



Can cultural events catalyse engagement with climate change?

A Season for Change case study

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The idea that culture and the arts are critical for engaging the public on climate change is central to campaign groups and sustainability practitioners such as *Culture Declares Emergency*, *Julie's Bicycle*, and *Creative Carbon Scotland*. A small research literature in the social sciences and humanities also explores the role of culture in catalysing public engagement on climate change. But despite the growing recognition of the central role of cultural events, and diverse cultural representatives, in deepening the meaning and shaping the story of climate change, relatively few studies have explored exactly how culture can effectively catalyse public engagement with climate change.

Using Season for Change as a case study, this report offers a social science perspective on how cultural events seek to build public engagement with climate change. At the centre of this report is a 'two-way question': on the one hand, do the Season for Change commissions embody or represent principles of effective public engagement; and on the other hand, do the social/psychological concepts that underpin public engagement make sense in this creative, cultural context?

In the run up to the UK hosting the 26th United Nations climate change conference (COP26), climate change rose in salience, with polls across 2020 and 2021 showing surging and unprecedented levels of climate concern despite the Covid-19 pandemic.¹ With the goal of showing leadership from the cultural sector ahead of COP26, Season for Change was conceived as a UK-wide programme of culture and the arts, led by Artsadmin and Julie's Bicycle, with the goal of responding to (and inspiring action on) climate change. From immersive poetry, theatre and radio through to workshops, builds and installations, the programme covers a broad range of art forms and activities as well as different topics. It is particularly focused on centring communities and groups that have been underrepresented in, and excluded from, the climate change conversation.

We interviewed a range of people (programmers, communicators, artists) involved in Season for Change, combining these insights with reflections (as audience members) on selected parts of the Season for Change programme. We focused on three projects that were commissioned by Season for Change and used these as examples through which to explore wider insights and observations, drawing on insights from social science research on public engagement with climate change. We hope this report can contribute to a dialogue in the arts and culture sector about how to effectively build public engagement with climate change.

There are some positive examples of climate change engagement principles embodied in the programme's activities.

Across the commissions, there was a common sense of focusing on agency and efficacy - that is, nurturing the sense that the actions we take matter. Also, where commissions were able to clearly make the link between the artworks created and sustainable use of materials, this practical message (i.e. of avoiding waste) is likely to have landed well with a range of audiences. Some climate change issues (and broader sustainability issues) were also made very tangible and some were rooted in a sense of place.



The commitment to platforming and meaningfully engaging with diverse artists and audiences is a positive step towards engaging a wider range of the public on climate change. Season for Change has been a learning/engagement opportunity for artists and project teams as well as audiences.

Season for Change appears to have centred people of colour and emerging artists, and communities and audiences who may not typically be involved in climate change related issues. We welcome Season for Change's approach in platforming and involving these voices and would encourage future cultural events on climate change to also have meaningful engagement with artists and audiences in a similar way, including working with communities who may be marginalised or not usually involved in arts and culture.

The commissions also provided an opportunity for those involved to learn about and engage with climate change - it was not solely an engagement opportunity for the audiences. Artists, producers and directors who are not 'from the climate scene' can become powerful communicators for diverse audiences if they can articulate existing problems (and established solutions) in new ways.

The extent to which climate change is explicitly referenced or linked to, varies - reflecting different approaches to audience engagement through creative practice. Cultural events can catalyse public engagement with climate change, but by building climate engagement more systematically into cultural programming, there is the potential to achieve much more.



The commissions were varied in terms of the impact they aimed to have on their audiences, reflecting the spectrum of art as a primarily creative outlet to art as activism, as well as the extent to which there was an explicit connection to climate change. Also, whilst the relevance of climate change may have been clear in the artists' and producer's minds involved in Season for Change, it is possible that the link to climate change may have been less obvious to some audiences. In some cases the commissions could have been more explicit about climate change without compromising the integrity of the art. Alternatively (or in addition), cultural events can be used as a stimulus for further discussion and incorporate structured climate conversation opportunities alongside them.

Cultural events can be a powerful stimulus for conversations and discussion. Designing climate conversations into cultural events, and structuring them based on the principles that underpin positive engagement, offers the potential to maximise the powerful strengths of culture and climate communication. The more that principles of climate engagement can be creatively woven into the design of creative projects, the more likely they are to connect with audiences. This applies both in terms of interpreting climate change as a cultural experience, and in terms of better public engagement with climate change.

Read the full observations and insights section.

Throughout the report we have indicated some of the better-established principles of climate communication and where we see these principles being applied in practice with the following symbols.

- Climate communication principle
- ☀ Climate communication principle in action

Climate and Culture

Opening up the climate conversation

Climate change is a salient and increasingly important issue for people. The UK public are highly concerned and believe that responsibility for tackling it lies with big polluters and the UK government, but are also willing to consider personal lifestyle changes.^{2,3} Britons see it as an issue for ‘everybody’,² yet not everyone is equally part of the climate conversation. Work by Climate Outreach has segmented the British public into groups based on their ‘core beliefs’ (psychologically and politically) and created guidance on how to engage them (Britain Talks Climate). Whilst some have a confident presence in the climate discourse or have political clout, others are struggling to find their voice on climate or assume progress on the green economy will not involve them.²

Running across these issues is the concern that high-profile environmental activism in the UK has been dominated by people (professionals and citizens) who are highly educated, middle-class, and white.^{4*} For climate change engagement to be meaningful, it cannot be limited to certain sections of society. This points to a crucial role for culture, and diverse cultural representatives, to widen public engagement on climate change.

What do we know about public engagement with climate change?



Diverse audiences: Climate Outreach argues that having a strong ‘social mandate’ is essential to bringing about action on climate change.⁵ Many researchers have pointed out that it is important to recognise that there is not a homogenous ‘public’: what works for one group may not work for another. For example, communication may be different depending on their faith or the country they live in.^{6,7} Having a clear understanding of your audience can help to make climate change more relevant and engaging.



Values & worldviews: Another reason that tailored communication is useful is the role of people’s values, such as believing equality is important or respecting tradition.⁸ These can underpin people’s attitudes and responses and can bring people together across different backgrounds and demographics. Values and ideas that resonate across Britain include “avoiding wastefulness” and “creating a healthier society”.² However, knowing where values differ can help communication to resonate with particular groups.



Emotions often trump knowledge: The emotions that are drawn on to communicate climate change – such as fear, hope, worry and anger – can drive engagement. Positive emotions such as humour and optimism can prompt and result from climate action.⁹ Equally, people may be more likely to support and take climate action the more they worry about it,¹⁰ but care should be taken not to overwhelm people. Feeling helpless or hopeless are commonly reported climate emotions – especially among young people – so a sense of efficacy and agency (the belief that what we do matters) is critical.^{2,11}

Communicators should avoid seeing emotions as simple levers for engagement, as emotions work in different ways depending on the context in which they arise.¹²

● **Global vs local:** The language used to describe climate change and the way it is framed can emphasise particular aspects. For example, talking about it as an emergency or a global (vs local) environmental issue positions the subject in different ways. For some, global climate justice is key; for others, overcoming the psychological distance of the issue by engaging locally, through a sense of place attachment is more powerful.¹³ Using narratives and storytelling can help to resonate with people's values, place climate change in a social context and help people make sense of complicated issues.¹⁴

● **Diverse messengers:** Who communicates about climate change is a key factor in public engagement. People in Britain view certain professions as trustworthy – particularly nurses and doctors, but also teachers, professors, scientists and museum curators.¹⁵ With regards to climate change specifically, people have a very high level of trust in university scientists and scientific organisations to provide accurate information, with TV and radio documentaries as well as charities, environmental or campaign groups trusted by approximately two-thirds of people.¹⁶ When engaging specific audiences there may be more appropriate people to communicate the issue – for example, people who are trusted in their local community or by particular demographics.

● **Talking climate:** Climate change communication is not limited to a one-way flow of information: dialogue and two-way communication is essential.¹⁷ Nor is it limited to the discussion of facts – climate change is deeply entwined with how we live our lives not only because it is human-caused but because we can interpret and relate to it in different ways. It has a diverse set of social and cultural meanings, including in relation to the more fundamental ways in which people understand nature and the human world.¹⁸ It is part of our imaginations as well as having physical impacts.^{19,20}

In summary, engaging diverse audience values – and diverse audiences – through a range of trusted spokespeople and representatives, and using narratives and storytelling to create conversations rather than one-way communication, are critical for effective public engagement. Culture and the arts have the potential to speak to these considerations,²¹ and so well-designed cultural events on climate change can potentially be a catalyst for public engagement and wider social transformations.



There has been considerable growth in the number of artworks and art projects about climate change over the last 20 years, mainly through theatre, literature, installations and film,²² but also many other forms including games and comedy.^{23,24} However, there is a gap in understanding art projects from a social science perspective and what the impact of engaging with climate change through the arts can be.^{22,25}



Art provides a creative outlet to reflect on and interpret our thoughts about the world. It can provide "an inspired understanding of a theme as opposed to a logical one", offering freedom to encounter, explore and imagine environmental topics in different ways.^{26,27} Research that analysed climate artworks and projects around the world found that most aim to increase awareness of the issue and engage the audience on an emotional level, though a smaller amount go beyond this to create dialogue and networks, aim to find practical solutions, and imagine our future.²² While some art and artists may set out deliberately to heighten concern or prompt action, others have argued for climate change art to take care to retain its more reflective and interpretive aims.^{28,29}

Exploring climate change through cultural events isn't the sole domain of artists. There can be joint work between academics and artists and in different ways – such as collaborations, artists being commissioned or projects being artist-led.³⁰ Examples include a theatre storytelling project that brought together acting and geography university students to create a climate change play, and a multi-media performance about the Arctic developed in conversation with climate researchers.^{31,32}

It has been suggested that there can be climate change engagement *in, with and through art* – three progressive levels that see engagement as being introductory, a two-way communication, and transformative, respectively.³³ However, research has also suggested that "simply applying creative storytelling to climate communication is insufficient" in changing attitudes and beliefs (if this is the aim), and that stories which centre 'people taking action' are important – shifting the focus from issue to action.³⁴

Research has argued that cultural engagement with climate change is unique in having the freedom to explore topics and generate further questions, and that it doesn't have to provide answers or solutions.²² However, it doesn't mean that cultural engagement with climate change can't do these things. Though the aim of art isn't necessarily to tell people what to do about climate change,^{28,35} there is an overlap between art and activism, so much so that it has a name: 'artivism'.



Examples of the linking of art and activism in relation to the environment can be found across the world, such as in Indonesia and by the Sámi Indigenous peoples who have a longstanding tradition of using artivism for environmental justice.^{36,37} There are also current research projects in the UK looking at artivism and climate action, and artivism, community and transformation.^{38,39} Global research has found that young adults, children and students are particularly involved in environmental artivism.⁴⁰

Researchers have argued that art has a unique reflective role in being able to get audiences to think about how they can be both part of a problem and solution in relation to climate change.²⁸ This may not come in the form of explicit artivism but does suggest that art can be an important platform for public engagement.

These considerations around how art, activism, culture and climate change integrate are pertinent to the many projects and initiatives that Julie's Bicycle has led in the UK and internationally. These are not always public-focused but support cultural organisations to be more sustainable and engage their own audiences on sustainability. Season for Change is explicitly aimed at external, public (and stakeholder) audiences and so is the perfect testbed to explore if and how the ideas and principles of effective communication described above are being applied and what can be learnt from this.

Case Studies

Using insights from the interviews we conducted and attendance at events, here we discuss three of the Season for Change commissions – *Cece's Speakeasy*, *The Space Between and Roma: Recycle-Reuse-Reimagine* – in terms of how they have sought to engage their audiences on climate change, and in relation to existing research on public engagement with climate change.

Apples and Snakes is a spoken word/poetry organisation working across England which centres art and social impact and elevates spoken word poetry. Their commission for Season for Change, Cece's Speakeasy, (in association with *Jazz re:freshed* and *The Albany*) is an immersive spoken word experience that imagines a future where coffee and chocolate production are so severely impacted by climate change that this is the only place to get them.

Cece's Speakeasy, set in 2031, is designed to be immersive from the start. In small groups, the audience is carefully taken through the garden and around the building, checking that nobody is 'following'. The audience is then ushered into a small, dark room to get its first (very small) taste of coffee and chocolate before being allowed into the main event. This encourages the audience to feel part of this imagined future and gives a clear idea of the scarcity of coffee and chocolate due to climate change.

We spoke to poets Bhumika Billa and Peter deGraft-Johnson, The Repeat Beat Poet, as well as Lisa Mead, the show's Producer, in relation to Cece's Speakeasy.



Lisa spoke about wanting to use these items to make climate change personal, human and tangible - an approach that was realised physically (the audience being given coffee and chocolate) as well as conceptually. When developing the idea with Zena Edwards, Artistic Director for Cece's Speakeasy, Zena's mention of climate change's impacts on coffee and chocolate had prompted Lisa to think "*Why have I never heard that before? That's really tangible. Why aren't people talking about that?*"

The main show blends music and spoken word by many different poets to take the audience on a journey exploring the production of coffee and chocolate, colonialism, land ownership and more. Throughout Cece's Speakeasy, the mood is designed to swing from upbeat and joyful to angry, sorrowful and back again. This is reflected not only through spoken word but also in the music (a key part of the experience).

In his first poem 'Pests', The Repeat Beat Poet plays the role of a reporter in Ghana in the future, aiming to communicate "*a sense of dread*". In 'Bust-A-Move', performed close to the end of the show, the tone is more upbeat and optimistic - a "*vision of a world where the relations to the earth had changed*". These distinct moods are reflected in the music - the first piece has a "*gritty, dubstep-inspired sound, quite industrial*" whereas the second uses a highlife rhythm, providing another link to Ghana. For Bhumika Billa, her humorous piece 'The Tiramisu Dance' (a recipe interjected with comments about privilege, access and chocolate and coffee production) was written to be "*joyful, engaging, and intended to break the tension of the room*". In contrast, her other piece 'Discoloured', designed to be performed in the intimate studio space before the main show as audience members were handed coffee and

chocolate, aims to prompt a sense of urgency and get people to connect with the issue.

This fluctuation of emotions and mood provides different ways for the audience to engage with climate change. Although dealing with a serious topic, there are also plenty of joyful moments, and the show ends on a positive and hopeful note. This reflects the different ways that emotions can be used in climate change communication – that negative emotions aren't always bad, but that providing some form of agency or hope can be important. In their interviews, both poets were conscious of the emotional impact their pieces could have on the audience:

"That fine line between an actual emotional connection and then not being overwhelmed by that - that's where I want people to be. Because that's a space where change can happen."

- The Repeat Beat Poet

"I made a deliberate attempt to refrain from telling them that 'this is what you need to do and this is the problem and we're all going to die' because as poets, this is what we end up doing when we are too serious or too concerned about an issue, right? We end up almost bashing and blaming the audience...It was a call to action without being too direct, asking them to join my dance, which was much more inviting, fun, and beautiful I think."

- Bhumika Billa

This also links to the distinction (or not) between art and activism and to what extent Cece's Speakeasy aimed to have an explicit ask or outcome for the audience, or whether it could be more subtle. Finding a balance between these was recognised as challenging by Producer, Lisa Mead, but also something that could have been pushed further to increase audience engagement:

"How can you create something that's driven by an artistic concept, but that has a real heart and a message or an impact that does create something beyond 'what a great night we just had'?...We did think 'oh, yeah, we should have had an action for people to go and do at the end', which we had talked about but just got lost in the many other things going on...I feel like we missed a trick a little bit."



Creating work on climate change led to new engagement from those involved in the show. Both poets we spoke to had not previously written about climate change. This was seen as a learning opportunity and a way to utilise existing climate change knowledge in a way that they hadn't previously. All the emerging artist programmes that were part of Cece's Speakeasy had sessions with writers and climate scientists to help develop their work and frame what they might write about. The topic also prompted sustainability to be more embedded in the creation of the show itself, for example set design and considering where products were sourced from.



Based in Mabgate, Burmantofts and Lincoln Green, Leeds, East Street Arts is a charity working within a broad definition of visual arts that includes painting and sculpture, as well as public art, socially-engaged practice, crafts and digital. Most of these creative approaches were represented in *The Space Between*, commissioned as part of Season for Change. East Street Arts engaged four individual artists, who together created *The Space Between* programme. These artists (and the titles of their commissions) were:

- Nwando Ebizie - Extreme Unction Vol.2
- Xavier de Sousa - Regnant
- Nicolas Henninger - Cabanon
- Jake Krushell - Turbine

In keeping with what East Street Arts told us, the projects sought to embody the organisation's core principles of connecting art and local communities to considerations of justice (global and local), and environmental/social issues in their locality. East Street Arts is a very place-based organisation, encouraging artists and audiences to join the dots between global issues and their own (local, personalised) experiences. This reflects East Street Arts' location which the team describes as a part of the city that is economically impoverished, ethnically and culturally diverse, full of creative and community energy, but under threat from regeneration and gentrification. As Layla Robleh-Davies, Communicator at East Streets Arts told us:

"We are part of a community that is working to combat aggressive gentrification. Moreover, we want to produce a programme that re-centres the climate change narrative within the communities most impacted by its outcomes."

These themes shape their work as an organisation, and are visible in different ways in *The Space Between* commissions. For example, Xavier de Sousa's project involved the active participation of diverse local community groups in pottery making, with the artists exploring 'global' themes such as migration, which in fact is a 'local' issue for many migrant communities, and how issues like this interact with climate change.

Issues of dislocation and distance from natural materials were present across the commissions too. In creating *Cabanon* (a cabin created from sustainable materials and with almost no waste), Nicolas Henninger asked questions about how so many people have lost touch with the way in which objects are created and made, and detached from a knowledge of materials.

A sense of DIY and building confidence and agency were common themes touched on by several of the artists in the way they described their projects. Jake Krushell taught himself how to build the small (but fully functioning) wind turbine that comprised his *Turbine* commission, observing that there was something hypnotic about the simplicity of the engineering involved, yet the task of building a machine that can create its own sustainable energy was so alien to most people. This notion of creative self-sufficiency may be a familiar one to adherents of networks like Transition Towns, but beyond these activist 'enclaves' (as noted earlier in the report), communities outside of these circles may not routinely engage in this way with the aesthetics or the practical value of what the artists in a group discussion referred to as 'appropriate technologies' (i.e. technologies that are designed for a purpose, and designed to be sustainable – operating at a small scale, and which are affordable).⁴¹

With so much of *The Space Between* realised through crafting and building physical installations and objects (using a strong DIY and 'demonstration' aesthetic), rather than conceptually, avoiding or eliminating material waste was a common thread across the four artists' work. In a public webinar involving each of the four projects, Nwando Ebizie's Producer, Emily Moore, emphasised how they had developed an enhanced understanding of materials, questioning whether each component of *Extreme Unction Vol.2* was 'worth it', and how they ensured that "every scrap of what we used should be chosen not just for beauty but for sustainability – this wouldn't have been the case 5-10 years ago". Similarly, in the same conversation, Xavier de Sousa commented:

"We made a point of recycling everything, not throw anything away, rather than trying to get the perfect thing. It made me think about materiality, how we create, when we understand what made the object we care more for it...it has changed my perception of want and need, and of becoming more sustainable in that way."



A final common thread between *The Space Between* commissions relates to what could be termed the aesthetics of sufficiency. Responding directly to a question asked of the artists around if (and how) art could change 'hearts and minds' on an issue like climate change, there was a broad consensus that making useful items and demonstrating the utility of creative projects was a way to bypass the grandiose, often overwhelming nature of the climate campaign discourse, and instead to communicate a sense of satisfaction or even joy through the simplicity of sustainable design (i.e. the aesthetics of sufficiency). As Layla Robleh-Davies from East Streets Arts put it, "*something that is easily understood and grounded...you don't have to have a degree in climate change*".

As a fitting last word on *The Space Between*, Jake Krushell observed "People say, 'why should I care about polar bears'...you have to make it something that is constructive or useful, as otherwise it becomes abstract even though we know how bad the problem is".



We spoke to artist-researcher Rosa Cisneros, Director of *Roma: Recycle-Reuse-Reimagine* which was one of six Common Ground commissions and co-commissions for Season for Change. The project had a wide reach, working with organisations across the UK and Roma families in the UK and Europe to explore issues of recycling, human rights and climate justice with outputs ranging from books and films to workshops and training sessions.

A training and learning opportunity (led by the organisation Metal for all of the Common Ground commissions) was built into the development of *Roma: Recycle-Reuse-Reimagine*. This was seen by Rosa as important in project development, confidence building and developing a deeper understanding of climate change. Although simply providing people with information about climate change is not the most effective way to communicate about the topic, here it was used as part of the project development process and had a significant impact. As Rosa describes:

"It gave me practical examples of how other artists were looking at climate justice and also researchers, artists, activists, and how they were honouring themselves within the serious topic...having been exposed to so many artists and so many researchers and having that kind of solid evidence allowed me to see value in what I was thinking...it's about conversations and a give and take."



 *Roma: Recycle–Reuse–Reimagine* certainly seems to fall into the category of climate change engagement through art,³³ with Rosa stating that “*this work transformed my life*” and that being exposed to the project development opportunities made her want to model climate-friendly behaviour, particularly when asking the Roma community to reflect and act on these issues so as not to appear hypocritical. She also spoke about how her position as a member of the Roma community meant that she was better able to have these climate conversations, which points to the importance of trusted messengers.

The work also had a significant impact and practical outcomes for participants, such as the creation of a climate justice children’s library and adoption of recycling by people involved in the project, as well as changes in attitudes. Rosa told us:

“Many were saying ‘I didn’t realise the importance of recycling’ or ‘I didn’t know that a children’s book could be so transformational for myself and my family’, ‘I didn’t know that I could talk to other people about my experience and that they would want to listen’..Those individuals realised that the simple act of asking the question ‘what does human rights mean?’ or ‘what does climate justice mean?’ was really important.”

The spirit of co-creation and co-production ran through the entire commission, and it was important for Rosa to centre the Roma community and ensure that “*the voices of the people were always present...to give platforms or spaces for those individuals to share their experiences*”. As well as meaningful engagement with communities from the artist, there also appeared to be meaningful engagement with the artist from Season for Change in terms of allowing flexibility for project changes, having regular supportive check-ins and having a culture of respect. As Rosa stated:

“Coming from the Roma community I always feel like I have to be extra transparent, super ethical. A lot of that is because of the pressure. Because I’m Gypsy, people are going to assume a, b, and c. And I didn’t feel threatened at all, you know, I didn’t feel that I was less than – I felt really respected throughout the whole project...and I don’t think that was only towards me.”

Observations and Insights

Most research carried out in the social/psychological literature is intended as general principles and/or not examined in a creative context. For example, they may be tested in experiments using short texts and as such, they may be less applicable for the case studies we considered. Here we expand on the key observations and insights raised in the introduction.

Examples of public engagement principles embodied in Season for Change:

The case studies embodied principles of effective public engagement on climate change in many ways. For example, making climate change into something tangible could be seen in the physical creations in *The Space Between*, the coffee and chocolate used in Cece's Speakeasy, and asking people to reflect on how these issues relate to their own lives as well as producing practical outcomes in *Roma: Recycle-Reuse-Reimagine*.

Place identity and attachment have been viewed as important for understanding climate change engagement.¹³ *The Space Between* explicitly encouraged audiences to view the commissions through the lens of their own communities and experiences, and in this sense, the climate connections that were made (though sometimes quite subtle) were essentially made through a lens of 'place identity'. Though place attachment can be an effective part of communication and engagement,¹³ reducing the 'psychological distance' of climate change by expressing it through 'local' terms is complex and does not always have positive effects.⁴² It is not a silver bullet for communication and action - for example, global climate change may feel personal and immediate to some people.⁴³ This highlights the importance of understanding people's values and what they care about, so that they can engage with climate change in a way that they can relate to.

A sense of agency and efficacy are critical for encouraging personal action on climate change, especially when the difficult or negative implications are emphasised.^{44,45} An emphasis on efficacy and agency could be seen in the DIY/ self-taught spirit of the *Turbine* and *Cabanon* projects in *The Space Between*, in the changes made for Roma communities and the Director in *Roma: Recycle-Reuse-Reimagine*, and in Cece's Speakeasy, though in a much more subtle way, where it was hoped the audience would reflect on their involvement with climate change rather than explicitly fostering a sense of efficacy. As Producer, Lisa Mead said, "it's not about 'you have to do this'; but if you felt something you could go and do whatever it is that you decide is the thing to do". Collective efficacy has been shown to be connected to positive engagement with climate change (it helps to avoid feeling overwhelmed),⁴⁶ so to the extent that the sense of efficacy conveyed in some of the Season for Change work was linked to the climate crisis, this is likely to have had a positive influence on audience engagement.

A consistent finding from studies asking how to engage across the social and political spectrum is that there is a widespread dislike of waste, and wastefulness: messages about energy and climate change that lead on avoiding wastefulness have been shown to be effective on the right as well as the left of the spectrum.⁴⁷

Platforming and meaningful engagement of diverse voices:

Considering power relations and who climate change art is actually engaging with (rather than assuming it is accessible for all audiences) is important; as Professor Julie Doyle asks, “If art remains the preserve of institutional spaces, who is included/excluded from these spaces?”¹⁹ Public engagement with climate change should be for the whole of society, with particular effort made to engage with those who are most impacted and who aren’t being heard or involved enough in this area.

It has been suggested that future research could seek to understand, through art, “what climate change means to people on an everyday level...in order to give local diverse communities a voice with which to explore ideas of what climate means to them – and speak back to policy.”²⁵ Although not directly speaking back to climate change policy, we feel that in the particular commissions we looked at, Season for Change appears to have centred and given voice to diverse communities (both as artists and audiences).

A variety of approaches to audience engagement and the explicit connection with climate change:

Roma: Recycle-Reuse-Reimagine sought to have very practical outcomes, with the main aim being for the families involved to learn about recycling. By contrast, *Cece’s Speakeasy* did not explicitly aim to have practical outcomes from the show, an issue that was touched on in our interview with Producer, Lisa Mead. Striking more of a middle ground, *The Space Between* foregrounded considerations around practical ‘skilling up’, reconnecting with material use and sustainability, and embodied an aesthetic of sufficiency across the projects (avoiding waste and emphasising the simplicity of sustainable design).

There were varying levels of attention drawn to climate change in the different commissions as well as within different elements of the commissions themselves, with other interlinked and wider issues, such as migration and colonialism, often drawn upon. The link between centring or explicitly mentioning climate change and how the commissions interact with their audiences was touched upon by Salome Wagaine, Season for Change Programme Manager, who reflected that the starting point for the projects across the whole Season for Change programme were initially clear in relation to climate change, but that some of them nevertheless chose to “[talk] through or around or near [climate change] because maybe it feels less didactic”. Lisa Mead, *Cece’s Speakeasy* Producer, also spoke about artistic concepts versus how they are read by audiences: “I did have some moments of like, ‘did people get the climate thing around Cece’s?...It’s quite subtle. It’s quite nuanced’.

There remains the challenge of striking a balance between providing audiences with the ideas and inspiration they need to ‘join the dots’ between art and its sustainability message, whilst not undermining the artistic integrity/cultural impact of the work. But one practical way in which cultural events can centre climate change more explicitly is by building in opportunities for audiences to discuss and debate the actions they can take, or the sorts of policies they support, in structured climate conversations. Whilst this happened through artist-led workshops to some extent, and through the wider Season for Ex-Change programming, ‘talking climate’⁴⁸ is a crucial component of building engagement that is not always evident in art that addresses climate change.



Artists may often be reluctant to push their work into the realm of activism, in part out of a concern that this may lead to problems obtaining financial support. In relation to this, Salome Wagaine, Season for Change Programme Manager, mentioned that one artist Season for Change had programmed for their talk series said that “sometimes the feedback they get in rejections is ‘is this art?’ and that the work is too political”.

Learning/engagement opportunities for artists, project teams and audiences:

Several of the people we spoke to had not previously engaged with climate change in their work before being part of Season for Change and in some cases this impacted their personal behaviour. Providing people with opportunities to engage culturally with climate change, even if they are not ‘climate change artists’, is an important part of an initiative like Season for Change.

Cultural events can catalyse public engagement with climate change – but building climate engagement more systematically into wider cultural programming has the potential to achieve even more:

The Season for Change commissions we focused on embody several principles of effective public engagement. From engaging through a sense of place identity (bridging the local and the global), to the mobilisation of diverse messengers, and the building of audiences’ confidence and sense of agency through practical demonstrations of sustainable art and design, the Season for Change case studies provide an insight into how principles of public engagement are realised in a creative context.

This report has emphasised that there is no single, prescriptive way to build climate change into cultural activities. Though this works in some contexts (such as the principles guiding visual climate communication, expressed in Climate Visuals),⁴⁹ it can be challenging in practice. However, informing debate and dialogue is an appropriate space to incorporate these principles.

It is likely that there will always be a tension between the sometimes didactic nature of climate campaigns and communication, and the creative capacity and credibility of a cultural event. In particular, the place of conversational and dialogue space has strong potential for building engagement into cultural activities. There are powerful and positive examples of this kind of 'creative conversation' to learn from and build on - Lola Perrin's Climate Keys project, for example, takes exactly this approach by combining music performance with guided conversation on climate action.⁵⁰ Undertaking research with audiences rather than solely speaking to artists would be the necessary next step to really understand how these creative climate communication projects land.

Both in terms of the research that underpins public engagement with climate change and for the artists and creatives seeking to engage audiences on climate, there is the potential to achieve a great deal more in the coming years.



Methodology

Our research for this report consisted of a literature review, interviews with artists and organisers, and attendance at events by the Season for Change commissions. A focused review of academic and other literature aimed to bring together research about public engagement with climate change, as well as the relationship between climate change and culture.

Between June and August 2021, we conducted six research interviews with people involved in Season for Change. These focused on three projects commissioned for the programme: *Roma: Recycle-Reuse-Reimagine*, Cece's *Speakeasy* and *The Space Between*, as well as an interview with the Season for Change Programme Manager. Our interview questions varied for each interview but broadly covered their involvement with the programme, aims and audience for each commission, activism, and the role of art and culture. We also attended a performance of Cece's *Speakeeasy* at *The Albany* in London and an online talk with artists from *The Space Between*.

We received approval from the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee at Cardiff University to be able to conduct the research interviews. We also drew additional insights from public performances and online artist talks.

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