



Arts and Sustainability

Artists' Residency

2015 Report

Reflections and documentation of Creative Carbon
Scotland's second annual artists' residency on the
Isle of Mull, Scotland

Reflections by Stephanie de Roemer
Edited by Allison Palenske

Background

Mull Artist Residency

Over the past two years Creative Carbon Scotland initiated a number of artistically focused projects, including the first Mull Artist Residency in 2014. This residency, funded by CCS, took place on the Isle of Mull in Scotland in partnership with Comar, and invited artists to imagine what it would mean to consider environmental sustainability and climate change within their practices.

The residency in 2015 had the following objectives:

- To provide artists, who may or may not have previously thought about environmental sustainability in their practice, with the space and stimuli to consider how it might drive new ways of working
- To collectively develop artists', Creative Carbon Scotland's and Comar's thinking about how environmental sustainability can be engaged with in different artistic practices on practical and conceptual levels
- To nurture and build a creative community of practice which embeds environmental sustainability at its core

The United Nations' post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals, questions of how the world might look in 50 years' time and what role artists may play in the changes to come provided the underlying narrative for the weekend discussions.



Image provided by Tom Butler

creative
carbon
scotland

Our Vision

Our vision is of a Scottish cultural sector that is playing its essential part in shaping a sustainable Scotland

Our Mission

We connect culture and environmental sustainability in order to bring about the transformational change to a sustainable Scotland. We support the cultural sector to achieve this through the work it makes and presents, the way it operates and how it speaks to the public.

Our work

We work with artists, cultural organisations, sustainability organisations, funders and policy makers to make this happen.

Participants of Mull 2015 Residency

Twelve artists currently working in Scotland attended the 2015 Mull Artist Residency. The following artists were selected from an applicant pool of 80 and represent a diversity of expertise and perspectives:

[Alice Cooper](#) (performer/theatre maker)

[Hannah Imlach](#) (visual artist)

[Hector MacInnes](#) (composer/musician)

[Holly Keasey](#) (socially engaged visual artist)

Jean Lanteri Laura (photographer)

[Kevin Dagg](#) (sculptor)

[Niroshini Thambar](#) (composer/musician)

[Rebecca Sharp](#) (writer)

[Saffy Setohy](#) (choreographer/dancer)

[Sam Cook](#) (visual artist)

[Thomas Butler](#) (composer)

[Vivian Ross Smith](#) (visual artist)

The artists were joined by Creative Carbon Scotland's Gemma Lawrence (Project Officer) and Ben Twist (Director), Professor Mike Bonaventura (Chief Executive, Crichton Carbon Centre), Stephanie de Roemer (Conservator, Glasgow Life) and Scott Donaldson (Head of Film Education, Creative Scotland).

Caroline Winn (Chief Executive) and Sion Parkinson (Creative Director, Visual Art, Craft & Film) represented Comar, a local multi-arts organisation, joining the debates and facilitating a site visit to FANK – a site-specific art project on Mull.

Over the course of the residency, Professor Mike Bonaventura facilitated in depth discussions and exploration of the Sustainable Development Goals within the context of the role of art. Stephanie de Roemer (conservator) recorded the weekend through photography and note taking in order to capture the 'performance' and the process of debate, obtaining insights towards formulating a network, framework and practice of sustainability.



2015 Residency Programme Overview

The residency took place from Friday, 27th March 2015 to Monday, 31st March 2015. Most participants travelled together, gathering from Edinburgh, Dundee, Shetland, Skye and Glasgow to make the trip to Mull. The residency's first session took place on Friday evening, acting as an introduction to the topics and programme for the following days. Saturday's activity-rich schedule included a discussion of the Sustainable Development Goals, a visit to the FANK site and a public discussion at An Tobar, part of the local arts organisation Comar. Sunday provided time and space for a reflection on the weekend's discussions, breaking out into smaller groups to discuss ideas in more detail. The residency group departed Mull to return home on Monday 31st March.

Friday 27th March: Welcome and introduction to Mull, Comar and SDGs

Comar: Sustainable Arts on an island

Caroline Winn joined the group over a welcome dinner, giving a brief introduction to the Isle of Mull and Comar.

Comar aims to encourage, promote and support artists within the local community in a collaborative and inclusive manner. This network also extends to artists further afield by forming connections with and on Mull through projects, commissions and events.

Caroline highlighted the challenges and circumstances Comar faces as an arts organisation in regards to the context of the Isle of Mull including infrastructure, transport and population flux and decrease with the island population increasing from 3000 islanders in the winter to 9000 visitors in the summer.

Sustainable Development Goals

At this point facilitator Mike Bonaventura introduced the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Figure 1) as a basis for the weekend's discussions, challenging participants to respond to the following questions:

- 1. Have the predecessors of the SDGs, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), been achieved?**
- 2. If not – why not?**
- 3. Are the SDGs understood?**
- 4. Why might the MDGs not have been achieved yet?**

Literature regarding the SDGs was disseminated to each participant prior to the residency. Despite the long day, immediate feedback indicated high levels of engagement amongst the participants, but also a sense of urgency for the opportunity to express opinion and responses on the subject.

Feedback from the residency's participants seemed to focus on the dilemma of being dependent on energy-consuming infrastructure and resources in artistic practices, while being acutely aware of the cost and detrimental effects this may cause to environments.

Barriers to the SDGs

Some key barriers to understanding our relationship to the SDGs were discussed, including:

- Too much focus on economic benefits over social and environmental aims
- Use of bureaucratic or abstract language resulting in alienation from the meaning of individual goals
- They appear too far removed from the individual's direct sphere of influence to act in promoting and achieving one or all even in a local setting – nevertheless on a global scale.

This reaction is likely to be representative of the wider general public's disengagement with sustainability as a whole and posed some interesting questions on whether and how individual artists might find some connection between their creative practices and the SDGs.

Saturday 28th March / Morning discussion session / An Tobar, Tobermory

The morning session started with Mike reflecting on the perceived sense of 'powerlessness' that came out of the discussion from the previous evening. To break this circle of thought during the residency, the debate on achieving the 17 SDG's was now approached on a smaller scale.

Participants had to choose one of the 17 SDGs to introduce themselves and their practice (Figure 2), explaining to what extent the selected goal reflected, addressed or resonated with them. Prior to embarking on this exploration of the SDGs, the discussion was outlined with a new set of questions:

- What do the SDGs mean to us? (on an individual level)
- What is the role of art in SDGs?
- What is art's role in the social agenda of the SDGs?

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

- GOAL 1 End poverty in all its forms everywhere
- GOAL 2 End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
- GOAL 3 Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
- GOAL 4 Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
- GOAL 5 Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
- GOAL 6 Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
- GOAL 7 Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
- GOAL 8 Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
- GOAL 9 Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
- GOAL 10 Reduce inequality within and among countries
- GOAL 11 Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
- GOAL 12 Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
- GOAL 13 Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts*
- GOAL 14 Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
- GOAL 15 Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
- GOAL 16 Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
- GOAL 17 Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

* Acknowledging that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is the primary international, intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change.

Figure 1: United Nations post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals

With 17 participants and 17 individual sustainable development goals to choose from, the choices were noted to observe which and how often specific goals would be 'picked' by individual participants.

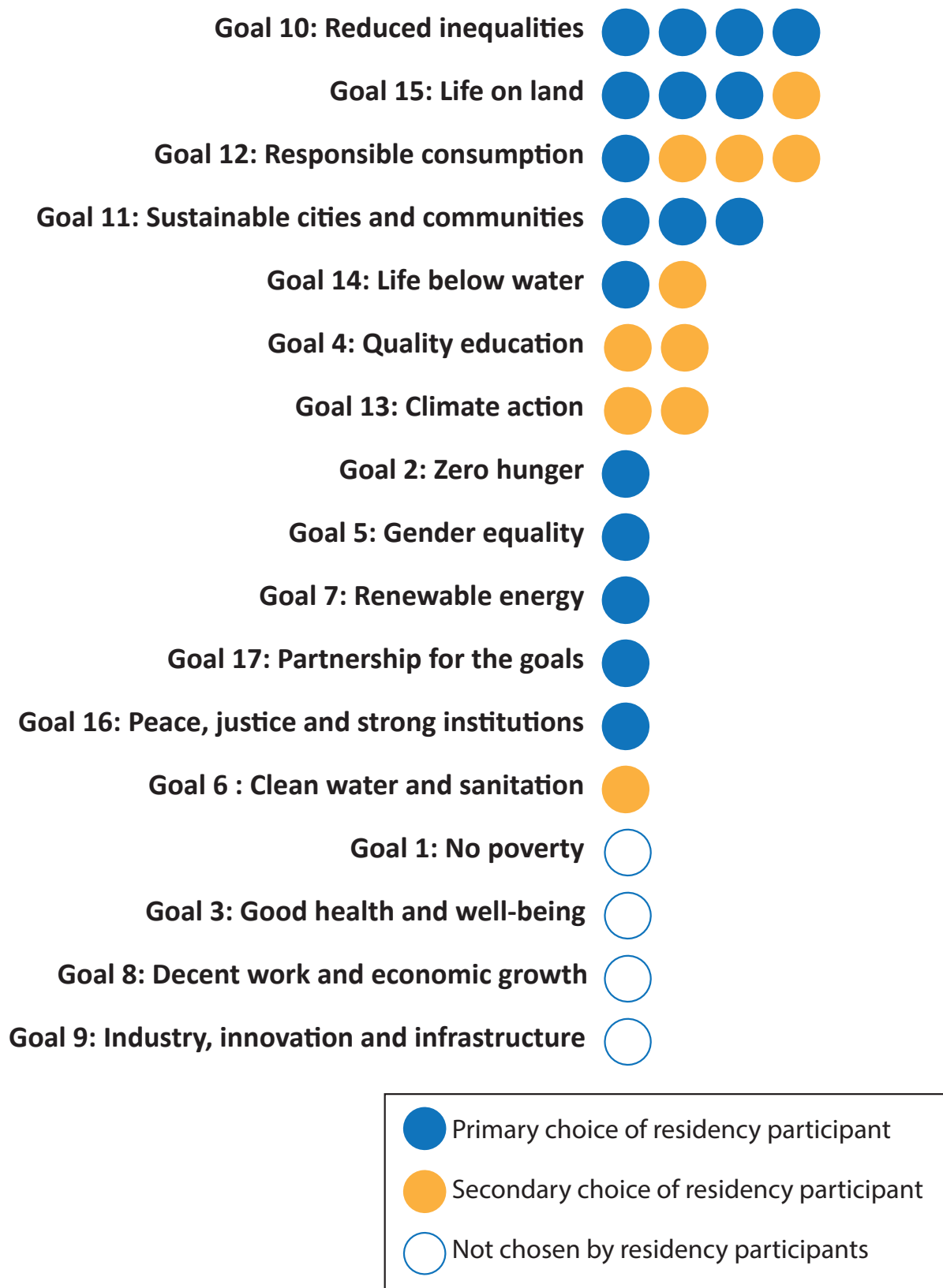


Figure 2: Residency Participants' Selection Per SDG

The following are some examples of how the residency participants presented their selected SDGs:

Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

Visual artist Sam Cook discussed his observations on the relationship between food and community, in which circumstances of location, people, society and environment may create specific contextual conditions. He has developed a slight scepticism of embedding arts within the community, stemming from perception of the 'food scene' as a driver of commercial development, consumerism and gentrification. To combat this, Sam's work creates places for discussions and engagement through and with food.



"Culture Soup", Sam Cook

Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Saffy Setohy, choreographer and dancer, presented the following question – "How can meaningful change happen if half of all potential people (female) are not involved?" The female body has been used throughout history for many different interpretations, including conceptual and cultural redefinitions. In her work, Saffy is interested in interconnectedness, creating places of encounter and transformation. Her work creates a space for viewers and participants to ask questions, including those about gender, power and relationships, through movement rather than words.

Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries

Ben Twist, director of CCS, shared his experience as a consultant for the British Council and the international travel that resulted from the demands of this role. Ben questioned the logic and overall benefits of this travel, given that he usually travelled a long distance solely to impart advice to those he was consulting. Ben's increased concern for growing inequalities, and the art world's reluctance to engage with these issues, prompted the creation of CCS and the various projects that aim to change or improve embedded models within the cultural sector. With a strong urge to change what the cultural sector was doing, and how those involved were doing it, Ben is critical of the commodification and professionalisation of art, as he believes that this results in exclusion of 'non-professionals' and furthers inequalities.

Musician and composer Niroshini Thambar also related this goal to her own practice and personal identity, as she associates both with a history and culture of continuous colonisation, and the idea of creating minorities within minorities. Niroshini affirms her identity through creative expression, which allows the space for thought and a starting point to interconnectivity with space, land and people. As soundtracks underpin narratives, Niroshini believes stories, a sense of belonging and a space for voices can be created through music and song.



"Invisible Lines", Saffy Setohy, Luke Birch. Image by David McCormick.



"Waves", Alice Mary Cooper

Goal 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.

Alice Mary Cooper, a performer and theatre maker, introduced this goal in relation to her own practice, in which she aims to use and encourage imagination as a force to re-imagine the world and one's place in it. For Alice, the most important aspiration listed in this SDG is to halt biodiversity loss. She believes that through the use of visualisation and animation, the SDGs could be made much more accessible and comprehensible, primarily for children but also for a wider audience. As humans, we are also animals, and we need wild places to play and experiment; through play we can imagine and make sense of the world. Alice believes a change of perspective is necessary to achieve this goal; learning from indigenous perspectives will help us understand humans as part of nature, and not separate.

Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Artist Holly Keasey works within socially-engaged practice to create temporary performative spaces, as an alternative to permanent sculpture or monuments. Holly mentioned her difficulty in picking just one goal, as she recognises her practice as a flow through all of them. She feels that the outreach of 'art' as a system has the potential to extend beyond the artistic community, which can be facilitated through the creation of neutral spaces that allow and encourage experimentation. Holly also discussed the relationship between humans and water; water has the ability to both support and destroy human settlement, which is reflected in her work by addressing adaptability and ephemerality.



"Trout at Transition: Becoming a Water Steward", Holly Keasey



Discussion Reflection

Insights obtained through the conversation over the 17 SDGs were assessed on the wider framework of sustainability on the model of the three pillars of sustainability: Social, Environment and Economic, visualised in the Venn diagram (Figure 3).

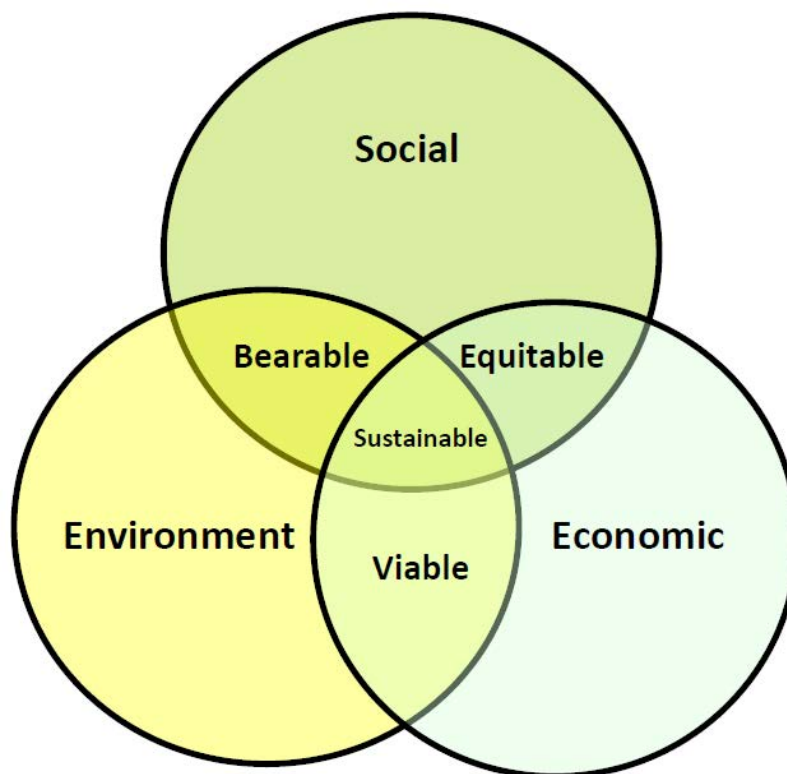


Figure 3: Venn diagram, three pillars of sustainability

The open approach of the ensuing debate appeared to be initially challenging for participants to commit to a single goal. The relevance of many or all of the SDGs to the participants' practices demonstrated the interconnectivities and complexities arising from this framework.

Interconnectivity appeared to be simultaneously the most challenging and enabling aspect in understanding the relationship between sustainability and art.

Degree and quality of interconnectivity of concepts, nature, and human communities also emerged throughout introductions and debates of artistic practice and sustainability as a decisive factor towards achieving social and environmental sustainability. As a form of dialogue or communication, social and environmental sustainability are dependent on engagement, relationships and partnerships, as well as the maintenance of constant collaborative action and facilitation.

Discussions of economic sustainability engendered a different perspective and tone; economic systems were discussed as perceived limitations, disruptions, and distractions (or friction) from social and environmental sustainability. The outcome of this portion of the discussion implies that the participants felt as though achievement of economic sustainability may be at the cost of either social or environmental sustainability, or both. Correspondingly, none of the participants chose to introduce Goal 8, which is most prominently associated with economic sustainability.



Afternoon site visit / FANK public art project / Lettermore Forest, Mull

Sion Parkinson (Comar) led the residency participants through the Lettermore forest to visit FANK, a site-specific art project initiated by Emma Herman-Smith with Comar. The project has seen the restoration of stone walls through volunteer involvement, providing an opportunity to learn the practical skill of 'dry stone walling'.

FANK began in 2014, with the restoration of a sheepfold (a "fank" in Scots dialect), with the intention of using the space as an outdoor classroom. Comar presented this project for public involvement by offering a series of workshops, fully-funded and open to all residents of Mull and Iona. The workshops offered locals a chance to learn a traditional skill, whilst aiding in the restoration of the fank and contributing to the preservation of local social heritage and craftsmanship.

The project has received an overwhelming amount of interest and volunteer commitment. The project marked a big success in regards to the ethos and role of Comar's programming as a model for an art practice of education, community engagement and sustainability.

FANK allowed a place to explore the theoretical insights, ideas and questions arising from the morning discussion session within a tangible case study for community-engaged art practice. The contextual on-site introduction to the FANK project also facilitated a multi-sensory communication of the materials, environment and conditions that the project encapsulates.

The site visit to FANK offered insight and provoked an appreciation of the effects – short and long term – of Comar's programme prior to further discussion later that evening on the relationship between the organisation, art and sustainability in the context of Mull.

Sunday 29th March 2015 / Morning Discussion/ An Tobar, Tobermory

For the morning's discussion on the SDGs, Mike introduced an alternative framework for the participants to further explore the goals. Representing the 'elements' for achieving the SDGs, as outlined in the United Nations Synthesis Report of the Secretary General on the Post-2015 Agenda, New York, December 2014, the goals are visualised through an interconnected circle diagram with the following themes – Justice, Dignity, Partnership, People, Prosperity and Planet (Figure 4).

With discussions from the previous day relating specifically to four of the six themes – **Justice**, **Dignity**, **Partnership** and **Planet** – participants were grouped together according to their selection of respective SDG (see overview below), intentionally excluding People and Prosperity (Goal 1 and Goal 8) to better focus the conversation.

Groups:

Justice: Gemma, Holly, Tom, Kevin (Goal 11, Goal 16)

Dignity: Sam, Saffy, Hannah, Sion (Goal 2, Goal 5, Goal 7)

Partnership: Ben, Scott, Niroshini, Stephanie (Goal 10 and Goal 17)

Planet: Hector, Alice, John, Vivian (Goal 15, Goal 14)



Figure 4: 'Six essential elements for delivering the SDGs' from United Nations Synthesis Report

The groups were asked to discuss their themes (Justice, Partnership, Dignity, or Planet) in the context of future societies, questioning how the role of art could test the sustainable development agendas of the Member States Open Working Group (an international/macrosopic body) within a local context. The discussion also regarded the processes necessary to establish communities of practice that would lead to more effective achievement of sustainability.

Each group was asked to forecast how art might have helped to achieve their theme in 50 years' time. The groups discussed the following ideas:

Planet

This group examined the values and systems that are embedded within our current society. In considering materials, the notion of building things to last and the resilience of objects emerged as an important step towards a more sustainable society. Giving people the skills to make things last elicits ownership and the preservation of the action of 'care'. Recycling is another reaction to the current desire for 'that capitalist obsolescence'. The group discussed how we generate waste after using resources because of our alienation from where resources originate. This alienation recurs in many aspects of society, including the production of food. The role of artists in this dilemma is to re-write the narrative and re-imagine the world. Artists can demonstrate how play is constructive, re-shaping a culture of curiosity and sensory perception. A key point made by this group is how the SDGs do not deal with 'individuals', but instead are about systems. For 2065, sustainability goals will be about people as the energy cells that interact and create processes.

Justice

This group compared what the values would be in a just society to the values of our current society. Viewing institutions as microcosms, the view was shared that there is a current lack of education for citizenship. If educational institutions were to better reflect their locality, a sense of connectivity to community could be better embedded within the educational system. This idea of localisation can also be applied to energy production, reduction, community involvement in production and distribution of energy resources. While education is currently working towards an industrial society, for 2065, education should work towards a sustainable society. The qualities of an artist (not risk averse, imaginative, adaptable) are valuable morals in society, and this group sees a need for support for artists who are supporting each other and others.

Partnership

A society based on partnership requires a common vision. In order to create a context conducive to engagement, aspects of emotion need to be considered; the SDGs show vision but overlook emotional aspects. In 2065, art manifests as an action rather than an outcome, becoming a practical action of emotional commitment. Through history, art has aided the sustainability of society. For 2065, art should be part of the round table discussion on sustainability goals and policies.



Dignity

Within creative practice, this group identified three different ways of working to facilitate change in a socially engaged way: content, process and practice. The value of education and life long learning is linked to the importance of art as a means of communication. For 2065, creativity and diverse skills should be part of education, more inclusively teaching the qualities held by artists such as innovation, problem solving and communication. Artists can be seen as leaders in bringing more focus to creativity, forging stronger bonds with science and other related sectors.

Conclusions

The exploration of the use of the SDGs in creating a sustainable society by 2065, based on the elements of Partnership, Dignity, Justice and Planet, demonstrated to discussion participants that the model developed by the international Member States Open Working Group is indeed applicable for translation into local, national and international contexts.

The underlying involvement of participants within the arts fuelled the motivation to explore and discover avenues towards sustainability, and demonstrated the relevance and indeed important role art plays in the physical and spiritual health of humans.

The value of the arts therefore does not lie in its outcome or product, but could be seen as being a facilitator of tools and methods enabling the stewardship of sustainable societies and environments. The proven applicability of artistic practices to the discussion of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals not only provides an alternative to economics-centred approaches, but also suggests that the goals and therefore 'sustainability' are more widely achievable.

The components of good facilitation, time, space, discussion and activity are all important features of the Arts and Sustainability Artists' Residency, and allow participants to develop their thinking and practices as artists in relation to environmental sustainability.

The quality of the facilitation, led by Mike Bonaventura on this occasion, in creating connections, engagement and communication was key to this process. Provocations and challenging established ideas, concepts and practices provided fertile ground for the artists during the residency, who through their inspired energy, fuelled an experience of art within a community of practice towards sustainability.



References

Open Working Group proposal for Sustainable Development Goals, Full Report of the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals, issued as Document A/68/970 (available at: <http://undocs.org/A/68/970>).

United Nations: The Road to Dignity by 2030, Ending Poverty, Transforming all Lives and Protecting the Planet, Synthesis Report of the Secretary-General on the Post-2015 Agenda, New York, December 2014.

Further Reading

Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals:

- Overview of Sustainable Development Goals: <http://unsdsn.org/resources/goals-and-targets/>
- Sustainable Solutions Development Network set up in August 2012 to mobilise “scientific and technical expertise from academia, civil society, and the private sector in support of sustainable development problem solving at local, national, and global scales.” More here: <http://unsdsn.org> and their overview of the SDG process is: <http://unsdsn.org/what-we-do/sustainable-development-goals/processes/>
- Guardian on Sustainable development goals: all you need to know: <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/jan/19/sustainable-development-goals-united-nations>

Perspectives on climate change and sustainability:

- Stop Climate Chaos: www.stopclimatechaos.org
- Bill McKibben and Naomi Klein at <http://350.org>
- World Bank: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/sustainabledevelopment>
- UN Sustainable Development webpace: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>
- CIFAL Scotland: <http://www.cifalScotland.org/index.php/resources-a-presentations> and <http://www.cifalScotland.org/index.php/past-seminars-a-conferences/257-scotland-and-the-post-2015-development-agenda-conference>

Perspectives and examples of the links being made between artistic practice and environmental sustainability:

- The publication ‘Landing Stages’ archives the documentation of environmentalism and performance previously hosted on the Ashden Directory website: <http://www.ashdendirectory.org.uk/downloads/Landing%20Stages.pdf>
- Emergence (based in Wales) 2015 publication ‘Culture Shift’: <http://www.emergence-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/CULTURE-SHIFT-Report.pdf>
- A piece from Creative Carbon Scotland – ‘Glasgow’s Green’: Imagining a Sustainable City – exploring how culture is inherently connected to a more sustainable society: <http://www.creativecarbonscotland.com/gala-2015-embracing-glasgows-green-spirit/>
- Short film ‘ULLAMH DHA’ by Scotland-based artist Valentina Bonazzi (2011) about the closure of primary schools in Argyll and Bute, filmed at Ulva Primary School (Mull): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EGwIElp8ArQ>

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City of Edinburgh Council: <http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/>

Comar: <http://www.comar.co.uk/>

Creative Carbon Scotland: <http://www.creativecarbonscotland.com/>

Creative Scotland: <http://www.creativescotland.com/>

