

CASE STUDY

ENGAGING WITH COP26: PRESERVING PASTS, IMAGINING FUTURES

Ahead of the UN Climate Summit COP26, National Galleries of Scotland (NGS) and the National Library of Scotland (NLS) partnered for an engagement project to connect Scottish audiences with the event being held in Glasgow in November 2021.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

PROJECT PARTNERS:

- National Galleries of Scotland, National Library of Scotland, and artist Patricia Macdonald

PROJECT FUNDERS:

- Museums Galleries Scotland Climate Beacons Ideas Fund

PROJECT DELIVERY:

- The project took place between August – November 2021
- Online and in-person events

THE PROJECT:

Using the power of both organisations' collections, audiences were encouraged to learn about Scotland's industrial and agricultural heritage and consider how landscapes have evolved and will continue to do so in the future, due to climatic, societal and technological changes.

Illustrations, photographs, audio-visual content and textual sources were collated for five locations around Scotland: Outer Hebrides, the Cairngorms, River Clyde, Fife and Edinburgh. These materials were then used to explain environmental topics such as sea level rise, the low carbon energy transition, active travel and sustainable food production, exploring how these related to landscapes across Scotland.

Visitors were encouraged to create their own artistic response to imagine how these Scottish landscapes could look in the future, with submissions including photography, collage and drawings. Workshops were held in-person and online to encourage discussion and wider participation. One was run in collaboration with NGS' Learning and Engagement's well-established 'Drawing Room' session. An online workshop was co-hosted with NLS around the work of Nan Shepherd. And finally, a photography workshop was held, centring round the MacKinnon collection with participants encouraged to bring along photographs which they felt related to climate change.

All the art works created by workshop participants were showcased on the NGS website and promoted through social media during COP26. Blogs were created to address the environmental topics of sea level rise and biodiversity loss in the Highlands and Islands. With Museums Galleries Scotland support, NGS was able to extend the reach of this engagement by getting the blogs translated into Gaelic.



Image: Land Use in The Outer Hebrides, Julia Clough, Collage

CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES:

- Partnership working with NLS and other contributors across the project, especially with the online workshops, has created a brilliant blueprint for future collaboration. An extension of this partnership was the formation of the Scottish National Culture for Climate Change group.
- NGS created a successful environmental engagement working group, which has continued post-COP and now extends to engaging on all aspects of NGS environmental work.
- The project generated diverse and imaginative submissions from participants, including great interaction on social media. The project gathered a lot of interest, with Radio Scotland approaching NGS to join the afternoon show to promote the workshops and encourage people to participate.
- Working during the COVID lockdown period meant that there was a lot of restriction around what could be done in terms of engagement and groups. We had to carefully plan out the days for health & safety considerations. It also restricted numbers for a planned indoor workshop.
- Public engagement was initially slow. Having a bank of examples might have given the project a boost at launch, and this was subsequently created. Alternatively, asking a group such as a school or college to respond first could have provided content with which to inspire entries.
- In the run-up to COP the opportunities available in terms of funding and collaboration evolved rapidly, and this required a very nimble and reactive way of working, which was challenging alongside other organisational commitments.

THE IMPACT IT HAS MADE:

- Preserving Pasts, Imagining Futures was a great way to bring the collection to the forefront of our offering when it comes to the Climate Emergency. Both NLS and NGS have an incredible resource for

connection to our audiences, and the project demonstrated the value of this resource in facilitating discussions and communicating complex themes. Previous exhibition and displays have touched upon environmental themes, but this project has allowed NGS to engage more fully with relating our work to the Climate Emergency and harnessing the full potential of our collection.

LESSONS LEARNED:

- During the project we learned the importance of being flexible, especially as COVID restrictions were constantly changing, and there was competing priorities and uncertainty about the future. Being flexible and having multiple options planned out meant that we were able to deliver more online sessions when we realised that the in-person sessions couldn't all go ahead.
- On the flip side of this, the positive lesson was the incredible role that digital tools played in allowing us still to connect as a project group as well as with our audiences.

GUIDANCE:

- Make the content personal – the Climate Emergency is such a huge and often complex issue. Breaking it down into defined topics and local examples helps to encourage a personal perspective and makes the topic more tangible for audiences.
- Partnership working opens a host of opportunities and great connections for future projects. It can also lighten the load of work while expanding your reach to audiences you may not have connected with before.
- Try to get everyone in your organisation involved in environmental sustainability work, rather than it being seen as an 'add-on' which only some colleagues need to prioritise.

USEFUL RESOURCES:

If you would like more information about this project please contact Gillian Gibson, National Galleries Scotland Sustainability Officer, email: Ggibson@nationalgalleries.org

Website links: [Launch Page](#) | [Online Responses](#) | [Workshop Responses](#)

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