despite the popularity of podcasts in (music) education (Michelse 2023; Bolden and Nahachewsky 2014) and the growing interest in sound-based pedagogy for children (Tinkle 2015; Recharte 2019), little is known about how curated listening practices in the community support the development of auditory culture, especially among teenagers. Even less attention has been given to the potential of community engagement, intergenerational collaboration, and interdisciplinary approaches in creating new spaces for auditory learning.

This paper examines collaborative professionalism within the international project *B-air Infinity Radio: Creating Sound Art for Babies, Toddlers, and Vulnerable Groups*,<sup>1</sup> which brings together nine European countries under the leadership of Radiotelevision Slovenia (Creative Europe, 10/2020—12/2023). *The Whisper of Memories* [*Šepet spomina*] is part of the B-air project developed by Radiotelevision Slovenia in the last quarter of 2023. It is rooted in Raymond Murray Schafer's soundscape theories (Schafer 1967; 1986; Järviluoma et al. 2009) and research on the relationship between sound, people, and the environment. It started as an experimental participatory project guided by a team of professionals in sound and music, including a radio director, sound artists and engineers, music educators, a writer, and researchers in ethnology, anthropology, community music, and sound pedagogy. The project's goal was to document the sounds of Lož Valley through intergenerational dialogue, culminating in a participatory documentary radiodrama<sup>2</sup> for children and adults as a soundmap. Pedagogically, the project aimed to involve school children (aged 9 to 14) in various aspects of the process: exploring the story and collecting local legends, learning how to record sounds and conduct interviews, interviewing elders, writing a script, and sound design. The research, following the children's encounters, comprised two parts: (1) live interactions in the school library and community (September 2023), and (2) online workshops (October to December 2023).

This research presents the results of ethnographic observations and focus group interviews conducted with members of the professional practice community to gain insights into how visiting artists and children exercised their creative agency in participatory radiophonic art. Four research questions guided this exploration:

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<sup>1</sup> B-air Project website: <https://b-air.infinity.radio/en/> (access: 15. 10. 2025.). B-air project publication (eBook): [https://b-air.infinity.radio/documents/200/B-AIR-Art\\_Infinity\\_Radio-eBook.pdf](https://b-air.infinity.radio/documents/200/B-AIR-Art_Infinity_Radio-eBook.pdf) (access: 15. 10. 2025.).

<sup>2</sup> *The Whisper of Memories* [*Šepet spomina*] participatory documentary radio drama: <https://prvi.rtvsl.si/podcast/rio-radijska-igra-za-otroke/173250372/175009826> (access: 15. 10. 2025.).

RQ1: What are the specific features of collaborative participatory soundwork in Lož Valley?

RQ2: How does this project connect identities and communities centered around sound and space?

RQ3: How do professionals perceive the collaborative process in the project, and what kind of impact does it have on them?

RQ4: How does children's engagement and relationship with sound and the listening process change throughout the project?

To gain a richer understanding of the process and relational dynamics between the team, I conducted several focus group interviews and ethnographic observations of the pedagogical processes during both in-site and online work with children. In analysing the specifics of the process, I use the situational knowledge generated by the co-researcher Katarina Juvančič, an ethnologist, anthropologist, singer, and songwriter who investigated soundscapes and sonic sensibilities (Juvančič 2023).

## Theoretical Background

For this research, both Katarina Juvančič and I agreed on viewing the soundscape as a musical composition (Schafer 1967; 1986) and as a cultural system (Feld 1982). Pedagogy in sonic arts draws from the 1960s and 1970s, influenced by the pioneering work of Canadian composer and music educator Raymond Murray Schafer and his World Soundscape Project (now known as the World Forum for Acoustic Ecology), as well as from the work of other composers and artists concerned with the ways of listening, such as John Cage, Pauline Oliveros, and Max Neuhaus (Tinkle 2015).

Enabling an aesthetic approach to everyday ambient sounds may empower the listener to merge life with art and be able to import rich moments of aesthetic experiences from music into their everyday life activities, just by choosing to listen, at will, with musical ears and a listening body (Etmektsoglou 2019, 4).

Fostering soundscape awareness, hearing, and listening is a primary area of discovery, research, and experimentation. Characteristic of sound-based education, this leads to *soundscape competence*. Juvančič (2023, 377) describes it as an "ability to comprehend environmental sounds as meaningful." The ecological approach in child development (Gibson and Pick 2000) perceives children as active and embodied agents in their environment, including the world shaped by their relation to and immersion in sounding objects (Etmektsoglou 2019). This approach challenges traditional methods of music education, expanding it toward a sound-centered approach that uses local soundscapes

as resources and encourages lifelong engagement with the sonic world. Etmektsoglou (2019, 6–8) describes soundscapes in music education as “music compositions”, “bridges to others, to the environment and the aesthetics”, “agents for life-long intra-personal development and identity formation”, and resource for “solitary and communal listening experience”.

Dionyssiou (2019, 22–28) proposes a methodology for listening to the acoustic environment based on perceiving sound as: (1) a gesture/movement; (2) a means of sound creation in the classroom; (3) a connection with the environment; and (4) a link to culture. Each of these dimensions of engagement with sound brings its own purpose, so it is useful to think about their combination within the learning contexts. The *sound as movement* guides learners to “higher levels of sound appreciation,” while the *sound as a means of sound creation in the classroom* encourages them to adopt a “playful, creative and artistic attitude in relation to the sound” (Dionyssiou 2019, 28). It also enables an interdisciplinary approach and involvement of teachers with different expertise and specialties, as well as involving visiting artists in school projects, just like the one presented in this paper. The *sound as a connection with the environment* can help raise learners’ awareness of acoustic ecology, “develop environmental consciousness” and “explore the history and features of a place through its soundscape” (Dionyssiou 2019, 26). Based on acoustemology and Steven Feld’s idea of the soundscape as a cultural system, *sound as a cultural product and a link to culture* invites learners “to understand and appreciate the sound as a cultural process, as an expression of the relationships in a community” (e. g. identifying local idioms and dialects, understanding local songs, games and customs, etc.).

The focus of sound pedagogy, as an analytical framework in sonic arts, is on transforming “auditory perception in the everyday life of the subject” (Tinkle 2015, 222). It relies on counter-pedagogies such as Paulo Freire’s critical pedagogy (Freire 2022), Raymond Murray Schafer’s concept of “ear-cleaning” and “ear-opening” (Schafer 1967, 1), and John Cage’s idea of “musicalisation of aurality” (Kahn 2001, cited in Tinkle 2015, 222) that involves listening without carrying a cultural backpack filled with codes related to the learning of music in schools. Emerging as an approach that opened “possibilities for broader and more immediate *participation* than in Western art music” (Tinkle 2015, 223), sound pedagogy (often called *critical sound and listening pedagogy*) shows the ways to listen in another way, where sound is perceived as a process which opens and expands forms of active engagement and participation in music. This happens through participatory exercises in a continuum of active listening and active soundmaking (Keylin 2023; Tinkle 2015). Recharte (2019, 78) introduces an “acoustemological, cultural production approach to music education” rooted in generating knowledge through and within the ecology of relations during listening practices in our everyday lives. This aligns with Salomé Voegelin’s idea of a *continuum of sound*, as an inclusive approach to listening that transcends genre boundaries, from classical music to experimental sound art. By highlighting the fluid, interwoven nature of sound experiences, she encourages listeners to engage with the “complex continuity” of the sonic

landscape, enhancing awareness of our interconnected roles within it. This approach not only deepens musical and artistic engagement but also invites listeners to consider ethical and ecological issues through sound. The agency of sound and its capacity to build community and solidarity is emphasised in Brandon LaBelle's writings (LaBelle 2018; 2021). While Voegelin (2014; 2018) argues that sound reveals voices and presences excluded by visual hierarchies, thus exposing the fragility of democratic space, LaBelle (2018; 2019; 2021) discusses the connection between justice and audibility, suggesting that listening and acoustics can reconfigure power and social orientation. Acoustic territories and spatialisation in the listening process, seen as a participatory act, serve as a foundation for the invisible, energetic architecture that extends social boundaries, providing an in-between (liminal) experience for listeners (LaBelle 2015). Listening can thus generate social, spatial, and phenomenological auditory knowledge and understanding of reality. Through everyday sensory aspects of listening, participating and tuning into the community, we practice sonic citizenship (Højlund et al. 2024).

Pedagogy in sound arts demands a collaborative culture, especially within community settings. For the Lož Valley project, this meant a collective effort from professionals across various disciplines, united by a shared interest and focus on sound. Unlike traditional professional collaboration, *collaborative professionalism* (Hargreaves and O'Connor 2018a) involves shared values and goals, inquiry, responsibilities, and new partnerships between different institutions and the community. In addition to social responsibility, it adopts a relational, situational, and contextual approach, emphasizing constant reflection. While professional collaborations and learning communities often rely on top-down knowledge transfer, collaborative professionalism adopts a bottom-up approach, with joint efforts based on "solidity and solidarity" (Hargreaves and O'Connor 2018b, 21–22). This approach values both individual professional expertise and the relationship between members equally. The concept of collaborative professionalism has gained popularity, particularly in settings that emphasize teamwork and shared responsibility as essential for addressing the complex challenges in education today. Collaborative professionalism and sound pedagogy in community environments may support the *expansion of professionalism* (Westerlund and Gaunt 2022) to address societal challenges and needs.

In this type of participatory sonic project, it is vital to observe aspects of intergenerational learning and peer learning. *Intergenerational learning* involves educational practices that encourage interaction, collaboration, creative aging, and knowledge-sharing between different generations, typically involving older and younger people. The aim is to foster a mutual learning environment where individuals of various ages can exchange skills, experiences, and perspectives, thus enriching each other's understanding and abilities. In music education, this approach is already showing promise. Although programs for seniors and kindergarten and primary school children, as well as seniors in nursing homes, are more common (e.g., Varvarigou et al. 2013; 2011; David et al. 2018), research on intergenerational interactions between seniors and teenagers remains less frequent. Particularly interesting is the research from music therapy that involves ac-

tive, music-based interventions connecting adolescents and elders with dementia (e.g. Dorris et al. 2022; Hessenberg and Schmid 2013).

*Peer learning* is closely associated with democratic and inclusive education, although it has often been described as hierarchical because it usually involves roles of being the “helper” and being “helped”, based on differences in abilities within the group. Creech, Varvarigou, and Hallam (2020) suggest viewing mixed ability levels not as a problem but as a resource that can enrich peer interactions and guide peer learning toward more collaborative and differentiated approaches. They see relational knowledge, friendship groups, and peer scaffolding as essential components for creating an inspiring learning environment, especially for teenagers. When considering types of peer learning, it’s important to distinguish between cooperative and collaborative, as well as symmetrical and asymmetrical peer learning. Cooperative learning is structured by the teacher and followed by intentional peer activities aligned with the teacher’s goals (focusing on organization and skill transfer), while collaborative learning refers to “the process of discovery” (Allsup 2003, 33), which fosters interpretation and group creativity. Unlike symmetrical peer learning, asymmetrical peer learning involves learners of different ages and abilities, which can be useful for generating collective peer knowledge (Creech, Varvarigou, and Hallam 2020).

## **The Whisper of Memories Research**

*The Whisper of Memories* was initially developed as an experimental project by a team of sound and music experts. Its goal was to capture the unique soundscape of the Lož Valley in Slovenia through an intergenerational dialogue that eventually became a documentary radio drama. The main theme of the radio drama, our starting point, was a local legend about a boy who dreams of having wings to fly while working in the fields with his family. An eagle appears and lifts him up; they fly together over the valley on various adventures, and eventually, he returns to the land as an old man. Pedagogically, the project aimed to involve school children at different stages of creation and production, equipping them with skills in storytelling and audio techniques. The number of children involved was 14, aged 9 to 15, all of whom conducted interviews with seniors. Two of them (aged 12 and 14) participated in the sound editing workshop, while three of them took part in the scenario writing workshop.<sup>3</sup> The educational process guided children through collecting local legends, learning to conduct and record interviews, writing scripts, and sound design. This educational component was divided into two phases: (1) live sessions with children at school and in the community (September 18th to 23rd, 2023), and (2) online workshops (once a week from October to December

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<sup>3</sup> Although we initially wanted to be present in all workshops, organizational reasons prevented us from participating in both the sound editing and scenario writing workshops because they were scheduled at the same time. The entire ethical procedure for the research was conducted by Radiotelevision Slovenia and the Elementary School Stari Trg pri Ložu, and the parents’ confirmations we got as a team on the first day of our work.

2023). The core team of visiting artists included professionals with diverse expertise in sound, each with their own role. My role was to observe the process and assist as a pedagogue since most team members lacked prior pedagogical experience. That is why I engaged with the process as a practitioner-researcher, as practice was a central method of scientific inquiry.<sup>4</sup> All exercises used in the scenario writing and sound editing workshops are mapped and published in the B-air project publication (Čorić 2023, 383–388). The project finished in December 2023 with a group listening of the radio drama organized in the Lož Valley by the community that gathered everyone involved. Furthermore, the radio drama *The Whisper of Memories*, children's sonic miniatures, and interviews with team members were broadcasted at Radiotelevision Slovenia. Interviews with elderly people led by children were broadcast in full length on the local radio in Lož Valley.

## Methodology

A qualitative methodology is used to address the four research questions, based on the idea that in this type of project, creative sonic practices themselves constitute knowledge. In this way, as a team, we recognized that “we do knowledge, we don't just think it” (Nelson 2013, 66), highlighting embodied and experiential knowledge-in-practice (Schön 2017).

### *Data collection*

Data were collected through: a) ethnographic observation of interviews and sound editing workshops (in school, communities, and online); and b) six focus group interviews with the team of professionals. The number of participants in the focus group interviews varied from three to six.<sup>5</sup> The focus group interviews were held daily after workshops at Elementary School Stari Trg pri Ložu, either while driving from Ljubljana to Stari Trg or during lunch breaks, as those were the only times I could gather the professional team together. One of these was conducted online before the project's completion. During the focus group interviews, sound professionals were asked questions directly related to the process. I also used these moments to guide them in observing specific pedagogical points during interviews with seniors led by children. These interviews took place simultaneously in different community spaces, requiring us to split up as a team. The data were recorded using a mobile phone audio recorder, manually transcribed, and analysed through thematic coding.

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<sup>4</sup> While I participated in proposing and co-creating the sound-editing exercises, I remained aside from their implementation, which enabled me to articulate a practitioner-researcher position grounded in observation and critical reflection.

<sup>5</sup> The composition of the focus groups varied, as parallel interviews and workshops often required the professional team to divide. Depending on the focus of the questions, different members participated. For instance, one focus group included the school librarian who coordinated the entire project.

### *Data analysis*

The analysis presented here was conducted in three phases. In the first phase, all qualitative data from the in-situ process in Lož Valley were analysed by the author and then shared and discussed with the co-researcher Katarina Juvančič and the facilitator of the sound-editing workshop. The second phase involved analysing online workshops, which were frequently shared and discussed with the sound editing workshop facilitator. This phase focused on exploring the possibilities and differences in engagement between the live workshops and online encounters with children. The third phase involved interpreting the data in dialogue with the results from Katarina Juvančič's research. The thematic coding process involved previously defined focus points such as collaborative professionalism, peer and intergenerational learning, and sound-based pedagogy. Emerging topics from the process include critiquing the current education system, emphasizing the library as a Thirdspace, and authors' rights. Results are organized thematically according to the identified topics.

## **Results and discussion**

### *Collaborative professionalism: potentials and challenges of peer and intergenerational learning*

Collaborative professionalism within the project involved observing the specificities of collaborative work on the documentary radiodrama in Lož Valley (RQ1). The *Whisper of Memories* is an interdisciplinary, participatory, and community-led project that extends beyond the project's timeline. The research showed that the key person in the entire project is a school librarian who has built a long-lasting collaboration with Radiotelevision Slovenia. Each year, students from the school visit the studios in Ljubljana. Afterwards, RTV technicians come to record students reading books aloud, creating audiobooks of some obligatory school literature for new generations. They are even gradually building a small computer room/studio in the library. Essentially, this project was a step forward, aiming to foster deeper professional collaboration with Radiotelevision and involve the whole community. The school library became a sonic *Thirdspace* (Soja 1996; 2010). Bringing together different generations in the library, which served as a studio, workshop, and meeting place, functioned as a time capsule and a liminal learning environment. In this lived space, physical and mental spaces from the present and the past converge into a larger whole.

Expanded professionalism as a form of collaborative professionalism in a library as a sonic Thirdspace allowed for diverse, flexible, and non-hierarchical expert positions, connecting professional identities and communities around the topics of sound and

space (RQ2). An inclusive and safe learning space enabled the discovery of a timeless story about Lož Valley by mapping sounds and memories *with, by, and for* community members of different ages, forming a counter-narrative to dominant and normative discourses in formal education.

Regarding the understanding of the collaborative working process in the project (RQ3), in addition to the evident learning happening at all levels and among all involved, not everything was smooth for the team of visiting artists. While the original plan was to include children in all aspects of creating a documentary radio drama and to foster their agency throughout the process, fieldwork revealed that completing the project with them was unlikely. Factors included the tight deadline for finalizing and broadcasting the radio drama on national radio, as well as the fact that facilitators from different countries and the school involved were located far from Ljubljana, where the Radiotelevision Slovenia studio was situated for sound editing and recording. In addition to the challenge of assembling the entire team in the same place after fieldwork in Lož Valley, we also needed assurance that children would be willing to continue collaborating online.

In addition to organization, some professionals in focus groups expressed concerns about the authorship of the radiophonic piece, citing differences in work quality between children and professionals. This kind of concern or tension is common in community art projects, resulting in performances that “unite professional and non-professional art-making” (Matarasso 2019, 26). However, children and seniors are considered professionals of their own lived experiences in this context. There was a lack of clarity during the online work within the team about the finish line. In some cases, there was a sense of lacking guidance and hierarchy, but eventually, everything went smoothly, and all the results were incorporated into the radiophonic piece. This is where the radio director played a key role in final decision-making, as she decided that the entire team makes the radio drama as a collective authorship.

Peer-to-peer “role modelling and mentoring may provide a structure for the development of well-understood musical-self stories” (Creech, Varvarigou, and Hallam 2020, 195). Regarding types of peer learning, the dynamic interactions between children as peers and among the professional team acting as peers proved especially useful, utilizing collaborative, cooperative, asymmetrical, and symmetrical peer learning in various contexts. Asymmetrical peer learning was evident in the sound editing workshop, but the child in the role of the “helped” due to less technological knowledge also served as a “helper” during the interview process with seniors. Both children and adults in the team made space for each other throughout the process, naturally embracing the shared task of creating a soundscape story. The clearest example of harmony in team collaboration happened on the last day of the on-site workshops in Cross Cave, which is described in the B-air project publication (Čorić 2023). Since peer learning proved to be a significant part of the process, the “collective peer knowledge” (Creech, Varvarigou, and Hallam 2020, 195) developed throughout all aspects of work is invaluable as an outcome.

Peer learning was less about exchanging technological skills and more about a collaborative process of discovery. It involved unlearning traditional school methods and engaging in ongoing dialogue within the team. It included continuous learning from different perspectives, such as intergenerational, peer, outsider and insider, professional and non-professional. For this reason, as a researcher and educator, I strongly relate to Juvančič (2023, 379), who advocates for more transgenerational sonic gatherings and *intergenerational sociability*, believing that “older members of the community stand to gain valuable insights from the youth (not just the other way around), as they collectively navigate the sonic landscapes of the present.”

*Sound pedagogy: the link between education and the community*

The project in Lož Valley demonstrated that children’s relationship with sound and their engagement with it drastically changed during the learning process (RQ4). In this way, we can say that they have developed sound competence, which is firmly rooted in discovery and research. It includes perceiving sound as: (1) a gesture/movement; (2) a means of sound creation in the classroom; (3) a connection with the environment; and (4) a link to culture (Dionyssiou 2019, 22–28). Juvančič (2023, 377) explains it:

Children actively cultivated sound competence not only through formal education, including school curriculum and extracurricular activities, but also by engaging in hands-on experiences facilitated by the research team and a school librarian. These experiences encompassed interviewing older generations, visiting villages, exploring diverse soundscapes, listening to narratives, and exchanging their own perspectives on sound. Additionally, their involvement in radiophonic work, sound editing, and the creation of radio play screenwriting, among other activities, played a pivotal role in nurturing their comprehensive understanding of sound (Juvančič 2023, 377).

In addition to exploring listening to the soundscape as a research process, it is also valuable to observe how children respond to different sounds (RQ4), which was especially evident in the sound editing workshop. In her acoustic inquiry into the process, Juvančič (2023) developed a classification of sounds articulated by the interview participants (elderly people) and divided them into four categories: (1) nature sounds; (2) animal sounds; (3) social sounds; and (4) work sounds. What was particularly interesting was that seniors mentioned the role of silence as a specific part of their soundscape, often linked to water. It’s clear that silence, as a culturally mediated form of communication, forms an important part of Lož Valley’s identity, even among children.

Since children’s task was to conduct interviews with elderly people and then listen to those interviews to select parts for sound editing, I followed and mapped “their” sounds during the workshops and in the analysis of their own sound miniatures. Children showed particular interest in these sounds:

1. social sounds (humanly crafted sounds, especially songs);
2. analogue sounds (sounds of nature and animal sounds; e. g. frogs);
3. technological sounds (machines, factories, train, tractor, cars);
4. imaginative sounds (a dragon from the local legend); and
5. silence (connection with floods, nature, rest, waiting time in the woods).

During the very first sound editing workshops, the children had the task of recalling their initial interviews with elderly people from the day before and choosing a short excerpt to work on. The children initially selected a story about church bells, and the first step was to learn how to cut that segment from the full interview, listen to it, and decide which sounds would be relevant for the soundscape. The facilitator explained how to find and insert recorded sounds from online repositories of free sounds, in case they didn't record the sounds themselves. Before inserting the sounds, two topics emerged, both encouraging children to listen more carefully. The first was the sounds of bells we wanted to find in the sound repository. Although the children initially felt the need to find the right sound quickly, while listening, one of the children noticed:

*This doesn't sound like our bells!*

This conclusion caused children to slow down and listen more carefully to the sounds on the list, in an attempt to find at least similar bells. When they couldn't find sounds that resembled the bells in their local environment, one child showed initiative by offering to take the Zoom recorder and capture the sound of real bells in the evening or early morning before school starts. The second topic focused on the pace and moments of silence. While listening to the finished task with an added soundscape for the story about the bells, the facilitator noticed some gaps between sentences and sounds. It seemed like the children didn't notice the pace, commenting that everything moves quickly in (social) media, with short exchanges of material. To demonstrate the power of silence in sonic art, the facilitator showed them how to create extra seconds of silence (Copy and Paste options<sup>6</sup>) to insert pauses at certain moments. This provided another opportunity to learn how to slow down and craft a sonic piece that "breathes".

In their second collaborative task, the children chose the part about frogs. They successfully found and inserted the sounds on their own without any issues. They independently noticed the specific moments in the piece where they could add silence, without needing assistance. Additionally, they began to experiment with sounds, conducting small tests and listening to the piece numerous times, allowing themselves to relax and truly feel the sounds without the fear of making a mistake, which was evident at the beginning of the workshop. Besides the sounds of frogs and water, the children wanted to include the well-known Slovenian song about frogs, *Žabe svatbo so imele*

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<sup>6</sup> For the workshop purposes we used Reaper digital audio production application: <https://www.reaper.fm> (access: 16. 12. 2025.).

[*Frogs Had a Wedding*]. Their first instinct was to download the YouTube video and simply insert the song into the soundscape. This became an opportunity to discuss copyright issues and explore an alternative way to include the song. In the end, the solution was to record the local choir singing this piece.

After the first sound editing workshop, a significant amount of time in subsequent sessions was again dedicated to silence. What was evident in all the sonic works the children produced by the end of the project during the online workshops is that silence played a crucial role in their sonic thinking, which was not the case during the initial encounters. Aside from noticing and incorporating silence into their sonic miniatures, each child gradually developed a personal relationship with silence by becoming “audible to himself as a discrete member of an audience” (Voegelin 2010, xv). Silence is not the “absence of sound”; it’s the “beginning of listening as communication,” which “embraces the body of the listener in its solitude, and invites him to listen to himself amidst the soundscape that he inhabits” (Voegelin, 2010, xv). This was evident when children began taking the Zoom recorder to their homes and recording sounds of silence. One child even mentioned arriving at rehearsal after hours of trying to capture the purring of his cat, one of his favourite sounds. The whole process of developing children’s sonic thinking was an example of “ear-cleaning” and “ear-opening” (Schafer 1967, 1), and John Cage’s idea of “musicalisation of aurality” (Kahn 2001, cited in Tinkle 2015, 222). This made us as a team to question the education system.

### *Critique of the education system: where does the creativity happen?*

A specific topic emerged from both the ethnographic observation of the workshops and the focus group interviews with the visiting artists. In the sound editing workshops, the children repeatedly mentioned that they didn’t realize *there was so much to do with sounds* because, in their music classes, they only listen to and analyse music in that way. Sonic sensibility and awareness are not part of the music curriculum. However, we took this opportunity to connect musical and sonic knowledge. With each new day and workshop, we engaged in the listening process more deeply in an organic way, gradually using more terms that children already knew from their music classes, such as tempo, dynamics, and rhythm. In this way, the process contributed to “decentering music” and “re-framing ‘music education’ as ‘sound education’” (Recharte 2019, 82). Furthermore, strengthened by acoustemology and cultural production,<sup>7</sup> the sound pedagogy approach created a meaningful detour from conventional classroom practices.

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<sup>7</sup> According to Recharte (2019, 83), the concept of *cultural production* offers a framework that highlights students’ “everyday symbolic materials and practices”, emphasizing how meaning is constructed through relationships and symbolic action. In turn, an acoustemological approach to sound-making, originating from Steven Feld’s notion of listening as knowing-in-action, understands sounds produced by humans as part of an already sounding, living soundscape. This perspective “de-center(s) the human” and situates listening within an “ecology of relationships that encompasses the human and the nonhuman, the living and the nonliving”.

The radio director was usually present at the end of sound editing workshops, listening to children's sonic pieces. In one of the focus groups, she reflected on the fact that she had to explain to the children that creating soundscapes for the radio drama doesn't mean putting the same sounds the narrator is talking about.

*The aim is not to illustrate something with the sound,  
but to create the experience of sound.*

In this sense, she emphasized the importance of multisensory thinking and embracing the specifics of experimentation, improvisation, and creation processes within the school system.

Another critique came from the interviewing process. The whole team noticed that children were considering inventing questions and leading interviews with seniors as a typical school assignment. In their first interviews, they simply read the previously prepared questions without genuinely listening to people's answers.

*Where and how does the real interest and motivation happens?*

This was the question that the radio director asked during the reflection focus group on the first day. As a researcher, I decided to put more focus on observing the interview process. Since some of the interviews in the local community occurred simultaneously with other interviews and workshops, I couldn't observe all the interviews, so I asked the professional team to focus on specific moments of connection between the child interviewer and the elderly person responding to questions. What was noticeable in the interviews was that moments of genuine connection occurred in several situations. These connections shaped the work of the entire team in the following days because we realized that teamwork is essential for conducting the best possible interviews. Some moments of connection occurred when the child and the elderly person engaged in an honest dialogue, often when the person mentioned a game, a specific space, or a childhood story that still resonates with the child's life. This encouraged children to connect and share their own stories, which also motivated the elderly person to keep the conversation going. Another spontaneous moment of connection arose when members of the visiting artists team asked unplanned questions based on active listening. For some of the children serving as interviewers, this clearly inspired them to ask questions spontaneously. During one of the reflections, one of the visiting professionals explained the importance of acting as role models throughout the process:

*We showed them how to use microphones and recorders and helped them to create questions for the interviews. But, we didn't show them how WE do it. And this is needed!*

Both critiques clearly highlight the still-prevailing *banking concept of education* (Freire 2022) in traditional education and emphasize the importance of actively seeking ways to create dialogue as a transformative learning approach for both sides. Drawing

on critical pedagogy and its application through sound pedagogy in the field of sound and music, education is understood as a *grassroots process* that fosters creative schools where teaching and learning are treated as an art form (Robinson and Aronica 2015, xxvi).

## Conclusion

In a world dominated by visual media, radio has continued to survive and even thrive in new ways against all odds. Since the arrival of television in the 1950s, many questioned whether radio could remain relevant in a visually saturated culture. Yet, through creativity and innovation, radio has adapted by finding new life in community radio and podcasting, which bring voices and stories to audiences in unique and engaging ways. The project presented in this paper builds on this resilience, using radio as a medium to connect children and elderly people, allowing them to share experiences, bridge generations, and create lasting memories through the simple yet powerful act of listening. Furthermore, it demonstrates the potential to incorporate various types of knowledge into the education system, grounded in the practice and lived experience of sound and collaborative community work.

Research findings indicate that involving children and elderly people, seen as experts in their lived experiences and as co-creators in participatory radiophonic projects, introduces a new level of intergenerational connection within the community. This bond is rooted in essential childhood experiences related to school, home, nature, and technology, illustrating the growing potential of radio in today's world. Results show that listening, sound creation, and music making all form a continuum of participatory radiophonic art. The multimodality of listening suggests that the deeper we involve children in participation and interaction with peers, elderly co-citizens, and radio professionals through various activities, the more focused and nuanced their listening becomes. Exploring innovative processes and collaborative professionalism within the professional community in this case study provides critical insights about the current education system and raises questions about collective authorship.

Key challenges, limitations and questions that I want to address for further research are:

### 1. language barriers in community research

Although the Slovenian and Croatian languages are similar, in this research, a specific language barrier affected the process in small ways. The sound editing workshop facilitator and I, as a researcher-practitioner who is Croatian-speaking, mostly didn't encounter problems with the language barrier in the on-site workshops, thanks to the children who spontaneously included language differences as a sort of game during the work. However, during online work, the language barrier was more noticeable and slowed down the process. This was also true in the delicate task of listening and editing

audio clips from interviews, where it was sometimes difficult for a foreigner to notice the subtle differences in the Slovenian dialect from that specific area, so the children stepped in and made corrections.

## 2. process vs. product

The topic of authors' rights, collective authorship, and the delays in finalization of the radiophonic piece emerged during the thematic analysis. It revealed that while the process was the most important, there was pressure to complete tasks by a specific date, with limited time slots in the professional studio for final edits and recordings. Furthermore, a common issue in projects involving visiting artists and community members is the question of artistic quality, as some creative professionals might perceive differences as a problem.

## 3. vulnerability of spaces *and/as* research contexts (rural vs. urban)

Since this project was conducted in a rural area of Slovenia, where children still live at a different pace of life than those in urban areas and align closely with the rhythms of nature, it would be interesting to repeat it in an urban setting to compare. Although the children in this project were clearly digital natives, they repeatedly mentioned that they prefer to go outside and play, ride bikes, or simply lie on the ground and listen to the silence. It would be interesting to see how children from the city respond to the sound of silence and listening in general. Another aspect of this is the comparison of intergenerational work between rural and urban areas, as it became clear that time in natural surroundings passes slowly, allowing us to talk deeply to people and truly listen.

## 4. knowledge production

The project in Lož Valley demonstrated *listening as a knowing in action* (Feld 2015), as a specific situational knowledge that emerged from the collaboration of sonic professionals and different generations of community members in the local environment, engaged through teamwork. It is worth considering how this can be applied or integrated into the existing education ecosystem.

## 5. interdisciplinary research encounters

One of the hidden gems of this research was that two seemingly unrelated researchers with different tasks entered the same process. Although not planned, the collaboration and dialogue developed spontaneously, creating connections between music education, anthropology, ethnology, and ethnomusicology. Sound-based pedagogical approaches are deeply rooted in sonic studies and the disciplines mentioned above. Furthermore, as critiques of existing education emerged from this learning process, understanding it through the lens of the anthropology of (music/sound) education became even more relevant, highlighting its potential to inform future pedagogical research in community arts projects.

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## ULAZAK U DOLINU ZVUKOVA: ISTRAŽIVANJE SURADNIČKOG PROFESIONALIZMA U RADIOFONSKOJ UMJETNOSTI (rezime)

U radu se istražuje suradnički profesionalizam na participativnom projektu koji se temelji na umjetnosti zvuka provedenom u Loškoj dolini u Sloveniji od rujna do prosinca 2023. godine. Na temelju pedagogije zvuka i uvida iz akustičke ekologije, u studiji se ispituje način na koji su profesionalni umjetnici, djeca i stariji stanovnici zajednički stvorili participativnu dokumentarnu radiodramu kroz slušanje, snimanje i pripovijedanje. Istraživanje je kao cilj imalo procijeniti ne samo umjetničke rezultate već i pedagošku i društvenu dinamiku suradničke prakse. Dizajn istraživanja uključivao je kombinaciju etnografskog promatranja s fokus grupama provedenim među sudjelujućim profesionalcima. Terenski rad odvijao se u dvije faze: (1) radionički rad uživo u školama i zajednici te (2) online radionice. Analiza rezultata ponudila je odgovore na četiri ključna pitanja: (1) Koje su specifične značajke suradničkog participativnog rada na zvuku u Loškoj dolini? (2) Na koji način projekt povezuje identitete i zajednice okupljene na temelju zvuka i prostora? (3) Kako profesionalci interpretiraju i doživljavaju procese suradnje? i (4) Kako se dječji angažman sa zvukom i slušanjem mijenjao tijekom vremena? Rezultati pokazuju da je participativni okvir omogućio djeci i starijim stanovnicima da djeluju kao sukreatori i stručnjaci za vlastita životna iskustva. Njihov doprinos proširio je kulturne i međugeneracijske aspekte projekta. Interakcije su pokazale da su veze sa zvukom ukorijenjene u svakodnevnom okruženju (škola, dom, priroda i tehnologija), pružajući temelj za osobno izražavanje i povezivanje zajednice. Analiza također pokazuje da slušanje, stvaranje zvuka i stvaranje glazbe treba promatrati kao dijelove kontinuuma participacije, a ne kao odvojene prakse. Slušanje je postalo fokusiranije i detaljnije kada su djeca aktivno sudjelovala u procesima učenja i suradnje s vršnjacima, starijim stanovnicima i stručnjacima. To podupire ideju da multimodalnost u slušanju poboljšava i perceptivnu oštrinu i kreativnu kontrolu. Za profesionalnu zajednicu, projekt je poslužio kao prostor za promišljanje o suradničkom profesionalizmu. I profesionalni i neprofesionalni sudionici primijetili su promjene u svom razumijevanju autorstva, odgovornosti i načina na koji se dijeli ekspertiza. Umjesto hijerarhije, proces je potaknuo kolektivni pristup autorstvu, dovodeći u pitanje tradicionalne pedagoške i umjetničke granice. Sveukupno, studija naglašava potencijal participativne radiofonske umjetnosti u poboljšanju međugeneracijskih veza, novih oblika učenja i poučavanja u školama, kao i poticanju novih oblika suradničkog profesionalizma. Ukazuje na to da radio, kao moderni medij, i dalje ostaje relevantan za obrazovanje, kulturnu produkciju i angažman zajednice.