Conference Report

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Introduction

The 50 Shades of Green conference was an interactive event for (and by) the green arts community. Taking place on 6 October 2015 at the Pearce Institute in Glasgow, it was Creative Carbon Scotland’s first conference for green arts organisations working to affect their environmental sustainability.

As well as a programme of community speakers, time was scheduled for people to interact informally, and share their professional experiences in a more individual format. A copy of the programme for the event can be found here.

The conference had several aims:
  • To enable the sharing of knowledge and best practice amongst organisations
  • To expand the network and interaction of GAI members
  • To showcase environmental sustainability work done so far and ambitions for the future
  • To identify new ideas and projects, resources and areas of use.

The Pearce Institute, located in Govan in Glasgow, was selected as a venue for the conference due to its central location being accessible by public transport (invited organisations attended from a range of national locations), its charity status and community involvement, and its status as a historic building.

Attendees consisted of over 75 individuals from Scottish arts organisations, each typically acting as the ‘Green Champion’ within their organisation. However, attendee roles varied significantly, with marketing, operations, administration and management represented at the event: leading to a strong mix of views!
CO₂ Reduction Room

For many arts organisations, carbon emissions reduction and reporting is the focus for environmental sustainability activities. The CO2 Reduction Room aimed to present a mix of emission-reduction experts and members of the artistic community working in this area in a particularly enterprising way.

As well as presentations from CCS’ own Director (Ben Twist) and Carbon Reduction Advisor (Jayne Murdoch), there were several expert speakers on a variety of carbon emissions reductions efforts and interesting projects.

Clare Wharmby, Zero Waste Scotland

Zero Waste Scotland provides support for all businesses throughout Scotland to find ways to reduce emissions and resources use as part of this support, Resource Efficient Scotland work with Zero Waste Scotland to provide training and tools to help businesses to monitor and reduce waste of all types. Many of our GAI members have made great progress in understanding how to collect information to calculate their carbon footprints, although the next stage is to work out how to make reductions. With shortage of time and money, how can we make the best decisions for action?

Clare Wharmby informed the group about the RES Carbon Footprint and Project Register Tool for small businesses which is part of a suite of tools for carbon management and planning which are available free and can be downloaded from the RES website. Clare provided lots of advice on how to get the best out of the tool to plan reductions to emissions.

Rhiannon MacIntyre, The Touring Network

Rhiannon provided us with an overview of the work of the Touring Network and particularly their focus on encouraging and supporting more sustainable behaviours among those involved in the arts in rural communities. The Touring Network supports 60 promoters in venues all over the Highlands and all of the Islands of Scotland, encouraging rural touring (with over 700 shows last year!) and providing best practice guides on how to set up tours and to run them sustainably.

The Touring Network’s website hosts the Tourbook: a member’s only section of the website designed to allow promoters and performers to coordinate and book performances. Tourbook helps performers in Dance, Theatre, Music, Comedy (and more) to connect with promoters and venue representatives across Scotland. More can be found here.

The organisation has also been working on a project to assess the Carbon impact of touring using the case study of a show produced by Comar which toured to 17 venues. Currently they are developing an online tool intended to allow companies to plan tours and calculate complete mileage and fuel used. More information can be found here.
These developments had been supplemented by work to survey audiences on where they travelled from and why they came to that venue. They encouraged audience responses by promising to donate 50 pence to a tree planting charity for every survey returned. The average audience size for the shows is 36 and 96% make the journey just to see the show. Car sharing is reasonably high but other methods of travel sharing could be investigated. Rhiannon finished with a lively discussion with the audience on ideas for promoting lower carbon audience travel.

Gill Davies, Hebrides Ensemble

Gill informed the group about the way that Hebrides Ensemble are using new digital techniques and particularly on their collaboration with the development and use of the LoLa technology: the LOw LAtency audio visual streaming system.

LoLa technology provides the ability for musicians to rehearse together even when they are located at a distance. Gill talked about the potential for the technology to have large impacts on the practice, and carbon emissions reduction aims of their organisation. The cross-distance connection can also aid those who would otherwise be unable to attend regionally-specific rehearsals, or even those unable to travel.

You can find our full blog on the LoLa technology and Hebrides Ensemble's use of it, here.
GAI Exchange Room

Our GAI exchange room focused on how the arts can promote wider engagement - with artists, audiences and staff members. The arts often reflect and challenge the society they exist within, and the sector has a wealth of experience in engaging those it works with on a whole range of issues. The GAI Exchange Room heard from three members of our Green Arts Initiative as to how they had explored engaging their various stakeholders in environmental sustainability.

Martin Latham, Aberdeen Performing Arts:
Engaging Staff in Sustainability

Mark Latham of APA ran through the theatre’s green team and how it functions. He explained some of the green team’s fundamental features:

- Only one member of staff from each department can join to ensure equal representation across the 300 staffed organisation
- They meet every 2 months
- Anything can be added to the agenda by any of its member
- They review their policies (which includes monitoring and reducing energy and water usage and waste production) annually

Some successful initiatives have included:

- BINWATCH, saving money by keeping an eye on how full the bins are for collection and also keeping track of waste outputs according to what’s on at the APA venues.
- Power down policy: successfully engaging staff to turn off appliances both in the office and at home, having double the impact

The green team have ensured the credibility of their decisions be ensuring that their meeting minutes are reviewed at board meetings. Martin emphasised the benefit of this in reducing the space between different levels within the organisation – “Housekeeping now has a direct line of communication to the board”.

Donald Smith, Scottish International Storytelling Festival:
Engaging Audiences in Sustainability

Donald gave us a different angle on the connections between creativity and environmental crisis, suggesting the two might be more linked than we think. He questioned whether we are at a tipping point both in terms of how we experience culture and how we inhabit the planet. Suggesting, with a twinkle in his eye, that gardening might be the new art form for the 21st century – as an activity which binds creativity and our wider ecosystems – he advocated a more open and more participatory view of culture that involved audiences in its making with the potential to connected participants with the natural environment.
Barry Church-Woods, Edinburgh Festival Fringe: Engaging Artists in Sustainability

Barry provided an overview of some of the initiatives instigated by the Edinburgh Fringe to engage artists and audiences in environmental sustainability when participating in or attending the summer festival. He highlighted the influencing role that an organisation such as the Fringe can play, when working with such a large number of visiting companies (3000+ shows this August), to highlight creative opportunities for more resourceful practices. Examples included the Fringe Sustainable Practice Guide, the Swap Shop for unwanted props and materials to be re-used/upcycled, and the Fringe Sustainable Practice Award which celebrates innovative practice.
Show and Tell Room

Our Show and Tell Room showcased the various ways the eclectic Scottish Arts sector is creatively approaching environmental sustainability. There is so much green arts work already taking place in Scotland, but often there is no forum for its discussion: we wanted to host an informal space where speakers and attendees could talk about the simple (or difficult) steps they had taken, ask questions of each other, and spark inspiration and connections.

Over the course of the day, we heard from nine arts organisations: ranging in geography, activity and environmental action.

**Rishaad Moudden, Ayr Gaiety**  
**Capital Project Planning and Staff Engagement**

Bravely volunteering as one of the first speakers of the conference, Rishaad talked us through current and future plans for Ayr Gaiety – a B-listed Theatre and Arts centre based in South Ayrshire that host over 200 touring productions every year. Ayr Gaiety is preparing for the final stages of the proposed capital project, and Rishaad told us about the challenges to date, as well as filling us in on his strategies for engaging staff members in more sustainable behaviour – including rollerblading to work!

**Kirsty Sommerville, Cryptic**  
**Environmental Sustainability in a Smaller Arts Office**

Cryptic is a music, sonic art, and multimedia arts organisation that hosts a series of regular and one-off events and festivals with a national and international audience, run by a small team and based in the CCA in Glasgow. Kirsty spoke to us about the opportunities and challenges presented by this small scale, the sustainability limitations of operating as a tenant within a larger organisation (and how to adapt), and the development of an office environmental policy with a wide reaching impact.

**Fiona Doring, Impact Arts**  
**Wonky Carrots and the Urban Green Project**

The Cranhill Urban Green project demonstrates an evolution in the sustainable design ideas that Impact Arts has been investigating for a number of years. Fiona told us about the social impact that the project has, in terms of green space empowerment, as well as the aesthetic, edible and practical elements of the project, which combines artistic considerations with our engagement with our surrounds.

**Fraser White, Yooz:**  
**Social Sustainability and Creative Re-use**

Based in Bellshill, Yooz is a reuse and recycling social enterprise which provides creative opportunities for those it works with, as well as providing a materials resource for the local and artistic community. Their show-and-tell item was a massive giant spider planter, created by a member of their team given the creative brief to ‘make something’. As an expert in maximising material capture and re-use, Fraser told us of the variety of items Yooz has received and redistributed: including pantomime sets and antique safes!

**Gabrielle Macbeth, Glasgow Women’s Library**  
**Working with Volunteers**
Gabrielle discussed the multiple benefits of their PaperGirls scheme. Initiated as a means of increasing the distribution of their events programme, the GWL invite voluntary paper girls to take up paper rounds across the city, dropping off programmes at cafés, venues and community centres which might not be reached otherwise. As well as promoting greener, more active travel modes around Glasgow, the scheme also has a positive social impact, allowing for cyclists to buddy up and discover new parts of the city.

**Charlotte Riley, Paragon Music**

Claimexpenses.com and Greening the Programme

Charlotte spoke about Paragon's adoption of ClaimExpenses as well as programme elements of the company's work which touch upon environmental themes. As an inclusive music company there are important accessibility priorities for the company when it comes to travel and Charlotte sees their role as an important influencing body for partners and participants. She’s embarked upon this first year of using ClaimExpenses as a data gathering exercise, taking on the majority of the work herself before rolling it out to the rest of the team with some aims and objectives for understanding and promoting sustainable travel. She also mentioned a production, 'Torque', which showed in 2013 which will be running again next year which looks at renewable energy and the transformation of raw energy into electricity.

**Mike Adkins, An Lanntair**

Building Improvements and LED Alterations

The group were particularly impressed after Mike revealed how he has not only met the stringent 20% energy reduction target set by management, but is also on track to exceed it through his investment in high-efficiency technology and experimentation with LED lighting for the An Lanntair theatre and arts building. Mike's tales of testing the effectivity of LED stage and strip lights against staff perceptions and traditional replacement costs proffered a great example of the potential impact of green technology.

**Tie MacBeth, Centre for Contemporary Art**

Expanding Environmental Policies and Sustainable Creations

As an artistic organisation co-ordinating their own series of activities, a group of artistic tenants, and a café, the CCA's decision to rewrite their environmental policy in 2014 required input from a large group of internal stakeholders. Tie also told us about their creative solutions to ongoing sustainability issues around their building, presenting the group with a very curious object, later revealed to be a vertical bike storage hook (and a result of an upcycled exhibition install item)!

**Emma Beatt, Federation of Scottish Theatre**

Procedures, Cocktails and the Recipe for Embedding Sustainability

As an organisation managing a large network and offering a series of trainings and opportunities for the theatre arts sector, FSTs management systems provide an exemplary model for maintaining procedures through staff changes and other irregularities. Emma used the metaphor of different cocktail recipes to explain the useful functions of FSTs procedural database, and we explored how embedding procedural sustainability can impact a wide-ranging organisation.
Stalls

At 50 Shades of Green: Stories of Sustainability in the Arts Sector, we also invited a limited number of groups to participate as stalls at the event, in order to showcase their contributions and potential collaborations regarding environmental sustainability in the arts.

We were pleased to host:
- Changeworks Recycling
- HeatHack
- Yooz
- Zero Waste Scotland
- Our Carbon Reduction Advisors

Conclusion

We're pleased and proud of 50 Shades of Green, and the first gathering of our GAI members. We've learnt from our first conference, and taken on board the feedback received. We're glad so many enjoyed it, and the unusual structure, but we'll be sure to balance that in the future. We're looking forward to continuing to develop the community interaction element of the initiative, and planning a future 51 Shades of Green!

If you have any ideas of what might be good for the next conference, if you're keen to speak, or if you know who should be invited, please email Catriona at: catrina.patterson@creativecarbonscotland.com.

To become part of the Scottish green arts community, and to hear more about events like 50 Shades of Green (as well as our other free training sessions and resources), sign up to the Green Arts Initiative.