

Case Study: Stockton - Sustainable International Commissions

Background

Stockton International Riverside Festival is committed to improving its environmental impact and supporting other events to do the same across the North East. One particular area of focus has been how to sustainably run international commissions, minimising the emissions that are typically associated with such projects.

The presentation of International work and International commissions offer immense value in showcasing talent from around the world, bringing diverse and exciting experiences to audiences. They also support international artists to extend the reach of their art. Ensuring we can continue to benefit from presenting international commissions in the context of emissions reduction is a crucial challenge.

For the 36th Edition of SIRF in 2022, Limbic Cinema, a Bristol based multimedia arts organisation, were commissioned to deliver a multimedia immersive experience that involved international collaboration without the high emissions that is typical of such work. The 'Within Without' project combined sound design from South Korean music duo Salamanda, choreography from the UK's Full Tilt Aerial and animated light projections by Limbic Cinema themselves. The project brief was to engage communities across the 6 townships in Stockton Borough to connect from the beginning and inform ideas. Local artists and volunteers were recruited to support with the delivery minimising on travel and also supporting talent development in the area.



Within Without, by Limbic Cinema and Full Tilt Aerial

The Sustainable Approach

A key factor helping to minimise emissions for this commission was the focus on remote international collaboration, avoiding unnecessary travel. Limbic Cinema worked entirely remotely with South-Korea based Salamanda, making use of collaborative online working platforms, such as Miro. The partners found that this arrangement worked smoothly, with it being possible to communicate and brainstorm ideas freely without the need for in-person meetings. Even the time-difference between the UK and South Korea, which could have proved a challenge for collaboration, enabled progress to be made efficiently as each partner could pick up where the other had left off the day before.

Travel was also minimised by employing UK-based dance performers for the project. Just one performer was based outside the UK, requiring a short-distance flight. The involvement of the local community was central to the piece too, with 6 stagehands being hired from the North East. Skills and training for emerging local talent was also part of the project, provided in partnership with the Northern School of Art.

The choice of materials was another factor that helped Limbic Cinema to minimise emissions. While the nature of the project meant it was primarily a digital piece with limited use of physical materials, conscious decisions were made to minimise the number of props and production materials. All staging, costumes and props that were sourced have been kept for reuse in future artistic projects.

Going forward, Limbic Cinema want to look closer at the power supply for their projections to ensure the energy used comes from renewable sources. This may involve establishing a tech rider to specify sustainable energy requirements from energy providers of the festival. A further consideration is how to minimise the impact of ground transport of production materials, which was the primary source of emissions for the Within Without project.



Within Without, by Limbic Cinema and Full Tilt Aerial

The Carbon Footprint Comparison

The emissions from Within Without were **more than 65% lower** than international pieces of a similar scale that Stockton has commissioned previously.

The smaller footprint is largely due to significantly reduced emissions from air travel, which is typically a feature of international projects. Just one return flight was taken for the production of Within Without, despite the international nature of the collaboration. Compared to a similar commission, flights for artists and crew racked up nearly 22,000 miles - 12 times more air miles than for Within Without.

The reuse of all staging, costumes and props meant there were no emissions associated with production materials, other than their transport to and from the site. However, the transport of production materials represented the largest source of emissions for Within Without, owing to the ground vehicles required.

The comparison, seen in table 1, shows that the Within Without project produced 6.46 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e) while the international project of a similar size produced 18.99 tonnes. This reduction is equivalent to [taking three petrol cars off the road for a year](#).

Table 1: Comparison of total emissions between Limbic Cinema's Within Without project and a 2019 international project of a similar size.

Impact area	Tonnes CO ₂ e	
	Limbic Cinema Within Without (2022)	International project of a similar size (2019)
Air travel	0.42	16.26
Road travel	1.55	0.13
Rail travel	0.25	0.00
Freight*	3.35	0.38
Production materials	0.00	1.37
Water Consumption	N/A	0.002
Accommodation	0.88	0.85
Total	6.46	18.99

*The impact from freighting was lower for the comparison international project because materials were transported via a sea container. Sea freighting is an efficient method of transporting materials on a per tonne basis as one vessel can transport a large quantity of items.

Limitations of Remote International Commissions

The experience of Limbic Cinema working remotely with international partners was overwhelmingly positive. The only limitation was that Salamanda were not able to visit the show in-person, meaning they could not conduct a final mix of the audio in the venue. While the the quality of the sound was not compromised for Within Without, this could be a potential challenge for future remote international collaborations.

While not a challenge in this project, remote collaboration may be limited by the types of contribution each partner needs to make. Partnering with an international collaborator on sound design worked well for Within Without because the piece could easily be developed remotely with regular check-ins on progress. However, this way of working could be more challenging if closer collaborative working is required.

Post-Brexit, working remotely may in fact be a good option for collaborations with European partners. But there may still be some bureaucratic challenges regarding visa, tax and payments. The greater restrictions on pan-European working may mean that locally there is increased demand for the same pool of performers. This makes it even more important to invest in training for the UK talent base.

There are also some limitations to emissions reductions. As the Within Without project shows, there are still areas of producing a show which contributes emissions, such as freighting production materials via ground transport. Further work is needed, some of which may be out of a project's control (e.g. current available infrastructure), to reduce emissions across all areas.



Within Without, by Limbic Cinema and Full Tilt Aerial

Julie's Bicycle

CREATIVE • CLIMATE • ACTION

SIRF

Learnings

Limbic Cinema and Salamanda have shown that it is possible to work remotely while still gaining the benefits of international partnerships, with all the diverse and creative ideas this brings.

There is a lot that can be learned from this partnership to inform the success of future international collaborations that can be delivered in a sustainable way.

Key recommendations:

- **Minimise travel** – Consider how you can minimise all unnecessary travel of the project from the outset.
- **Choose international collaborators carefully** – Working internationally can broaden the skills and talents that your project taps into, but it is important to work with partners who can deliver their work remotely.
- **Establish your remote working arrangements** – Agree with your international collaborators on which online platforms work best and how often you will check-in on progress. You may also want to consider any challenges around time-difference for meetings.
- **Prioritise close communication** – Working remotely on international collaborations makes communication even more critical. Make sure briefs are clearly understood and all partners are satisfied with how the project is progressing.
- **Use local talent** – As well as searching globally for talent to contribute to your projects, you should also consider local partners who can deliver aspects of the collaboration in-person. This is a win-win by investing in local talent and reducing long-distance travel.
- **Choose more sustainable travel** – When you do need to travel, try to take the train. Avoid flights where possible. Fly economy if you need to fly.
- **Consider material choices** – Think about how to minimise the amount of materials you need for sets, props and costumes. Aim to source pre-used items and consider how you will use them again. If you do need to buy new items, try to source items made with recycled content or with other sustainable credentials, such as certified organic fabrics.

This case study was produced as a **Creative Green partnership** with **Stockton International Riverside Festival**.

Julie's Bicycle

CREATIVE • CLIMATE • ACTION

The logo for Stockton International Riverside Festival (SIRF) features the letters 'SIRF' in a stylized, multi-colored font (blue, red, yellow, green) set against a dark blue square background.