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Project: 101173961 - Nature studio
Deliverable n:o D3.3.
Methodology or "user's manual" for open air studio
locations in Heinävesi, Finland.

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Foreword

By project leader Mikko Keinonen

One of the main aims of Echoes of the Ancient is to create a chain of open air studios across Europe in Finland, Latvia and Portugal. The idea is not to build anything: the studio status will be based on wide knowledge on the chosen locations.

While planning the project one of the goals was to create a “studio methodology” for each recording location. Now, after exploring the locations and gathering the information, observations and insights, we must admit we made a terminological error while planning.

“Methodology” is a scientific term, which has a specific meaning. In our case it’s too specific and therefore misleading. It promises an approach which is not exactly relevant concerning our workflow and findings.

Anyway, our plan has a remark which opens up the reality of recording in nature and has proved to be completely accurate in our project: Recording in nature is a constant never ending learning process because the number of variables and unknown factors is so wide. Natural locations change constantly depending on the weather, time of the day and season and there can always be something unexpected because they are not environments which are isolated from the rest of the world.

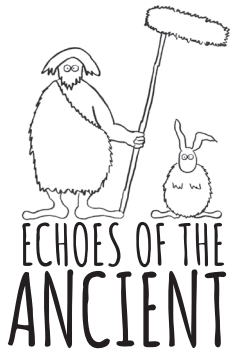
Another unpredictable factor are the people using these locations: every instrument has their special features, possibilities and limitations. Every musician has their own ways of using their instrument or voice and every sound professional has their own priorities and methods and ways to react to the changing conditions. When you combine all these factors, the number of potential outcomes is already endless.

Innovations with the help of experiments

Echoes of the Ancient is an innovation project which experiments via bringing together elements which weren’t brought together earlier - like musicians and sound technicians with different backgrounds and different working environments. The goal is to produce new information and create new art and hopefully find insights that would be new and meaningful enough to be called innovations.

Anyway, the goal is not to create a final truth or canon on how things should be done in the locations we’ve chosen to explore. Instead, the idea is to invite ourselves and others to an experience which challenges our ideas and conceptions of a correct work flow, definitions of art, relationship between humans and other elements of nature or whatever makes us blind and deaf for a load of opportunities only because they weren’t a part of our plan. The idea is also that this experience and process wouldn’t end when the project is over and we’ve given our report. Our project is just supposed to be a beginning, a spark for something that will go on without limits when it comes to time or location.

If we acknowledge and accept these common goals it becomes clear that we’d be contradicting ourselves if we tried to create something that would qualify as “methodology” - at least on a wide scale. If we tried, the first problem would be that it would demand a lot of simplification and compromises to agree upon something every professional involved in the project and process would accept. Another problem is that if we managed to reach such a compromise, it probably would be more harmful than useful because too exact methodologies, guidelines or dogmas would just create a delusion



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that we already found everything relevant and the only thing others coming after us would be to try to repeat what we already did.

Anyway, there's a lot we can provide: practical information, insights, observations, findings, even warnings. Still, it would be misleading to call all that a methodology or even a user's guide. A tourist guide to acoustic nature locations for sound and music professionals and enthusiasts would be probably closer to reality.

Different approaches, different results

There will be "studio methodologies" from Latvia, Portugal and Finland and the form and content of the document will be quite different for each country. That's because the process, conditions and methods vary a lot.

In Latvia the data is mainly based on the experiences of the vocal group Saucējas and their recordists. They have a long experience of recording in nature and even the Latvian vocal tradition is widely based on singing outside and they have a lot of songs with instructions on how to do it.

In Portugal the emphasis is more on acoustic experiments done by sound recordists and technicians and partly on recordings done with more variety of musicians.

In Finland the approach was the most experimental with quite a variety of locations with both wide and small spaces and forests, rocks, caves and lakes and also with a wide range of musicians and music genres.

Maybe a "methodology" after all?

Anyway, despite everything written above, there could be some general guidelines for recording outside. They could be even called a methodology and they could be written on a stone somewhere in a deep forest:

1. Stop and listen.
2. Forget about what you know and open your ears to hear what's really there.
3. Expect unexpected and accept it.
4. Don't try to fit the environment to your vision. Fit your vision to the environment.
5. Feel free to feel free, but show respect. Remember you are there as a visitor.



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General policies concerning the use of nature locations

In Finland we have everyman's rights which means that you are free to access any land unless it's a private yard or especially restricted for other reasons. It also means that you are allowed to for example pick berries, mushrooms or plants or do camping. You are not allowed to make a fire without permission and also cutting trees or taking soil or rocks is restricted.

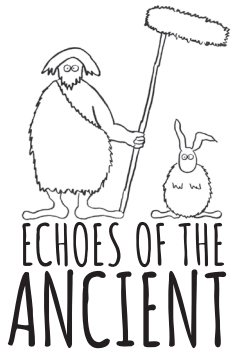
You don't need to have a special permission to take photographs or record sound or video on someone's land, either. Anyway, there are limitations.

A general rule is that you need a permission if you do something commercial on someone else's land. That concerns for example guided tours in nature if they are paid for. Also a wide scale recording session is quite clearly commercial and therefore it's better to have a permission.

Another factor is the volume. According to the law for example open air concerts need a permission from the local authorities in case there's a reason to assume that the noise would be disturbing to the surroundings. In these cases you should inform the authorities not later than 30 days before the event.

In case of nature recordings it's not totally clear what could be considered disturbing. An acoustic performer or ensemble in a forest or cave probably won't disturb anyone but if there's loud, amplified music, in most cases it would qualify as disturbing noise. That's something to remember especially if the recording is done by the water because in calm weather sound travels far on the water surface.

Heinäveden Muinaisseura ry has long term contracts for the use of all recording locations in Heinävesi and association will help with any question concerning permissions. In other cases small, random recordings can be done without permission but wider scale actions should be discussed either with Muinaisseura or the land owner.



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Information site by site



Sonja Saagaia on Karhukallio. Image: Mikko Keinonen

Karhukallio

Access

Karhuvuori is a part of a private nature preservation area and the access is restricted because the flora on that location is vulnerable. For that reason it's not even recommended to make the location of the site publicly known.

Heinäveden Muinaisseura ry has a permission to do recordings on the site but we need to take care that the most most vulnerable parts of the area stay untouched and movements are limited to certain paths. Therefore any actions done in Karhukallio need to be agreed upon with either Heinäveden Muinaisseura ry or with the owner Risto Sulkava.

Terrain

The terrain around Karhukallio is pretty uneven. The path to the best recording spots for performers goes partly through a cave by a high cliff. The terrain is rocky and rocks have a lot of part edges and uneven surfaces. A part of the path is covered with moss but there's a lot of holes and gaps between rocks and anyone walking the path needs to be extra cautious on every step and not put their weight on their foot without making sure the surface under it is steady.

The terrain becomes even more dangerous during or after a rain because rocks covered with moss may become very slippery and treacherous to those who are not cautious enough.

Rubber boots, hiking shoes or other steady enough footwear is recommended to those visiting Karhukallio.

All visitors taken Karhukallio are always warned about the terrain and given precise advice on the precautions but still there have been a couple of minor accidents or threats. Therefore the risks need to be taken seriously.



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Acoustic observations by main recordist Patrick Tubin-McGinley

A natural amphitheatre; it made most sense to allow some distance between the 'performance' space and the microphones. I found a spot on the slope opposite the rock face and hand-held a boom with mid-side microphone rig aimed towards my best guess at where the performers were (for the most part, i couldn't see them at all). The result is that, thanks to the amphitheater qualities of the space, the musicians' sounds are sharp and clear (much clearer in the microphones than they were to the naked ear), but thanks to the distance, the environmental sounds and reverberation are strong.

Kermanranta ritual place



Saucejas on Kermanranta ritual place. Image: Mikko Keinonen

Access

The land is owned by the town of Heinävesi. No permission needed for small scale recordings but loud sounds should be announced because there are houses less than 200 meters away.

Terrain

Terrain is easy. The location is about 50 meters from the closest road and there's a clear path from the road. Regular parking places are a little more 100 meters away in the harbour of Heinävesi.

Acoustic observations by main recordist Patrick Tubin-McGinley

With several recordists, we took on different roles to document the group performances at this site, which was open with little reverberation off the large rock at its center, but quite a lot through the trees of the open surrounding forest. I positioned a mic stand with mid-side rig further away, about 10-20 meters from the 'stage', while a colleague positioned mics in the center of the action.



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Salman Rafique on Honkaniemi cliff. Image: Mikko Keinonen

Honkaniemi

Access

The land is owned by the town of Heinävesi. No houses on close range. Permission needed only for wider scale recordings or especially loud actions.

Terrain

The terrain is challenging. A good recording spot is only about 50 meters from the road but the terrain is pretty uneven. A good place for performing is on top of a cliff. It's climbable but the rocks covered by moss can be slippery, so caution should be taken.

Acoustic observations by main recordist Patrick Tubin-McGinley

Initially the musicians were positioned out of sight at the top of the cliff. I chose a location amongst the trees at a small distance from the cliff, but facing it, experimenting in the vicinity to find a point on the forest floor that best caught the reverberation of the sound coming over the edge. I recorded with a mid-side rig on a tripod at a height of about 2.5m. I did not find an ideal balance of environmental sound to musician intervention; the musicians sounded initially slightly too distant and faint. Later other musicians performed in front of the rock face as opposed to on top of it, and I moved closer to record a more direct sound, with reverberations off the rock face, with the same microphone set up.



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Eero Peltonen and Tiina Huttu casting spells under the table stone of Kolmiyhteinen in Pilppa. Image: Mikko Keinonen

Pilppa, Kolmiyhteinen

Access

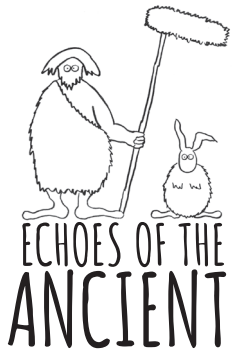
The land is owned by the state. The distance to the closest house is more than 2 kilometers, so there's no risk of disturbing the neighbours.

Terrain

The terrain is easy because the stones are about 20 meters away from the road.

Acoustic observations by main recordist Patrick Tubin-McGinley

A pair of offering stones with an acoustic corridor between them; I began by recording activity at the larger stone with a boomed mid-side rig, starting from the smaller stone and moving slowly towards the activity. The environmental sound was powerful; a strong wind presence in the trees, without being windy at ground level. The results are clear recordings of the musicians with a strong environmental presence.



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Eero Peltonen, Carlos Norton, Martins Krastins and Tiina Huttu on the path leading to the ancient meeting square in Vieruvuori.

Pilppa, Vieruvuori

Access

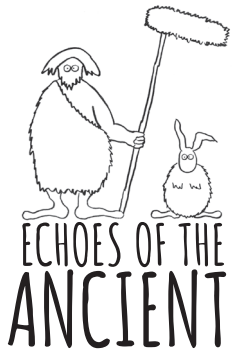
The location is in Kolovesi national park. No restriction for moving in the area but ecological factors need to be remembered.

Terrain

About 400 meters to the road. A clear path on an easy terrain leads to the place.

Acoustic observations by main recordist Patrick Tubin-McGinley

A deep forest clearing with a stone table and seats in a ring; this allowed for sonic interventions that made more use of the space and movement than in previous locations. I recorded mid-side, either moving slightly to follow the musicians' activities, or from a fixed location at a height of about 2.5 or 3 meters. The wind is again pleasantly present in the recordings, and the size of the 'stage' is apparent as sounds come from different distances with different levels of natural reverberation.



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Humalniemi Cliff and Jumppanen's cave

Access

The land is owned by the forestry company Tornator. Recording and other actions have been agreed upon with the company.

Terrain

Humalniemi rock painting is about 10 meters from the road, so logistics is easy. The rock painting is a registered relic, so nothing around must be harmed.

Jumppanen's cave is on the other side of Humalniemi cape. It's about 4 meters deep cave with a self-made ladder to help enter the cave. The path to the cave goes across a top of a cliff and falling down from the cliff would be lethal. The path isn't really challenging but extra caution needs to be taken - especially if the rock is wet because it can treacherously slippery. Steady footwear recommended for safety.

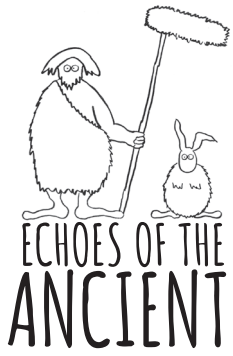
Acoustic observations by main recordist Patrick Tubin-McGinley

Humalniemi Cliff

A narrow "stage" area with gentle reverberation off a rock face at its back, focusing sound without much echo. The musicians centered their playing around a stomping stone a few meters in front of the rock face, and used it largely as a percussion element. As such, I decided to record mid-side relatively close to the performer (while colleagues concentrated more on forest reverb and ambiance from a greater distance), and include a geophone fixed into the ground near the stomping stone in a third channel to capture bass percussion for including in a final mix.



Hanna Järvi playing flute by Humalniemi cliff.



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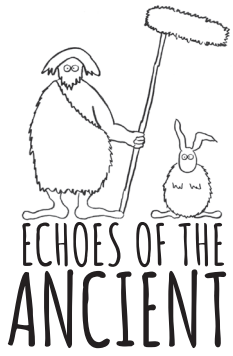
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Jumppanen's cave

A tight cave amongst stones as the water's edge, with a few difference chambers and 'tunnels', offering strong bass reverberation and focused treble. My colleague descended into the cave with the musicians to record up close, while I explored along the exposed roof of the cave for openings/gaps into which i could insert a pair of miniature omnidirectional mics, in the hopes of capturing both the internal spatial reverberation and some of the outdoor soundscape. The Result is focused, quiet sound from inside the cave, with less outdoor sound than i expected.



Sonja Saagaia and Eero Peltonen drumming in Jumppanen's cave.



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Sonja Saagaia singing in Kytöjoki tafone. Patrick Tubin-McGinley recording. Tiina Huttu, Jarno Mattila, Johanna Mattila, Paula Saraste and Eero Peltonen listening.

Kytöjoki tafone and cave

Access

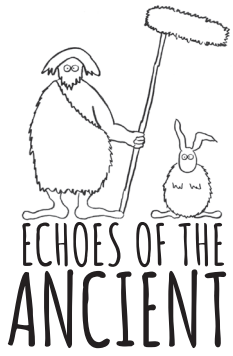
Kytöjoki tafone and cave are situated on land owned by forestry company Tornator. Recording actions have been agreed upon and the company has nothing against such action as long as there's no forestry activity that could be disturbed. The forest has been cut 2018, so nothing is about to happen on that branch in decades.

The tafone is about 50 meters from the road. There's a clear but the terrain is quite uneven. Rubber boots recommended because there are wet spots on the way.

The cave is by the road, no logistic challenges.



Marcello Giannandrea in Kytöjoki tafone.



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Acoustic observations by main recordist Patrick Tubin-McGinley

Kytöjoki tafone

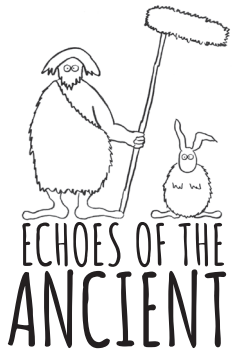
The acoustics in the space inside the stone, which was just barely big enough for a single musician and maybe a small instrument, intensely resonated bass frequencies, especially when certain specific frequencies were hit. Instead of trying to record from the outside, I decided to experiment with attaching a small pair of miniature omnidirectional microphones inside, as far apart as the space would allow, to attempt some kind of quasi-AB recording with the musician at its center. The results are clear, focused, bass-heavy recordings with little evidence of the space outside the stone.



Tuomas Rounakari playing pipe in Kytöjoki tafone. Patrick Tubin-McGinley recording, Salman Rafique shooting.

Kytöjoki cave

The small cave provided an intimate space ideal for individual instruments and a quiet voice. I recorded with my mid-side rig on a tripod at around head height, although most musicians played from a sitting position. I didn't have much choice for positioning; I simply had to place the tripod in a spot that was not too close to the performer and would not get bumped or jostled by anyone in the cave. The reverberation was gentle and amplified the instruments slightly, but the cave was open enough that sound from outside it filtered in as well.



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Hiekkaniemi

Access

Hiekkaniemi has a public picnic place and the land is owned by the state. No special permissions needed for small scale recordings.

In case of amplification or other loud music an announcement to authorities is recommended because sounds travel far on the lake and noise can disturb the cottages nearby.

Terrain

A parking place is about 300 meters away. From there there's an easy path to the end Hiekkaniemi cape. According to locals Hiekkaniemi has a lot of adders, so either rubber boots or hiking shoes may be a good idea.

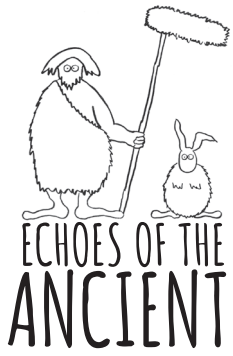


Jenni Hanikka, Patrick Tubin-McGinley and Hanna Järvi in Hiekkaniemi.

Acoustic observations by main recordist Patrick Tubin-McGinley

It was quite windy when we arrived on the cape, so the expected echo from across the water was not very noticeable. I decided, instead of trying to focus on the broader acoustic and fighting the wind, to try to zoom in of macro elements of the environment and create a situation in which musicians could interact directly with elements of the soundscape that were not readily apparent to their ears.

I positioned my mid-side rig so that it projected just off shore out over the edge of the water, pointed down, so the mid-channel picked up micro-movements in the surface of the water caused by the wind. I then invited musicians to sit near the water's edge and listen to the microphone sound in headphones. I asked them then to let the sound in the headphones inform their playing, so their piece would become something like a duet or collaboration with the environmental sound. Many of the musicians were very inspired by this approach, and the results, to me, very moving.



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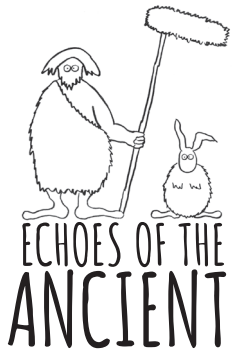
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Acoustic observations by project leader Mikko Keinonen

Hiekkaniemi cape is an open space and therefore the acoustics really depends on the weather. It's also very different in different seasons. When we arrived there Martine-Nicole Rojina in april, lake Suurijärvi was still frozen and the clean ice formed a strong surface which would carry sounds far. When we tried the acoustics with a loud holler, Martine counted nine separate echoes with the longest delay being six seconds.



Schröder, Mike Keneally and Chanan Hanspal in Hiekkaniemi.



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Polvijärvi Ridge and Kettle Hole

Access

Polvijärvi Ridge is owned by the state and partly protected. No restrictions to trespassing or recording.

Terrain

Very easy and smooth terrain. There's a path on top of the ridge. Closest access by car about 100 meters away.



Acoustics

On top of the ridge the echo is surprisingly noticeable. There are no cliffs around but the pines around create a cathedral-like soundscape with a soft but strong echo.

On the southern end of the ridge there's a kettle hole which is a total opposite to the strong echo of the rest of the ridge. The pit, with diameter about 30 meters and maximum depth about 8 meters is totally covered with moss which makes it acoustically dry, a natural sound booth.

